



## Board of School Directors Committee Meeting Minutes - Wednesday, May 14, 2025

Generated by Renai Cardillo on Wednesday, May 28, 2025

**Members present:** Nicholas Braccio, William Brong, Janet Flisak, Andrew Landis, Ken Keith, William Formica, Kimberly Wheeler, Michael Barnacz

**Members absent:** Stephen Nelson

**Others present:** John Franzen, Frank Gallagher, Christopher Hey, Katie Kennedy-Reilly, Carlie Lambert, Christine Maine, Fran Masin-Moyer, Kim Musselman, Michael Taylor, Sam Varano, and Megan Zweiback

### 1. Education-Personnel Committee

#### 1.1 English as a Second Language Curriculum Presentation

Mr. Landis called the EP meeting to order at 6:35 PM

Superintendent Gallagher introduced Director of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment & Technology, Dr. Kennedy-Reilly.

Dr. Kennedy-Reilly introduced the agenda item Enhancing ELD Education noting that ELD is English Language Development specifically designed for English learners to develop their English proficiency. Dr. Kennedy Reilly spoke to having worked with the ESL Department for 12 years to develop and promote curriculum that serves all of our students. She noted that the program is for students who English is not their first language. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly also spoke to the extensive process to identify EL (English Learners) as they enroll in the school district and stated that currently over 20 different languages are spoken within the school district.

Dr. Kennedy-Reilly spoke about a recent conference where the ESL Department presented to members of the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly introduced ESL Coordinator and High School teacher Kimberly Musselman, Elementary ESL teachers Christine Maine and Carlie Lambert.

Ms. Maine spoke to ELD and ESL as interchangeable acronyms for the department. She cited a curriculum writing course which she participated in with other educators which prompted the revisions to existing ESL curriculum. In addition to the screening of new ESL students, the WIDA (annual assessment) assists in monitoring the progress of students. The revisions to the curriculum focus on newcomers across all grade levels with four units; each containing grade level bands for Community, Family, Routines, and Weather.

Ms. Lambert explained that the four subject areas allow for students to join the curriculum at whatever point they come into the district. Ms. Lambert explained that the units are not sequential allowing for varied instruction as student move, leave or join the district. Ms. Lambert explained that the Newcomers Curriculum is based upon the age of the student and offers four goals to not only be successful in school, but also good citizens in the community.

Ms. Musselman spoke to the support of administration and staff developers at the high school. She elaborated on the collaboration between ESL teachers and regular classroom teachers to meet not only the language needs of students, but their success beyond the ESL classroom. She discussed the sharing of tools, strategies and techniques to foster student success in general education classes. Ms. Musselman also spoke about peer observations of regular classroom teachers to observe interaction with EL learners. Ms. Musselman cited the high school Red Zone as a time for additional assistance and support.

A brief discussion occurred about the *Wonder & Wisdom Book Club* which was a literacy project headed by high school ELA teacher Kristin Momsen, partnering students with residents of The Souderton Mennonite Home fostering self discovery and shared experiences.

Dr. Kennedy-Reilly and Ms. Maine spoke about the work that continues on a monthly basis to develop new tools and create accessibility for ELD learners. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly stated that it is a very dynamic group and the opportunity to share efforts county-wide has been very rewarding.

Mr. Landis praised the collaboration with regular education teachers citing the interaction as important for full immersion in their schedules. He also commented on attending the book club lunch and the success of the students participating.

Mrs. Wheeler praised the program and the give back to the community with participation in a shared event. Mrs. Wheeler spoke about the placement of students in the program and the supports that Souderton is offering.

Mr. Braccio commented on the difficulty of teaching ESL students and the amazing success that is occurring in the classroom.

Mrs. Flisak asked about the completion of the units. Ms. Lambert noted that the goal is for completion of all units. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly stated that upon completion a newcomer does not exit the ESL program, it simply allows for district teachers to know what ESL students have completed. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly also stated that current EL enrollment is 357 students +/- six percent. She noted that over the course of a few years, the enrollment number fluctuates between 350 - 410 students.

Mr. Barnacz praised the Newcomer program as a benefit to the entire county, should students move schools. Mr. Barnacz also asked how to determine what level a student is at for learning and Ms. Musselman responded that assessments offer assistance in determining student skills. Mr. Barnacz also asked about opposition for student participation and Mrs. Musselman stated that she has not encountered opposition, and as students are participating in other school activities, there is a desire to learn the English language. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly added that speaking of the home language is encouraged with families at home.

Mr. Barnacz also asked about other struggles EL students may encounter. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly that time is always the issue. All EL students need to participate in general education classes as well as their ESL classes. Mrs. Musselman praised the High School Red Zone program which allows students extra time for support or activity participation as needed.

Mr. Keith praised Red Zone opportunities and noted the complexities of teaching ESL students. He expressed appreciation for the work that the teachers are doing. Mr. Keith asked about annual assessment of productivity and Dr. Kennedy-Reilly responded that the ESL work group meets regularly to discuss and evaluate the program, its systems and structures.

