

The Mohawk Trail School System
Mohawk Trail Regional School District | Hawlemont Regional School District

Michael A. Buoniconti, Superintendent of Schools
Michael Kociela, Business Administrator
Leann Z. Loomis, Director of Pupil Personnel Services

24 Ashfield Road
Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts 01370
Phone: (413) 625-0192 – Fax: (413) 625-0196

Mohawk Trail Regional School District
School Committee Meeting
Wednesday, February 15, 2017
at 7:00 p.m.
Superintendent's Conference Room Mohawk

Agenda

- I. Call meeting to order
- II. Statement of Trust
- III. Approve the minutes from the School Committee Meeting of February 8, 2017
- IV. Action Items

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Vote to approve the FY2018 Elementary Operating and Capital Budgets to meet the March 1st date as specified in the Regional Agreement.2. Vote to approve the FY2018 Middle/High School, Central Office and District Wide Operating and Capital Budgets to meet the March 1st date as specified in the Regional Agreement.3. Vote to use \$50,000.00 from Excess & Deficiency to reduce Town Assessments.4. Vote to use \$258,257.00 from Chapter 71, Regional Transportation Revolving Fund to reduce Town Transportation Assessments. |
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- V. Adjournment

School Committee Meeting Dates:

School Committee Professional Development Meeting on Monday, February 27, 2017 at Mohawk
School Committee Meeting on Wednesday, March 8, 2017 at Mohawk

**MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Mohawk Trail Regional High School
Wednesday, February 15, 2017**

The Massachusetts Open Meeting Law requires minutes for all school committee and subcommittee meetings. The recorded minutes are open to the public for inspection within 10 days of the meeting. Minutes are recorded to provide a brief overview that reflects the subject matter discussed and any decisions made. Motions made are to clearly indicate who made the motion and who seconded the motion. Record who was in favor, who opposed, or who abstained. The names of any person(s) appearing before the committee are to be indicated.

The Mohawk Trail Regional School District School Committee met at Mohawk Trail Regional High School on Wednesday, February 15, 2017 at 7:05 p.m.

Members present at the meeting: Poppy Doyle and Emily Robertson [Ashfield 8.5 each], Martha Thurber [Buckland 9.4], Evelyn Locke [Charlemont 6.2 each], Joe Kurland and Nina Martin-Anzuoni [Colrain 8.2 each], Suzanne Crawford [Hawley 1.7], Budge Litchfield and Bob Gruen [Heath 3.5 each], Jason Cusimano and John Payne [Shelburne 9.3], Leslie Rule and Heather Davis [Plainfield 3.2 each].

100 is the total weighted vote with 50 being half and 50.5 being the majority for a quorum. Members present at the beginning of the meeting total 93.8, which constitutes a quorum.

Members absent from the meeting: Julia Aron [Charlemont 6.2]

Administrators present: Superintendent Michael Buoniconti; Business Administrator Michael Kociela; Sarah Amy Looman, Principal Colrain Central School; Jesse Porter-Henry, Principal of Heath Elementary School.

Staff/Students present:

Sue Mitchell, District Nurse Leader; Jacqui Goodman, BSE and MDEA; Sharon Wickland Shearer, Colrain staff

Others present:

Bob Hinds, Kendra Canaday, Marie Gauthier, Jennifer Norwood, Kate Barrows; Ginny Ray, The Independent; Diane Broncaccio, The Recorder; Sheila Litchfield, Heath Select Board

Documents:

Agenda for MTRSD Meeting of February 15, 2017
Draft Minutes from MTRSD Meeting of February 8, 2017
MTRSD FY18 Budget Motions and Special Articles
MTRSD FY18 Budget and Assessments
MTRSD E & D Certification and Use
MTRSD Revolving Fund Balances
MTRSD Tuition Budget Detail

- I. **Call meeting to order:** Martha Thurber called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m.
- II. **Statement of Trust:** Martha Thurber read the Statement of Trust
- III. **Minutes:**
On a motion by Emily Robertson and seconded by Leslie Rule, the Committee **voted to approve the February 8, 2017 School Committee Meeting minutes.** Heather Davis abstained.

IV. Action Items:

1. Emily Robertson moved to approve the FY2018 Elementary Operating and Capital Budgets to meet the March 1st date, as specified in the Regional Agreement. Leslie Rule seconded the motion.

