

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

**Regular Meeting
January 24, 2022
Lincoln/Virtual**

PRESENT: Eisenthal, Kohls, Meggers, Mix, Ntem-mensah, Orsene, Pattacini, Patterson, Stefanovicz

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Geary, Deputy Superintendent Curriculum & Special Services Radikas, Director of Finance & Management Clancy, Director of Human Resources Sone-Moyano

ABSENT:

A. OPENING

A.1. & 2. Meeting Called to Order

Chairperson Pattacini called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. All in attendance participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, led by Mr. Pattacini.

A.3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

APPROVED – Minutes Regular Meeting of the Board of Education of January 10, 2022. Secretary Patterson moved and Mr. Eisenthal seconded the motion.

8/0/1 – Voted in favor.

A.4. Approval of Minutes of Budget Workshop

APPROVED - Minutes Budget Workshop of January 13, 2022. Secretary Patterson moved and Ms. Mix seconded the motion.

9/0 - Voted in favor.

B. COMMITTEE REPORTS

B.1. Personnel and Finance Committee

Mr. Meggers reviewed that the last P&F Committee meeting was held on January 10, 2022. Committee Members in attendance were: Peter Meggers, Tracy Patterson, David Eisenthal, and Michael Orsene. Also in attendance was Superintendent Geary, Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Management Clancy and Purchasing Specialist, Heather Adams.

At that meeting, Ms. Clancy provided a summary review and pricing of two proposals received in response to the Request for Proposal that was issued for Student Transportation for a contract for the period from July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2025. The Committee agreed to present this information to the full Board of Education at the January 24, 2022 regular meeting and to request that they authorize the Superintendent, in conjunction with legal counsel, to enter into negotiations with one of the bidders.

C. CONSENT CALENDAR

Mr. Geary presented eight items on the Consent Calendar for Board approval.

C.1. Personnel Action

Details had already been provided to the Board members with their agenda.

C.2. Transfer of Funds

None.

C.3. Establish an appropriation for the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Secondary Basic Grant for the FY 21/22 in the amount of \$115,705

C.4. Establish an appropriation for the American Rescue Plan (ARP) - Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 611 Grant for the FY 21/23 in the amount of \$422,390

C.5. Establish an appropriation for the American Rescue Plan (ARP) - Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 619 Grant for the FY 21/23 in the amount of \$40,059

C.6. Establish an appropriation for the ESSER II Special Education Recovery Activities Grant for the FY 21/23 in the amount of \$120,000

C.7. Establish an appropriation for the ESSER II Bonus Special Populations Recovery Grant for the FY 21/23 in the amount of \$25,000

C.8. Establish an appropriation for the ESSER II Bonus Dyslexia Recovery Grant for the FY 21/23 in the amount of \$11,050

The Chairman called for a motion.

Secretary Patterson moved and Mr. Ntem-Mensah seconded the recommendation to adopt the Consent Calendar.

9/0 - Voted in favor.

D. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

Alexandra Hamza reported that the 2nd quarter and the 1st semester at Manchester High School came to a close today. Tomorrow will be the start of the 3rd quarter, with many students starting in new classes.

Winter sports are still ongoing. Sports like wrestling and basketball are having great seasons while still adhering to COVID restrictions. Spring sports, including tennis and golf, have begun their informational meetings.

In the music wing, some classes are preparing for the Midwinter concert - which will be on February 10th this year.

Students in the Student Equity Advisory Team have begun planning their Black History Month awareness lesson which will be played in all classrooms in February. This lesson includes a presentation and then a video put together by black people in the workforce including doctors, med students and teachers.

Today, students in Silk City, a cooking class at MHS, served ethnic foods to teachers and staff in a successful Food Truck Festival.

Finally, yearbook sales have begun at the high school. The yearbook club has been hard at work taking pictures and editing.

E. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, spoke about Columbus Day and an article in *American Archeology* magazine. He mentioned World War 2. Mr. Stringfellow noted that people of Latin or Hispanic heritage of different complexions are adopting Latinx as a non-binary term. Other news items Mr. Stringfellow touched on included racism, TikTok copycats in Enfield, eating disorders like anorexia and the Fentanyl overdose of a student in Hartford recently.

F. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT – PART I

F.1. Budget Update

Mr. Geary reviewed, in detail, the next section of the budget. There were no emailed questions sent after the last meeting.

