

**MONROE BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Monroe, Connecticut**

**Meeting Minutes**  
**April 18, 2016**

**Present:** Chairman Donna Lane  
Vice-Chairman George King III  
Secretary Shannon Reilly-Monaco  
Board Member Christine Cascella  
Board Member Jeff Guttman  
Board Member James Martinez  
Board Member Carlos Reinoso, Jr.  
Board Member Jerry Stevens  
Board Member Alan Vaglivelo

**Absent:** Superintendent James Agostine  
Masuk Student Board Representative Kanu Caplash

**Also present:** Assistant Superintendent John Battista  
Finance Director Gabriella DiBlasi  
Masuk Student Board Representative Amit Gupta  
Masuk Student Board Representative Ali Moraveck

**Call to Order**

*Chairman Lane* called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

**Exemplary People-Sean Serafino-CSTA Award Recipient**

*Sean Serafino*, a teacher at Monroe Elementary, was recognized at tonight's meeting for being awarded the Connecticut Science Teachers Association Excellence in Elementary School Science Teaching Award for 2015-2016. The award is given to a teacher who has demonstrated excellence in classroom science teaching, as well as dedication to personal and professional development. *Principal Kovachi* added that *Mr. Serafino* has taught several grade levels at Monroe Elementary, and it has provided him with a broad range of experience. He pursued his six-year certificate in Science Leadership and Education, and his interdisciplinary approach is evident in the classroom. In addition, he is Monroe Elementary School's Technology Integrator and a member of the Leadership Team.

**Report of the Chairman**

*Chairman Lane* said that the budget passed on the first vote, and she thanked everyone for voting. She added that now that the budget has been approved, the Board can proceed with their planning.

## **Consent Agenda**

### **Motion to approve the Consent Agenda**

**Motion: (J. Guttman)**

**Second: (J. Stevens)**

Discussion: None

**Motion passed 8 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Guttman, Martinez, Reinoso, Stevens and Vaglivello)-0**

16-019

## **Reports of the Committees and Liaisons**

### **Masuk Student Representatives**

*Masuk Student Representative Moraveck* said that over Spring break, several Masuk students traveled to Spain and Portugal, China, and Germany. This Thursday, there will be the music talent show in the auditorium, and on April 30 students will be offered the opportunity to take the practice test for the ACT. *Masuk Student Representative Gupta* said there was an assembly on texting and driving for juniors prior to the break, a Community College Technical Fair will be held on Thursday, and there will be a performance for calculus students on Monday, April 25. He added there will be a blood drive on Friday, April 29.

### **CES**

*Board Member Reinoso* said that he attended his first CES meeting, and the Education Commissioner provided updates on current issues. He said they were advised there will be a reduction in Magnet School and Six to Six funding, and that districts will be responsible for making up the difference. He added that CES is concerned with the lack of bilingual teachers in the region. There will be CES meetings in May and June.

### **Public Participation**

There was none at tonight's meeting.

### **Report of the Superintendent**

#### **Review of the Fund Activity Statement**

*Ms. DiBlasi* said that insurance is trending positively through March, and the District received a Prescription rebate check from Cigna for approximately \$172,000.

She said that the public hearing on the lighting for the Turf Field will be voted on at this Thursday's Planning and Zoning meeting. Inlands/ Wetlands tabled their vote until their next meeting, but she anticipated having all approvals by early May. Milone & MacBroom is working on the RFP which should be released shortly. *Ms. DiBlasi* continued there will be a walk through at Stepney Elementary to review the removal and replacement of the oil tank.

### **Budget Update**

*Ms. DiBlasi* reiterated that the budget has passed, and that the District continues to monitor costs. Purchase orders will be closed up within the next week or so.

### **Travel Update for 2015-16 School Year**

*Assistant Superintendent Battista* said that they were in close contact with all the travel coordinators and chaperones, and all the feedback they received has been positive. He added there was a meeting for parents a week before departure to address concerns, and there were only one or two who chose to cancel their plans.

### **Insurance Cost Update**

*Assistant Superintendent Battista* said that insurance costs will increase 5% this year which is considerably lower than many districts. Open Enrollment begins in May.

