



Potomac Elementary School

School Board Minutes

For

April 12th, 2021

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

Call to Order

In room 112, Chair Vann called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm by leading all in the Pledge of Allegiance. Vice Chair Kelsy Ployhar and trustee Wes Mitchell were present. Trustees Gary Long and Dr. Courtney Hathaway attended via Webex. Principal John Rouse and Clerk, Heather Marcella, were also in attendance.

Public Input (for issues not on the agenda):

Mrs. Michelle Dunn, a parent: Mrs. Dunn read a letter that she previously sent to the board. Mrs. Dunn asked the board to canvass parents and teachers privately for their opinion on the district's mask mandate. Mrs. Dunn supports making masks optional and lifting the mandate.

Chairman Cliff Vann responded by reading his response letter where he detailed the reasons that the mandate remains in place at this time.

Mr. Nick Salter, a parent: Mr. Salter asked if any board members or administrators had contacted the Health Department.

Vice Chair Kelsy Ployhar advised that communications sent to the whole board, can be considered a public meeting. She stated letters are being read, however because of the rules governing school boards, and what constitutes a meeting, they cannot responded. Vice Chair Ployhar said she called the health department multiple times with no response. She called the Governor's office, which directed her to Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI). She said OPI was contacted with no response. Vice Chair Ployhar called former Potomac School principal and former OPI employee, Tim Johnson, for his advice.

Mrs. Michelle Dunn, a parent: Mrs. Dunn said she contacted the health department with no response. She asked if the school would submit a proposal to the health department asking for an exception for the district.

Principal John Rouse advised during the principal's report the board could give direction to the administration with regard to the issue.

Mr. Dave Knapp, a parent: Mr. Knapp asked what the consequence would be for not making the children wear masks.

Chairman Cliff Vann advised that they would revisit the topic during the principal's report.

Consent Agenda

Minutes of March 8th were on the Consent Agenda

Warrant Lists – Total Claims = \$95,944.07 Total Payroll = \$76,124.57

Business Cards – Included in Total Claims noted.

Petty Cash – Supplemental to monthly warrants used between Board Meetings – Reimbursed thru Claims.

Extracurricular (Student Accounts) – On March 1, 2021- \$61,991.26 thru March 31, 2021 - \$62,790.26.

Vice Chair Kelsy Ployhar moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Wes Mitchell seconded the motion. **Passed 5-0**

8th Grade Class Trip Report – Leah Nelson & Lily VanGrinsven

The 8th grade class needs a second chaperone for the class trip. They asked for permission to bring a volunteer hourly staff member. Mr. Rouse advised that per fair labor laws, a non-salaried employee cannot go on the trip. Chair Vann asked principal Rouse to canvass the 8th grade parents to see if anyone could volunteer. If so a background check will be completed per school policy. If no volunteer can be found by May 1st, the board will revisit the request.

The 7th grade class joined the meeting to request approval of their 8th grade trip proposal for 2022. The early request is being made in order to take advantage of discounts for early registration at their chosen institute. Their first choice trip is to World Strides in Florida. Levi Brown, Evan Pulfer, Kaycee Salter, and Sierra Heisey presented their proposed trip budget goal of \$15,000 and shared an informational video. The class began fundraising earlier this year in order to come up with the deposit amount.

Trustee Gary Long moved to approve the first-choice trip for the class of 2022 plus their deposit. Dr. Courtney Hathaway seconded the motion. **Passed 5-0**

Teacher Reports:

Ashley Olsen

Ashley Olsen discussed 2nd and 3rd grade reviewing morphology, six syllable types, and word analysis. At the “Plain Talk” conference Ms. Olsen learned strategies for teaching morphology and word structure. Students are learning how to decode the meaning of a word with the use of etymological dictionaries. During the staff retreat she learned math strategies with presenter Janell Chisolm. One strategy outlined the benefits of having students stand while problem solving for better learning and engagement. Ms. Olsen has started to implement this technique and has lined the hallway walls with dry-erase pages. She has students work in pairs while standing and writing on the home-made boards. Ms. Olsen has noticed the students are more engaged during these exercises.

