

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

Regular Meeting April 25, 2022 Lincoln Center/Virtual

PRESENT: Eisenthal, Kohls, 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: Meggers

A. OPENING

A.1. & 2. Meeting Called to Order

At 6:15 p.m., Mr. Eisenthal moved to go into Executive Session. Mix seconded the motion.

8/0 - Voted in favor.

Executive session concluded at 6:45 p.m.

Chairperson Pattacini called the meeting back to order at 7:01 p.m. He explained that due to both COVID safety and travel, both he and Ms. Patterson would be remote this evening. Mr. Eisenthal will be acting as Secretary and helping to facilitate the meeting. 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 March 28, 2022. Acting Secretary Eisenthal moved and Mr. Ntem-Mensah seconded the motion.

8/0 – Voted in favor.

B. COMMITTEE REPORTS

B.1. Curriculum & Instruction Committee

The last meeting was held on March 21, 2022. Mr. Ntem-Mensah reported that in attendance were Richard Kohls, Peter Meggers, Tracy Patterson, Kwasi Ntem-Mensah, Amy Radikas, Shardae Shipman, and Josh Steffenson.

Committee members were provided several different tasks related to an excerpt from *House on Mango Street* to complete and discussed which of the CT Core Standards within Reading and Literature would align to each task. The standards highlighted were chosen from grades 5, 8, and 11-12 to illustrate how standard develops in rigor from grade to grade. The task provided committee members with an overview of how CT Core Standards are organized and the work needed to unpack the standards to ensure students are engaged in meaningful experiences.

The meeting closed with a discussion of the work that will continue to tighten vertical alignment within the secondary level and what role directors, building administrators, department leaders, coaches and staff will play in this work.

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 23, 2022.

B.2. Buildings & Sites Committee

Mr. Orsene reported that the last meeting was held on March 28, 2022. Committee members in attendance included David Eisenthal, Richard Kohls, Michael Orsene and Melanie Stefanovicz. Others in attendance were Karen Clancy, Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Management and Lindsey Boutilier, Director of Operations & Athletics.

The Central Office modular update was discussed. The portable unit has been installed behind the central office building and will house a number of central office staff members in six (6) offices. It will be ready for staff to move within the next several weeks.

Energy Audit/Upgrade & Solar Projects - The town's energy efficiency lighting and solar project initiatives are well underway. Buildings & Grounds supervisors are working closely with the contractors to ensure installations are completed according to plan.

ESSER Projects - Funds have been allocated through the ESSER grant to replace HVAC equipment in the high school auditorium.

Summer Capital Improvements - Mr. Boutilier distributed and reviewed a list of summer projects that are being planned for Manchester High School and Illing Middle School.

MHS Plans: We are currently looking at space at the high school to expand the cafeteria and to add small group spaces in the library. We will keep the Board informed of any updates. We are looking into the possibility of installing a digital sign in front of the high school that will provide the community with current events and other information.

Verplanck Roof Issues: The water intrusion issues at Verplanck have been resolved.

Buckley & Bowers Renovation Projects: The Buckley School renovation project is running on target. O&G has received contractor bids for the Bowers School renovation project and is in the process of awarding the bids to contractors.

C. CONSENT CALENDAR

Mr. Geary presented two 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

- **Transfer from Systemwide English Language Learner account (\$6,757.00 from Systemwide ELL Consultants account; \$843.00 from Systemwide ELL Professional Development account; \$710.00 from Systemwide ELL Dues/Fees account) for a total**

transfer of \$8,310.00 to Systemwide Curriculum and Instruction account.

