

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

Regular Meeting

July 8, 2019

Lincoln Center

PRESENT: Hughes, Maio, Meggers, Scappaticci, Stefanovicz, Thames

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Geary, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Radikas, Director of Human Resources Sone-Moyano

ABSENT: Conyers, Hagenow Pattacini

A. OPENING

A.1. & 2. Meeting Called to Order

Chairperson Thames called the meeting back to order at 7:01 p.m. from an Executive Session that was previously called to order at 6:25 and ended at 6:50 p.m. All in attendance participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, led by Mr. Thames.

A.3. Secretary's Welcome

Mr. Scappaticci stated that as Acting Secretary of the Board of Education, he wished to extend a warm welcome to everyone present and to the television viewers. He, along with the Board and the Superintendent, were pleased to be joined in celebrating the achievement, reviewing information, and discussing areas for growth, along with making policy decisions related to the effective operation of the Manchester Public Schools. Mr. Scappaticci explained that this is a regular meeting of the Board and all items that will be discussed or voted on this evening have been posted, as required by state law.

Mr. Scappaticci explained that as the Manchester Board of Education, they are here to set goals, listen to reports of the Superintendent, approve budgets, contracts, and personnel appointments, and to create policy for the district. It

was explained that meetings of the Board are open to the public, but are not meetings with individual members of the public. Therefore, comments from the audience will be confined to the time designated for the public to address the Board.

Last, Mr. Scapaticci stated he appreciates the public's interest in this evening's meeting and the Manchester Public Schools.

A.4. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

APPROVED – Minutes Regular Meeting of the Board of Education of June 10, 2019. Secretary Pattacini moved and Ms. Hagenow seconded the motion.

7/0 – Voted in favor.

A.5. Approval of Minutes of Special Meeting

APPROVED - Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Board of Education of June 24, 2019. Acting Secretary Scappaticci moved and Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the motion.

5/0/1 - Voted in favor.

B. COMMITTEE REPORTS

None.

Chairperson Thames asked for a motion to amend the Consent Calendar.

Acting Secretary Scappaticci moved to amend the Consent Calendar to add item C.5. Permission to Apply for FY 19/20 Manchester Head Start Cost of Living Adjustment. Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the motion.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

Mr. Geary reviewed that this item was originally approved at a prior meeting, but the original amount was listed incorrectly. The accurate amount is \$37,012 and is split with Enfield.

C. CONSENT CALENDAR

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

C.1. Personnel Information

Details were provided to Board Members in their packets.

C.2. Extended Field Trip Request - Illing, Bentley and MHS Students Youth Leadership Institute, Babson College, 6 Students attending, 2 chaperones - August 5-7, 2019

C.3. Permission to apply for the FY 19/20 Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Organization Statewide Improvement Grant

C.4. Permission to apply for FY 19/20 Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Secondary Work-Based Learning Enhancement Grant

C.5. Permission to apply for the FY 19/20 Manchester Head Start Cost of Living Adjustment

The Chairman called for a motion.

Acting Secretary Scappaticci moved and Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the recommendation to adopt the Consent Calendar as amended.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

D. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

None.

E. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Alyce Rawlins, 66 Waranoke Rd., was surprised to read in the June 26th *Journal Inquirer* that the Board was considering allowing hats and durags at the high school and she is opposed to this. Ms. Rawlins stated she has been an African American for “a long time” and doesn’t remember growing up with durags. She wondered why the Board feels it is proper attire.

Dr. Sedrick John Rawlings, 66 Waranoke Rd., has lived in Manchester since 1954. He is old school, noting he is in his mid-90s. He also had no recollection of durags in his youth, though he did mention he wore a stocking cap at one time. Dr. Rawlings noted he has been involved in the criminal justice system and didn’t see any durags there either. He has heard many say that durags are part of a gangster culture, and it is immaterial whether he agrees with them or not. He did state that this appears to be a fad, recalling wearing a stocking cap in the 30s, pink pants in the 40s, and a big hat in the 50s. Dr. Rawlings noted that young people think differently. He wondered if durags could be restricted for when a student displays respect for self and others, and pride and service to the community, a reward of a “Gucci” durag can be given. He hopes we do not allow students this privilege.

Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Rd., mentioned the anniversary of the end of World War II and recommended a book about the atomic bomb. He mentioned the Interim Education Commissioner Desi Nesmith and noted a new pick will be made in August. As for durags, he is neutral on the topic, though in his day it was a sign of respect for men to remove their hats in the building. Last, Mr. Stringfellow mentioned Indigenous People’s Day and the Cleveland Indians mascot.

F.1. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

F.1. Update on Spring Data

Mr. Geary gave a brief presentation on the Spring data, noting this was just a first look and more detailed reports would follow.

Ms. Maio was confused why the graduation rate information for last year was not available. Mr. Geary explained it is a bit more complicated than just counting the number of students that graduate in a given year. It is a state calculations that takes into account students moving in and out of the district during the course of high school.

