

## **MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION**

### **Regular Meeting**

**October 14, 2020**

Lincoln Center/Virtual Meeting

**PRESENT:** Heinrich, Hughes, Meggers, Pattacini, Patterson, Thames

**ALSO PRESENT:** Superintendent of Schools Geary, Deputy Superintendent Curriculum & Special Services Radikas, Director of Finance & Management Clancy.

**ABSENT:** Gundersen, Scappaticci, Stefanovicz

#### **A. OPENING**

##### **A.1. & 2. Meeting Called to Order**

**Chairperson Thames** called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. All in attendance participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, led virtually by Mr. Thames.

##### **A.3. Secretary's Welcome**

**Mr. Pattacini** stated that as Secretary of the Board of Education, he wished to welcome the online viewers to this regular meeting of the Board of Education. He, along with the Board and the Superintendent, were pleased to be 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. Pattacini 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. For the public speak section, speakers are asked to sign up in advance. If a member of the public is not able to virtually attend this meeting, they are welcome to reach out to the Superintendent via email. There are online forms available for written public comment as well.

Mr. Pattacini thanked the public for their interest in this evening's meeting and the Manchester Public Schools. He is proud of the work happening in Manchester.

#### **A.4. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting**

**APPROVED – Minutes Regular Meeting of the Board of Education of September 28, 2020. Secretary Pattacini moved and Mr. Heinrich seconded the motion.**

**6/0 - Voted in favor.**

### **B. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

#### **B.1. Policy Committee**

**Mr. Thames** reviewed the last Personnel & Finance Committee meeting took place September 28 with Mr. Hughes, Mr. Thames, Ms. Patterson, Mr. Geary and Ms. Clancy in attendance.

The committee reviewed the status of the 2020-2021 budget. The budget is on target and stable and will continue to be monitored and tracked carefully. The district is the recipient of \$1.5M in Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds and \$860K in Coronavirus Relief Funds to support unanticipated expenditures related to the pandemic.

Ms. Clancy provided committee members with a listing of COVID-19 related expenditures since 7/1/2020 totaling \$1.1M. These expenditures include over \$600K in PPE such as hand sanitizer, plexiglass, masks, signage, tents, desk shields, air purifiers, disinfectant sprays, microfiber wipes, and vinyl gloves. Other expenditures are student hotspots, software licenses for student access to online programs, online book licenses, webcams and digital textbooks. These expenditures will be shifted to the Relief grants described above. Manchester has been notified of a grant available to Alliance districts for the purpose of General Improvements to School Buildings. We are in the process of compiling a list of eligible projects, focusing on Manchester High School, that will

be included in the application. Manchester could receive up to \$1,080,000 from this grant.

The 2021-2022 Budget Development Calendar was distributed and reviewed with the committee. The budget process will start with a Pre-Budget Workshop that is scheduled for November 18th. It is important to note that this will likely be one of the most challenging budget years to date due to many unknowns.

Ms. Clancy updated members on transportation. With the hybrid model in place, transportation services are provided for only four days per week. DATTCO still expects that we pay 100% of the contract although we are not receiving 100% of the services. The Board's legal counsel is working with DATTCO's legal counsel to resolve the situation.

### **C. CONSENT CALENDAR**

**Mr. Geary** presented 14 items on the Consent Calendar for Board approval.

#### **C.1. Personnel Action**

Details were provided to Board Members in their packet.

#### **C.2. Transfer of Funds**

- **Transfer from Bennet School Administration General Supplies and Materials account Bennet School Administration Printing and Advertising account in the amount of \$1,900.00.**

**C.3. Establish an appropriation for the Title IV, Part A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant for the FY 20/22 in the amount of \$133,979**

**C.4. Establish an appropriation for Release Time for the MEA President for the FY 20/21 in the amount of \$28,575**

**C.5. Permission to apply for the National School Lunch Program Equipment Assistance Grant for the FY 20/21 in the amount of \$18,293**

**C.6. Permission to apply for the Nellie Mae Education Foundation Supporting Districts Addressing Two Pandemics Grant for the FY 20/21 in the amount of \$250,000**

**C.7. Permission to apply for the General Improvements to Alliance Districts' School Buildings Grant Program for the FY 20/22 in an amount not to exceed \$1,080,000**

