

MONROE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Monroe, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes
February 6, 2017

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

Absent: Board Member James Martinez

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 - J.P. Sredzinski, Connecticut State Representative

Superintendent Agostine said that during his career, he has never had the benefit and privilege of working with someone who represents the legislature as much as *State Representative Sredzinski*. He added that they share information and that State Representative Sredzinski is very attentive to Board of Education matters in the legislature. *Superintendent Agostine* thanked him for being a champion for the Board of Education.

Report of the Chairman

Recognition of Donations

Scott Pietro of Meritage Group LP has made several donations to the District in the past and his most recent donations were:

- 21 Dell 200FTP Flat Panel Monitors
- 19 Dell Precision 790 Desktops CPUs
- 6 Dell Laser Printers
- 2 Cisco 7301 Routers
- 2 Cisco 750WAC Power Supplies
- 6 Cisco WS-C3560G Switches

Motion to add item under Old Business, Discussion of Bus Contract with anticipated vote

Motion: (S. Reilly-Monaco)

Second: (C. Reinoso)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 8 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Cascella, Ferris, Reinoso, Stevens, and Vaglivello)-0 17-011

Consent Agenda

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda

Motion: (S. Reilly-Monaco)

Second: (C. Cascella)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 8 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Cascella, Ferris, Reinoso, Stevens, and Vaglivello)-0 17-012

Reports of the Committee and Liaisons

Student Board Representatives

Student Board Representative Cobuzzi said the Color guard competition will take place on Saturday, February 11, at Masuk. *Student Board Representative Santee* said there will be a presentation of the Dance Showcase for students on Thursday, February 9, and the Winter Recess will be February 17 through February 20. *Student Representative Brown* said there will be a blood drive on Wednesday as well as course selection for grades 9-11.

Policy

Vice-Chairman King said they will be reviewing new policies at the next meeting.

Pension

Board Member Ferris said that he and *Superintendent Agostine* attended the Pension Committee meeting on the February 5. He said the Committee set dates for future meetings, and the attorneys are working on summary items.

CES

Board Member Reinoso said there is no February meeting. The Day on the Hill will be held at the Bushnell in Hartford on March 8.

Public Participation

Chairman Lane read a letter from *Connie Crowell*, a parent of a special needs student at Masuk. She wanted to share with the Board “the overwhelmingly positive experience” he and their family has had at Masuk and to reassure other families and members of the community that the social climate at Masuk is caring, accepting, and safe for all students. *Mrs. Crowell* continued that it should not be defined by the recent negative event. She added that after candid discussions with students and staff, she is convinced that it was an isolated act and not reflective of the general population at Masuk and that it created an opportunity for discussion of freedom of speech, the role of social media, administrative policy and procedure, and how we communicate with each other.

Superintendent Agostine said that he felt the letter was very reflective on what really goes on at Masuk.

Report of the Superintendent

Notification of CABE’S Day on the Hill

CABE has scheduled a Day on the Hill for Wednesday, March 8, 2017, in Hartford.

Budget Update

Superintendent Agostine said that the budget is currently at a 2.95% increase over last year’s budget. As St. Jude’s is closing, there will be some savings from the nurse’s salary, but he did not anticipate being able to eliminate a bus run. *Superintendent Agostine* and *Ms. DiBlasi* will work with All-Star to see if there can be any savings. Another area of possible savings is the reduction of a nurse for a student who has passed away. *Superintendent Agostine* continued that they will continue to look at anything they can to reduce the budget including further retirements. He will present jointly with *First Selectman Vavrek*, at the Town Council meeting on Monday, and he will advise there may be an additional \$80,000 in savings since the budget was created.

Negotiations

Superintendent Agostine said that the one of the Unions advised that the negotiation meetings usually start late afternoon and he wanted to know if any of the Board Members who volunteered could be available between 4-5 p.m. *Board Members Stevens, Ferris,* and *Reinoso* said they would depend on the dates.

Presentations

Upcoming Legislative Session-J.P. Sredzinski

Representative Sredzinski said that he was a Town Council Member for nine years, and since being elected to the Legislature, he has been appointed to the Energy and Technology Committee, the Appropriations Committee, and as the Ranking Member of the Safety Committee.