- **Transfer from Manchester Middle Academy Alternative Education Instructional Supplies & Materials account in the amount of \$2,500.00, transfer from Manchester Middle Academy Office Supplies & Materials account in the amount of \$500.00, and transfer from Manchester Middle Academy Dues & Fees account in the amount of \$1,000.00 for a total transfer of \$4,000.00 to Manchester Middle Academy Other Purchased Services account.**
- **Transfer from Systemwide Science Consultants account in the amount of \$10,000.00 and Systemwide Science Professional Development account in the amount of \$5,879.00. Transfer to Systemwide Science Field Trip Transportation account in the amount of \$3,715.00 and transfer to Systemwide Science Instructional Supplies and Materials account in the amount of \$12,164.00.**

The Chairman called for a motion.

Acting Secretary Eisenthal moved and Ms. Mix seconded the recommendation to adopt the Consent Calendar how it's presented herein.

8/0 - Voted in favor.

D. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

Alexandra Hamza shared the MHS update:

- At Manchester High School, Quarter 4 is well underway with many students and staff members excited to have the end of the year in sight.
- With the warm weather comes the end of the year festivities: senior prom and picnic tickets are on sale this week and Junior prom is on Friday.
- The Spring Sports schedule is packed at MHS with girls and boys tennis, track and field, golf, baseball and softball.
- Last week four MHS music groups went on a 4-day trip to Boston where they participated in a music festival and went on many tours around the city. The students

returned to Manchester yesterday and have been regaling their classmates with what a great time they had.

- Students are also getting ready for the beginning of AP testing which begins next week on Monday, May 2.
- Seniors continue to get supported and acknowledged as they finalize their post-secondary plans.
- College Commitment day for seniors is coming up during the first week of May. The school is offering opportunities for seniors to review their financial aid awards with counselors to determine which schools would be worth a second look.
- The MELC program at MHS has begun with many students excited for an opportunity to get after school help with various topics ranging from college preparedness to just help on school work.

It feels great to see the momentum at Manchester High School, and Alexandra is excited to see what the rest of the year will bring!

E. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Cindy Kadikis, who is a resident of Vernon, but works at Manchester High School as a paraprofessional, expressed her concern about the paraprofessional contract that is on the agenda to be ratified this evening. Ms. Kadikis stated that paras went above and beyond during COVID, especially once we went Hybrid. They have been asked to do more than ever and have supported the classrooms as much as possible. Ms. Kadikis claims that the current contract only provides a 30c raise for many of the paras. Some are working with up to 6 students with multiple disabilities. The position is challenging, but the goal is to help kids feel proud. Ms. Kadikis is pleading with the Board to think about the contract as she feels there is no equity with a 30c raise.

Ms. Debbie Streeter, 25 Eastfield Street, has been a para in town for 33 years, 25 of which has been at the middle school level. She loves her job most of the time, however it doesn't pay well. She wonders how many careers that require either an associates degree, 60 college credits, or passing a ParaPro test, pay so poorly. There are a wide variety of jobs that paras do, depending on the ages and abilities of the students in their care. Life skills, including eating and toileting, are taught. Some students are in self-contained classes while others are mainstreamed. Ms. Streeter is asking the Board to reconsider the contract and pay them fairly. She feels the contract is a great disappointment and the little raise will be eaten by the increased cost of insurance. The last few years have been challenging and she feels that all the government funding

seems to stop at North School Street, where some are promoted to new positions and sit behind plexiglass, while paras work side by side with students. They are also often subbing for the teachers (with a stipend). Ms. Streeter added that about a year ago her son became a para and we need to attract more male paras as well.

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, spoke about Cinco de Mayo and world history. He recommended the book *El Norte - The Epic and Forgotten Story of Hispanic North America*. Mr. Stringfellow noted the Disability Act is 32 years old and he suggested the book *Demystifying Disability*. Mr. Stringfellow also touched on gender identity, teachers afraid to teach history, Earth Day and climate change, as well as an article about paras in the *Hartford Courant*. Last, he reminded the Board that an update on crossing guards has been requested.

Mr. Colin McNamara, 47 Grandview Street, points out the para situation is the perfect microcosm of all the money being dished out not hitting the people doing the work. A 30c raise does not even touch inflation. Mr. McNamara congratulated the Board and high school staff for MHS being ranked 96/200 schools. This is a feat with all our challenges.