**C.8. Permission to apply for the Title I, Part A - Improving Basic Programs Grant for the FY 20/22 in the amount of \$2,072,452**

**C.9. Permission to apply for the Title II, Part A - Supporting Effective Instruction Grant for the FY 20/22 in the amount of \$259,222**

**C.10. Permission to apply for the Title III, Part A - Language Instruction for English Learners Grant for the FY 20/22 in the amount of \$59,834**

**C.11. Permission to apply for the Bilingual Education Program Grant for the FY 20/21 in the amount of \$11,367**

**C.12. Permission to apply for the Immigrant Students and Youth Grant for the FY 20/22**

**C.13. Establish an appropriation for the Board of Education Community Use of Schools - Bailey Auditorium account for the FY 20/21 in the amount of \$5,760.00**

**C.14. Permission to apply for the Rethink Adult Ed Challenge Competition FY 20/21**

**The Chairman called for a motion.**

**Secretary Pattacini moved and Mr. Heinrich seconded the recommendation to adopt the Consent Calendar as outlined in the evening's packet.**

**6/0 - Voted in favor.**

#### **D. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE**

Tiffanie Henry, our Student Representative, noted that in September MHS seniors celebrated their last, first day of school with a senior sunrise on the football field. There was a great turnout and seeing friends off schedule, 6 feet apart of course, was wonderful. Students seem to be slowly acclimating to the new hybrid schedule with more independent time than before. After school activities are now opening up with modified meetings and online applications and try-outs.

#### **E. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Stephanie Knybel, 185 East Center Street, read an email she previously sent Board members in response to the plan to have elementary students return to full time, in-person learning next month. Ms. Knybel feels we should keep the current Monday/Thursday and Tuesday/Friday schedules as they are working with a low number of cases impacting the MPS community, while the state numbers are rising. This is flu season and with spending over \$1million to outfit our classrooms, why would we risk our K-4 population. Is this equity? Why are only elementary schools returning full-time? Ms. Knybel was worried about there being enough social distancing space and enough staff for this plan. Ms. Knybel was worried about when the intense cleaning will be done which is now done on Wednesdays. She suggested possibly waiting until January to reevaluate the current situation and make a change then. If this change is made, she hopes that the Board of Education will be meeting in person and no longer virtually.

**Mr. Geary** read public comments that were sent in via email or the new public comment form, or seen on social media. Here is a sampling:

Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, sent in the following concerns/suggestions:  
1.) Census ends on 10/15/2020 - last date to collect names - not being extended.

- 2.) Trump pushing back about diversity training or critical race theory - anything critical of U.S. History - will this affect funding for schools? He claims it's unamerican and Marx's teaching - Trump is also targeting books - such as Blue is I
- 3.) How is home school going - is this different from remote learning?
- 4.) PPS Student Mental/Physical Health - last done by Retired Nurse Lynn Gustafson in April or Oct 1995.
- 5.) Problems about student safety and stranger danger with students being at home.

Suzanne Szumowski, 735 Lydall Street, via email stated: I am a grandmother to a 1st grader and 4th grader in town. We have witnessed the hybrid school in our home for 4 weeks now and I have to say it is extremely difficult for kids, parents, grandparents and teachers! These children miss school and cannot wait to go back to a more normal education. I hope that will happen much sooner than later. Thank you for all you have done thus far and for allowing comments here.

Gentiana Vjesto, via phone, Please let our kids to go to school every day. Our kids are falling behind because they are not going to school full time. We need to have our kids back to school because the coronavirus is not going to go anywhere. This is our future life. What are we going to do for the future for our kids? Kids have higher risk to get the coronavirus out of school than in school. They go to friends house without the mask and they socialize with each other. This has been a very difficult time for parents and teachers. We as parents have been struggling with this coronavirus for everything. So please we are begging you to open the school at least 4 days a week and you can keep Wednesday for cleaning. Vernon and Ellington are opening schools full time. Why is Manchester not opening the schools full time????????? PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE OPEN OPEN the school for kids. We and the kids are struggling so HELP HELP US make our life easy and better please.