### **Presentations**

#### **Board of Education Professional Development-Capstone**

*Principal Kobza* updated the Board on the Capstone Project. He explained that capstone is a masonry term which means the stone that holds everything together, and the Capstone Project is the culmination of the Monroe K-12 educational experience. He continued that the project has come a long way from its inception in 2013, and parents and students have come to embrace it and regard it as an opportunity for personal development and to pursue an area of interest. *Principal Kobza* said that the Capstone Project is presented to the junior class in March, and over the years more students have opted to work on the project over the summer and present it in the fall. He continued that the critical piece of the project is selecting a topic that the student feels passionate about. Some of the topics have included Business Management, Criminal Justice, Nursing, Coaching, Culinary Arts, Robotics, Architecture, and Auto Mechanics. There are three phases of Capstone:

Phase 1 - Research, fieldwork, and fieldwork journals - Students are required to spend a minimum of 20 hours doing field work with a mentor.

Phase 2 - Reflection Paper

Phase 3 - Presentation before a panel of judges from the community. A presentation is expected to last a minimum of 8-10 minutes.

*Principal Kobza* continued that community support has increased as the program as grown, and students are looking beyond Monroe for their fieldwork. One of the changes to the Capstone Program is an increased emphasis on the portfolio, due to the amount of time and work the students have to invest in it. Additions to the 2015-2016 rubrics include having an engaging, creative opening and incorporating the research into the presentation. A passing score is now 40 points out of a possible 54 points.

*Principal Kobza* continued that the students benefit from the Capstone Project in many ways including:

- Critical and creative thinking
- Creativity
- Interpersonal skills
- Personal and social responsibility
- Technology fluency
- Character Development

- Experience in speaking to a professional audience
- Preparation for college and the work force

The Capstone Presentations will take place on May 26. *Principal Kobza* said there will be training for first-time community judges, and he invited the Board Members to participate.

## **Old Business**

There was none at tonight's meeting.

## **New Business**

### **National School Lunch Program**

*Alan Dean* and *Donna Lopiano* of Sodexo spoke to the Board about the option to take Masuk off of the National School Lunch Program. *Mr. Dean* said that currently 48% of Masuk students participate in the lunch program with 11% of total lunch counts being free and reduced and 23% of breakfast counts being free and reduced.

The projected cost to the Board of Education to subsidize the current free and reduced participants is \$36,000. The projected loss of Federal and State reimbursements if Masuk goes off the program is approximately \$85,000. Due to the loss of commodity food, food costs will increase by approximately \$20,000. The total impact to the program will be approximately \$105,000. To cover the \$105,000 loss, meal counts would need to increase by approximately 125 per day, with an average price of \$5. If Masuk goes off the National School Lunch Program, *Mr. Dean* said that there will be a base meal that will include two sides and milk at a recommended price of \$3.35. This would be the option for students qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

He continued that every station including Pizza, Grill, Creations, Deli and Salads would have larger portions and an upgraded option that will be sold a la carte at higher price points. These options would also include two sides and milk.

*Board Member Vaglivo* asked if the towns who have decided to get off the program have lost money. It was noted that Newtown has been profitable since they went off the program. *Board Member Stevens* asked if the decision to get off the National School Lunch Program would be a permanent one; *Mr. Dean* said that the District could go back at any time. *Ms. Lopiano* noted that they continue to try new menu items and added that many students request larger portion sizes. *Mr. Dean* added that they are proposing to bring in a sushi company, and a variety of gluten free items is also being considered.

*Mr. Dean* continued that Sodexo has a food truck brand that has been very successful in the other regions, and they are considering the option, contingent on security approval. It would run during warm weather and a possible location is the upper tier parking area at Masuk. *Student Representative Gupta* said that he thought an outside dining area would be well received. In addition, after school meal service was also discussed; *Mr. Dean* said that healthy selections would be served and would benefit the many students who

participate in after school activities and sports. *Mr. Dean* continued that student input is important to Sodexo, and they would develop a Student Board of Directors for their suggestions on menu development and student outreach.

