



Mountain Lakes Board of Education meeting, 2-7-22

Ethics Presentation, Vic LaPiro

The role of a board member is to make policy, develop plans, and evaluate outcomes. The board member's role is not to run the schools, but to see that they are well run. Board members should have no part in managing the daily operations of the district. When BOE members are confronted with a complaint from a community member, their job is to relay the concern to the district Superintendent, and they should never promise an outcome. The board member alone has no power or ability, rather he/she only has power as a member of the whole board; the Board operates as a unit. Individual members do not speak for the board, apart from the Board President. Board members should avoid airing public grievances, especially on social media. Board members should keep confidential any information that is deemed confidential, especially information connected to students and faculty and staff. The School Ethics Commission has the power to recommend reprimand, censure, or removal for BOE members who violate these ethical standards. The BOE members should regularly review the 10 points of the Code of Ethics. Board members should not have influence over hiring decisions except for the hiring of the Superintendent. Neither should they conduct exit interviews. This is a topic that the School Ethics Commission has scrutinized recently.

Program Of Studies presentation by Acting Director of Guidance, Ray Searles

The High School administrators polled teachers and students to gauge interest in various new electives. They have identified 8 new single-semester electives to add for that had teacher support and student interest. Aside from the 8 added electives, there are no changes to the program of studies from last year.

The Junior class will sit for the NJGPA test this spring. This is the inaugural year for the NJGPA, which all juniors must pass in order to graduate. This is a new standard from the NJDOE. If a student fails the NJGPA, there are two alternate pathways he/she can take to qualify to graduate.

The Entrepreneurship 1-4 classes are being renamed. The first class is a single semester class called Introduction to Business. Entrepreneurship 2-4 will be replaced with Business Management, Entrepreneurship Honors, and Sports and Entertainment Management Honors (semester) + Digital Marketing Honors (semester).

Dual enrollment offerings are being expanded in partnership with Seton Hall. They are starting a partnership with Syracuse University. Our teachers must become adjunct professors at SU in order to teach the Syracuse dual enrollment classes.

Mr. Searles asked the Board and the Superintendent to support these new electives in their vote to approve the program of studies tonight. The remainder of the program of studies for MLHS was unchanged from last year. The motion was a "hand carry motion," so it did not appear on the public agenda.



Report of the Board President, Joanne Barkauskas

Committees are starting to do their work. Many have met and all have begun defining their agendas and schedules.

Superintendent Update, Michael Fetherman and Dr. Sumit Bangia

The Governor has announced that schools can be mask-optional on 3/7/22. Our school will follow that guidance. The Strategic Planning group is working with teachers in depth to develop goals and action steps for the Plan. The new graduation requirement, the NJGPA, will be administered to the junior class in the spring. It will have sections on ELA, Algebra 1, and Geometry. There was a professional development (PD) day on Jan 12, which focused on various categories including Wellness and Self-care, Fear and Anxiety in students, Methods for Paraprofessionals dealing with challenging students. There will be a workshop for parents focused on SEL on 3/22, in person, 7-8 PM. Training phase of the Wingman Program (peer to peer emotional learning and support) is underway. Student participants applied for inclusion. Next Coffee Talks are 2/9 at 7 PM in the Media Center and 4/27 at 9 AM, virtual setting.

Board member Ms. Lewis commented that Covid case numbers are dropping but they are still high. She asked what the plan is for the immunocompromised population, would they be offered any hybrid or virtual option? Mr. Fetherman replied that as far as he knows, there will be no virtual instruction offered. The research shows the greater debilitating effect of masking on students' development and SEL versus their protective effects, so the district will follow the Governor's plans, as it has been doing throughout the pandemic.

Business Administrator Update, Alex Ferreira

Mr. Ferreira stated that he has been cleaning up the layout of the agenda and minutes. The State aid numbers for our 2022-23 budget are not yet available, but budget planning continues. There will be a drop in revenue owing to the loss of the Biotech Program and a drop in BT enrollment. This loss of students will result in a 14-16% drop in district revenue, which will have a significant financial impact on the district. Board member Ms. McIntyre asks how recently a long-term demographic study on future student population has been undertaken. Mr. Ferreira replied that it was 5 to 6 years ago; he will put this on the plan.

