



Potomac Elementary School

School Board Minutes

for

March 12, 2012

Phone (406) 244-5581

Fax (406) 244-5840

www.potomacschoolmontana.us

*“Potomac School equips each student for his/her future
within a culture of excellence that values the small community experience.”*

UNOFFICIAL SUMMARY – OFFICIAL MINUTES SUBJECT TO BOARD APPROVAL

Call to Order

Board Chair Robert O’Boyle called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM by leading all in the Pledge of Allegiance. Those trustees present were: Jeff Hahn, Gary Long, Victoria Richardson and Jim Wrobel. Tim Johnson, principal and Jill Thornton, clerk, were also in attendance.

Public Input (for issues not on the agenda) None.

Consent Agenda

Victoria moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Jim seconded the motion. **Passed 5-0.**

School Policy Manual

Jim moved to postpone the first and second reading of the school policy manual. Victoria seconded the motion. **Passed 5-0.**

Principals Report

Community

- March 3rd BINGO night for PTC was huge success!
- Grading input from community; March 6th meeting
- PAC meeting well attended on February 23rd, next meeting will be on Tuesday, March 27th.
- The 8th grade chili cookoff raised \$319
- Culleys first Friday dessert night will be held on the 13th of April instead of the 6th. (Good Friday)

School

- Science Fair 8 students have the option of continuing on 19th in Missoula
- Updated Montana Common Core Standards on Website (English Language Arts will be updated soon)
- Counselor continuing anti-bullying curricula with school (goal)
- Centennial Celebration (Pre-centennial) planning well under way; Meeting this thursday
- VISTA application resubmitted to Montana Campus Compact at the U of M. Efforts continue to strengthen U of M connection for Fine Arts, Technology through Office of Civic Engagement, School of Music, etc. (goal) This would provide a 1 year position, full time.
- WMCPs Technologist Diane Woodard will be scheduled two more times with our staff (google); and possibly for a parent night (Helping parents understand handheld devices) (goal)

Activities

- Girls Volleyball continuing, season ends this month
- **CRITICAL NEED:** Coaches needed for long distance track and field events. Grace Leacock is coaching short track events

Vision Impact

- Consideration for alternate funding, reporting/grades, and school day schedule

Clerks Report

Our current Budget is within the guidelines set at the beginning of the year, as we have had no unexpected expenditures.

School Board – Professional Development

Jeff attended the MTSBA Budget Symposium with Tim and Jill. The day was very informative for a trustee – showing how the school budgets are funded. He also took part in the 8th grade fundraiser at Culleys as well as Bingo night with the PTC.

Gary also attended and volunteered at Bingo night. He supported the 8th grade fundraiser at Culleys by consuming chili! He also came to Volleyball and is reading the Daily Dispatch sent to board members from the MTSBA. (The Montana School Board Assoc.) The Daily Dispatch is a compilation of ‘Schools in the News’ from around the state.

Victoria supported Kristina at her hockey game, Jim met with Tim and Jill on budget considerations, and Bob is working on when the School Board can set up an appreciation dinner (or dinners) for the staff.

Inter-District Agreement

The Missoula County Public Schools District #1 is offering an agreement with Potomac SD11 to purchase supplies, computers and copier/printers. The list of supplies and costs was compared with our list and found to contain significant savings. The agreement is still being worked on with the next meeting to be held March 23rd, in the MCPS conference room at 8:30 am. A possible special board meeting will be held the week of March 26th.

Four Day School Week

Jim moved to approve a four day school week. Victoria seconded the motion. This motion then allowed Chair O’Boyle to open the topic for discussion.

Bob asked who would like to speak to the board from the audience. Four community members and three staff spoke.

First was Lynn Sainsbury. She said she did not have a big stake one way or another, but feels more discussion and research is necessary. Her comments/questions were:

- How did the schedule shift create more contact time?
- Though her daughter does not have any homework problems, her son has difficulty with his homework. Often it is work he hasn’t been able to complete in school. She likes being able to work with him at home. She feels in school study halls would not work as well for struggling students. How would we deal with this?
- She likes that there would be more class options for upper school students, but asks who would teach them?
- Her biggest concern is students being home alone on the day off. She knows that the Boy’s and Girl’s Club currently has a standard after school program with the ‘power hour’ for homework. How would their schedule be on the day off?
- How would athletics be scheduled?
- The new length of the student day would be from 8 to 4:30. Is that too long?
- Alberton has a .5% increase in student achievement. Is that statistically significant?
- How would we deal with any staff that would have hours cut?
- Right now, Potomac scores listed on the OPI website are average for reading and math. When the scores are adjusted for special needs students, we are above average. Why change what is working?

