

MONROE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Monroe, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes
February 21, 2017

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

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

Absent: Board Member Christine Cascella
Masuk Student Board Representative Michelle Cobuzzi
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.

Report of the Chairman

There was no report at tonight's meeting.

Consent Agenda

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (D. Ferris)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 7 (Lane, King, Ferris, Martinez, Reinoso, Stevens, and Vaglivello)-0

17-015

Reports of the Committee and Liaisons

Student Board Representatives

Student Representative Brown said Music and Meatballs, sponsored by the Masuk Music

Parents' Association, will be held at Masuk on Saturday evening. On Monday, February 27, there will be a Grade 8 Shadowing Day which provides eighth grade students from other schools, such as St. Judes and Christian Heritage, the opportunity to visit Masuk and help make their decision on where to attend high school. March 3 is the midpoint of the third quarter, and progress report notices will be sent to families.

Board Member Vaglivo said that the Masuk Swim Team broke their record in the 4 x400 Free Style Relay.

Public Participation

There was none at tonight's meeting.

Report of the Superintendent

Ms. DiBlasi said that per the auditors' request, a balance sheet is now included in the Fund Statement. She noted that the Insurance Fund Balance is beginning to trend a bit better, and they ended January with approximately \$840,000 in the account. While the medical trend is better than at this time last year, there are still three claimants that have met stop loss for the year, and there are eleven claimants with claims over \$50,000.

Chairman Lane asked about the representatives from the new broker, One Digital, and *Superintendent Agostine* replied that they are very responsive and *Jeff Cross*, the lead representative, will be present for negotiations.

Ms. DiBlasi continued there is a spending freeze for all departments, and they continue to study the proposed cuts and increased charges in the Governor's Budget and are working with Town Officials.

Assistant Superintendent Battista provided the Board Members with copies of their individual Self Evaluation forms as well as a summary of all the Members' evaluations. The Self Evaluation will be discussed at the next meeting.

Presentations

Assistant Superintendent Battista and *Ann Odoy*, K-12 Guidance Coordinator, gave a presentation on IDEA (Special Education) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. He said that they are different things but there is some confusion on how they work together.

General Education Interventions

Assistant Superintendent Battista said that these are the techniques and strategies the classroom teachers do in the classroom.

Section 504 Plans-These are accommodations for students with disabilities.

IEP- A student is considered eligible for special education if they meet criteria of one of

13 disabilities, and they require specialized instruction and services. The 13 disabilities are:

- Autism
- Deaf/Blindness
- Developmentally Delayed (ages 3-5 only)
- Emotional Disturbance
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- ADD/ADHD
- Specific Learning Disabilities
- Dyslexia
- Speech and Language Impaired
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment

The specialized instruction and/or services include:

- Academic Instruction
- Behavioral Instruction and Support
- Speech and Language
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Social Skill Instruction/Support

Section 504

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights law protecting the rights of all individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive Federal Financial Assistance. The definition of Eligibility for Section 504 is “a student with a physical or mental impairment that limits a major life activity in a substantial way.” *Ms. Odoy* noted that a physical or mental impairment is any physiological or psychological disorder or condition.

Assistant Superintendent Battista added that though they are discussing students, it also includes adults as this is a global law. Major life activities include functions such as caring for one’s self, performing manual tasks, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working. *Ms. Odoy* continued that the term “in a substantial way” is subjective piece of the law, but it says if it substantially limits the ability of an individual to perform a major life activity as compared to most people in the general population. In a school setting, it compares students at issue to the average student.

504 Accommodations can include:

- Environmental Accommodations such as alternative settings or quiet zones

- Time Accommodations
- Materials Accommodations though the content isn't changed
- Visual Processing
- Language Processing
- Organizational
- Use of Group and Peers
- Cueing/Preferential Seating

The Differences between IDEA and 504:

IDEA

- An Education Act
- Special Education
- Requires a written IEP document and must be reviewed annually
- The Program Manager is the Special Education Teacher
- For Compliance issues, the contact is the State Department of Education

Section 504

- A Civil Rights Law-The Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Regular Education
- Requires a written educational plan and accommodations should be reviewed periodically
- The Program Managers are the School Counselors and Nurses
- For Compliance issues, the contact is the Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

There are approximately 240 students in the District that have a 504 Plan. The physical and mental impairments include ADD, ADHD, ODD, OCD, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Post concussive disorder, depression, Mood Disorder, Psychiatric, Neurological, and Medical issues such as Diabetes, Respiratory and Endocrine. *Ms. Odoy* continued that it does not mean that everyone with impairment receives accommodations, as sometimes it is not brought to anyone's attention. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* added that there has to be a length of time for an impairment to receive a 504 plan. All the Guidance Counselors have a manual with all the necessary forms so there is consistency within the District.

Old Business

Superintendent Agostine said that the Governor's budget, which proposes cuts to Monroe's revenues by \$7 million with the Board of Education's portion at approximately \$5.5 million, has occupied much of the District's time and attention since it became known. He added that, in his opinion, the drastic cuts coming to fruition is unlikely as it is an unheard of approach with no warning or phase in plan, "We could never accommodate the kinds of cuts and losses and still maintain a viable school district." To accommodate a \$5.5 million cut, the District would have to lay off one third of the staff and eliminate all extracurricular programs and activities.