**Motion to take Masuk off the National School Lunch Program and go with the proposal as presented by Sodexo**

**Motion: (A. Vaglivello)**

**Second: (C. Cascella)**

Discussion: None

**Motion passed 9 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Cascella, Guttman, Martinez, Reinoso, Stevens and Vaglivello)-0**

16-020

**Approval of 2016 Jockey Hollow Recognition Night and Masuk High School Graduation**

**Motion to approve June 13, 2016, for the Jockey Hollow Recognition Night and June 14, 2016, for the Masuk High School Graduation**

**Motion: (S. Reilly-Monaco)**

**Second: (J. Stevens)**

Discussion: None

**Motion passed 9 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Cascella, Guttman, Martinez, Reinoso, Stevens and Vaglivello)-0**

16-021

**Discussion of Foreign Travel**

*Chairman Lane* said that *Assistant Superintendent Battista* has gotten some possible new field trip policy language from CAFE and that perhaps there should be a discussion on whether the Board wants to put a moratorium on foreign trips for the next year or if they should continue to approve trips and rewrite policy to protect participants and the District if cancellations are necessary. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* said that some districts canceled their trips while others did not.

He continued by stating that at the meeting the District held with parents and chaperones, the chaperones were willing to continue with the plans and the vast majority of parents were as well. He added that if a parent decides to cancel, even with insurance, they wouldn't get a refund unless there was a specific incident in the area they would be traveling.

*Board Member Stevens* said that he does not want to stop trips but that he wants to be careful with the destinations. *Board Member Guttman* said he was in favor of delaying them for now due to the current state of affairs. *Chairman Lane* said that the moratorium would only apply to foreign travel. *Board Member Reinoso* said that he agreed that safety needs to be the priority. *Student Representative Gupta* said that tragedy and violence occurs worldwide, and international travel provides experiences that cannot be had by staying local. *Board Member Martinez* said that they have the responsibility to keep students safe, and that the Board is not saying this is a permanent decision. It was his opinion, that for now, they should hold off on further foreign travel. *Board Member Guttman* suggested a moratorium on foreign travel until January.

*Assistant Superintendent Battista* asked *Mr. Strange* how much advance planning is necessary for the trips. *Mr. Strange* said that about a year, but he wanted to know what metrics would be used to determine whether things have settled down in the world. *Board Member Guttman* said that things are either settling down or getting worse. He acknowledged that an incident can occur anywhere but, “You always feel a little safer when you are on home turf.”

*Board Member Lane* reiterated that the Board is not looking to cancel foreign travel permanently. *Board Member Stevens* asked if the discussion could be tabled as he wanted to hear the presentation that *Mr. Strange* had prepared for tonight’s meeting. It was noted that a formal decision or vote did not need to be taken tonight. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* asked *Mr. Strange* when he would need a decision to proceed with the trip to South Africa as planned; he said that he would need a decision by the summer.

The discussion on foreign travel will continue at the next Board meeting.

### **Field Trip-South Africa**

*Mr. Strange* said the Masuk Classical League wanted to travel to South Africa-Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Kruger National Park over April break 2017. He stated that traveling to foreign places provides the students with memories that will last a lifetime and affords them opportunities to grow that are not possible by staying home. Safety is primary concern and locations are chosen carefully.

He said that the trip to South Africa will include a two day safari in Kruger National Park where the students will have the opportunity to see wildlife in their natural habitat. He said they will also visit Robin Island which is now a tourist attraction. There is currently one student who has signed up, but there is an agreement with the tour company that in the event the Board denies the trip, the money will be refunded. It is a fully guided tour from start to finish.

*Board Member Vaglivo* asked about where the students would be staying while in the cities; *Mr. Stange* said that the tour company has over 50 years experience, and they select locations that best accommodate the needs of the group. He reiterated the emphasis is ensuring the students’ safety.

### **Policies**

The following policies were presented at tonight’s meeting for first review:

Policy #5131 Student Conduct

Philosophy of Discipline

Areas of Responsibility

Student Behavior

Policy # 6146 Instruction

Graduation Requirements

Subject Credits

Ability Placement

Policy #9320 Bylaws of the Board  
Meetings  
Public Participation  
Interruption of Meeting

**Adjournment**

**Motion to Adjourn at 9:30 p.m.**

**Motion: (J. Guttman)**

**Second: (J. Stevens)**

Discussion: None

**Motion passed 9 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Cascella, Guttman, Martinez,  
Reinoso, Stevens and Vaglivello)-0**

16-022

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Reilly-Monaco  
Board of Education Secretary