Mr. Formica thanked the teachers for their work and asked how many teachers are teaching ESL? Dr. Kennedy-Reilly responded that there are approximately 15 teachers and 11 assistants,

Mr. Braccio asked about different cultural backgrounds and Dr. Kenney-Reilly responded that it is unique to each family. Some families embrace both languages. There are many layers and complexities to each student situation, however teachers always honor home language. Mrs. Maine acknowledged all of the cultural nuances brought to school, even without ESL language barriers.

Dr. Gallagher noted that the school district has family navigators assisting ESL students and families.

The Committee agreed to move forward for Board approval.

## 1.2 Artificial Intelligence

Dr. Kennedy-Reilly introduced the subject in an effort to give an update where the district is and where we are going with Artificial Intelligence. She noted that the district remains rooted in its mission and reviewed definitions to give clarity and understanding to the subject. A slide was shared explaining what Artificial Intelligence is and what it is not.

Dr. Kennedy-Reilly stated that the district had created an Exploratory Work Group earlier this year with the goal to take a proactive, comprehensive, collaborative approach to developing A.I. supports that address safety, ethics, equity, transparency, and responsible use for students and staff.

Dr. Kennedy-Reilly shared that surveys were conducted to parents, students and staff regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence. Results were varied, however understanding, responsibility, critical thinking concerns and acceptance were echoed by all groups.

A video created by John Spender was shared. It depicted the use of Artificial Intelligence in the classroom as a tool and a new practice for learning. He titled the successful implementation of artificial intelligence into the educational environment *Vintage Innovation*.

Dr. Kennedy-Reilly stated that as the district begins its exploration into the use of A.I. in the classroom, a color-coded stop light system will be used. A Red Light signaling - A.I. tools are not allowed for use on this assignment. A Yellow Light indicating that explicit permission must be granted in order to use A.I. on a particular assignment. A Green Light which would encourage use of A.I. tools on an assignment, with prior discussion before beginning.

Additional slides were shared showing perceptions of possessing Artificial Intelligence skillsets in the marketplace. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly cited several brands of A.I. currently offered by software creators. Some of the names may be familiar, the challenge will be to learn which platforms are applicable and safe for use. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly acknowledged there are a lot of next steps, and careful and thoughtful navigation will be key to implementation. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly reiterated the significance of Artificial Intelligence and the importance of on-going staff development.

Mr. Landis and Mrs. Wheeler thanked Dr. Kennedy-Reilly for the diligent research and desire to learn about A.I. Mrs. Wheeler praised implementation with guidance and caution.

Mr. Braccio reinforced the need to continue to allow students to learn for the sake of learning and Mrs. Flisak cautioned use of A.I. without knowledge and guidance, noting the effective traffic light graphic.

Mr. Barnacz also cautioned use without guidelines and the need to instruct safely and praised the age appropriateness use. Mr. Keith praised the professional learning and appreciated the forward thinking.

Mr. Formica also spoke to the speed of learning and the pace at which we act and implement as the growth of A.I. increases.

A member of the audience asked about closed A.I. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly responded that the A.I. tools currently in use are bound by vendor agreements and have been vetted as such within those agreements managed by the school district. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly reiterated the existing rigorous vetting that occurs for all digital resources.

A member of the audience asked about staff development and how it gets approved. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly stated that professional development is created on both the building and district levels and is a collaborative discussion with administration.

A member of the audience asked how A.I. can be good for teaching and learning. Dr. Kennedy-Reilly answered that it is a part of the on-going philosophical approach to embrace innovation.

Mr. Landis thanked Dr. Kennedy-Reilly for the presentation.

The Education-Personnel Meeting was adjourned at 7:51 P.M.

## **2. Finance Committee**

### 2.1 Approve 2025-2026 Special Education Shared Service Plan with MCIU

Mr. Keith called the Finance Committee Meeting to order at 7:53 PM

Mr. Keith announced the agenda item for approval - the annual approval of the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit Shared Services Agreement. Mr. Keith introduced Director of Pupil Services Mrs. Zweiback. Mrs. Zweiback indicated that the plan is a fluid document, weekly and monthly depending upon the needs within a student's individual educational program. She noted that it includes costs associated with students that may be placed in district as well as special placements served by the M.C.I.U.

Mr. Keith spoke about the delivery of services to students and Mrs. Flisak reiterated the early intervention services provided by the I.U.

Mr. Braccio asked to project for next school year and Mrs. Zweiback responded that usage is based upon current services being provided. Mr. Barnacz asked about Explorations program costs and Mrs. Zweiback responded that their program focus is mental health supports and the education program that accompanies it.

Mr. Keith thanked Mrs. Zweiback for balancing the services that the district is able to provide along side of those serviced by the intermediate unit.

It was agreed to move forward for approval on May 22nd.

### 2.2 2025-2026 Budget Update

Mr. Keith introduced the budget update, speaking to the consistent philosophy of the school district to work toward getting the most accurate and up to date data in order to prepare the annual budget. He noted the target date of June 19th to approve the final budget.

