

MONROE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Monroe, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes
June 5, 2017

Present: Chairman Donna Lane
Vice-Chairman George King III
Secretary Shannon Reilly-Monaco
Board Member David Ferris
Board Member James Martinez
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 Michelle Cobuzzi
Masuk Student Board Representative Kevin Brown
Masuk Student Board Representative William Santee

Absent: Board Member Christine Cascella
Finance Director Gabriella DiBlasi
Board Member Carlos Reinoso

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 – Recognition of the Masuk Free Press awards won from the New England Scholastic Press Association

Chairman Lane and *Superintendent Agostine*, on the behalf of the Board, recognize and congratulated the Masuk Free Press staff, under the supervision of Vivian Segall, for winning the following awards from the New England Scholastic Press Association contest:

- First Place, All-New England
- Highest Achievement in Scholastic Editing and Publishing
- Special Achievement Awards won by:
 - Jess Ferrigno '17 (editor-in-chief), for her column, "Women march to make America equal again"
 - Olivia Dougherty '19 for her sports story, "In the net -- and in the penalty box"
 - Sydney Guerrero '18 for her sports story, "Blood, sweat and lots of glitter"
 - Jake Welch '19 for his column, "How correct is political correctness?"
 - Jake Welch '19 for his news story, "Brexit: not just a bad pun"

Molly Carriero '19 for her front-page news story, "Monroe wishes Sandy Hook a heartfelt goodbye"
Megan Cunninghame '17 and Madison O'Gull '19 for their news page design of "Page One, March 2017 issue"

Report of the Chairman

On behalf of the Board, *Chairman Lane* and *Superintendent Agostine* congratulated and recognized the following 2016-2017 retirees for their years of service to Monroe Public Schools:

Charlene J. Benoit, Masuk Special Education Teacher	11 years
Janet Charland, Stepney Kindergarten Teacher	17 years
Debra Charles, Jockey Hollow English Teacher	40 years
Patricia J. Fredericks, Masuk Custodian	28 years
Judith Fusti, Jockey Hollow Reading Intervention Teacher	23 years
Elaine Iannarone, Masuk Special Education Teacher	11 years
Joanne Kruk, Fawn Hollow Paraprofessional	17 years
Irene Miscione, Fawn Hollow Paraprofessional	18 years
Jeanne Moore, Stepney Library Media Specialist	19 years
Cynthia Peters, Fawn Hollow Paraprofessional	24 years
Bradley Peterson, Fawn Hollow Music Teacher	37 years
Joanne Ruby, Fawn Hollow Third Grade Teacher	40 years
Kim Shea, Masuk Special Education Teacher	32 years
Deborah Walls, District-Wide ELA K-5 Coordinator	30 years

Chairman Lane introduced Dr. Joseph V. Erardi, Jr., Superintendent of Newtown Public Schools and the Newtown Board of Education Chairman, Keith Alexander, who asked to address the Board and *Superintendent Agostine* in lieu of *Superintendent Agostine's* retirement from Monroe Public Schools. Dr. Erardi thanked *Superintendent Agostine* for coming forward and helping their district in doing "the right thing and not the easy thing" through some very dark times after the Sandy Hook tragedy. Chairman Alexander thanked *Superintendent Agostine*, and stated that whatever Sandy Hook needed, *Superintendent Agostine* and Monroe provided. He continued that Newtown could never repay him, but Newtown wants to thank him again for all that he did for them.

David York, Emergency Management Director for the Town of Monroe, spoke to the Board and the public present at the Board Meeting detailing some of the countless hours he has worked with *Superintendent Agostine* on both a school district level, as Mr. York was a school counselor, and a Town level with countless hours spent to be sure the roads were safe for schools to open. David York continued by thanking *Superintendent Agostine* for his partnership and his dedication to all that he has done during his time as Monroe Superintendent.

Superintendent Agostine thanked the team that he has worked with during his time as Superintendent both Administrators and Board Members. He continued by saying that all that he was able to accomplish was because of their assistance and support.

Chairman Lane stated that the Board reluctantly accepted *Superintendent Agostine's* letter of retirement. She continued by thanking *Superintendent Agostine* for all the work that he and his team have accomplished during his five years as Superintendent in

bringing the district forward “in leaps and bounds.” She continued by stating that Monroe is a now Town that a desirable place to live, because of the schools and education offered. *Chairman Lane* thanked *Superintendent Agostine* for his leadership. *Board Member Reilly-Monaco* thanked *Superintendent Agostine* for all the care he demonstrated in his decision making, both big and small, with always having the children in mind.