Bryanna Peterson

Bryanna Peterson discussed her Pre-K class. They are currently learning about rhyming, counting to twenty, sharing feelings, and identifying the alphabet and letter sounds. She recently had the students help create math story boards. Students worked on their scissor skills to help cut out colored construction paper that was then used to make a scenery page that was laminated. Ms. Peterson then provides the students with math stories and has them draw on the board to count and solve the problem. During the staff retreat Ms. Peterson learned math strategies that she will use in Pre-K class. One in particular was to have the students stand in a line as a physical representation of the number line.

Principal’s Report – John Rouse

All of the following activities and accomplishments would not have been possible without the full cooperation and engagement of all of the Potomac School staff members.

Teaching and Learning

- Because our teachers have not been able to travel to attend professional development conferences due to Covid-19, we decided to hold our own mini-conference. The focus of our mini-conference will be on strategies for effectively teaching mathematics. As part of our needs assessment for our literacy grant, we identified a few key math components as areas that needed some additional focus. Dr. Leah Esmont, our outside instructional consultant through the grant, and Janelle Chisolm, a well-respected math education specialist, will facilitate our mini-conference. The mini-conference will take place at the Hilton Garden Inn in Missoula on Friday, April 9th, and Saturday, April 10th. The PTC is covering the expenses for our meals and refreshments since grant funds

cannot be used for food items. The rest of the expenses for the hotel meeting facilities, hotel room expenses, and compensation for our teachers are being covered by the literacy grant. Each teacher also will receive a copy of a helpful math teaching resource, *Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics*. In recent years, mathematics educational specialists have emphasized teaching students to understand the metacognition or thinking that underlines the steps that a student takes to solve a math problem. The professional development opportunities that have been provided through out literacy grants have really been beneficial to our staff members. We look forward to taking advantage of these opportunities while the grant funding is available.

- Parent-Teacher conferences took place on April 7th and 8th. There was a good response from parents who were interested in meeting with their children’s respective teachers. All of our teachers were well prepared for the conferences in that they collected recent data regarding each student’s academic progress as measured by our formative assessments.
- In order to fine tune our strategies for improving our students’ literacy skills, the school leadership team has decided to take part in a curriculum management audit that will focus on literacy for grades preK-8 at Potomac School. A curriculum management audit is a thorough, data-driven process that is designed to verify the degree of deep alignment between the written, taught, and tested curriculum. Specifically, our audit will look to see how well our written English language arts curriculum, primarily Core Knowledge in Language Arts (CKLA) for grades prek-5 and Amplify for grades 6-8, align with our assessment measures- MAP, ISIP, and SBAC. Additionally, the auditors involved in this process will verify how well what are we are doing in the classrooms is aligned with the written goals of our literacy grant.

The curriculum audit procedure is not required by OPI or the grant. It is something our staff felt would give us good data that is triangulated by outside auditors through direct observations in our classes, their review of our written curriculum documents that are guiding our instruction, and through interviews the auditor will conduct with our instructional staff members as well as board members. The lead auditor will be in our school for three days- May 17, 18, and 19. Prior to that date, we will provide both the on-site auditor and at least one remote auditor with a number of specifically requests documents for their review prior to visiting our school. The final audit report will be completed within 90 days of the audit. It would likely be well over a hundred pages of findings and recommendations that will be shared with the instructional staff and the board. We will use this data to make adjustments to our instructional program and the delivery of instruction, if warranted. The cost of this audit is covered by grant funds and is enthusiastically supported by Terri Barclay with OPI.