Mr. Geary noted he is still working on the living wage information and will have it for the Thursday Budget Workshop. This evening he explained what Purchased Professional Services, Contracted Services and Other Purchased Services cover.

Mr. Geary clarified that outside the district we have about 25 paras that serve students in magnets, etc. at a cost of \$37-57,000 each.

The per pupil expenditures of Connecticut districts are ranked from low to high. At \$18,027.25 per pupil in Manchester, we are ranked 128/169 for spending.

Mr. Geary reviewed what is covered under the Purchased Professional Services line. This covers consultants, professional development, sports officials, other professional services, legal fees and SPED related services. Overall this line has increased 17.46%.

Contracted Services are what is needed to maintain our buildings, such as elevator and fire alarm systems, rental of copiers and other items related to Board operations.

Other Purchased Services are services other than educational services that support the operation of the school district, such as lawyers, therapists, audiologists and 1:1 paras. Special education related services include occupational therapy, speech, counseling, social work and billable psychology. This covers transportation, including special transportation, transportation to athletic fields and field trips as well as homeless transportation. Also covered in this section is interscholastic insurance, telephones and related communication equipment, library databases, postage, tuition for public and private, as well as other purchased services. You may access the full presentation online.

There has been a significant increase (up \$1,819,869.20) in special education costs from this year's budget. Currently we have 1262 students in magnets and Vo-Ag schools. Of those, 168 students receive special education or 504 services that Manchester is responsible for providing at a cost of about \$1.8million. There are 22 students out of 237 enrolled in Odyssey for which Manchester is also responsible at a cost of \$215k per year.

The number of students in private outplacements has remained pretty stable for the last several years, hovering at mid 50s to low 60s. For the 21-22 school year the tuition and related costs for the 56 students in private outplacements will be about \$3,762,791.

Mr. Geary explained the reimbursement formula for students and the projected reimbursement amount of \$1.7million.

Mr. Kohls was overwhelmed by the amount of information presented. He reiterated his written question about legal counsel, wondering why we don't cut costs by hiring an in-house attorney. Mr. Geary reviewed there are only two large educational firms in Connecticut, so we do not bid this service. In hiring in-house counsel, it would be hard to impossible to find someone that has such vast expertise in so many different fields as our current attorneys at Shipman &

Goodwin. We have utilized many different departments of their very large firm over the years.

Ms. Stefanovicz asked about EAP services (Employee Assistance Program). Mr. Geary reviewed that the services are available to all, though the utilization rate is not high. It is something used more after a crisis, such as a student death. We are investigating a more systemic route for the future.

Ms. Stefanovicz would like to know the demographics percentage of magnet student enrollment by grade.

Last, Ms. Stefanovicz asked as far as the per pupil expenditure of about \$18k per student, does that include our grant spending? Mr. Geary explained it includes some federal and state funding. Looking at surrounding towns we spend about \$600 less per pupil and looking at surrounding states we spend about \$2k less per pupil.

Mr. Eisenthal wondered how much of the increase in public tuition is related to special education type expenditures. Mr. Geary noted that of the over \$820k in public tuition currently, \$635k of that is special education costs. Mr. Eisenthal pointed out that these are uncontrollable costs we have to pay with no input or recourse. Mr. Geary agreed, noting we can discuss at a PPT where a child should be placed, but if a student requires services we cannot provide safely and educate them in district, the student is outplaced. We have many programs, including self-contained classes, autism classes and multi-handicapped classes to provide for the needs of many of our students, but sometimes children need a higher or more specialized level of care. These classrooms are located in buildings throughout the district, allowing disabled peers to mainstream some classes with non-disabled peers. This line can be very volatile, sometimes we have a family move to Manchester mid-year with a student already outplaced. That may mean that we do not even get excess cost reimbursement for that child, but still have to pay their tuition. Special Education is not adequately funded in Connecticut. Mr. Eisenthal is in favor of giving all students exactly what they need, but he wants people to see some of the costs that we have no control over.

Mr. Pattacini noted that the Special Education increase of \$1.8million is about a 20% increase in that line alone. We already operate the district in a cost effective manner and use grant funds. Mr. Geary noted that we always overspend on Special Education. If we were in a pre-Covid year at this point we would be freezing the budget. We are not doing that this year because we have Federal funds to help get us through.