Chairman Lane addressed all the parents present at the Board Meeting with reference to cutting fifth grade music because of the State budget cuts. She stated that she hears their concerns, and the Board does not want to cut fifth grade music, but the State budget cuts do not leave the District much choice. *Chairman Lane* continued that the District still does not have a budget from the State, and we are not certain how much Monroe’s funds will be cut. The District has very difficult and painful cuts that have to be made at this point. She continued that the fifth grade music program is approximately a \$76,000 cost to District. *Chairman Lane* continued that unfortunately, at this point, the District does not have the funds to cover this cost.

Chairman Lane invited the parents to feel free to speak during public participation to voice their opinion, but she wanted to let them know that until they hear back from Hartford on the allocation, the Board must move forward with these unfortunate cuts. *Superintendent Agostine* agreed with *Chairman Lane* and added that every day they have been looking for savings in the budget. He continued that they were able to bring back some of the items originally cut, namely freshman sports and clubs and activities, because of a late notice retirement. *Superintendent Agostine* stated that they will continue to look for additional cuts, and wait for the State to make a decision on the budget. *Superintendent Agostine* continued that it is the most awkward budget cycle that he has ever seen in his entire career.

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda

Motion: (S. Reilly-Monaco)

Second: (D. Ferris)

Discussion: *Superintendent Agostine* noted that, with regrets, the District received a resignation from Minjoo Park, Jockey Hollow math teacher. The District is in the hiring process for this position.

Motion passed 7 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Ferris, Martinez, Stevens, Vaglivo) -0

17-043

Reports of the Committee and Liaisons

Student Board Representatives

Student Board Representative Cobuzzi thanked *Superintendent Agostine* on behalf of the Student Board Representatives for his years of service to the District and wished him well in his retirement. She continued that senior finals will begin on Monday, June 12, and for all other grades on Friday, June 16. There will be half days during exams with two exams on each day.

Student Board Representative Santee reported that the boys track team won the CIAC Class MM championship with 30 to 40 teams competing. Advisory will take place in two days. It will be the last one of the year. There will be class elections for freshmen

through juniors. The seniors will be opening their letters that they wrote to themselves in freshman year.

Student Board Representative Brown reported to the Board about his experience at DECA. He stated that it was extremely grateful that Masuk has this program. He continued that it was beneficial for him in a social aspect and enabled him to experience business in a real setting. *Student Board Representative Brown* thanked the Board on behalf of the Student Board Representatives for having the opportunity to serve on the Board of Education for the 2016-2017 school year.

Chairman Lane thanked the Student Board Representatives for their input throughout the year and invited *Student Representatives Brown and Santee* back to serve on the Board next year. She continued by wishing *Student Board Representative Cobuzzi* well in college.

Public Participation

The following parents came to address the Board regarding the anticipated budget cut of the fifth grade music program due to cuts in Monroe's budget from the State Department.

Kelly Pietro, 124 Lazy Brook Road – Mrs. Pietro described what a positive impact the fifth grade music program has had on her fifth grade son, and wanted to speak in favor of her support of the program in the future. She also thanked the music program teachers for their excellent job this past year.

Janet Patti, 97 Lazy Brook Road – Mrs. Patti is a fourth grade parent, and was looking forward to her daughter being able to play an instrument next year.

Angela Cross, 18 Lazy Brook Road – Mrs. Cross is a fourth grade parent, and her daughter is excited to choose what instrument she would like to play next year. She also has a daughter who is a freshman who is athletic, and she expressed her gratitude that freshman sports will be available to her next year.

Jen Paulson, 93 William Henry – Mrs. Pulson read letters from students asking to keep the program with all their positive reasons why they want the program to continue.

Dianna McCaffrey – 100 Williamsburg Drive – Mrs. McCaffrey began by stating that she wasn't aware of the \$76,000 figure that is needed to pay for the fifth grade music program. She continued that she was wondering if an alternative solution, like pay to play, has been discussed. Mrs. McCaffrey read a letter from her fifth grade child asking for the program to be kept so that her younger siblings will also have the opportunity to play.