Director of Business Affairs, Mr. Taylor reviewed a slide presentation. The first slide outlined Significant Revenues and Mr. Taylor noted that the local revenues remain the item of which the Board has the most control over, state and federal revenues less so. Mr. Taylor commented that real estate tax collection remains favorable along with positive trends for real estate interim tax revenues.

The Act 1 Index slide was shared which shows a history of the Act 1 Index along with the school district tax rate history and future projections. A Local Revenues slide was reviewed and Mr. Taylor reiterated that the real estate tax collection rate remains at 97%. He also noted that while earnings on investments has remained steady, the district is cautious not to project too much of an increase in the event of a rate change by the Federal Reserve.

Mr. Taylor stated that at this time nothing has changed in the Governor's Budget Proposal and our expectation for Basic and Special Education Funding remains the same. Mr. Taylor stated that he and administration had a recent legislative visit to Harrisburg where they continued to advocate for public education and the maintenance of non competitive grants supporting mental health. He also noted that there is some hopeful discussion for cyber charter funding reform.

A slide depicting Federal Revenues was reviewed and comment that a major impact to budgeted amounts is not expected to change.

Mr. Taylor reviewed a Significant Expenditures slide which highlighted Salaries, Social Security, PSERS Retirement, Health Insurance and Transportation services as some of the most significant portions of the budget.

A slide showing Special Education Trends over a ten-year period was also reviewed. Over a ten year period Special Education expenditures increased from \$17.9M to \$31.9M. The slide also showed that neither the state or federal special education funding has not supported that increase.

Mr. Taylor reviewed a slide that showed a revision to revenue budget projections that included an increase in the state property tax reduction allocation in the amount of \$337,357. These are monies received from the state from gaming. Mr. Taylor also cited an increase of \$49,905 in the Facilities Construction Reimbursement Subsidy.

Mr. Taylor cited areas that expenditure budget projections that would be reviewed over the next few weeks. Those adjustments are projected in salaries and benefits, building budgets, revised technology budgets, operations and maintenance, energy projections, and special education professional services budget. Mr. Taylor also stated that other areas that will be closely reviewed to close the budget deficit include monitoring real estate tax collection, earned income, transfer taxes, and allowable investments to maximize interest earnings.

Mr. Taylor also noted that there would be review of positions and the factoring of retirements, medical benefit trends, and costs associated with cyber charter school enrollments. He also noted that monitoring will occur of the Governor's proposed changes to cyber charter funding.

A slide showing Debt Service & Future Capital Improvements with Five Year Actual's and Five Year Forecast was presented. A Debt Service Trends slide was shared that depicts debt service to remain at approximately \$6.5M through the years 2045-2046.

A 2025-2026 Budget Overview slide showed a preliminary budget with a deficit of \$5.7M and revised expenditures of \$161,536, 359. Mr. Taylor reiterated that work will continue in all areas of the budget to create a balanced budget prior to the scheduled approval date of June 19, 2025.

Mr. Keith thanked Mr. Taylor for the presentation and noted there is not a specific target amount at this time of the year. Mr. Formica praised Mr. Taylor for the presentation. Mrs. Flisak asked about the Title I and Title II reduction and Mr. Taylor stated that adjustments are based on student needs and enrollment and the allocation calculation from the Commonwealth is not always as clear or concise as desired.

Mrs. Flisak commented on the cyber charter audit report noting fund reserves that exceed the annual operating budget. Dr. Gallagher spoke favorably on the cyber school funding bill that Senator Pennycuick is working on. Mr. Taylor commented on the cyber school funding entities are not held to the same standards as brick and mortar schools.

A brief discussion occurred about the Homestead Reduction Act and the offset that it can impact on homeowners real estate property taxes.

Mr. Landis asked about interest earnings and rate cuts. Mr. Taylor said that he did build any rate cuts into this budget and indicated that current interest rates still allow for significant earnings. Mr. Taylor expressed concern for potential rate cuts in the future.

Mr. Brong commented on unfunded mandates that inevitably end up on the shoulders of the taxpayers.

Dr. Gallagher noted there are no program cuts and there will be the addition of an orchestra teacher at the high school.

A member of the public asked if monthly reports of construction spending are available. Mr. Taylor responded that changes orders are not expected because of the GESA process and cooperative purchasing agreements. He stated that change orders should only occur if there is a change of scope in the project.

A member of the public asked about the detail of the Approved Proposed Final Budget? Mr. Taylor stated that the administrative staff is entering that data into the PDE form and it will be published to the website shortly. The same member of the public questioned the deficit and the amount of time before a budget must be approved. Mr. Taylor responded that he is confident that the school district will get to a balanced budget as work will continue every day.

Mr. Keith reiterated that this Board has never dictated a percentage increase to reach.

A member of the public stated that it appears as if the school district has overspent its current budget. Mr. Taylor responded that the expenses for special education costs had exceeded budgeted amounts.

Mr. Keith adjourned the Finance Committee Meeting at 8:44 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,



Michael Taylor, C.P.A.  
Board Secretary / Director of Business Affairs