



MEEKER AND WRIGHT SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE

Board Meeting - Joint Powers Board #0938

Tuesday, February 25, 2025 - 5:00 pm

Meeting Minutes - *Official*

Present: Sarah Baker, Alex Carlson, Gena Jacobson, Jessica Johnson, Cindy Miller, Jen Rasset

Absent: Kelsey Puncochar

Others Present: Melissa Hanson, Caren Heltne, Heidi Hennen, Laura Holmquist, Emily Schneider

I. Call to Order

The Regular meeting was called to order at 5:01 p.m.

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 Sarah Baker. Motion carried unanimously.

IV. Consent Agenda

A motion to approve the consent agenda was made by Cindy Miller and seconded by Jen Rasset. 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
- *Resignation/Retirement of the following staff:*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Effective Date</u>
Britta Barth	Special Education Teacher, Village Ranch	June 6, 2025



- *Employment of the following staff:*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Effective Date</u>
Holli Amberg	1.0 Temporary Paraprofessional, Trek	February 3, 2025
Nancy Barnes	1.0 FTE Paraprofessional Village Ranch	February 10, 2025

V. Reports

Executive Director Report

Governing Board

MAWSECO welcomed Alex Carlson, representing Litchfield Public Schools, to the 2025 MAWSECO Board.

50th Anniversary of MAWSECO Celebration Planning

A volunteer committee has been formed to plan a celebration to honor MAWSECO's 50th Anniversary. This event will be incorporated into MAWSECO's all-staff spring inservice in June.

MN Legislative Advocacy

On February 25, MAWSECO special education administrators participated in MASE Day at the Capitol. They engaged in discussions with legislators highlighting key issues impacting our students and programs. As tri-chair of MASE Legislative Committee, Melissa has met with multiple legislators and key policymakers over the past month to address a range of special education topics and advocate for meaningful policy support.

Federal Policy & Funding Shifts and Their Impact on Special Education

Recent federal administrative changes significantly impact special education, particularly the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Title 1 funding. The proposed dismantling of the Department of Education involves transferring key special education programs to other agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services. Transferring IDEA to HHS would likely shift the focus away from education and weaken essential support for students including research, teacher training, and technical assistance that help schools effectively serve children with disabilities.

The administration's support for school-choice initiatives may redirect public funds to private and faith-based schools. Critics argue that this could weaken public education



systems, especially in rural and low-income areas, potentially reducing resources for students with disabilities.

A federal funding freeze has disrupted various educational programs. Although Title I and IDEA funds appear unaffected at the moment, the situation remains fluid, and policy experts are seeking more guidance on the actual impact.

The administration canceled nearly \$900 million in contracts for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), a key U.S. Education Department agency, impacting long-term studies on student learning, teaching strategies, and support for youth with disabilities.

All of these changes underscore the need for vigilant advocacy to ensure that students with disabilities continue to receive the support and resources they deserve.

Section 504 Lawsuit

The lawsuit *Texas v. Becerra* involves 17 states seeking to overturn Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Initially filed against former HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra, the case challenges a 2024 HHS Final Rule, which asserts that "gender dysphoria may be a disability." The lawsuit does not focus on specific provisions of the rule but instead argues that Section 504 itself is unconstitutional.

If the lawsuit is successful, it could have serious negative consequences for individuals with disabilities, including in education. The Department of Justice must decide by February 25 whether to proceed with the case following the change in administration. In the meantime, disability advocacy groups are urging the 17 state Attorneys General involved to withdraw from the lawsuit to protect Section 504 and the rights of individuals with disabilities.

General Updates

Meet and Confer - EdMN had no topics for discussion so the March 2025 meeting was cancelled.

2025-2026 Program calendars are being developed and will be brought to the board for approval upon completion.



Director of Business Services Report

Delayed Egress Update

Reminder, due to student safety concerns, there is a need to install delayed egress on seven doors for student safety. After obtaining quotes from two sources, the total project is estimated to cost under \$35,000. After exploring grants, no funding sources were found. Two options are considered:

Option 1: Use federal Part B IDEA funds, which requires approval from HLWW for the project and ensure that the company would be in compliance with the Build America Buy America Act.