When Lynn finished, Jim asked if Mike from Majestic Bus Service could share his information on savings in transportation costs at this time, which would then allow him to leave the board meeting if he wished to. The board agreed. Mike presented the following information on transportation costs:

- His calculations on transportation costs show a significant decrease of about 11.5% annually. That would be about \$46,478 savings over the course of 5 years.
- The savings in the schools payments for fuels could be as great as a 20% saved.
- He has dealt with this before, and one thing that had concerned him is lost wages for bus drivers. He softened the blow by adding a per hour raise. The drivers also had more opportunities to bus other activities without losing their AM or PM shift when a school went to a four day week, which allowed them to increase their pay.
- The only negative he saw for this schedule is the time in winter when it would be dark during the transportation times. Other schools have dealt with this, including the school in Victor where he is based.
- He said Majestic Bus Service will work with Potomac whatever is decided.

Alicia Vanderheiden asked if this would be a direct savings to the school. Jill Thornton, the clerk, said that transportation costs are assessed to the taxpayers only for the amount required to run the busses, so any cost savings would be given back directly to the taxpayers of the community, county and state.

The second community member to speak to the board was Corina Stanley. She moved her daughter here from Alberton, where they have a four day school schedule. The comments she presented were:

- Her daughter thrived on a four day school week. One student in her daughters' class, who was highly intelligent as well as difficult to control, became a calm student with the longer structured days.
- Her daughter still had homework, but she loved it.
- After being in the Potomac community a short time, she said she couldn't think of a better community to go through the changes a four day week brings.
- She also found that teacher meetings were scheduled for the day the students were off, which translated in her experience to more teacher time in the classrooms.
- Alberton's day off was Friday.
- She felt that her daughter was better rested after the 3 day weekend and could concentrate more when at school.
- Her last comment was that though change is often hard, she has seen that this change is good, and everyone adjusts.

The third speaker was Heather Olean, one of our staff who prepares our meals for the lunch program. Her comments were:

- The change this year to a combined lunch hour for the entire school already caused a reduction of 20 hours per month for her. If her hours are reduced further, she could even lose her insurance.
- She wonders if the possible addition of breakfast to the hours she currently has would offset this.

The fourth speaker was community member Alicia Vanderheiden. She had the following comments for the board:

- First, she wanted to thank the School Administration, Teachers and the Board. She appreciates all their work.
- Then, she said she was concerned about the process. She feels the data is subjective. She would like to see data that shows a 4 day week would be better for the students.
- She also does not see how this could save any money for the school district, and feels there could be costs not considered. One of those is loss of work for some non-professional staff.
- As she works a 40 hour week, shifting the school schedule to four days might mean she would have to move her child so she can continue her work schedule.
- She also feels quality time with her son would be impacted, as well as her sons choices for activities such as YMCA, MISMO, and other Missoula activities.
- Currently there is only one daycare in the Potomac valley, and it is full. Where could she place her son?
- Has the board looked at other options to achieve increased continuous class time such as 'block scheduling' or a longer school year?
- She is in favor of innovation and creative problem solving. She supports the integrated math program at school and would like to see it expand to other subjects.
- She feels this issue could divide the community, or result in a loss of students
- With these comments, she said she does not support the four day school schedule.

The fifth speaker was community member Allyson Nelson. She had the following comments for the board:

- She feels a four day school week would work great.
- She also said she doesn't see how it is the schools deal to provide daycare.

- Then she said she would like to hear what the teacher think about the 4 day school week.

The sixth speaker was teacher Terri Klein. She said:

- The four day school schedule is not a 'do or die' proposition. The school doesn't have to stay on the four day schedule. Whatever was decided, the teachers would adjust.

Corina Stanley added that she saw some savings when her child was at Alberton in her own transportation costs. She also asked if there wouldn't be savings in electrical and heating.

Alicia Vanderheiden asked if loss of work for any classified staff whose work schedule would be affected by this could be handled in negotiations.

Jim said they could be. The board would go through contracts to ease the burden on staff that would be affected. Jim also had questions of his own. He wondered what happens to students on the day off. He heard a comment that students have time off in summer while their parents are working, so what is the difference during the school year? Also, why are so few people at the board meeting to discuss this?