Beatriz Rodriguez, 78 Greenwood Lane – Mrs. Rodriguez has three children in the District, one currently in the fifth grade program. Mrs. Rodriguez continued that two out of three of her children have been part of the music program, and she is very happy with the program and the teachers. She continued that her concern is that the type of music teachers that are in the program presently will be difficult to find again if the program is reinstated.

Jen Aguilar, 32 Curry Lane – Mrs. Aguilar does not have any children that the music cut will affect, but all her kids did participate and prospered by it. She continued by asking if any other avenues have been looked at, like possibly a senior citizen to teach the class for a stipend, or pay to play. Has the District looked outside the box?

Eric Booth, 385 Webb Circle – Mr. Booth is a parent of a fourth and fifth grader. He is a musician, and his fifth grader is in the program now, and has fallen in love with playing her cello. The growth in her musical knowledge is amazing, and he is concerned that his fourth grader may not have the opportunity to play. However, he is hopeful that the program could be brought back, once we find out about the budget from Hartford.

Keri Salustri, Settlers Farm Road – Mrs. Salustri is a music teacher. She has a child in seventh grade who is in the music program, and a fourth grader who speaks of becoming a music teacher. Mrs. Salustri spoke extremely high of the music teaching staff. Her concern is that not having fifth grade strings will affect not only fifth grade but the music program in the upper grades as well.

Chairman Lane addressed the pay for play topic that was brought up by some of the parents. She explained that they did have a pay for play option in the past. It did not work, because the only time to do it is before school, and on the elementary level it was difficult to get students to commit to coming to school that early once or twice a week for band. It was a stipend. *Chairman Lane* explained that we do still have the whole summer to decide what to do with the program. Hopefully, we will hear from Hartford before the school year begins.

Chairman Lane also addressed the topic of the music teachers being let go. She continued that there is a music teacher that retired, and her position is not being refilled. *Chairman Lane* assured the parents that the current music teachers are not being let go.

Report of the Superintendent

Superintendent Agostine did not have any further reports at tonight's meeting.

Old Business

Budget Update – Prioritized Cut List Update

Superintendent Agostine provided the Board with a document with proposed cuts which is a product that has been done since the referendum. He continued that clubs/activities and freshman sports are able to be put back into the budget once again. *Superintendent Agostine* indicated that the items highlighted in blue on the provided document are the recommended cuts. He continued by reading these cuts aloud: K-5 Coordinators, Equipment Replacement, Technology, Summer PD Work, Curriculum Writing, Central Office Administrator, Music Teacher, High School Teacher, three Tech Paras, Repairs, Teachers College, and one bus.

Superintendent Agostine continued that when beginning the budget process the idea is to keep the cuts as far away from the students as possible. He continued that the Board of Education feels they have done that with these cuts, and they do hear the concerns with the fifth grade music program. *Superintendent Agostine* stated that the Board of Education does understand that fifth grade is where you can get kids to

join a music program more easily. The Board plans to do the very best we can to bring that program back.

Superintendent Agostine pointed out to the Board that the area in the white section on the presented document is the catastrophic cuts that would have to be made if the Governor takes more than \$4 million from the Town of Monroe. These cuts include: Assistant Principal, Instructional Supplies, 6-8 Sports Fully Funded (pay for play), Nurse, Reading Teacher, Data Specialist, and a Custodian.

Superintendent Agostine continued that he recommends that any funds that should be given to the District should be used to put the grade five music program back into the budget.

Vice Chairman King asked what items highlighted in blue make up the cost of the grade five music program. *Chairman Lane* responded \$57,842 and \$16,450.

Chairman Lane asked if those numbers reflect a fully funded program.

Superintendent Agostine responded that they do. *Vice Chairman King* asked about looking into pay for play again. He continued would it be possible to get an estimate the parent cost. *Chairman Lane* responded that it would be an estimate depending on how many students would be interested in the program.

Superintendent Agostine added that a survey could be conducted before the end of the year to discern how many students would be interested. *Vice Chairman King* stated that he feels that it would be a good thing to look into. He continued that Monroe Elementary presently has strings beginning at 7:15 AM twice a week.

