

MONROE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Monroe, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes
January 17, 2017

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

Also present: Superintendent James Agostine
Assistant Superintendent John Battista
Finance Director Gabriella DiBlasi
Masuk Student Board Representative Michelle Cobuzzi
Masuk Student Board Representative Kevin Brown

Absent: Masuk Student Board Representative William Santee

Call to Order

Chairman Lane called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. and led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Exemplary People-Masuk Turf Building Committee

Superintendent Agostine thanked the Committee for their hard work and efforts in completing the project. He noted it was a very knowledgeable and dedicated group of individuals. The members of the Turf Building Committee: *Chairman Rick Henderson, John Battista, Christine Cascella, Vic Ciancetta, Gabi DiBlasi, John DeGennaro, Mark Hughes, Joe Kobza, Bill Lardi, Jeff Raucci, and Jack Zamary.* *Superintendent Agostine* noted that the field looks great, the new sound system was installed a few weeks ago, and the lighting system is a major improvement. *Chairman Lane* added that the project went very smoothly, and she thanked the Board and the community for their support.

Report of the Chairman

Chairman Lane announced the passing of *Ciara O'Driscoll*, a sixth grader at Jockey Hollow, who passed away due to complications from a seizure. "There are no adequate words to express the loss of one of our children." *Ciara* was remembered for overcoming challenges every day, and "she has enriched us all by teaching us the meaning of perseverance." There was a moment of silence in honor of *Ciara*.

Chairman Lane read the following statement regarding the incident at Masuk last week: "I want to begin by saying that the Monroe Board of Education and our Administrators are fully committed to the safety and wellbeing of our students and staff. As has been

stated previously, any type of discriminatory or inappropriate behavior within our district will not be tolerated.

We, along with law enforcement officials are continuing to work together on the recent issue of disturbing social media posts. It is important to note that the Administration and the Board must comply with all legal requirements concerning this situation and for that reason, please understand that legally, we are very limited on what we can and cannot say regarding this matter.

As a Board, we continue to take this situation extremely seriously. We will continue to address this issue, thoroughly, and in compliance with all legal requirements. The best interest of our students and of the entire Monroe School community continues to be at the forefront of all our decisions and actions.”

Consent Agenda

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda

Motion: (C. Reinoso)

Second: (S. Reilly-Monaco)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 9 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Cascella, Ferris, Martinez, Reinoso, Stevens, and Vaglivelo)-0

17-005

Reports of the Committee and Liaisons

Student Board Representatives

Student Board Representative Cobuzzi said the Second Quarter ends on Thursday, and mid-term exams begin on Friday. There will be a Parent Teacher Council meeting on January 24, at 7:30 p.m. *Student Board Representative Brown* said there will be a College Funding presentation for parents tomorrow evening, and the Dance Showcase will be held on February 7, in the Masuk auditorium.

CES

Board Member Reinoso said that they met on Thursday and discussed Burden of Proof and unfunded mandates. He said there was some discussion with some of the RESC members at the Legislative Breakfast regarding the unfunded mandates from the state and there is now a task force working with legislators to address and reform the unfunded mandates. ECS Funding was also discussed as well as Special Education funding. The newest CES member is *Peggy Sullivan*, the Director of Finance and Operations. *Board Member Reinoso* added that he has agreed to be a part of the RESC Finance Committee.

Public Participation

Chairman Lane reminded those speaking tonight that they could not name any specific individual.

Kanu Caplash - He stated that students are taught if they see something to say something, and those students involved on one side of the situation did something. He said that the suspension did not resolve the problem as the hurtful posts continued, and they continued to hurt the community. *Mr. Caplash* continued that he felt the District should address the

punishment system and engage in conversations to address the root cause of the issues. “The spotlight is on us, and we have the momentum for change.”

