

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

Regular Meeting

July 12, 2021

Lincoln/Virtual

PRESENT: Gundersen, Hughes, Pattacini, Patterson, Stefanovicz, Thames

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Geary

ABSENT: Heinrich, Luna, Meggers

A. OPENING

A.1. & 2. Meeting Called to Order

Chairperson Thames 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. Thames.

A.3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

APPROVED – Minutes Regular Meeting of the Board of Education of June 28, 2021. Secretary Pattacini moved and Ms. Patterson seconded the motion.

5/0 – Voted in favor.

B. COMMITTEE REPORTS

None.

C. CONSENT CALENDAR

Mr. Geary presented one item on the Consent Calendar for Board approval.

C.1. Personnel Action

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

The Chairman called for a motion.

Secretary Pattacini moved and Mr. Gundersen seconded the recommendation to adopt the Consent Calendar as outlined in this evening's agenda.

5/0 - Voted in favor.

D. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

None.

E. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Stephanie Knybel, 185 East Center Street, noted that the town is now opening more and more and many people are vaccinated and she wondered when the Board of Education meetings would resume full in-person with the public being allowed to attend meetings at Lincoln Center. She notes the room is large enough to accommodate social distancing. With students attending both school and camp in person she feels it is time to stop virtual meetings and let the public in. Her next question was whether Manchester Public Schools would be giving out school supplies to students. She notes the town community members collect gift certificates and supplies for the Human Services Department and asks for donations and she wanted to know if that was a duplication of efforts. Last, Ms. Knybel questioned the decision to rent office space when buildings such as Nathan Hale and Washington have available space. She feels renting space for Adult Ed and offices on West Middle Turnpike is an unnecessary expense. Mr. Thames noted that questions are not typically answered during public comment, however he agreed that he also would like to resume in-person/open to the public Board meetings and they will announce soon when that will occur, hopefully being in-person by the next Board meeting.

Jerry Beckford, 149 Maple Street, noted that while her children attend private school, her tax money supports Manchester Public Schools and yet her children were denied entrance to the summer camp. She wondered where the funding for the camps comes from and why, as a resident of Manchester, her children are not eligible.

F. Superintendent's Report

F.1. Spring Data Update

Mr. Geary reviewed the Spring data, which confirmed the Winter data. His full presentation is available for viewing on the website. Some key points in his presentation included:

- Approximately 10% less students in grades K-4 are meeting or exceeding the grade level target in reading in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20
- In grades K, 1, and 2 the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the grade level target in reading in 20-21 is more than 15% less compared to 2019-20
- In grades K and 1 the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the grade level target in math fluency is similar to 2018-29
- Over 15% less students in grades 3 and 4 are meeting or exceeding the grade level target in math fluency in 2020-21 compared to 2018-19
- Student performance on K-8 district math unit assessments remains strong
- There is a minimal difference in performance between remote and in-person learners in reading and math
- Chronic absence rate is approximately 33%
- Graduation rate remains just under 90% with very small gaps between bands
- The percentage of students meeting or exceeding the state average on SAT reading and math were trending up but slipped during 2020-21
- Class grades at MHS continue to show more students in the A range and more students in the F range, along with a shrinking number in the mid (B, C, D) range compared with 2019-20
- Student writing remains an area of concern
- Under 3% of students received an in-school suspension this year

Mr. Geary noted the following as being critical as we respond to the pandemic:

- Centering all decision on equity and race and ensuring appropriate time and space for regular reflection on race and equity throughout the year
- Ensuring parents, students and staff continue to work as partners
- Continue to adjust learning models to support students and staff
- Ensure physical and mental health needs of students and families
- Monitor the health and wellness of MPS staff and support self-care

- Support vaccine distribution as directed by the CT Department of Public Health and the local health department

Mr. Geary noted the summer Curiosity Camp, which is funded by federal dollars and at no cost to the families, has over 1800 students enrolled. In response to the public comment made earlier, the funds from ESSER were intended for students in public schools. While we would have been happy to open enrollment to those in magnets and parochial schools, those schools received their own funding and our summer program already has a waiting list of public school students.