Superintendent Agostine and Assistant Superintendent Battista said that a pay for play program could be compared to the present program. An example is that there would not be any additional lessons during the day by a music teacher. It was decided that a survey would be conducted before the end of this school year to determine how many parents would be interested.

Board Member Vaglivo asked what the Data Specialists do, an item listed on the white section of the document of budget cuts. *Superintendent Agostine* explained that they oversee operation of the District's software programs, inputting data each day in order to generate and complete State Department reports. Jack Zamary added that they do a lot of work in order to keep PowerSchool updated and running for the District's use. *Superintendent Agostine* continued that because of the increased use of technology, it is very difficult for a District to be without these positions.

Board Member Vaglivo stated that if any money comes back to Monroe from the State, the fifth grade music program should be a priority. *Superintendent Agostine* and *Chairman Lane* agreed. *Chairman Lane* continued that if the State cuts us any more than the \$4 million dollars, it will be catastrophic, and all the cuts on the presented document will need to be made plus some. *Superintendent Agostine* agreed that it would be devastating, because it would mean that reading teachers would be cut at the elementary level. He continued that he can think of nothing more catastrophic.

Chairman Lane stated that none of these cuts are positive. The District is losing their K-5 Coordinators. She continued that the District could not have implemented

Math in Focus without the assistance of the Math Coordinator, which assisted us in meeting our Common Core requirements. *Superintendent Agostine* added that this hold true for the Science Coordinator with the new science standards, and LA with the Readers and Writers Workshop. He continued that the District would not be where they are without the work that these Coordinators accomplished. There will be a significant difference without these Coordinators in coming years.

Board Member Stevens asked if the cuts have been prioritized in the event Monroe should get any money back from the State. *Chairman Lane* responded that the Board would make that decision based on the amount of money the State gives back. She continued that clearly fifth grade music, the K-5 Coordinators, and the Tech Paras would be a priority, and the rest would need to be decided by the Board.

Motion to Approve the Proposed 2017-2018 Budget Cuts Highlighted in Blue Only as Presented

Motion: (J. Martinez)

Second: (D. Ferris)

Discussion: *Secretary Reilly-Monaco* stated that the reality is that she believes the Board is not truly in favor of the cuts. *Chairman Lane* agreed, and continued that these are cuts are unfortunately not avoidable at this time. All the Board Members agreed.

Motion passed 7 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Ferris, Martinez, Stevens, Vaglivelo) -0

17-044

Motion to approve Policy #3541.35, Business/Non-Instructional Operations, Procedures for Bus Drivers; Policy #5141.22, Students, Communicable/Infectious Diseases; Policy #6172, Instruction, Alternative Education Program as presented.

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (S. Reilly-Monaco)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 7 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Ferris, Martinez, Stevens, Vaglivelo) -0

17-045

New Business

Poll Board for 2017-2018 Board Professional Development

Assistant Superintendent Battista presented the Board with a generated suggested list of topics that the Board may be interested in covering in 2017-2018. He continued by encouraging them to take a minute to add or edit the list, and the information will be compiled. *Board Member Ferris* said that he has enjoyed the PD sessions, and since he does not have an education background, they have helped to educate him further in order to better serve the District.

Motion to approve 2017-18 Rates/Fees Schedule, Tuition Fees, and Facilities Use Fees as presented

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (D. Ferris)

Discussion: *Superintendent Agostine* pointed out the increases to the Board. He continued that they have added a turf field fee which may be a revenue generator for outside agencies who may want to rent the use of the turf field. *Superintendent Agostine*

stated that at some point there was talk of having to replace the carpet 10-12 years down the road, and he suggested putting any usage fees earned aside so that those funds could then be used to offset the cost of replacing the carpet when needed. *Chairman Lane* agreed.

Board Member Ferris asked about the tuition fees listed. *Superintendent Agostine* responded that there is a very rare occasion when a non-resident student pays to attend Monroe Schools. This is extremely rare. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* added that this is a rate that is calculated by the State each year based on the previous year's cost. It's a per pupil expenditure.

Board Member Stevens asked when the rate for subs was raised last. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* responded that they were raised last year.

Motion passed 7 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Ferris, Martinez, Stevens, Vaglivo) -0

17-046

Motion to approve Healthy Food Certification for Grades K-8 as presented

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (A. Vaglivo)

Discussion: *Assistant Superintendent Battista* explained that the healthy food guidelines are set by the State of Connecticut. Our District receives six cents per meal for grades K-8 for following the guidelines and applying for the certification.