Ashton Henry, via email: My concern, as the mother of a second grade student at Martin, is that children and parents/guardians have gotten used to the present schedule which has been in place since the beginning of the academic year. Is it really in everyone's best interests to return to a full time in-person learning experience after child care and transportation adjustments have been made to coincide with the present learning model? I wholeheartedly support children being in school full time; however, I feel it should be implemented following a break in the calendar to allow caregivers time

to adjust and make necessary arrangements. I believe it would make more sense to have K-4 students return to the schools full time at the conclusion of holiday break as this not only provides ample time for everyone to plan for the change, but also allows for the district to revert to the hybrid model should COVID cases continue to proliferate. I wouldn't like to see the students return full time in November only to be sitting at home learning 2-3 weeks later again because illnesses increased.

Izaura Negron via phone: Since the district is changing k-4 schedules in November, can parents have a chance to change their child from hybrid to distance learning? This is very concerning due to changes being made right before the flu season! Why can't school resume full time after the new year?

Cheryl no last name given via phone: Before school started there was talk about mask breaks for the kids being during Art, science, music etc. and that those classes would try to be outdoors as much as possible ... but my kids have stated the only mask break is recess and lunch. If school resumes back to 5 days, which I am very much in favor of, I'm wondering if more mask breaks will be discussed and can be followed through with now that it is a longer/fuller week?

Melanie Michaud via email: Why try and send the kids back to school full time when flu season is about to start and the infectivity rate in CT has doubled? The number of cases are staying low in the schools because there is a limited amount of exposure. Why change this now?

Mary LeRoux via email: I believe it would be a bad idea to resume full time in person classes in November. Many parents are reluctant to keep their hybrid students at home if the child doesn't feel well. The state count has increased to 2.4%. This will only increase more if precautions are not kept in place.

Christy Driscoll via email: We have seen a huge increase in the use of technology in education as a result of the pandemic, at home but also in the classroom. As a parent, the amount of time the kids are spending on the ipads and chromebooks is troubling, especially for the little ones. They are easily distracted by all the bells and whistles of the technology, and they are little guys who are just learning to write and are now being asked to type or use their fingers instead. I know that this is necessary given the

current state of the world, but do you see this as being a permanent change when we get back to normal? What do you see as the benefits and also the downsides of such an increase of the use of and time in front of screens? Are there discussions being had in the district about the relative benefits and detriments of the large increase in the use of technology in education? Thank you!

Carmen I. Llano Mendoza via email: The Ipad are a great source for the children, but there is a problem with that. We had to exchange the Ipad 3 times and we can still doing that, but that problem challenged us during class. Are you working on fixing that? What are your plans for that, if you have one?

## **F. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

### **F.1. Bennet School Improvement Plan**

**Mr. Geary** introduced Joe Chella, Principal of Bennet Academy. Mr. Chella, along with Assistant Principals Joan Charnas, Cathy Amadasun, and Megan Thompson, gave a presentation that included a typical day of a student and teacher.

### **F.2. Update on Elementary Equity Work**

**Mr. Geary** introduced Ryan Parker, from the Equity Team, who spoke about the Read Alouds being taped for engagement with elementary students. These books are being read by staff and community members of color and feature authors of color and characters of color so the students of color see themselves represented.

**Mr. Thames** noted that his mother nurtured his love of reading early. He loved that Mr. Parker's message was powerful and positive with no negative words and no racism references. Mr. Thames felt this was a great initiative and he is excited to be one of the first readers.

**Mr. Pattacini** thanked Mr. Parker for his inspirational update. He appreciates his work. Mr. Pattacini wondered what the Board can do to further this activity? Mr. Parker was excited to know the support is available and he will be thoughtful about his response and get back to the Board at a later date. Mr. Pattacini

stated we need to become comfortable with the uncomfortable and he feels good about working to do that and notes it is critical that we get it right.

**Mr. Meggers** felt this was a moving presentation and he supports and appreciates the efforts.

**Ms. Patterson** thanked Mr. Parker and echoed her fellow board members offers of support. She loves the contagious energy and appreciates what Mr. Parker offers the team.

**Mr. Heinrich** thanked Mr. Parker for a phenomenal presentation and stated he is completely behind the work that is making a difference.