Mr. Norm Delaura, 47 Garden Grove Road, pointed out the many young students in the room and was upset at the topics being discussed.

F. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

(Friendly amendment, switching F.2. to F.1.)

F.1. Buckley Update

Mr. Geary introduced Principal Ann Johnston, along with Kendra Montstream, Librarian and several students. Mr. Geary reminded us that Buckley will be the first net zero school in the state and the science behind being a net zero building will be shared by the students.

Ms. Johnston is excited about the Geo-thermal heating and cooling system and it also piqued the interest of staff and students alike. Ms. Montstream explored this topic with her students and they collaborated on a common goal of creating this presentation. The students communicated about what type of work they wanted to create, a slide show, a jam board, or something else. They

determined what they needed and used critical thinking to link the problem through the disciplines. Their creativity is showcased on each slide that they created themselves. The students did a marvelous job presenting and you may view them on the website.

Mr. Ntem-Mensah complimented the students on their research and congratulated them on a job well done.

Mr. Eisenthal, who is the Board Liaison to Buckley, noted this presentation exceeded his expectations tonight. He is proud of the work the students did. A 5 minute recess was called to allow the students time to take pictures with Board members. **Recess 7:47 - Back in session 7:51.**

F.2. Update on Technology

Mr. Geary introduced Kerri Kearney, Director of Instructional Technology. Ms. Kearney's slideshow can be found on the website. She discussed curriculum integration and teacher support. Teachers were given new laptops with docking stations to replace desktop computers and chromebooks to allow for flexibility.

Ms. Kearney reviewed the types of device found at different grade levels and the needs for students of different ages.

Hotspots have been purchased for some families to provide access to the internet to support learning.

With technology comes many challenges, including teaching Digital Citizenship and providing security for confidential systems.

F.3. Buckley Playground Equipment Package

Mr. Geary introduced Mr. Michael Scott from TSKP Studio. Mr. Scott showed the Board the different playground equipment slated for Buckley. He explained that we need the Board to approve this to move on to the state for approval of the budget.

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered if there is fencing around the playground. Mr. Scott stated there is as required by the state. There are also benches for parents for evening/weekend use.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

H. NEW BUSINESS

H.1. 2022-2023 Board of Education Meeting and Workshop Schedule

Mr. Geary noted this included a change to the July meeting dates.

Acting Secretary Eisenthal moved for the Board to approve the 2022-2023 Board of Education Meeting and Workshop Schedule. Ms. Mix seconded the motion.

8/0 - Voted in favor.

H.2. Approval of Buckley Playground Equipment plans and specifications

Acting Secretary Eisenthal moved for the Board of Education to approve the plans and specifications for Playground Equipment for Buckley Elementary School dated April 08, 2022 prepared by TSKP Studio and the associated cost estimate, for submission to the Department of Administrative Services, Office of School Construction Grants for review of final plans. Ms. Mix seconded the motion.

8/0 - Voted in favor.

Mr. Geary noted that the next three items are back on the agenda as we submit the final numbers to close out these projects to the state. There was a dispute about a payment in the Verplanck project that was recently settled between the town and two vendors. The amounts have all been adjusted accordingly and we are prepared to

submit final closeouts to the state. We have to close out old projects in order to begin drawing down money for Buckley from the Department of School Construction.

**H.3. Acceptance of Cheney Bennet Academy Project #077-0234
RNV/EA as Complete**

Acting Secretary Eisenthal moved for the Board of Education to accept the Cheney Bennet Academy Project #077-0234 RNV/EA as complete. The Scope of Work included expansion and alteration of the Building. Total cost of the project was \$20,171,616. Reimbursement from the State Bureau of School Facilities to the Town of Manchester for this project is estimated at \$11,448,341. Mr. Ntem-Mensah seconded the motion.

8/0 - Voted in favor.