Lynn Sainsbury feels there are more options for students during the summer, but not during the school year.

Gary said he researched this topic, and found that 30% of schools in Colorado are on the 4 day school schedule, and that 4 day schedules are similar in Ohio. All of the schools said the issue of how parents would deal with the 5th day was a big consideration before they started the schedule. Then not one district said there was a problem after the schedule started. He said he would also like to hear more from the teachers.

The seventh speaker was Kristina Davis, Potomac schools science teacher. She said her classes would benefit greatly from longer continuous class times. She has considered scheduling some of the field trips she would like to coordinate for the day students are not in school. Other thoughts she has had are to start programs like robotics or skiing on the off day.

Victoria asked why the board received so little feedback with all the opportunities that were given for it.

Terri Klein said in all the years she has been at this school, there has never been an administrator like Tim who provided so much opportunity to discuss issues.

Tim said he feels people fall into a habit of not participating. He is very appreciative of what Lynn, Corrina, Alicia and Allyson had to say. He also feels there is not a lot of research to find on this topic, but what he did find was that at its worst, this schedule performs the same as a 5 day week. So, why do it? From his research, the answer to that is:

The stakes are getting higher. The federal and state governments are requiring what he feels are valuable new measures schools need to implement. His question is how to accomplish these new things. By implementing the four day schedule:

- Continuous class time is increased. This has proven benefits to student learning.
- Required homework is completed in the classroom with trained professionals. He receives calls on how different today's methods are in some subjects and the parents are not familiar with the process their child is learning. That makes it difficult for them to help their child with homework.
- Working with the students on homework in the classrooms also equalizes the resources for those students who don't have someone to help them at home.
- Sending home practice homework would still involve the parents with where their child is in the lessons. This would just not be graded homework.
- With the new Common Core Standards, critical thinking has added importance. The extra continuous time in each class helps the teachers achieve this. The Common Core Standards have also increased the intensity and rigor required in the classroom. Extended continuous time in the classroom is pivotal to achieving this.

Tim stated that the educator's priority is what goes on in the school building, not after school programs. The four day school week provides the tools to achieve greater excellence. The following points are to answer some of the questions brought up tonight as well as those sent to him by others:

- "There is not enough research on this issue." That is true. There is not enough information on the four day schedule. What is difficult is to quantify how each school uses their time as well as the levels of the students in that school. There is also not enough research on a five day school week. How Potomac school uses their time is the opportunity he sees. With the longer continuous class time a four day week provides, the

opportunity is to deepen the lessons for the students. Extracurricular classes with volunteers on the 5th day can also provide more extensive learning.

- “This change in schedule could affect community cohesiveness.” Change impacts our experiences and comfort level. The integrated math realignment was a struggle for teachers and parents. It has had great results and is a model for how we can improve.
- “Only 10 minutes are added to each class.” Yes, and those 10 minutes provide the timeframe that gives the best performance. Too long and students reach ‘content overload’. Also, another interdisciplinary class is added. This can address both gifted and struggling students.
- “Parents need to see homework to know where their students are.” Using the teachers for required homework helps the students continue their pace when they come to questions. Additional practice homework can go home to give parents insight into where their child is.
- “What qualified teachers will teach these extra courses?” All the teachers on staff are qualified and certified to teach elementary school. Though everyone is qualified, the difference is that not everyone is gifted in all subjects. That is considered during scheduling. Another active process that is being pursued at this time is a cooperative effort with the University of Montana to bring gifted graduate students in for music, fine arts and technology.
- “Athletic schedules would make students miss more time from class.” The principals meet to schedule athletics. The class schedules are taken into account. Just having one of the weekly games on Friday would provide a net gain in class time for those students in athletics.

Jeff asked about transportation to the games on days when school is not in session. Tim said his experience is there have been enough parents to drive whenever those situations have come up in the past.

- “The 8½ hour school day is long.” It is. Other schools have seen students adapt quickly to the longer day with no problems. Scheduling in breaks is also one of the methods the school uses to help the students.
- “Where do children go on the 5th day?” The Boys and Girls Club has offered to take on the 5th day. Current after school programs provide some time for homework and free time. A full day or half day of Boys and Girls club can do more programs.

Jim asked if those additional programs would use volunteers. Tim said they would, and at this point the school is hopeful they will have a full time VISTA volunteer for next year.