- The April board meeting is the time when teachers’ employment contracts for the next school year are approved by the school board. For the benefit of the newer board members, it is important to know that the State of Montana statutes require that certified teachers and administrators after receiving three consecutive employment contracts with a school district must be offered a tenure contract for the fourth employment contract and for all subsequent contracts. Once a teacher or administrator receives tenure contract status, that individual is provided more protections under term contract renewal statutes than individuals with provisional contracts have.
- This year, one of our teachers who will now be eligible for a tenure contract is in a unique position because she is certified in Montana to teach only special education classes or a reading course. Due to the fact that our special education caseload numbers have declined, the number of students in her caseload no longer warrants a full-time special education position. In the past, we have had special education teachers who taught special education students for a portion of the day and then taught other academic classes for the balance of the day. In this case, the teacher has an out-of-state certification that does not allow her to teach general education classes in grades K-8 in Montana, except for a reading class. Since we do not offer separate reading classes at Potomac School, that is not an option. Our reading is incorporated into our English Language Arts block each day. This individual could work as an instructional interventionist assisting with one-on-one or small instruction under the supervision of the regular certified classroom teacher and be funded out of our literacy grant. However, once the grant funds are gone, the school district would have to fund the full-time position out of the general fund if the teacher is given a full-time tenure contract.

School districts are allowed to offer the teacher a part-time tenure contract instead of a full-time tenure contract. Under a part-time tenure contract, the employment could still have the benefit of tenure status, but the school

district would only be obligated to continue employing the individual in a part-time capacity. By definition, part-time employment is any employment that is less than 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE).

Budget and Finance

- We have been informed by Nicole Noonan, our financial auditor, that she will not have our audit report done until perhaps late June. When asked why the delay, Ms. Noonan’s reply was that her firm got over extended. I have asked Ms. Noonan to honor the commitment her firm made with our school district by completing the audit report in time for our June 14th board meeting. As of the time of my preparing this principal’s report, she had not made a commitment to have the audit completed by the regular June board meeting.

Student Activities

- Our track season is scheduled to start on April 12th.
- The Missoula City-County Health Department has relaxed the rules regarding the size of indoor gatherings, so at this point, we can host the Missoula Children’s Theater on May 8th and kindergarten and 8th grade graduations on June 10th without limitations on the number of people who can attend the events indoors. At this time, face masks will still be required.
- The 8th grade class is still looking for a second adult chaperone for their trip to Moab, Utah. Due to some uncontrolled circumstances, no other teachers are available to participate. Mr. Rouse is unable to commit due to on-going concerns over his wife’s health issues. Although there are potentially some classified employees who would be willing to chaperone, the Fair Labor Standards Act restrictions make it inadvisable to send hourly employees on overnight trips. Basically if we were to send an hourly employee, we would be required to compensate the employee for anytime that person was expected to be responsible for supervising our students. That would result in some major overtime expenses for the school district. This also creates an imbalance for the certified (contracted) employee who is serving also in a chaperone role. Teachers on these trips do not receive any compensation beyond what they normally would make according to their employment contract.

While some classified (hourly) employees may offer to take “vacation” leave in order to participate as a chaperone, it is advised by our attorneys not to allow the use of vacation leave for this purpose because in previous FLSA court cases, doing so has been ruled as circumventing the FLSA regulations, and school districts have been held financially liable for fully compensating the hourly employee. The 8th graders are planning to ask the school board to allow a non-employee parent volunteer to participate as a chaperone in this case. If the board chooses to allow this, that individual would need to have a criminal history check completed prior to participating in the trip.

Safety

- We have established a School Wellness Committee in order to comply with the request from OPI in order for us to be eligible to receive funding for the summer food program. This group is actually be a subgroup of our Safety Committee. For the purpose of conducting the required school wellness survey, we selected five individuals to complete the survey instruments. The five respondents were; two teachers, our food service manager, and two students. Based on the survey results, areas in need of improvement were identified and then used to develop a draft School Wellness Safety Plan. This plan will be presented to the school board and the Parent Teacher Club for review and suggestions. The draft Action Plan is also posted on the school district’s web site.
- The draft School Wellness Action Plan is included in the board packet.

