



**MEEKER AND WRIGHT SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE**  
**Board Meeting - Joint Powers Board #0938**  
**Tuesday, December 17, 2024 - 6:00 pm**  
**720 9th Ave., Howard Lake, MN 55349**  
**Meeting Minutes - *Unofficial***

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**Present:** *Colleen Carlson, Gena Jacobson, Amy Johnson, Jessica Johnson, Cindy Miller (arrived at 6:03), Julie Rae Pennertz, Kelsey Puncuchar*  
**Others Present:** *Melissa Hanson, Caren Heltne, Heidi Hennen, Emily Schneider*

**I. Call to Order**

The regular meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm.

**II. Pledge of Allegiance**

The board recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**III. Approval of Meeting Agenda**

A motion to approve the agenda without changes was made by Gena Jacobson and seconded by Julie Rae Pennertz. Motion carried unanimously.

**IV. Consent Agenda**

A motion to approve the consent agenda was made by Kelsey Puncuchar and seconded by Jessica Johnson. The board unanimously approved the consent agenda which included:

- Minutes of Previous Board Meeting
- Bills for Payment and other financial reports as attached
- Personnel Items

- *Employment of the following staff:*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Effective Date</u>
Gail Bergstrom	0.2 FTE Paraprofessional Village Ranch Alternative Program	December 12, 2024
Brenda Brandvold	0.8 FTE Paraprofessional Village Ranch Alternative Program	December 9, 2024
Diana Jimenez	1.0 FTE Paraprofessional, Trek Program	December 16, 2024



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Cindy Lower	1.0 FTE Paraprofessional, Long-Term Sub Eastern Wright	January 2, 2025
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## V. Reports

### ***Executive Director Report***

#### *MAWSECO Programs*

A MAWSECO team of six, along with all six MAWSECO member districts within Wright County participated in the “I love U Guys” training hosted by Wright County. The seminars provided valuable insights and practical strategies for crisis response and post-crisis reunification.

All but four STEP students will be graduating this year. Administration is working with the STEP teachers to determine programming opportunities “pathways” that can meet the anticipated varied needs of approximately 20 new students joining the program next year.

#### *Special Education*

**MDE Program Monitoring:** MAWSECO and its members are in the process of MDE’s special education program evaluation. File reviews were conducted and results were submitted to the MDE. Verification process has occurred and MDE findings letters will be released on January 31st, 2025.

**MDE Fiscal Monitoring:** Notice was given to the MAWSECO Executive Director that MAWSECO will be participating in the MDE Special Education Fiscal Monitoring for all districts. MDE has returned to a Cycle approach to special education fiscal monitoring.

**Early Childhood Special Education:** Statewide & MAWSECO Help Me Grow Referral Data shows that referrals are up statewide and across MAWSECO.

#### *Staffing Updates:*

MAWSECO is partnering with Radar Talent Solutions to assist with our recruitment with paraprofessionals.

#### *Legislative Updates and Advocacy*

MASE 2025 Legislative Platform has been finalized and approved by their board. MASE Leadership met with MDE for discussions related to policy and budget priorities for the 2025 legislative session. MDE is waiting for permission to share bill language. Special



Education leaders are getting many questions since the budget forecast about rising costs of special education. MDE special education complaints are already higher than last year which was already a record year.

Along with three other representatives of MASE, Melissa met with PELSB to discuss MN special education teacher licensure. PELSB is considering changes to Minnesota's special education licensure framework. MASE supports this initiative to streamline licensure requirements as it aligns with national trends and the evolving needs of special education. These changes could be initiated through the rulemaking by the PELSB board without requiring legislative approval. However, the rulemaking process, along with the subsequent development of aligned higher education programs, will take significant time to implement.

Given the urgency of current staffing shortages, MASE has requested that PELSB grant special consideration for Out-of-Field Permissions in federal setting IV special education programs. The request would specifically propose that OFPs issued for teachers in these programs would not count against the total allowable OFPs for individual teachers. This temporary adjustment would provide schools with the flexibility to meet immediate staffing needs while ensuring continuity of services for students with the most significant needs.

Seclusion: In collaboration with our MASE lobbyist and executive director, Melissa Hanson will be meeting with representatives of MDE on December 20th to discuss Seclusion.