**H.4. Acceptance of Waddell Elementary School Project #077-0233
RNV/EA as Complete**

Acting Secretary Eisenthal moved for the Board of Education to accept the Waddell Elementary School Project #077-0233 RNV/EA as complete. The Scope of Work included expansion and alteration of the Building. Total cost of the project was \$24,537,035. Reimbursement from the State Bureau of School Facilities to the Town of Manchester for this project is estimated at \$14,414,693. Mr. Ntem-Mensah seconded the motion.

8/0 - Voted in favor.

**H.5. Acceptance of Verplanck Elementary School Project #077-0235
RNV/EA as Complete**

Acting Secretary Eisenthal moved for the Board of Education to accept the Verplanck Elementary School Project #077-0235 RNV/EA as complete. The Scope of Work included expansion and alteration of the Building. Total cost of the project was

\$28,603,945. Reimbursement from the State Bureau of School Facilities to the Town of Manchester for this project is estimated at \$16,941,789. Mr. Ntem-Mensah seconded the motion.

8/0 - Voted in favor.

H.6. Ratification of the Manchester Federation of Paraeducators Local #3175, AFT CT, AFL-CIO Contract

Mr. Geary noted that Board members were provided a summary of the contract that was ratified by the Union and needs Board ratification. Some items in the contract include the removal of a 30 minute clause before the \$12.50/hr stipend for covering a class for a teacher kicks in. Over the next few years, several paid holidays were added. Insurance goes up 2% over 4 years (0.5%/yr). Including the paid holidays, there is an 18% wage increase over the 4 year contract. Tuition reimbursement has been added as well as a personal care differential of 5% for those paraprofessionals that help students with personal care such as toileting.

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered, although this contract is an improvement, is it enough? These professionals work with our most fragile population. She would prefer the administration go back to the drawing board to increase all steps adequately and keep the paras in line with inflation, as well as reward them in a fashion that conveys their value and head closer towards a living wage. She also noted a gender disparity, as most paras are women and most buildings and grounds staff are men and we are paying custodians more than paras. She asked that we step back and ask if we are being equitable.

Mr. Orsene agrees with Ms. Stefanovich. He gives credit to the paras who spoke this evening.

Mr. Eisenthal wants to praise the paras, who he feels are frontline workers. He asks that we consider going forward with the contract and have an option to reopen negotiations if we cannot retain our staff.

Ms. Stefanovicz stated that that would be asking people to leave.

Mr. Ntem-Mensah also sides with Ms. Stefanovich. He commends all paras for their work and asks us to go back to negotiations.

Mr. Geary states that the administration negotiated this contract in good faith with a committee appointed by the union. If we reject this contract on behalf of the Board it would set a dangerous precedent. He needs more clarity of what the Board wants to do. The union ratified this contract - they did not reject it. The next step is not to go back to negotiations, but to move to arbitration. In arbitration, it is unlikely that they would offer an 18% wage increase over the life of the contract. Other items may also be struck from the contract. We have to be mindful that the contract was negotiated in good faith between the union and administration and then it was ratified by the union.

Mr. Pattacini thinks it would be a good idea to speak with legal counsel about what the next step would be if the item is voted down. He recommends that this item be tabled until the Board can meet in executive session to discuss options. He wondered if there was a time frame during which we needed to ratify the contract.

Mr. Geary will check with legal counsel, however the next step is arbitration. In the case of arbitration the Board attorney and the Union attorney would open every item that was negotiated. We can have Atty. Mills present, however there are always some happy and some frustrated with any contract in every union. Mr. Geary recommends the Board ratify this contract that was negotiated in good faith. If that is not agreeable then he recommends tabling the item instead of voting it down this evening.

Mr. Pattacini asked board members for a sense of where they are at. At least 3 members are not in favor of the contract being ratified.

Ms. Patterson is prepared to ratify this evening. She does understand and support the paraeducators and feels confident in the nature of which the contract was negotiated.