**Mr. Geary** expressed his appreciation for the Equity Team work.

### **F.3. Update on Opening of School**

**Mr. Geary** noted that even with the positive cases that have impacted schools this year, there has been no spread within the school. Supplies, technology and PPE have all been distributed to staff and students. The Corona Virus Relief Fund provided \$855,575 from the state. The ESSER Fund, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, provided for \$1,540,381 in funding.

Mr. Geary reviewed his plan to have elementary school students that are not remote return to school Monday-Friday from 9:10-2:10. The classes will have less than 13 students each, to allow for continued social distancing. In order to accommodate the small class sizes, elementary STEM teachers will be reassigned to become classroom teachers and four temporary teachers will be hired. The start date for this new schedule will be November 2. Mr. Geary acknowledged that while many parents are in favor of this change, not everyone is. Mr. Geary feels that due to the number of elementary student families choosing to be remote, we can safely get the rest of the elementary school kids back in the buildings full time.

One issue Mr. Geary acknowledged is bussing. While many families have chosen to drive their children this year, that is not possible for everyone. Having the full

cohort of Hybrid students come full time means that buses may have 20+ students on them, which means social distancing may fall to less than ideal, though students are still required to wear their masks on the bus.

Mr. Geary acknowledged that some students will have to be shifted to a new teacher, with the addition of the STEM and four new temporary teachers having full classes.

**Mr. Hughes** wondered if families that are currently Hybrid can change to fully Remote if they are not in favor of this schedule change. Mr. Geary stated that anyone that was approved to make the switch prior would be accommodated and beyond that changes will be made on a limited basis.

**Mr. Pattacini** appreciated the thoughtfulness of this decision and the flexibility. He noted that the lack of transmission through schools shows we are doing the right things. In Manchester over the last several weeks there have been 119 COVID cases and only about 10 of those impacted our schools. Mr. Pattacini wondered about keeping Wednesday remote for deep cleaning and having a four day return. Mr. Geary noted he considered that but that ending the elementary day at 2:10 is significantly earlier than in the past and allows extra time for cleaning in the late afternoon/evening. Typically Wednesday cleaning is for less used areas and for refilling PPE, soap, hand sanitizer, etc. Those duties will be shifted across the week and if needed overtime can be authorized on Saturday mornings. In trying to best support parents, Mr. Geary feels a five day return is the best option.

Mr. Pattacini wondered about changes to the lunch program with this new schedule. Mr. Geary noted that the time of elementary school is not changing this year and has ended at 2:10 since the start. Students will continue to eat lunch in their classrooms instead of the cafeteria.

Mr. Pattacini noted that at any time the numbers in the state could warrant a return to the original Hybrid model or even to remote learning and then back in buildings again. If this happens, would students who are about to have their teachers change be made to go back to their original teachers? Mr. Geary stated

it would be unlikely to make any further changes and STEAM and temporary teachers will remain with their new student cohorts.

Mr. Pattacini feels it is important to get elementary age students back into the classrooms, even if it winds up being only for a few weeks. He appreciated the request to hold board meetings in person, however as a community we have to decide what in-person interactions we choose to participate in. A virtual meeting is one way to continue to keep Covid cases low.

**Mr. Geary** added that health and safety is our first priority. A board meeting in person would require masks, which makes speakers inaudible and unable to see each other's faces. The conversation about in-person students and in-person board meetings is not the same.

**Mr. Meggers** echoed Mr. Geary's sentiment that we have to be flexible. Nothing is set in stone. We are subject to state guidelines. He appreciated the comment about virtual meetings if elementary returns full-time, but agreed that those are unrelated to each other.

**Mr. Geary** also pointed out that many other communities felt pressure from their Boards of Education to return students to school full time. This Board has always put students and staff safety first and has not pressured the district.

**Ms. Patterson** also respected the community's comments and thoughts. As a parent you worry when they go to school and there are tough decisions to be made. She supports the work and due diligence involved in making these decisions. As a full time working parent, who works in the home, this has not been easy to balance. Many parents and children do not have the right supports at home and have potentially been left behind. Ms. Patterson applauds the leadership team and supports the return 100%.

**Mr. Thames** supports the return as well. He currently has grandchildren in the Manchester system and he worries about them. He knows we did a good job with remote learning but there is no substitute for in-person learning. All precautions are being taken. Mr. Thames pointed out the state chart about

number of cases per 100,000 people. Mr. Geary noted the chart is intended to help local Boards of Education with guidance around when classes should go hybrid or fully remote.