***Director of Business Services Report***

*STEP Program awarded \$10,000 CTE Grant!*

STEP Special Ed Teacher, Olivia Engel, Identified a need for greater diversity in the curriculum to account for a wider variety of student levels/needs. Olivia and Stephanie Harbulak-Barron, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Specialist, were able to identify curriculum that would serve the identified needs and use that information in applying for the grant. For more detail regarding the needs: [STEP 24-25 RTS ImpactFunding\\_GrantApplication](#)

*Fiscal Recommendation regarding restricted/committed funds*

There was continued discussion at the Executive Advisory Committee meeting on the topic of increasing the committed legal fund balance from the current \$100,000 limit. These funds are not in a separate account and are designated as a committed fund balance



on paper but do not exist separate from our operating funds. These are in our PFM investment account so they are being invested but any interest earned is being applied to the general fund and not being applied to programs or back to this particular fund balance. This has led to further thought being given to restricted funds as well.

Heidi Hennen recommended that a separate account be created for the express purpose of housing the committed legal fund balance as well as any restricted fund balance. She also recommended that guidelines be put in place for allocating interest to the different fund balances. The next steps would be to create detailed guidelines to implement moving funds to a separate account and for allocating interest to any of the existing fund balances.

### ***Site Administrator Report - Sholund, Village Ranch, Wings***

#### ***Village Ranch Alternative Program***

The year remains positive for both staff and students at VRAP. The program is fully staffed after the addition of two new staff members, filling the fifth para position. Jennifer Janikula has begun her transition back to Sholund and will return full-time after the holiday break. Laura Holmquist continues to be an effective leader for both students and staff. She's made adjustments to the schedule to facilitate Jennifer's transition, communicating effectively with the staff. December presents new challenges with 12 students discharging and 12 new students enrolling at VRAP. On average, there are only 1-2 discharges at a time, with a slower intake process. The transition has not caused significant disruption to the school day.

#### ***Sholund School for Girls***

There are currently eight residential students and one day student. The staff remain dedicated to building relationships and providing quality education despite the additional strain they have due to the significant mental health needs of the residents at Village Ranch. There are three or four new students expected in December which is the reason for Jessica's transition back to Sholund.

#### ***WINGS Alternative Program***

The WINGS program's census has remained stable with an average of 17 students. Wylie reported a decrease in female referrals, while male referrals are exceeding available space. The teachers are providing exceptional educational services. Nancy has shared that she is enjoying her position and Karla is appreciative of a second teacher. Having a



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second teacher has allowed her to complete required documentation and find time to explore additional curriculum.

## **VI. Action Items**

### **A. New Business**

1. A motion to approve the December 1, 2024 Seniority Lists was made by Jessica Johnson and seconded by Colleen Carlson. Motion carried unanimously.
2. A motion to approve the resolution Directing the Administration to make Recommendations for Reductions was made by Julie Rae Pennertz and seconded by Gena Jacobson.

Roll Call Vote:

*Cindy Miller - Aye*

*Amy Johnson - Aye*

*Kelsey Puncochar - Aye*

*Julie Rae Pennertz - Aye*

*Colleen Carlson - Aye*

*Jessica Johnson - Aye*

*Gena Jacobson - Aye*

Motion approved unanimously.

### **3. Policy Review [First Reading]**

The following policies were brought to the board for a first reading. No action was taken.

*Policy 204 - School Board Meeting Minutes*

*Policy 421 - Gifts to Employees*

*Policy 450 - Soliciting Funds from School Personnel*

*Policy 452 - Substitute Teachers*

*Policy 453 - Student Teachers*

*Policy 454 - Instructional Improvement and Staff Evaluation*

*Policy 518 - DNR-DNI Orders*

*Policy 523 - Policies Incorporated by Reference*

*Policy 528 - Student Parental, Family and Marital Status Nondiscrimination*



*Policy 530 - Immunization Requirements*

*Policy 531 - Pledge of Allegiance*

*Policy 554 - Student Insurance*

*Policy 702 - Accounting*

*Policy 703 - Annual Audit*

*Policy 705 - Investments*

**VII. Future Board Meetings**

- A. January 28, 2025, 6:00 p.m., MAWSECO Ed Center, Howard Lake, MN
- B. February 25, 2025, 6:00 p.m. MAWSECO Education Center, Howard Lake, MN
- C. March 18, 2025, 6:00 p.m. MAWSECO Education Center, Howard Lake, MN

**VIII. Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:02 p.m. was made by Julie Rae Pennertz and seconded by Colleen Carlson. Motion carried unanimously.

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