

MMUSD Board of Directors Meeting Minutes February 25, 2010

Present: Judith Jones (Chair), George Till, Ken Wyman, Cliff Peterson, Alison Anand, Linda Willmott, Bob Robbins, Diane Kirson-Glitman, Yasmine Ziesler, Michael Marks, Jeff Forward, Mark Carbone, Jim Massingham

Judith Jones called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.

Budget Discussion

George Till said that there is only one school, an elementary school, spending less per equalized pupil than MMUSD. Fifty-eight percent of school districts decreased their spending, 42% increased their budgets, Till said. An average in the negative is pretty remarkable, Till said – it shows that the Titanic has turned. Till added that it's possible that there may be one cent less added to the statewide property tax rate. They won't know until after the legislature votes. Jeff Forward said that seems as if people in Montpelier feel as though the state's school boards spend willy-nilly and that they need to help us reduce our spending. It doesn't seem that we need their help to curb spending, he said. Mr. Till said that the legislature can be a bit schizophrenic. If a Vermont company added 300 jobs it would be deemed a great thing for the economy; if a school does it, it's deemed a disaster even though it would have no less impact as a stimulus.

Jim Massingham said that RIFs (note: not sure of spelling on this one) to specific teachers are due by April 15. Cliff Peterson said that will be very hard on morale. Bob Robbins said that it would present a different picture budgetarily from what we've presented to the public if we're losing more teachers. Mr. Till said that they told the public that there are lots of moving parts to the proposed budget. Mr. Massingham said that the Executive Committee is meeting in the third week of March to discuss RIFs. Ken Wyman posed the question of whether the only alternative to RIFs is reducing all teacher salaries, which is not acceptable to the union? Mr. Massingham said that the offer on the table to the teachers union is a zero-percent salary increase. Ms. Jones pointed out that the negotiators are also asking for teachers to increase their health-care contributions.

The budget that has already been presented to the public for '10-11 assumes a regular STEP increase for all teachers, said Massingham. There is no set conclusion date to the negotiations. Last time they ended in the summer. If there is no agreement by then it goes to mediation and fact-finding, Massingham added. To avoid that they would need to have negotiations settled by the time the first paychecks are cut in mid-August. If they succeed in their negotiations of a zero increase for teachers then that money would be available to offset any bad news from Montpelier, Massingham said. If there's good news, then it will likely be bad in the future, so the district could hold on to that money until that time. From my understanding it will be an even tougher budget period next year, said Massingham.

Mr. Forward said it would be good for MMUSD teachers to hear this conversation outside of negotiations. If they don't hear it, the zero salary increase is perceived as a negotiating tactic. It would be good for them to hear that we don't want to do this and that it's not a strategy, Forward said. It might dampen the blow if it's not perceived as a strategy.

Alison Anand asked what the cost of going to mediation might be. Mr. Massingham said he does not know that exact expenses, but said that compared to the amount of money at stake it would be a reasonable agreement.

Policy Review

-Work Study Students: Diane Kirson-Glitman said this will serve as an official Warning, and that a seconded motion has been passed on from the Policy Committee. The work study student policy will entail appropriate supervision for safety and that the district shall check the sex offender registry when considering new hires. Those on it will not be eligible to be a work study student for MMUSD. Currently the district does not employ work study students, Kirson-Glitman said.

Mr. Till said that in the aftermath of the bus driver incident, shouldn't the policy say the district can perform background checks so that it is up to the school's superintendent. Ms. Kirson-Glitman said that they still wouldn't receive any better criminal background check than they did with the bus driver. Mr. Forward asked why the district even needs this policy if it has no work study students. Mr. Peterson said that the legislature passed a law saying that all school districts "shall have" this policy.

With the warning read, the Board will vote on the policy at its next meeting.

-Volunteers: Volunteers are defined as people not employed by the district who give services of their own free will and are not reimbursed, Ms. Kirson-Glitman explained. The policy would say that only volunteers who are reasonably expected to have extended unsupervised contact with school children will be subject to sex offender registry checks. If they are on it, they are not eligible. Criminal background checks, meanwhile, "can" be performed by the superintendent if he/she saw fit.