Budge Litchfield moved to amend the motion. Mr. Litchfield moved that the FY18 operating budget be increased by an amount of \$230,000, with this additional money only to be used to fund the contingency plan developed by Principal Porter-Henry in the event that Heath Elementary School children are not being tuitioned to a neighboring district for School Year 2017-2018. The source of these funds would preferably be new revenue provided by the Commonwealth to rural schools or if that is not available, appropriate revolving fund accounts.

Bob Gruen seconded the motion to amend.

Mr. Litchfield supported his amendment, saying that he believes that every child deserves an equal educational opportunity and that he does not agree that the monies currently proposed in the budget are adequate to ensure that for Heath Elementary students. While he understands from the Budget Subcommittee that the proposal being brought forward has been crafted with the full expectation that Heath students will have moved on to another school because the towns will have all voted to make that happen, Mr. Litchfield urged the Committee to remember that it has not yet happened. Mr. Litchfield cautioned that Heath citizens may instead view this sort of limited budget as being unlawful and seek the support of lawyers to challenge it. Mr. Litchfield reminded the School Committee that the decision to close Heath Elementary School could not be made by the School Committee and that they needed to work together in good faith to bring that town vote about. He asked too for members to consider that the students of Heath will be the only ones in the district to have their futures decided town by town.

Emily Robertson responded, agreeing that the Budget Subcommittee had hopes that a fair tuition agreement would soon be worked out. Ms. Robertson further explained that Superintendent Buoniconti had given his, now public, verbal commitment to re-working this contingency budget with input from Principal Porter-Henry, in the event that a town voted *no* to the closure of Heath Elementary. Ms. Robertson assured those present that the Budget Subcommittee felt a deep commitment to every child under their purview, including Heath children, which was why the subcommittee had voted unanimously to approve this budget.

Bob Gruen reiterated Mr. Litchfield's concerns that the proposed budget would make it difficult for some Heath citizens to see things the same way. Mr. Gruen also expressed frustration that while the Heath Educational Task Force had been working toward formulating a proposal for Hawlemont or Rowe and thought that the Heath Ad- Hoc Subcommittee had been also, that now they were putting Colrain and BSE on the table for discussion as the school of choice.

Discussion followed regarding the school choices open to Heath. Again it was clarified that Colrain Central and Buckland-Shelburne Elementary Schools were options open to Heath, but that Heath would have to make that choice, that MTRSD could not make that choice for them. It was proposed that Heath could choose one of the district schools as a short-term location, in the event that an agreement with Hawlemont or Rowe has not been finalized by the beginning of School Year 2017- 2018.

Mr. Litchfield addressed the fact that this would mean transitioning young students one more time. Instead he would prefer the short-term solution to be that Heath remain open another year using the contingency budget plan that Principal Porter-

Henry had worked out, that Mr. Litchfield said he believes offers a viable, innovative plan but that would require the additional funds requested in this proposed amendment.

Joe Kurland expressed his appreciation for the many hours of meetings that the Heath Educational Task Force had already given towards trying to find a good solution, adding that it is because this task force has made the decision that keeping Heath Elementary open right now is not the best decision, that he respects their judgment. Mr. Kurland too articulated his concern that the children of Heath receive the same opportunity as all of the other students in the district, but in a way that does not lower the standards or financial resources for every other child in the district, especially since the budget being proposed is necessarily already at a below level services.

Suzanne Crawford expressed her own longtime attachment to the Heath School, as the preschool teacher and agreed that it was important to offer a proposal to the town of Heath that was respectful. Ms. Crawford asked if it were possible to offer to bus the students of Heath to Hawlemont or Rowe as a tide-over plan, if one town voted down the proposed agreement amendment. Mr. Buoniconti said he did not believe that the state would prohibit that. Martha Thurber added that a potential pitfall however, would be if one parent did not agree to choice a child there since DESE requires that there be a certain place for every child to attend.

Mr. Kurland raised the question of what happens if the receiving school were to only have a certain number of openings, requiring the hiring of another teacher, if there were to be more students. Mr. Buoniconti assured the committee that the District is that the District is aware of that possibility and a variety of other factors that will require the cooperation of all sides to resolve.

Discussion followed in which some expressed their concern as parents that their own children would not have thrived in such small classes (as there would be in the Fall of 2017 at Heath) and others said that they knew students who did very well in such small classes.