Mr. Kohls stated it is a complicated situation and it seems we should proceed with caution.

Ms. Mix is comfortable tabling the item to get more information.

Mr. Pattacini suggests tabling the item. He agrees with Ms. Patterson. The process is to negotiate in good faith with the union and the expectation is then to ratify the contract. If we do not ratify, the next step is to meet with legal counsel and be comfortable with the next step, which is arbitration. This may result in less of a contract. The item was tabled.

H.7. Bid Waiver

Mr. Geary explained that there is a ropes course on Hillstown Road that is shared with the community and the schools. It was created in 1998 with NW Adventure LLC. The course currently needs about \$20,000 in repairs. We would like the former head of NW Adventure LLC to perform the work, but he is now at a different company. This bid waiver allows us to use the same person as prior, just at a different company, for the repairs. We do not need to vote on this item, it just requires 5 Board member signatures. There were 5 members in the room willing to sign this evening.

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

Ms. Debbie Streeter, 25 Eastfield Street, noted it was nice to be thanked by many parents this evening for her work as a para. She appreciated the comments about the contract made by some Board members this evening as well. She noted that her son became a para a year ago and we need more male role models. Care for special education students in middle and high school is physically challenging. It is difficult to hire more para at the current pay scale. Her son makes more money when he works for DoorDash. State workers got a bonus, why not us? She thinks that paras currently on Step 1 should move to Step 3. Current Step 1 paras make 40c less than the current contract. Paras give the Board of Education and the Town a lot of bang for their buck. We help keep students in the district instead of outplacements. We feel undervalued. Para Day came and went recently with no acknowledgement.

Ms. Elizabeth Klinck, who works at MHS but lives in East Hartford, noted the union recently lost their president and got a new one⁴. She says the vote on the contract was very close, about 5 votes. There was an extreme lack of communication and many

didn't know what was going on. It is difficult to keep good people in the district. We need more support. We all love the kids and that is why we stay.

Ms. June Conrad, 39 Dover Road, a para in town, says they were given PD on de-escalating behaviors and a lot of that work is the role of a Behavior Tech. Paras deal with developmental and physical needs. We need more paras and the low wages impact our ability to find and keep good people.

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, supports the Consent Calendar and thinks it was money well spent on the three school projects. He was happy with the parent turnout this evening and he wishes the press had been here to see that. Mr. Stringfellow touched on several topics, including the first black astronaut, geothermal energy, mental health legislation and social emotional learning being vital. He reminds us public schools have to take all students. He also states that parents are not the only ones with rights, as in his case he has no children by choice.

J. COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Eisenthal noted that Sean Webster, the Family Resource Coordinator at Buckley, is helping create a time capsule to be opened at some point in the future, at the Buckley site. He is requesting notes or stories from former Buckley staff or students be mailed gto Buckley % Mr. Webster or emailed to him at swebster@mpspride.org. Please remember to include your name and the years you worked at or attended Buckley. Submissions are due by May 20th.

Ms. Stefanovicz announced that this was her last meeting as a member of the Board of Education. She notes it has been a pleasure to serve the students of Manchester and she has enjoyed contributing towards the success of MPS. Between a recent career move and the desire to spend more time with her family, it has become necessary to step down.

Mr. Pattacini stated the Board would miss her leadership. Serving on any Board takes much effort and time from your personal life. He thanked Ms. Stefanovicz for her commitment to serving the students of Manchester and also thanked her family for their sacrifices as well.

K. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

Monday, May 9, 2022 Manchester Preschool Center Update

Monday, May 23, 2022 Adult Education Update

Monday, June 13, 2022 Manchester Middle Academy Update

L. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Pattacini called for a motion to adjourn.

**Acting Secretary Eisenthal moved and Mr. Ntem-Mensah
seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.**

8/0 - Voted in favor. Adjournment 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

David Eisenthal, Acting Board Secretary