Mr. Till said that this policy limits the district to extended unsupervised time. If we're suspicious, why can't we check a volunteer's background for a shorter period of time, he asked. Mr. Till also requested that the phrase "if he saw fit" be stricken from the policy, and that there be a period after the word "volunteers" so that the checks aren't limited to criminal activity. Ms. Kirson-Glitman said she would be fine with that, but asked when the issue of invasion of privacy comes into play. Linda Willmott deferred to Camels Hump Principal Mark Carbone. Mr. Carbone said that either version of the policy would give him the authority he needs.

Mr. Forward said that keeping the word "criminal" in could be useful. Michael Marks said that keeping it out would allow the administration some flexibility in their decision-making. There are many circumstances where they may say, "It's a bad idea to have that person as an extended unsupervised volunteer," even if they don't have a criminal or sex offender background. So it might be good not to limit the wording to criminal activity, Marks said. Mr. Forward said that that language would leave it open for future administrators to deny gays and lesbians, for example, because of some bias against that demographic.

***Cliff Peterson MOVED that the Volunteer Policy draft be amended so that there is a period after the word "volunteers", and that the rest of that sentence be struck. George Till SECONDED the motion. MOTION CARRIED.**

***Michael Marks MOVED that the Board delete the word "criminal" prior to "background checks" in the Volunteer Policy. Ken Wyman SECONDED the motion. MOTION CARRIED.**

Strategic Planning Committee Report

Mr. Peterson handed out a skeleton of the committee's Strategic Plan. He said it was difficult to come up with. Other districts' strategic plans are very broad, some are overly detailed. Neither of those extremes is helpful. He said that the committee hopes to do the strategy part and leave tactics to the administration. Peterson said that remembering the context was a major point of the plan, with declining enrollments and financial concerns. The plan is about what the school should look like in 3-5 years, he added. Programs, Teaching, Community Involvement and Transitions are the four major categories at the moment. Any of them can come out or be changed, he said. The committee's object was to keep the number of strategic goals limited. Mr. Peterson said the board should get input from teachers and administrators first. Nothing in here is written, he said. You may feel we've missed the boat.

Mr. Forward said that governance might be a good category to include. Citing one listed example in the skeleton, Ms. Anand said the Board can't mandate that class sizes be no less than 17 students. Mr. Robbins explained that that example was merely a placeholder for the purpose of soliciting priorities. It is merely an example of what could be the outcry from community members. I don't think anyone on this committee would support that number, he assured.

Mr. Peterson said that the Board just heard about teacher RIFs. Any Strategic Plan over the next five years that isn't about money is misguided, he said. Yasmine Ziesler said that in terms of getting down to nitty-gritty goals that the Board should let the administration handle that.

Superintendent's Report: Mr. Massingham said that Golden Apple Award nominations are due by March 1.

Approval of Minutes and Warrants: The MMUSD Board meeting minutes of February 11 were approved with one addition: That Nancy Guyette announced in her administrator report that a follow-up meeting for Browns River Action Planning will be held on April 6. Warrants in the amount of \$1,014,518.15 were approved.

Other Business

-A motion from the previous meeting to approve a request for an extra half-day of in-service on the final day of school at Browns River was tabled until this meeting for the purpose of getting feedback from Camels Hump as well. Mr. Carbone said that Camels Hump could certainly use the extra half-day of in-service to plan out the next year's VMI work.

***The motion from the previous meeting was taken off the table. It was amended to include Camels Hump for the extra half-day of in-service on the last day of school. Mr. Peterson made the MOTION. Mr. Till SECONDED it. MOTION CARRIED.**

-Mr. Till said that the state's judiciary committee is interested in changing the criminal background disclosure rules in light of MMU's recent bus driver incident. A new bill won't be worked on for a few weeks, though, Till said. He added that the school consolidation is also being discussed in the education committee.

The Meeting was adjourned to Executive Session for the purpose of negotiations at 9:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Preston

Unofficial until approved