Mr. Geary noted that due to construction issues, camps were limited to Bowers, Waddell, Verplanck, Bennet and MHS. Next year he hopes to add Highland so that Waddell will not need to accommodate as many students.

Mr. Geary also noted that the latest CSDE advice is that anyone not fully vaccinated should continue to wear masks in school.

Ms. Stefanovicz asked about the contracted services for mental health. Mr. Geary noted he is in discussions with CHR and CCGC to assess their capacity to support the district. Even before COVID, trying to access outside agency services was difficult for families (getting to appointments, missing school, etc) and use of telehealth has improved that.

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered if the one-third of students on the chronic absent list covered the entire year. Mr. Geary noted that once you are on the list, having missed 10% of the school year, you remain on the list even if your attendance improves. (ie, you could get on the list in November and then not miss another day the rest of the year, but you remain chronically absent). Once we resumed full in-person school in April those numbers definitely improved.

Mr. Pattacini wondered if the school district or the families pay the fee for their students taking the SATs. Mr. Geary noted that the PSAT are funded through the Alliance Grant and the State pays for the SAT taken at school. Of course, if students choose to retake the test on their own they are responsible for that charge. Mr. Pattacini was happy to hear that cost was not a factor for families for those tests and he was encouraged at the relatively high graduation rate.

Regarding adding 23 staff members at the elementary level to decrease class sizes, he wondered what that would look like. Mr. Geary noted that specials would be moved to carts so art rooms and other areas could be used as classroom space. In addition, cafeteria spaces and some library space would also be retrofitted as classroom space. Mr. Pattacini thanked Mr. Geary for his creative thinking and noted he is grateful to the administration and staff for their dedication and hard work, especially those working the summer programs.

Mr. Thames wondered what the difference in summer program attendees is from previous programs. Mr. Geary noted last year there was only a small remote program in grades K-2 which had about 150 students attending. Prior to that the SAAM program had invited about 400 students, of which about 250 attended. The first SAAM summer program, which served more grades, had about 500 attendees. Typically, we do not offer a summer experience for grades 5-8 and at the high school level it is more about credit recovery or a jump start for incoming freshmen. As we did not know the funding amounts early, we did the best we could to plan an experience for students to ease them back into the routine of school and provide parents with a place for their children to go during the summer.

Mr. Geary noted that currently the program looks too much like school and he wants to inject more fun. Field trips are scheduled for a Yard Goats game, movies, museum visits and even tie dye at Bennet. Last week students in the K program visited a farm as well.

Mr. Thames recalled attending an outward bound experience at UCONN as a youth and suggested looking at that type of program to blend academics with extracurriculars.

Ms. Patterson, whose daughter attends one of the camps, was happy to hear the plan to inject more fun in the summer program and noted her daughter was happy to be able to see friends in person!

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

H. NEW BUSINESS

Secretary Pattacini moved for the Board of Education to remove item H.2. from the agenda to discuss at another meeting. Ms. Patterson seconded the motion.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

H.1. Family Partnership and Student Engagement

Secretary Pattacini moved for the Board of Education to authorize the Superintendent of Schools to enter into a rental agreement for the property at 320 Middle Turnpike West, Manchester, CT to house new staff focused on student attendance and engagement. Mr. Gundersen seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered if we could use the \$300,000 rental fee (for three years rent) could instead be used as an investment to update Nathan Hale or another building for our use instead of renting this building. Mr. Geary noted they went back and forth on this decision, but they struggled because there is no current plan for any of the vacant buildings. The Repurposing Committee wants the use to be community driven. While he would be happy to not have to rent space elsewhere, and did receive permission to use part of Washington for 1-2 years to house MMA, there is a ton of work that would be needed to use Nathan Hale and it is not possible at this time. Central Office is already packed full and can not accommodate more offices. Also, the need for a central location with an easy entry was needed for the Welcome Center and that office will move to the Middle Turnpike West space as well. Mr. Geary is in communication with the Repurposing Committee and has provided a list of our needs and thoughts for them to consider as they move forward with their plans.