Option 2: Use general education funds, offset by federal funds covering school psychologist salaries, which reduces purchase service billing and simplifies the process. Option 2 is recommended due to fewer procedural requirements and similar outcomes for the districts.

Business Office Efficiencies

The team is working on improving efficiency and accountability in their processes. A problem with accessing credit card payment information by vendor was identified. Thanks to Kim and Michelle, a new process has been implemented that greatly improves efficiency in finding information about credit card payments.

MA Revalidation Completed

Revalidation is a process completed every 5 years to ensure enrollment information is up-to-date and credentials meet state requirements. Elizabeth Thompson successfully completed the MA Revalidation process for MAWSECO and all 7 districts.

Federal Funds Draws

The MDE issued guidance reminding districts to draw federal funds at least quarterly, if not monthly. For the Cooperative, this includes Title I funds from Annandale, Dassel Cokato, and Litchfield. A mid-year billing will be done at the end of this month, and moving forward, this will be done regularly.

For IDEA funds, MAWSECO will do monthly draws for Fin 419 starting from December/January, and plans to do a mid-year draw for Fin 422 B-2 funds this year to comply with the request. However, for Fin 419/619 and Fin 420/620 funds, mid-year draws are not planned, as fund designations aren't finalized until late March, and there's concern about overdrawn funds. These will be drawn at the end of the year instead.



Program Administrator Report

Village Ranch Alternative Program

VRAP continues to have a successful year and is now fully staffed. The program has experienced challenges with staff absences due to illness, but the team has worked collaboratively to maintain a high-quality educational experience for students. Following the holiday break, a staffing transition resulted in adjustments to the supervision of the reset room, which remains a supportive space for student self-regulation. A retirement has been announced, and the position has been posted.

Sholund School for Girls

Sholund's enrollment has been increasing, with 11 students currently in the program. Administration is awaiting confirmation on additional referrals for placement at Village Ranch. Staffing adjustments have allowed both students and staff to return to a regular schedule.

WINGs Alternative Program

The WINGs program has maintained a steady enrollment of 18–19 students. Since the start of the school year, 35 students have been discharged, with an average length of stay of 55 days. Mental health concerns among residents have increased, creating additional challenges in providing education. Despite these complexities, staff continue to tailor educational experiences to individual student needs. There are no current plans for facility expansion.

Student Information System Implementation

The implementation of Infinite Campus remains on track. Weekly meetings with the project manager continue, and the process is at the halfway point. Once initial meetings conclude, internal sessions will establish consistent procedures across all programs. The system is scheduled to go live on May 6, with training beginning on May 7.

VI. Action Items

A. New Business

1. Materials Requested to be Determined as Surplus Property

A motion to approve the request to designate the named material as surplus property to be disposed of was made by Alex Carlson and seconded by Jessica Johnson. Motion carried unanimously.

2. Policy Review: Policy 522 - Title IX Sex Nondiscrimination Policy, Grievance Procedure and Process [Single Review Reading Approval]



A motion to approve the listed policy with changes as recommended was made by Gena Jacobson and seconded by Jen Rasset. Motion carried unanimously.

3. Policy Review [First Reading]

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

Policy 101 - Legal Status of the School District

Policy 102 - Equal Educational Opportunity

Policy 207 - Public Hearings

Policy 211 - Criminal or Civil Action Against School District, School Board Member, Employee, or Student

Policy 412 - Expense Reimbursement

Policy 455 - Tax Sheltered Annuities

Policy 456 - Post Retirement Health Care Savings Plan

Policy 519 - Interviews of Students by Outside Agencies

Policy 521 - Student Disability Nondiscrimination

Policy 713 - Use of Credit Cards

Policy 713 - Student Activity Accounting (New)

4. Fiscal Year 25 Revised Budget

A motion to approve the FY25 revised budget was made by Cindy Miller and seconded by Gena Jacobson. Motion carried unanimously.

VII. Future Board Meetings

A. March 25, 2025, 5:00 p.m., MAWSECO Education Center, Howard Lake

B. April 22, 2025, 5:00 p.m., MAWSECO Education Center, Howard Lake

C. May 27, 2025, 5:00 p.m., Wings Alternative Program, Litchfield

VIII. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:33 p.m. was made by Jessica Johnson and seconded by Alex Carlson. Motion carried unanimously.

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