The issue of the financial cost to other towns was raised, some saying that their towns had already made it clear that they had agreed to subsidize Heath's diminishing enrollment for many years now, but that at some point they could no longer justify it to their own towns. Mr. Gruen pointed out that the tax rate in Heath is higher than in any of the other towns.

Leslie Rule spoke as someone from a town that did not have its own school and said that she knew that Plainfield would support the proposed budget, but not one that included Mr. Litchfield's amendment. Ultimately, Ms. Rule said, the number of variables are greater in the plan being proposed by Mr. Litchfield. Ms. Rule expressed frustration that the task force was not further along in its planning since the enrollment numbers at Heath have been decreasing for years. Ms. Rule asked that Heath residents also understand how many concessions have been made over the years by the other towns. Nina Martin-Anzuoni asked Heath residents to understand that Colrain Central School was facing similar hard choices in its near future.

The question was raised as to whether or not the budget could be "re-voted" later in the year, if the assessments to towns was not raised, to add money from reserves. Mr. Buoniconti answered that it could be re-voted.

Joe Kurland voiced his unease with the reduction in the School Counselor's hours and hoped that this was a place where an upward adjustment could be made. In particular, Mr. Kurland addressed the increased incidents in bullying in other schools

and wanted assurance that if any such situation were to develop in our schools, that they could be addressed. Mr. Buoniconti gave his assurance that this issue is being addressed on an on-going basis by the DLT and staff. If there comes a point, Mr. Buoniconti said, that it appears that more resources are required, they will be provided.

Mr. Litchfield conveyed his appreciation to Mr. Buoniconti for the hard work he had done when he first came to the district, helping to bring up the revolving funds, in particular. Mr. Litchfield said that he understood the importance of those funds and does not want to see them depleted, but that right now he would ask that some of these funds be made available to Heath, in the event that any town rejects a tuition agreement and it is necessary to keep the school open. He expressed as well, his belief that the conversations that are taking place regarding a tuition agreement are on a positive path and only wants this to continue.

Chair Martha Thurber echoed Mr. Litchfield's wishes. When there were no further comments, Ms. Thurber called the vote on Budge Litchfield's amendment to the proposed budget.

With weighted votes totaling 100.0 eligible to vote on this matter and a vote of 71.5 NO to the amendment and 28.5 YES, the motion to amend the proposed budget was defeated by majority vote.

Weighted Votes tally sheet is attached.

Martha Thurber then called for a vote on the original motion.

On the original motion, with weighted votes totaling 100.0 eligible to vote on this matter and a vote of 70% YES and 20% NO, and with 10 ABSTAINING, the School Committee voted by a 2/3 majority to approve the FY2018 Elementary Operating and Capital Budgets to meet the March 1st date, as specified in the Regional Agreement.

Weighted Votes tally sheet is attached.

- 2. On a motion by Leslie Rule and seconded by John Payne, with weighted votes totaling 100.0 eligible to vote on this matter, and a vote of 82.7 YES and 17.3 NO (representing absent and vacant seats), the Committee voted by a 2/3 majority to approve the FY2018 Middle/High School, Central Office and District Wide Operating and Capital Budgets to meet the March 1st date, as specified in the Regional Agreement.**

Weighted Votes tally sheet is attached.

- 3. On a motion by Emily Robertson and seconded by Leslie Rule, with weighted votes totaling 100.0 eligible to vote on this matter, and a vote of 82.7 YES and 17.3 NO (representing absent and vacant seats), the Committee voted to use \$50,000.00 from Excess and Deficiency to reduce Town Assessments.**

Weighted Votes tally sheet is attached.

- 4. On a motion by Emily Robertson and seconded by Poppy Doyle, with weighted votes totaling 100.0 eligible to vote on this matter, and a vote of 82.7 YES and 17.3 NO (representing absent and vacant seats), the Committee voted to use \$258,257.00 from Chapter 71, Regional Transportation Revolving Fund to reduce Town Transportation Assessments.**

Weighted Votes tally sheet is attached.

- V. **Adjournment**: On a motion by Emily Robertson and seconded by Leslie Rule, the Committee voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

School Committee Meeting Dates:

Next Regular Meeting – February 27, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. – Mohawk

Patricia Donohue
MTRSD School Committee Secretary