Mr. Hughes wondered if the In-School Suspension data was related to a decrease in Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions. Mr. Geary noted he will look at the data over the summer. Mr. Geary also mentioned that we only expel for mandatory reasons (weapons/drugs) but the increase in ISS may well be due to a decrease in OSS numbers. He will bring that information back to the Board.

Ms. Stefanovicz loved the format of the presentation. She was encouraged to see the upwards trend for reading and fact fluency data. She wondered about a system to track behavioral data. Mr. Geary noted there is discipline data sent monthly to schools with the top offenses and responses noted. We have been trying to implement more restorative responses.

Mr. Thames was concerned about Out-of-School suspensions and wondered if those also spiked up. Mr. Geary noted they had not, and were about the same level as last year. Mr. Geary did note that one or two elementary schools had more suspensions than he would like, but noted that usually suspensions at the elementary level are due to a safety concern. More resources are needed. Mr. Thames asked about the relationship between restorative justice and suspensions. Mr. Geary noted there are times a student needs to be removed from a class, but the goal is to have less suspensions.

Mr. Thames asked what In-School Suspension looks like. Mr. Geary explained that at Bennet, Illing and MHS there is a staff member that works with students to complete a packet of work. The student also does some reading, working with a behavior tech and possibly a restorative conference with the other student or adult that they had a conflict with. Mr. Thames would be interested to look at the racial composition of suspensions. He also noted that colleges look at this data. Mr. Geary agreed, but noted that there is a process that the state allows for one incident to be expunged from a student's record, so if there was a "one time" lapse of behavior it will not stigmatize them. Mr. Thames would like this

information added to the student handbook to be sure parents and students are aware.

F.2. Bus Schedules and School Start and End Times 2019-2020

Mr. Geary noted we are required by statute to provide transportation to students who live in and attend school in Manchester. That means that we are not only providing bussing to the public schools, but also to charter, parochial and technical schools in town. He presented a chart explaining how reworking some start and end times will allow for fewer buses to be used (bringing the number down to the contracted amount of buses). In reviewing this issue it was also discovered that not all of the schools were in session the same number of hours, and that was corrected as well.

Ms. Maio wondered if the “door open times” would remain the same at the elementary schools for students that are dropped off, noting that parents would be most concerned about this if they drop off on the way to work. Mr. Geary stated he is looking into this and hopes the time will not change more than 5 minutes, if at all.

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered, if a family has a preschooler, and students in grades 5 and 7 how would they drop off all three on time. Mr. Geary noted that having students in different schools can be an issue, but noted that oftentimes one or more students can take a bus. Mr. Geary also noted that the goal is to share bus routes with parents by mid-July so that any concerns can be addressed over the summer. He would like to make no changes to bus routes the first two weeks of school, other than for students moving into the district those weeks.

Ms. Maio noted it is important to continually communicate with parents that only safety changes will be made at first, and later changes for convenience can be addressed. Ms. Maio wondered about half day times and Mr. Geary noted those had all been equalized as well. Ms. Maio noted that this will help with sibling pick up for those who have an older student pick up a younger sibling. Mr. Geary noted that he wished he could have kept the start time at the elementary for 9:05 and end at 3:35, but he preferred to move that to 9:10-3:40

and be sure that he can get buses there on time. He may revisit those times next year.

Ms. Stefanovicz liked the idea of adding additional support to the transportation office for the first three weeks of school. She also was interested to hear about the collaboration with the town regarding which streets have crossing guards. Mr. Geary noted they had not looked at "no-cross" streets in a while and they will review that and may consult the Highway Department as well. The town pays for crossing guards.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

G.1. Policy Recommendations

The Policy Committee submits to the full Board its recommended policy revisions for a second reading and adoption in accordance with its policy on policy changes. All policies are available for review on the website.

1a) Policy 1401 - School Volunteers/Chaperones

Acting Secretary Scappaticci moved for the Board to accept 1a) Policy 1401 - School Volunteers/Chaperones. Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the motion.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

1b) Policy 3280 - Gifts, Grants, Bequests

Acting Secretary Scappaticci moved for the Board to accept 1b) Policy 3280 - Gifts, Grants, Bequests. Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the motion.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

1c) Student Dress Code

Acting Secretary Scappaticci moved for the Board to accept 1c) Student Dress Code. Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Thames expressed concern about the durags, though he didn't see the specific section addressing durags. Mr. Geary noted the policy says head coverings. Mr. Thames has mixed feelings about this as in his opinion durags have been a symbol of gang affiliation as well as bandanas. Mr. Thames noted that even though there is not a lot of gang violence in the area now, there was a presence in the past and he commended the police force for their efforts to battle that. Mr. Thames thinks durags bring negative attention and he does not think children need to be subjected to that negative stereotype. Some say this is unfair, and he agrees it is unfair, but he would rather a child not be mistaken for a gang affiliate. Mr. Thames has worn a durag, but never in public. He would only do so in his own yard/home in private. He thinks children need to be dressing accordingly with decorum. Mr. Thames feels like a person who wears a durag doesn't look as smart as one without. He has told his children and grandchildren not to wear them due to the stigma it creates. He will vote against this policy, even though he realizes the hassle it is to enforce a ban. He feels he cannot tell his children not to wear them and then vote for them here. Mr. Thames went on to state that as an African American there are different rules in society and all African American parents have the "police talk" with their children at some point. He feels it is unfortunate that stereotypes exist, but they do.