Mr. Pattacini wondered if we have any forecast on the magnet tuition costs for next year. Mr. Geary stated we do not find out that information until about May, well after the budget has been established.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

H. NEW BUSINESS

H.1. Contract Negotiations for Student Transportation

Mr. Geary reviewed that we had two bids for student transportation and First Student had lower prices as well as a thoughtful plan to be responsive to the shortage of drivers. We previously had some issues with First Student, but we are hopeful that with their plan and a larger pool of drivers to pull from, we will have a better experience this time. We have worked closely with Dattco over the last four years. Though we have worked diligently, it has been very challenging. Parents are frustrated with the timeliness of communications and what the plan is going forward.

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered what Mr. Geary sees in the contract with First Student to make him think their communication would be better? Mr. Geary stated that part of the impact of the pandemic has been a driver shortage. First Student's plan for problem solving, including items such as having a yard manager and router that just work for Manchester, having a live person, not just dispatch, for after-hours issues were a few items. They also have plans to collapse bus routes and what that looks like. Ms. Stefanovicz hopes the transition goes smoothly. Next, Ms. Stefanovicz asked about the living wage issue impacting this contract. Mr. Geary stated that any increase to wages impacts our budget. He believes that First Student, because they are a larger

company, will have more access to drivers. In the past, approximately 90% of current drivers move over to the new company when changes are made. We need proactive people with ideas and Mr. Geary believes we have a better chance at that with First Student.

The Chair called for a motion.

Secretary Patterson moved for the Board of Education to approve the Superintendent, in conjunction with legal counsel, to enter into negotiations of a 3-year contract for student transportation for the period from July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2025 with First Student. Mr. Meggers seconded the motion.

9/0 - Voted in favor.

H.2. Review and Discussion of Bid Waiver for Simple Pack Mfg. & Packaging, LLC, as the provider of 100% biodegradable containers utilized in serving lunches to students in classrooms.

Mr. Pattacini explained that this item and the next item do not need a vote, they only need five Board members to sign the paperwork.

Mr. Geary stated we usually either use vendors on the state or federal list or go to bid. However, this company seems to be the only vendor that has 100% biodegradable containers to use in individual packaging of lunch. There has been an advantage to having lunch in classrooms versus the cafeteria and for \$12,000 a month we can use a product that is better for our environment. Board members did not have any further questions and Mr. Geary asked members to be sure to sign the paperwork before they leave this evening.

H.3. Review and Discussion of Bid Waiver for DatAvail Corporation

Mr. Geary reviewed that we are about to upgrade our student management system from eSchool to Infinite Campus. DatAvail Corporation has been identified as a preferred provider of data integration, database administration, and data migration services with 17 years of the experience and expertise necessary to complete the migration of our student information system data. Their experience includes work within our legacy student information system

(eSchool) and our new student information system (Infinite Campus). The combination of expertise, experience and resources that DatAvail Corporation possesses makes DatAvail Corporation uniquely qualified to complete the data migration and database setup in the limited amount of time available to complete the project for the start of the 2022-2023 school year. Mr. Geary explained that this company, DatAvail Corp., has done this type of work before, they have the expertise, and they can work within our timeline.

Ms. Stefanovicz recognized that using an expert saves money in the long run.

This paper also needs to be signed by 5 Board members this evening.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Limited to items on tonight's agenda)

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, supports the Consent Calendar. He recognizes the cost of Special Education services is necessary and that no students feel marginalized. Mr. Stringfellow pointed out that next week begins Black History Month. He recommended a book, *Speaking of Race*. Mr. Stringfellow believes all voices count. He attended the State Board of Education meeting last week. He spoke about farmers of color being discriminated against. Mr. Stringfellow passed along an article that might interest Dr. Radikas about technology in education. Last, he wished all good luck with the contract negotiations.

J. COMMUNICATIONS

None.

K. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

Thursday, February 3, 2022	Adoption of Budget
Monday, February 14, 2022	Winter Data Update Update on Student Behavioral Supports
Monday, February 28, 2022	Bowers Update Update on Technology

L. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Pattacini called for a motion to adjourn.

Secretary Patterson moved and Mr. Orsene seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

9/0 - Voted in favor.

Adjournment 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Patterson
Board Secretary