Rene Abdalah - Mr. Abdalah said that he has never felt more out of place in Monroe since he moved here in 2005. He said that what was posted should not be allowed in our schools or in our community, and addressing discrimination - the rules and punishments that are implemented need to be reviewed. *Mr. Abdalah* continued that not only is he concerned with the posts but with the number of “likes” they received. He stated that he has spoken with *Superintendent Agostine*, and he was very helpful and communicative. He continued by saying, “Something has to change and put it into motion.” and “Many people do not feel safe.” We are under a microscope. We have an opportunity to stand for the values the majority of the community stands for.”

Ali Moravek - A Masuk graduate, said that *Coach Butler* is by far the best coach she has ever had, and the lessons he instilled in her have been some of the most important in her life.

Abbey Saia - She reiterated Ms. Moravek’s sentiments and added, “*Coach Butler* is the most caring, dedicated person I know. He not only created a competitive environment but a family.”

Kathy Moravek - Ms. Moravek said that she was speaking on behalf of the *Winkler* family and herself regarding naming the new track after *Coach Butler*. She read from a letter written by the *Winklers* stating their admiration for him and why they felt there was no one more deserving of the honor to have the track named after than *Coach Butler*. “We were witness to a coaching experience like no other. He fosters a culture of positive teamwork and camaraderie within the *Masuk* team and teaches kids to compete and win as a team.” *Matthew Winkler*, a 2016 *Masuk* graduate, wrote that he felt extremely lucky to have had *Coach Butler* as his coach and that he encouraged and fostered a sense of community. “We all had a great time while working hard.” *Ms. Moravek* said that the sentiments expressed are accurate, and *Coach Butler* has always been an inspiration and he embodies what high school sports are all about - character building teamwork, and inclusiveness.

Evan Fahr - He said that the thought the District could learn from other districts in providing students the ability to anonymously report incidents of cyber bullying directly from their website.

Karen Culpcoffey - She is a 1985 *Masuk* graduate and mother of a student on the track team and stated there is no one more deserving to have the new track named after than *Coach Butler*.

Jen Aguilar - She said that she hoped the Board would consider bringing back the field trips as it is disheartening that trips to Washington DC, Boston, and foreign travel have been taken away.

Report of the Superintendent

Ms. DiBlasi said that we are still struggling with the self insurance funding. There are three claimants that have met stop loss for the year, and there are eleven claimants with

claims over \$50,000. For fiscal 2016, there were a total of three claimants over stop loss and fourteen claimants over \$50,000 for the year.

Ms. DiBlasi continued that they have instituted a spending freeze for all departments. The Board of Finance has backstopped the reserve, and that will need to go to Town Council for their approval.

Superintendent Agostine provided copies of *Tony Wagner's* "Most Likely to Succeed" for the Board Members to read for the Administrative Book Talk, and there will be a discussion in the spring.

Superintendent Agostine continued that there are two additional unfunded mandates being proposed in addition to the current 38. One is regarding the adoption of a position statement on computer science for Grades 6-12. *Superintendent Agostine* said though at first glance it looked like a good idea, it is unfunded and something would need to be taken out of the existing curriculum to include it. In addition, it would violate a lot of the student data privacy laws. The other unfunded mandate is Alternative Education; as it varies from district to district, it makes sense there should be guidelines for consistency, but the cost of educating an expelled student would increase from \$15,000 to \$50,000. *Superintendent Agostine* added that our Alternative Education Program is not a punitive program, it is for those students who learn better in a smaller environment, and our program meets the state's criteria.

Superintendent Agostine said they are looking at the concept of One to One which means every student in Grades 6-12 would have a Chromebook. Given the rising costs of textbooks, it is cost effective to have equipment the students would have access to all the time. This is not in the budget for next year, and *Dr. Zmary* will chair the committee to research it further. *Board Member Lane* asked about the District's Bring Your Own Technology, *Dr. Zmary* said that though the BYOT program is successful, there is a consistency in having all the same equipment in each classroom. And with the One to One program, the back-up devices will be identical and the District could access Open Education Resources at no additional charge.