Bob asked if there was a possibility for food on the 5th day. Tim has looked into this through our existing school food program, and it cannot legally operate on a day school is not in session. He is looking into grants for this. Bob wondered if the classified staff who would be affected by the reduced number of days could be used for food prep and serving. Grants might possibly be able to pay them.

- “Would we lose students as a result of this four day schedule?” Other schools, Victor comes to mind, had their student enrollment increase.
- “Family time would be decreased with this schedule.” The experiences of other schools have shown parents and students feel they have an increase in family time.

Jeff asked if other schools provided 5th day programs for the day off. Tim said they did, and after 2 to 4 weeks no one attended the programs.

- “How would the teachers and staff get the professional development that occurs during early outs?” There would be no early release days. The professional development would be on the 5th day.
- “The data is subjective.” Kids are variables. There are articles but they don’t compare the same school shifting back and forth between four day and five day schedules. Statistics show that once a school starts a 4 day program, the parents and students want to stay with it.
- “Illnesses would result in too much education lost with so many classes in a day.” All the schools Tim talked to had increased attendance, as well as increased moral in both the students and staff. The success administrators have been discussing has had Montana go from 29 to 53 schools on the four day schedule in just two years.
- “Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades are in school too long.” The early grades will not be in school any more than they are now, and their schedule will be adjusted as it is now with recesses and extra breaks.

- “My child will not be able to go to Missoula for after school activities.” Our goal is excellence in education as our top priority. While providing additional activities for grades Kindergarten through 4th has difficulties, extracurricular activities for 5th through 8th will be handled in Potomac.

Mike from Majestic Bus Service said his experience in Victor is with piano lessons, and the slots right after a standard school day were always taken. Now the students could find openings later in the day.

- “Has block scheduling or a longer school year been looked at?” Tim explained his personal experience with block scheduling. He said he saw that having a day in-between classes, as block schedules are set up, was not as beneficial as having a class every day. The continuity in the work showed better results. As to a longer school year, studies he has seen do not give support to the concept that better learning is accomplished with a longer year.
- “Does a day off equate to ½ day Kindergarten?” No, the same number of hours are in the four day schedule as in the five day schedule.

Jeff asked what Tim has found that relates to how a four day schedule works for children with disabilities. Tim said the more continuous time on a topic, with a trained professional, helps with working through difficult concepts. The constant is the learning disability. It’s the same whether it’s a four day week or a five day week.

Bob said one of the comments he’s heard is once the students get used to a four day school week here, they will have to go back to a five day schedule at Hellgate. Or, the four day schedule is not how the ‘real world’ works. Tim said the more he has looked at the four day schedule, the more he sees the opportunities it offers over the five day schedule. He also feels this models how things actually are in the ‘real world’. More and more companies are going to flex time, or remote work locations. Having flexibility in our schedules is a good preparation for the students when they leave school.

Tim added that what the school has now is not broken. But excellence requires leveraging every opportunity, and the four day schedule provides opportunity.

Victoria asked Tim what he would see happening if he left Potomac. Tim said he’s part of the process, but it’s not just about him. 53 other districts are doing this right now. For him, this school provides unique and noteworthy opportunities. He would like to see this school get more attention for the right reasons. One of his goals is open enrollment; he wants people to want to bring their children here.

Bob asked what would happen if we lose some of our student population? Does Tim feel this is a real possibility? Tim said it’s difficult to predict. Leaving the valley creates more of a difficulty for parents than staying. And he feels this schedule would provide the most attractive package in academics for students.

Jim asked if it would be too late if the board held off their vote until the April meeting. Tim said it would put an undo crunch on the staff to be ready for next year.

Jim said he had a couple of concerns. First was the loss of income for some of the classified staff. With the addition of breakfast, or some of the other possibilities he heard, would that be addressed? And second, would families pull their students out of Potomac? He asked if Tim could explain the block concept problems he talked about earlier.

Tim said he found that habits develop more quickly with everyday practice than with every other day as in block schedules.

Gary said he read that there was reduced absenteeism with the four day week.

Jim moved to postpone a decision on the four day school week until the April meeting. Jeff seconded the motion.

Jim said he likes what he’s listened to and read about the idea, though he started out neutral.

Allyson stated that people are often resistant to change, but she would like to see the board make a decision.

Jeff said the board is never going to please everyone and he is comfortable with voting tonight.