Superintendent Agostine continued that it would not be possible to reduce each elementary grade level by a section as it would automatically violate Board of Education policy of having more than 30 elementary students in a classroom. Even if the current budget is stripped of technology, summer professional development, and curriculum writing, it would only get the District to a 2.5% increase, another \$517,000 would need to be cut to get to a 2% increase, and getting to a 0% increase would require as much as cutting 1.6 million; approximately 20 teachers.

Superintendent Agostine said the Town has asked him to provide some scenarios, and he is reluctant to release a specific plan, because what the Governor's budget will be is an unknown and giving a lot of possible scenarios will be counterproductive.

Chairman Lane said that Board of Education Chairmen from across the State have an email chain as to what they are looking at, and many of the districts are not even entertaining the public "what if" scenario. She has submitted testimony to the Appropriations Committee for their meeting tonight and contacted *Representative Sredzinski* to ensure that her letter and those from Monroe are read. *Chairman Lane* continued that she felt the approach should be proactive with the Town boards joining together in opposition. She gave the example of Groton holding a press conference with their Board of Education, their Board of Finance, and Town Council to uniformly state that they will fight the cuts. She added that the Day on the Hill will be March 8, and that she thought a united presence with neighboring districts would make an impact. *Chairman Lane continued*, "These cuts will affect property values. They will have a devastating effect not only on the schools but the community as a whole."

Superintendent Agostine stated that the District will continue to work with the Board of Finance and agrees that it is a revenue problem rather than a spending problem though the teacher retirement is expenditure. *Ms. DiBlasi* said that the State is also cutting ECS Funding Grants and looking at recalculating the Special Education Reimbursement. Another issue with the pension is that the TRB is significantly underfunded and the assumption has a current rate of return at 8% which is extremely aggressive for a pension plan. The State's plan is to push \$400 million to the districts, and Monroe's responsibility would be approximately \$3.3 million this year, and that liability would only increase over the years. *Superintendent Agostine* continued, "It becomes an unsustainable formula for the State and for the towns."

Board Member Vaglivo said the Governor's budget is an "epic failure." *Board Representative Reinoso* agreed that he also did not think the budget would be approved as it was presented. He added that he thought it would be beneficial to have a meeting with *Senator Moore*, and he will try to set up a meeting with her.

Superintendent Agostine also suggested the possibility of having bus transportation to the Day on the Hill. *Board Member Reinoso* thought that each school should also have PTO representatives on the bus. *Chairman Lane* reiterated there is strength in numbers, and she feels it was critical to have a united front with neighboring towns and districts.

Superintendent Agostine said that he has heard talk about the possibility of closing a school, though he read from the results of the AD HOC Committee's report that stated

the enrollment trend is relatively flat, and if one elementary school closed, neither of the remaining two schools have adequate core facilities even if portables were utilized. *Superintendent Agostine* stated, "Closing a school to find savings is not a viable option." *Board Member Ferris* said that the Board passed a budget, and they should move forward with it; he agreed there is strength in numbers and thought people should contact their representatives and Senators.

Chairman Lane agreed people should reach out to their representatives as even though *Representative Sredzinski* supports the District, he is only one person and everyone needs to reach out to Hartford. *Board Member Reinoso* said that the Student Representatives have a voice at Masuk; there is a Politics Club and this is an opportunity for students to rally and write letters. *Board Member Martinez* added that there are pros and cons in holding a press conference, but they need to create a sense of urgency, as he did not feel that everyone in Town appreciated the severity of the situation.

Board Member Stevens asked when the State votes on the budget. The response was that it could be June, July, or as late as September. Monroe's budget is currently with the Town Council, who can only make recommendations for changes. The Board of Finance reviews it next, and they need to set the Mill Rate by March 21. The referendum will be April 4 before the Governor's budget is approved. *Chairman Lane* said, "We are flying blind, and we may not have an idea until the next fiscal year. It could be nothing, it could be a portion of the \$7 million or it could be the full amount; no one knows."

A possible option is to take from the Fund Balance, which is an extreme, and would lower the rating from Moody's, and increase the cost of bonding. *Chairman Lane* noted that the Board of Finance has to make a contingency plan for "x" but again, no one knows what "x" really is. *Board Member Stevens* said this is the worst time to be silent, and he thinks the Board Members should go to the Day on the Hill. It was noted this is not a party issue, it is everyone's issue. *Chairman Lane* said even if the State eases the unfunded mandates. It would have no impact on the level of cuts that will need to be made.

New Business

Policy-First Review

Policy #6142.101, Instruction, Student Nutrition and Physical Activity (Student Wellness Policy) will be voted on at the next meeting. *Vice-Chairman King* said that there is a minor change in language which removes anything related to afterschool hours.

Superintendent's Mid-Year Evaluation-Executive Session Anticipated

Motion to enter into Executive Session inviting the Superintendent

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (D. Ferris)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 7 (Lane, King, Ferris, Martinez, Reinoso, Stevens, and Vaglivo)-0

17-016

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn at 9:52 p.m.

Motion: (D. Ferris)

Second: (D. Lane)

Discussion: None

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

17-017

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannon Reilly Monaco". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shannon Reilly-Monaco
Board of Education Secretary