## **G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **G.1. Policy Recommendation**

**Mr. Thames** reported that the Policy Subcommittee submits to the full Board the proposed revisions to the Temporary Additions and Revisions Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic Policy, # C19 for a second reading and adoption in accordance with its policy on policy changes.

**Secretary Pattacini moved to approve the revision to Policy # C19, Temporary Additions and Revisions Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic Policy. Mr. Meggers seconded the motion.**

**6/0 - Voted in favor.**

## **H. NEW BUSINESS**

None.

## **I. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**Mr. Geary** read some public comments that had been submitted during the meeting.

Katia Rivera via email - I support Superintendent Geary's plan to move forward with opening elementary schools up the entire week. It is so difficult for working parents. I cannot keep track of all of the work online or if it is being submitted so I am constantly emailing teachers. I think opening them 4 days and keeping Wednesdays off for cleaning would be helpful. I have yet to figure out childcare for off days.

Connie Anglin via email - NO! Do not support going 5 days. I signed up for hybrid knowing it was going to be twice a week, not in person every day.

Will students be moved from their current classroom/teacher if we go back 5 days and but it goes over the allowed number of students per classroom?

So No STEM the rest of the year regardless?

Terry Vallieres Berube (posted on Facebook): Students (K-8) who can cohort should return to school full time. Young students learn best in person in my opinion. MHS should remain on the hybrid schedule. HS students mostly can handle the hybrid learning plus cannot cohort especially for lunch.

Sheri Myers (posted on FB): I definitely want to see younger children return to full in person. PreK through 4th would be wonderful. This has been very difficult. The teachers are doing amazing but it's hard for everyone involved

Danielle Barnett (posted on FB): I support manchester in hybrid from they're doing amazing but I would support full schedule if it was enacted.

Amanda Buckingham (posted on FB): Hybrid students should be in school full days for the 2 days. Currently, This is not enough in-school time. It boils down to one full day in person.

Lisa Marie (posted on FB): I just don't understand why towns next to us have gone back to school full time but we haven't. What is the hesitation? I'm burnt out as are many other parents.

Tanya Lynn Harmon (posted on FB): That's my concern- Manchester hasn't gone a week without kids in quarantine. I would like to see a month without a case before we move forward.

Ted Fravel - I'm for keeping in the hybrid 2 days a week BUT have them go the normal school day.. 9-3:30pm (K-4) We're all trying to juggle schedules and having them released at 2pm just doesn't work.

Lori Klar (posted on FB): smaller schools have gone back just hope if k-4 go back they can be with their same cohort they have been with some consistency. The younger kids struggle more than middle school and high school some still confused about what normal school actually is.since they have not had one yet

Kate Papsun (posted on FB): What about classes that have more than ten students? Will those students be reassigned randomly?

---- the following were "live" during the meeting:

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, spoke about teaching tolerance and civil rights. He recommended the book *Words of Change* which is antiracism. Mr. Stringfellow mentioned Indigenous People's Day and recommended an article in *American Archeology*. He also mentioned the Italian Renaissance and black explorers. Last, Mr. Stringfellow mentioned this is the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, of which his father was involved.

Stephanie Knybel, 185 E. Center Street, pointed out that while the new schedule for elementary students is said to start November 2nd, election day is November 3rd and we vote in many of the schools. She wondered if voting would be impacted. Ms. Knybel noted she does not always agree with Mr. Geary and his plans, but she thinks that he is doing a wonderful job!

Mr. Geary acknowledged that 11/3 is election day and therefore a remote school day for the entire district, so the first week of the elementary students going back to school five days a week will in fact be only four days. The following week will also wind up being a four day week, as Veteran's Day falls mid-week.

## **J. COMMUNICATIONS**

**Mr. Geary** announced the state will allow virtual snow days.

**Mr. Thames** pointed out an African American Black Affairs Commission voter registration and kid mask/coat drive happening at Squire Village Community Center on October 24, 11:30 to 2:30.

## **K. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS**

October 26 - Board of Ed Retreat

November 9 - Update on Human Resources

November 18 -Update on STEAM and Humanities

**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 9:06 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Pattacini  
Board Secretary