Ms. Maio respects Mr. Thames opinion and understands his feelings, but she feels differently. She noted students brought this to us and if we vote against it we are taking their choice away from them. It is Mr. Thames choice not to wear one, but we shouldn't take away the feeling of inclusion in our community because we are not allowing the students to present in the way they feel comfortable. We should not judge a person based on their look, but on their character. Ms. Maio also noted that the concept of removing a hat indoors is sexist as only men are expected to do so.

Mr. Hughes asked for clarity on the policy and Mr. Geary read the changes, which still prohibit hoods, but allow for other headgear i.e., hats, durags, etc.

Ms. Stefanovicz noted that in reviewing this topic at the Policy Committee meeting she was intrigued by the thoughtfulness of the presentation. She noted the stigma associated with durags being unclassy is similar to a woman going out in curlers. Ms. Stefanovicz noted that at school students have different attire than if they were going on an interview. Students wear sneakers, track pants, tee-shirts. All items they wouldn't wear to an important event. Ms. Stefanovicz was not aware of any negative stereotype on durags, and views them as a practical hair covering. She feels headgear is a reflection of a student, who might wear a hat for their favorite team. If the administration ultimately finds this a distraction, we can make corrective action. The intent of the policy is to reduce friction and focus on learning.

Mr. Scappaticci has a perspective contrary to Mr. Thames. He is the parent of a son of color and about 6 years ago the boy wanted to grow an afro. Mr. Scappaticci's partner was opposed to this because he didn't want their son judged or treated differently. Ultimately the partner realized he had a fair amount of internalized racism and noted that if a person would judge the boy for an afro they would likely judge anything on a boy of color. Mr. Scappaticci works at MCC and works with many young people and he hopes that he does not internally judge a student who may have a durag. It is interesting to see how this conversation unfolded. He noted that historically dress codes have been used for minorities. Ultimately, this is not just about durags, but that students should have the option to wear what they want. It is not our right to policy the bodies of young people. He is proud of the children who asked for this change and if it doesn't work out we can change things back.

Mr. Meggers noted that when he was in highschool hats were not allowed and he recalls teachers spending a great deal of time dealing with enforcement. He understands the safety concerns with hoods, but he is not sure our efforts should be spent on enforcing compliance. We should focus our time and resources on learning. He noted that students would likely not wear a durag at an interview.

The vote was called.

5/1 - Voted in favor.

G.2. Superintendent's Evaluation

Acting Secretary Scappaticci moved for the Board to accept the written evaluation of the Superintendent of Schools for the 2018-2019 school year. Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Thames reviewed the evaluation process was the same format as last year, where the Superintendent submits a rubric and self-reflection. Mr. Thames reviewed Mr. Geary's accomplishments outlined in the evaluation.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

G.3. Superintendent's Contract

Acting Secretary Scappaticci moved that the Board Authorize the Board Chair to enter into a contract for July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2022 with the Superintendent of Schools. Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the motion.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

Mr. Thames reviewed the basics of the contract included a 2% salary increase, which is modest and in line with the other non-affiliates raises. He also noted the Superintendent will contribute 1% more (up to 16% from 15%) for his health insurance.

H. NEW BUSINESS

H.1. 2019-2020 School Calendar Revisions

Acting Secretary Scappaticci moved for the Board to adopt the revised school calendar for 2019-20, which includes an adjustment from half days to full days of school on October 16 and March 25 due to PSA and SAT testing, and the addition of half days on October 9 and March 18. Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Geary reviewed that the PSAT and SAT dates were set and happen to both fall on scheduled half days, so that had to be changed. He also included the changes to school start and end times in this calendar.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

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

Dr. Sedrick John Rawlings, 66 Waranoke Rd., thanked the Board for their deliberations on the dress code. He noted it is difficult to make a decision when it comes to persons of color. He has been involved in civil rights since 1940 and it is difficult to change. He prays the changes will be positive. He told the Board to continue their hard work and thanked them on behalf of his family. His oldest and youngest both graduated from MHS and are doing well for themselves.

Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, graduated MHS class of 1974 and also graduated from UCONN. He is unsure about the changes to the dress code but thinks we should give it a chance. Black men should know how to carry themselves and never consider themselves second class citizens. He saw segregation in his youth and was grateful to attend college. Mr. Stringfellow commended Mr. Geary on his contract and thinks he has done a good job. He enjoys his presentations. Mr. Stringfellow is again asking for a presentation on the non-college-bound student, pointing out a recent article on the lack of military applicants. He would like to hear from Mr. Stetson. Mr. Stringfellow hopes the achievement gap closes.

J. COMMUNICATIONS - None.

K. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

Monday - August 26, 2019 - Opening of School Update

L. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Thames called for a motion to adjourn.

**Acting Secretary Scappaticci moved and Ms. Stefanovicz
seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.**

6/0 - Voted in favor. Adjournment 8:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jason Scappaticci
Acting Board Secretary