Superintendent Agostine said that he attended an ADAM meeting with *Principal Kobza* regarding having drug dogs at Masuk. The District currently has a policy that allows for dogs to come through the school, and he asked for the Board's approval to proceed with having dogs come through the building. *Board Member Ferris* suggested that they also look at Newtown's policy.

Old Business

Policies - Second Review

Policy #5131.81 Students, Electronic Devices

Policy# 5141.21 Students, Administration and Medications

Motion to approve Policy #5131.81 and 5141.21 as presented

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (C. Reinoso)

Discussion: None

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

17-006

Discussion on Moratorium on Field Trips

Board Member Lane said that it is the District policy that the Superintendent has the right to cancel a trip if necessary, and parents are required to take out insurance. The question is in what capacity, if any, would field trips return. *Superintendent Agostine* added that the moratorium was primarily for foreign travel. "It is an enormous responsibility for those planning and chaperoning the trips and for the parents whose students are away."

Board Member Vaglivo asked what other districts are doing; *Superintendent Agostine* said that it varies from district to district. *Board Member Reinoso* said that he feels more comfortable, and there are guidelines in place such as insurance and Superintendent discretion. He added more domestic travel opportunities should be explored. *Board Member Stevens* asked how many international trips occur on a yearly basis. *Chairman Lane* said that it varies but last year there were three. The current ratio of students and chaperones is 10-1. *Board Member Ferris* said that he felt the committee did a good job, and we trust the Superintendent so we should proceed with the approval.

Motion to lift the moratorium on foreign field trips

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (C. Reinoso)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 9 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Cascella, Ferris, Martinez, Reinoso, Stevens, and Vaglivo)-0

17-007

New Business

Naming of the Masuk Track

Superintendent Agostine said that *Jim Winkler* approached him and *Chairman Lane* about naming the new track after *Coach Ed Butler*. *Jackie Tynan* and her husband *Rob* also wrote to express their support and enthusiasm for having the new track named in honor of *Coach Butler*; "as the parents of a current Masuk athlete, we know that each track member is treated with respect." *Principal Kobza* said he unequivocally supports a decision to name the track after *Coach Butler*, and it would be greatly appreciated by the Track Community. *Mr. DeGennaro* shared another letter from *Amanda Schneider* that expressed her admiration and respect for *Coach Butler*, and he agreed that no one is more deserving than *Coach Butler*.

Motion to name the Masuk Track after Coach Ed Butler

Motion: (S. Reilly-Monaco)

Second: (J. Stevens)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 9 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Cascella, Ferris, Martinez, Reinoso, Stevens, and Vaglivo)-0

17-008

Alternative Education Location/Lease

Chairman Lane said the lease is up on the current location, and the Town has not committed to a three year plan for Chalk Hill. She is seeking the Board's approval to have the Superintendent explore options.

Motion to direct the Superintendent to explore properties and enter into a lease agreement in the event that a property is found

Motion: (G. King)

Second: (A. Vaglivello)

Discussion: Board Member Ferris asked about the length of the lease. The response was that it would be a year lease. Secretary Reilly-Monaco asked if there any properties in mind. Superintendent Agostine said one they are considering is less expensive than the current location, and it is in a good location. Board Member Stevens asked if the First Selectman was aware that the District was looking at alternative sites. Chairman Lane said that they were very clear that a three year plan for Chalk Hill was needed, or the District would need to look elsewhere.

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

17-009

Negotiations

Superintendent Agostine asked for volunteers from the Board to participate in the upcoming negotiations with the paraprofessional, secretarial and custodial unions; the Administrators contract negotiations will begin in the summer. *Chairman Lane, Secretary Reilly-Monaco, Board Member Stevens, Board Member Reinoso and Board Member Vaglivello* volunteered to part of the negotiating teams.

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn at 8:45 p.m.

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (C. Cascella)

Discussion: None

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

17-010

Respectfully submitted,



Shannon Reilly-Monaco
Board of Education Secretary