He noted there are many issues at the State level that will impact us at the local level, and the Governor will present his budget on Wednesday to the General Assembly. Representative Sredzinski said he is not sure what to expect or how it will impact Monroe

and Newtown. ECS is going to be a large part of it as there was a ruling in September that deemed the ECS formula unconstitutional and broken.

He continued that the data given to them recently shows a wide discrepancy in the amount of funding towns receive. Some are funded at 46% while others are funded at levels as high as 180%. “Basically it is a matter of politics.” Monroe is funded at approximately at 86%. Nobody knows yet what the new ECS formula will look like as everyone wants what is fair for their district; “The question is what is fair, what money do we have, and how we divide it up.”

There is a bill put together by the Board of Finance Chairman in Woodbury, and his proposal states that every school district be funded no less than 50% and no more than 100% of their ECS formula. There will be a press conference tomorrow on a budgetary plan from House Republicans and Senate Republicans to address the shortfall in ECS cuts the Governor made this past January. The Governor cut LOCIP and ECS funding from many towns across the board, and some of the members have found money in the budget in other areas that would reduce or eliminate the cuts. There is an invitation to have it as a bi-partisan legislative agreement. It is in the discussion and public hearing stage of the process.

Representative Sredzinski continued that he has had discussions with *Superintendent Agostine* and *Chairman Lane* about mandate relief because, “If the State is going to take away the money from us, we need to ease the restriction on what the State tells us we have to do. Local decisions drive local policy.” He co-introduced a bill that would require municipal funding be set by March instead of June. He continued the Student Data Privacy Moratorium is across the State and some districts are more engaged than others. “Monroe is doing it the right way.” *Representative Sredzinski* said that he introduced a bill that would delay implementation until 2018 though some want it repealed.

He added there is a significant push to change the Burden of Proof, and there are strong feelings from both Superintendents and parents of special needs students.

Representative Sredzinski said that magnet school tuition is a big issue. He continued that he would be fine with negotiating something that would allow districts to be charged going forward, but many students have been there for years, and he did not feel it was the responsible thing for the State to make them pay for those students.

In addition, *Representative Sredzinski* said there is discussion regarding the School Calendar Mandate and whether it should be made optional rather than mandatory. New Mandates continue to come up such as seatbelts on school busses. The cost is approximately \$15,000 to retrofit a bus per *Ms. DiBlasi*. Alternative Education is another topic the Education Committee is exploring.

Representative Sredzinski continued that the Governor has proposed that municipalities pick up the \$400 million that the State pays out in teacher pensions. *Superintendent Agostine* said that if that comes to pass, Monroe would be responsible for \$2.5 million extra per year in spending for this. *Superintendent Agostine* stated, “It is another way the

State is shifting the burden onto local communities.” *Representative Sredzinski* said that it concerns him that the Governor has said “after pension billing and new municipal aid systems are weighed together, some communities will come out ahead and others will lose ground.” He said that he will continue to work so that Monroe and Newton do not lose ground.

Secretary Reilly-Monaco thanked him for the push back in unfunded mandates, *Board Member Vaglivo* asked if there is bi-partisan effort to stop the mandates, and the response was there are a lot of issues that are not necessarily party driven. *Superintendent Agostine* and the Board thanked *Representative Sredzinski* again for his support. *Chairman Lane* suggested there be an annual update from *Representative Sredzinski*.

Digital Safety and Citizenship - J. Battista

Assistant Superintendent Battista and *Dr. Zmary* gave a presentation on Digital Citizenship and Safety and what Monroe is doing about this. Digital Citizenship is defined as “the norms of appropriate, responsible behavior with regard to technology use.” There are nine themes to Digital Citizenship:

- Access
- Commerce
- Communication
- Literacy
- Etiquette
- Law
- Rights and responsibilities
- Health and wellness
- Security

Safety In School and Outside of School - *Assistant Superintendent Battista* said that at the Safety Committee, they reviewed the Cyber Bullying and Bullying Policy; in addition to Board of Education policies, the school also uses CEN (Connecticut Education Network) Filtering, District Filtering, District Device Control and Google Account Control. *Assistant Superintendent Battista* continued that the law changed a few years ago that if activities occur outside of school, they can be addressed by the school if they meet certain criteria.