Comments from the Public on Agenda Items only

A community member stated that the term "Freeholder" in the policy 3233 should be replaced with "County Commissioner," because the office has been renamed. She commented that language in the political activities policy 4233 stating that teachers couldn't post political circulars on bulletin boards was overly specific. She asked if there was a regulation connected to policy 3233 (which applies to staff), because the agenda backup only included a regulation connected to policy 4233 (applies to teachers). She asked if the bullet points 5 and 6 in this regulation mean that there will be no political ads in yearbooks or sports programs. *Policy committee chair Ms. Parker replied that there is a regulation for 3233. They discussed the "bulletin board" phrase and thought it was understood that it meant any posting but would discuss further, and that their intention is to keep all things partisan out of the*



schools. The Superintendent replied that they will change the term “Freeholder” to “County Commissioner.”

A community member asked what has been done to address the fact raised in a meeting several months ago that our AP scores were below the state average. *Mr. Searles stated that they looked at other schools and some are holding back the GPA weight for students unless they take the test. They determined that runs counter to efforts to support SEL and will instead focus on PD for AP teachers.*

A community member asked who will make decisions on the mask optional and when will it be sent out? *Superintendent Fetherman answered that it is his decision, and, as announced today, it has been made; he will share with the community promptly.*

A community member commented on the Finance Committee Charter, which states that meetings shall not be open to the public and places restrictions on which members of the public can attend and under what circumstances. He stated that this practice is not transparent, it engenders suspicion, and is hypocritical, because some board members were helping the finance committee when they were members of the public. *Finance Committee Chair Mr. Driscoll replied that the committee meetings used to be closed and now they are open, with these restrictions. The restrictions are necessary because of the nature of the committee’s discussions, but he believes that they are very transparent and candid about outcomes when discussed in the public BOE meetings.*

A community member commented that, during her time on the Board of Education, the committee meetings were never closed. Members of the public could request to attend if they had an interest in the topic. They would contact the committee chair and the committee chair would arrange the agenda so that the member of the public could attend, and anything that was confidential could be dealt with after the person left, for example. It happened very infrequently, but the Board wanted to be open and transparent to the public. *Mr. Driscoll replied that it couldn’t be done because of the nature of their meetings, which may be different from the meetings described by the community member speaking.*

A community member asked if the Open Public Meetings Act allowed this. *Mr. Ferreira replied that the OPMA applies only when there is a quorum, and the committee meetings do not have a quorum of the Board.*

Committee Reports

Ms. Leninger reported that the Special Services Committee had met with Special Services Director, Kerry DiGiacinto. Wildwood School is doing an Applied Behavioral Analysis program in their self-contained classrooms. Briarcliff is changing the structure of the classes for grades 7 and 8 to align more closely with the High School. The district passed Indicator 11 (a measure of our success in identifying and evaluating students). The district recently submitted to the state an assessment of post-school outcomes for the special services cohorts. They are studying pre-K trends. They are doing well sticking to their budget and are currently looking for 2 paraprofessionals.



Mr. Driscoll reported that the Finance Committee will meet tomorrow. The charter included in the agenda today is the same as last year. It is included today to reaffirm their role and operating principles for the new board members.

Mr. Hirschfeld spoke about the Curriculum Committee. The committee reviewed and discussed in detail the changes outlined in Mr. Searles presentation. The Pixel program is status quo. The success of the new "Geometry First" math sequence will be assessed in a year in and a half and thereafter as the initial students progress to Pre-Calculus. Articulation with the math program with RVS continues.

LWV note taker left the meeting at 10:15 pm

Presentations Link

The presentation on the Ethics of School Board members and the Changes to the Program of Studies are available here:

https://www.mlschools.org/board_of_education/board_meeting_presentations