Board Member Reilly-Monaco asked how it is going at Masuk not on the plan. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* responded that it is going well. He continued that by the end of the school year, we will receive an accounting of how it has worked, but we have made up the money of the State's offer of six cents per meal. *Chairman Lane* requested to review the report at the September Board Meeting to see how much the Masuk meals and revenue has increased in this past year since Masuk has been off the Healthy Food Certification.

Board Member Reilly-Monaco asked if it would ever make sense to not do the Healthy Food Certification in grades K-8. *Superintendent Agostine* and *Assistant Superintendent Battista* both responded that they did not think so. *Superintendent Agostine* continued that he believes there is a limit to what parents would be willing to pay for an elementary and middle school lunch. *Board Member Reilly-Monaco* asked if it would necessarily have to change the prices. *Superintendent Agostine* responded that it does, because you have the basic lunch, but then have all the additional items that cost more. He continued that most of the high school students could buy a basic lunch, but most of them are going to the other stations. The *Student Board Representatives* agreed with *Superintendent Agostine*. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* stated that most high school students, for the most part, make good nutritional choices on what to eat, and he believes that most K-8 students would have more difficulty doing that.

Board Member Lane asked the *Student Board Representatives* if they like the food trucks coming to Masuk. All the *Student Board Representatives* replied that they do.

Motion passed 7 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Ferris, Martinez, Stevens, Vaglivo) -0

17-047

Approval of Bus Contract with All Star Transportation

Superintendent Agostine began by saying that in All Stars previous contract, which began five years ago, there is a five year extension renewal that the District could capitalize on without having to go out to bid. He continued that it's a solid financial decision to take this extension in comparing bus costs of other Districts in the area. *Superintendent Agostine* stated that the Board attorney reviewed the contract, and made some minor edits that All Star agreed to, and the adjustments to the contract have been made.

Superintendent Agostine stated that the District's bus fleet is swapped out every five years, and have already been swapped out on this five year mark. *Chairman Lane* added that this is important because this will mean less break downs and issues. She continued that the move to All Star Transportation has been very positive for the District, with only very minor issues.

Board Member Ferris asked if any of the new buses have seat belts. *Superintendent Agostine* stated that besides the high cost of seat belts, the District would need an extra adult on the elementary buses assisting young students, and it is actually not favored to have seat belts for safety reasons as well.

Motion to approve the Bus Contract with All-Star Transportation as presented

Motion Passed 7 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Ferris, Martinez, Stevens, Vaglivo) -0

17-048

Insurance Broker

Superintendent Agostine stated that they were approached by a new broker and met with them with *Chairman Lane* and were impressed with them. Assistant Superintendent Battista added that in addition to some initial savings, the thing that they liked most about them is that they have a division that is just for school districts and municipalities, and they are keeping up with that information specifically for school districts. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* stated that he called some other districts that presently use them, and they are very satisfied with their customer service, which is something that is very important to our District as well.

Chairman Lane explained that we are not changing our insurance company just our broker who is the go between us and our insurance carrier. She continued that if we have any issues with our insurance company, it is the broker who works with the insurance company to resolve them. Assistant Superintendent Battista added that the broker also helps with negotiations in assisting to collect important data and will continue to look for the best insurance provider for the cost. *Chairman Lane* stated that we have not been happy with the customer service that we have been receiving with the current broker. She continued that they are very impressed with Brown and Brown. *Chairman Lane* stated that there is no down side to the switch starting July 1. If the Board ends up not being happy with them, there is nothing keeping us from switching to another company within 30 days.

Motion to approve the Change of the District's Insurance Broker to Brown & Brown

Motion: (A. Vaglivo)

Second: (S. Reilly-Monaco)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 7 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Ferris, Martinez, Stevens, Vaglivello) -0

17-049

Board Member Stevens and Board Member Ferris thanked Assistant Superintendent Agostine for coordinating the End of the Year Celebration to recognize the retirees and employees' years of service to the District, on June 1.

Motion to Adjourn at 8:55 p.m.

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (D. Ferris)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 7 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Ferris, Martinez, Stevens, Vaglivello) -0

17-050

Respectfully submitted,



Shannon Reilly-Monaco
Board of Education Secretary