Dr. Zmary continued that the District incorporates Internet Safety into the Curriculum. Monroe Library Commons Curriculum - Elementary Grades- (Grades K-3 can only go to District selected sites.)

The essential questions for Elementary students include:

- How do you go places safely on this computer?
- What can you do when someone is mean to you online?
- How can you create a positive online community?
- How do you know if a website protects your private information?
- What is cyber bullying and how do you deal with it?

Middle School - The essential questions for Middle School students include:
What is the place of digital media in our lives?

What is Identify Theft and how can you protect yourself from it?
When can you trust what you find on the Internet?
What rights and responsibilities do you have as a content creator?

High School - The essential questions for High School students include:
When can you trust what you find on the Internet?
What rights and responsibilities do you have as a content creator?
How can information you post on the Internet affect your future opportunities?

Assistant Superintendent Battista said a student spoke about Anonymous Reporting, and the Health Safety Security and Climate Committee created a subcommittee (*Assistant Superintendent Battista, Dr. Zmary, Principal Ceccolini, Principal Kobza, Officer Buckle, and Student Representative Jonathan Bartek*) to review Apps. They chose Anonymous Alerts as the one they wanted to try. The app allows students to download it and anonymously report concerning behaviors they witness. Students would also have the opportunity to identify themselves if they choose. The app will alert an administrator who then can communicate with the student to obtain further information, but they will not know the student's identity unless a student chooses to reveal it. The App will also provide data at the end of the year so the District can see patterns. If the District decides to go forward with this, there will be a promotion and Kick Off Date. The cost for the app for the remainder of the year is \$1,900. The cost of the entire year is \$4,500. Newtown and a few other districts use it, and find it to be a good tool.

The student representative, *Jonathan Bartek*, said it was good idea though he expressed concern over students reporting false incidents. *Board Member Vagliveo* asked the Student Representatives for their input. *Student Representative Cobuzzi* liked the anonymity of the service, *Student Representative Santee* said that he thought it was a good communication tool and *Student Representative Brown* shared the concern of the instances of false reporting.

Assistant Superintendent Battista continued that Internet Safety is addressed at the schools. Jockey Hollow will be presenting the *Google Online Safety Roadsho*, sponsored by Google, and *Congressman Jim Himes* next month. In addition, there will be a presentation for parents by the Monroe Police Department on Internet Safety: What Every Parent Should Know, on March 1, at 6:30 p.m. To address Digital Citizenship, Masuk has assemblies, small group discussions, and an Advisory Council. In conclusion, the District manages Digital Citizenship and Safety through its curriculum, procedures, policies, resources, parent sessions, and a positive school culture.

Old Business

Superintendent Agostine provided the Board Members with a copy of All-Star's proposed rates for the next five years. He noted that while many districts currently pay more than \$400 a day per bus, Monroe would not break the \$400 mark until the fifth year.

Motion to move forward on the Bus Contract based on a 6.75% increase the first year, 4.0% increase for the second year, 3.50% increase for the third year, 3.4% increase for the fourth year, and a 3.0% increase for the fifth year

Motion: (S. Reilly-Monaco)

Second: (D. Ferris)

Discussion: Board Member Ferris asked Superintendent Agostine if he was satisfied with All-Star's performance. Superintendent Agostine said that he is very happy with the professional and efficient service they provide to the District.

Motion passed 8 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Cascella, Ferris, Reinoso, Stevens, and Vaglivelo)-0

17-013

New Business

There was none at tonight's meeting.

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn at 8:45 p.m.

Motion: (J. Stevens)

Second: (C. Cascella)

Discussion: None

Motion passed 8 (Lane, King, Reilly-Monaco, Cascella, Ferris, Reinoso, Stevens, and Vaglivelo)-0

17-014

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Reilly-Monaco
Board of Education Secretary