Mr. Thames noted the RFP for a Community Outreach Consultant is due soon and will help the process of planning for Nathan Hale, Robertson, Washington and Martin. He appreciated Mr. Geary giving the Committee a list of needs and to see how the community feels about the buildings.

Mr. Pattacini noted he is comfortable moving forward this evening with a vote and Mr. Thames agreed.

The vote was called.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

H.2. Ratification of the AFSCME Council 4 Local 818-49 Manchester Building and Grounds Supervisors Contract

Removed from the agenda for another meeting.

H.3. Mural Celebrating the history of broadcast journalism

Mr. Geary reviewed that CT Murals, who did the wonderful murals at Washington School, selected Manchester to receive funding for a mural promoting the history of broadcast media and wishes to add the mural to the high school exterior (location to be determined). Funding for the mural is provided by CT Murals, a public art management and consulting service of the nonprofit organization, The RiseUP Group, Inc. CT Mural's mission is to activate spaces with creativity and public art. This is not something that we need to vote on or approve, as the Town has the authority to approve this, but Mr. Geary wanted to review the plan and pointed out there is no downside to this project. Manchester has one of the oldest broadcast journalism programs in the state and this will highlight that accomplishment.

Mr. Thames wondered what the selection process would look like for the mural and wondered if we would be part of the process. Mr. Geary was unsure but will check into it.

Mr. Pattacini has heard great reviews about the murals at Washington and notes that it sparks positive comments about how cool Manchester is. Mr. Thames agreed they did a wonderful job on the powerful murals thus far.

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

Stephanie Knybel, 185 East Center Street, was still confused about the rental agreement for the West Middle Turnpike building. She wondered how long we wait for community input on the buildings. Ms. Knybel was also very vocal about the concern

for the MMA students. She feels it is unfair for those students to have to move their school building for a third time. They need a home to take pride in and that needs to be a priority. We need to make sure those students get their own school as it is unfair to ask them to keep moving. Regarding the summer program, Ms. Knybel is working at Bowers this summer and though camp is not what they thought it would be, students and parents are getting used to it and enjoying their time. She notes it is not easy to plan a social, fun yet educational experience and she commends the administration's efforts and hopes next year will be even better.

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, (due to technical difficulties, some of this discussion was unable to be transcribed) suggested several books and articles around Juneteenth, slavery and rethinking schools.

J. COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Thames announced that Board Member Gundersen has tendered his resignation effective August 2, 2021. He thanked Mr. Gundersen for his contributions to the Board and noted he added depth to what we do and he appreciated his input.

Mr. Gundersen noted that being elected was an answer to his prayers and it has been a privilege to serve the town for the past 21 months. The reason for his resignation is that he and his wife will be moving to Bolton. He leaves Manchester Public Schools in good hands. He understands the challenges the Board faces and appreciates the tasks before them.

Mr. Hughes noted it has been a pleasure to work with Mr. Gundersen.

Mr. Pattacini thanked Mr. Gundersen for his service and the perspectives he brought to the Board. The goal is to make sure each child is successful and Mr. Gundersen brought valuable input and thoughtful questions to the group. While they may have had differing views on topics, the end goal remained the same.

K. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

Monday, August 9, 2021 - Update on Opening of School

Monday, August 30, 2021 - Update on Opening of School

Monday, September 13, 2021 - District Improvement Plan Update/Professional Development Highlights

L. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Thames called for a motion to adjourn.

Secretary Pattacini moved and Ms. Patterson seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

Adjournment 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Pattacini
Board Secretary