Facilities

- Over Easter weekend, a grass fire got out of control adjacent to the school property. The fast-moving fires burned up one section of our high jump landing pad that was located on school property near the fence boundary with the adjacent property. The homeowner who was responsible for the prescribed burn has offered to replace the damaged pad.

Respectfully submitted by:
John P. Rouse, Principal

During the Principal’s Report Chair Vann requested the Clerk to move the Strategic Plan and Goals Action item from May to August.

Chairman Cliff Vann opened the meeting to public comment during the “Safety” portion of the Principal’s Report

Chairman Cliff Vann stated he would like the county health department to give a metric for guidance on removing the mandate.

Trustee Dr. Courtney Hathaway said the metric set on the county health department website showed a goal of 24 cases for every 100,000 people. Dr. Hathaway noted the goal had been met but no update to the mandate.

Trustee Gary Long stated he wanted a vote to make masks personal choice, not by mandate.

Michell Dunn, a parent: Mrs. Dunn stated she agreed that masks should be personal choice. Mrs. Dunn requested the board call a vote.

Dave Knapp, a parent: Mr. Knapp agreed with the statements made by other parents and the board members. Mr. Knapp was concerned with the psychological affects of the masks on children. Mr. Knapp said other schools were not mandating masks. Mr. Knapp stated the county health department could attempt to sue the school, but no suits had been won to date.

Allyson Nelson, a parent: Mrs. Nelson said masks should be personal choice.

Chairman Cliff Vann explained that the school would have to sue for the right to remove the mask mandate, the health department would not have to sue to enforce it. Chair Vann advised the school could be shut down and assessed fines by the county health department if they went against the mandate.

Trustee Wes Mitchell stated the Sheriff’s office has stated it will not enforce the mandate.

Mrs. Michelle Dunn, a parent: Mrs. Dunn asked parents and board members to join the weekly health department HEAT meeting to become more involved.

Vice Chair Kelsy Ployhar stated she would attempt to contact the state health department.

Trustee Gary Long motioned to make mask wearing voluntary at Potomac School. Vice Chair Kelsy Ployhar seconded the motion.

Trustee Gary Long voted aye.

Chair Vann, Vice Chair Ployhar, Trustees Mitchell and Dr. Hathaway voted nay.

Failed to Pass: 1-4

Clerk Heather Marcella leaves the meeting at 9:17 pm, Vice Chair Kelsy Ployhar continues with the minutes.

Clerk’s Report

The Clerk’s report included information on expenditures over \$10,000, the 7th grade fundraising and a correction on the Student Accounts Ledger, as well as a list of items scheduled for the next meeting in May.

New Business

Approve Certified Employees Intent to Hire

Trustee Wes Mitchell moved that the board approve the intent to hire. Dr. Courtney Hathaway seconded the motion. **Passed 5-0**

Approve Clerk Intent to Hire and Negotiation Committee

Trustee Dr. Courtney Hathaway moved to approve the contract amount as was stated in the matrix. No second, motion withdrawn.

Approve School Calendar for 2021-20232

Trustee Wes Mitchell moved to approve the school calendar for 2021-2022. Dr. Courtney Hathaway seconded the motion. **Passed 5-0**

Approve 2021-20223 Bus Routes

Trustee Dr. Courtney Hathaway moved to approve the bus route as presented. Trustee Wes Mitchell seconded the motion. **Passed 5-0**

Surplus Property – Sell, recycle, donate, dispose of Hobart Industrial Kitchen Oven and Wilray 2,000 Gallon Diesel Fuel Tank

Trustee Wes Mitchell moved to approve disposing the surplus property. Dr. Courtney Hathaway seconded the motion. **Passed 5-0**

Adjourn

Chair Vann adjourned the meeting at 9:45 pm.

Cliff Vann, Chair

date

Heather Marcella, Clerk

date