

**Hillsdale County Intermediate School District  
Board of Education Meeting  
March 19, 2020 ~ 5:30 P.M.  
DRAFT MINUTES**

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**Board Members Present:** Brandes, Grossheim, Gutowski, Nye, Vanlerberg      Absent: --  
**HCISD Staff:** Reehl, Svacha, Shaffer, S. Masters, Wilson, O’Heran  
**Guests:** M. Masters

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**CALL TO ORDER**

President Laura Nye called the meeting to order at 5:33 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

To stay in compliance with the OMA (Open Meeting Act) and governmental compliance in regard to COVID-19, the Board met in multiple rooms within the Hayes Building: Mr. Reehl’s office (Laurie Brandes and Scott Gutoski), Dining Room (Maxine Vanlerberg and Ron Grossheim), and the Conference Room (Laura Nye).

**APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Minutes, February 20, 2020, Regular Meeting
- B. Minutes, February 20, 2020, Closed Session
- C. Minutes, Countywide Board Workshop, February 6, 2020
- D. Report on Investments
- E. Bills Payable

Brandes/Vanlerberg to approve the consent agenda as presented.      Ayes: All      Nays: None      **Carried**

**COMMENTS FROM GUEST**

Brandi Revers, Pittsford parent, expressing her concern for the safety of students and staff at Pittsford Area Schools. Brandi asked if bringing a weapon to school is an automatic expulsion. Supt. Reehl provided Ms. Revers with a document showing what is appropriate for an ISD versus the local district.

Susanne Masters read a statement. Ms. Masters submitted a copy for the board minutes. The statement is attached.

**OTHER BUSINESS ACTION ITEMS**

- A. New Hires

Brandes/Gutowski to approve the hire of Jo Patterson.      Ayes: All      Nays: None      **Carried**

- B. Budget Amendments (2019/2020)

Gutowski/Vanlerberg to approve the budget amendments presented in February 2020.      Ayes: All      Nays: None      **Carried**

- C. Resolution to Consider Non-renewal, Special Education Director

President Nye read a statement regarding the consideration of the non-renewal of the special education director’s contract that detailed relational items.

Brandes/Vanlerberg made a motion for the consideration of non-renewal for Susanne Master’s contract as Special Education Director to expire on June 30, 2020.

Ayes: Brandes,Gutowski, Nye, Vanlerberg      Nays: Grossheim      **Carried**

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**BUSINESS OFFICE REPORT**

Director Shaffer included a report in her board report.

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**SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Superintendent Reehl reported on the current state of the schools in dealing with COVID-19. Mr. Reehl thanked everyone for their support in passing the Vocational Education millage.

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**GENERAL EDUCATION**

Stefanie Rathburn and Mindy Wilson provided a report in the board book.

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**SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Susanne Masters provided a report in the board book.

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**HILLSDALE AREA CAREER CENTER**

Jamie Mueller provided a report in the board book.

**CLOSED SESSION FOR ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE**

The closed session did not take place.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Vanlerberg/Gutowski to adjourn at 5:58 PM

Ayes: All

Nays: None

***Carried***

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kim Svacha

## Susanne Master's statement.

“Good Evening,

For the past five years it has been an honor to serve the students, parents and districts of Hillsdale County as the Special Education Director . . . and I thank, you, the intermediate school district board for this opportunity.

In August of 2017 the State Department released new regulatory-guidance that redefined the role of the Intermediate School District in relation to the obligations of the Special Education Department. Some of you were present when Teri Chapman and several representatives of her department came to our district to explain this shift in responsibility. That is, the redefined role of Special Education Director of not only oversight, but also assurance that Free Appropriate Public Education, or FAPE, in the Least Restrictive Environment is afforded to all Special Education Students throughout Hillsdale County. And to ensure alignment with these regulations, many ISD special education director position descriptions now clearly define the role of oversight, consultation, legal and compliance responsibilities.

During my time as Director in Hillsdale County, I have worked with administrators and staff to support students with IEP's in their Least Restrictive Environment as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. While understanding the need to support districts in the move to compliance, it has been disheartening to encounter a few superintendents who have shown a desire to refuse to support children under this law. Under my leadership, the ISD has provided multiple legal and high quality national and state level trainers to support districts to address compliance shortcomings. Unfortunately, throughout this work with local districts, I have heard a variety of disappointing – if not disturbing – comments from superintendents . . . such as ‘they know they are not complying with the law, but they are going to “roll the dice” that they will not be caught’. And, [quote] “I have been told that the needs of the one student with an IEP are not as important as the rest of the class; that a child who isn't earning credit in a course should not take a seat away from someone who could earn credit”. Without question, these have been difficult comments to hear when we have the legal and moral obligation to ensure the most vulnerable of our students receive support from leadership. I stand here today with clear conscience that I personally have provided that leadership . . . I wish we could state the same for others.

When I came to Hillsdale County there were not very many processes and procedures in place in the special education or general education departments. I worked diligently to put processes and procedures in place so that administrators, staff and parents could access documents to support them in navigating this law. An extensive online policy and procedure manual was developed and posted on our ISD website; entrance and exit criteria to the ISD programs was developed in coordination with the Superintendents group and is posted online; and I coordinated and launched countywide Principal group meetings, to build a network of support and professional development for principals who were often isolated in their work. And, in addition to developing and implementing systems for local and ISD programs, the ISD team has also developed programs that have brought State level attention to this county. The preschool program has presented at two State conferences, as well as hosted visits from three different ISD's, interested in designing an inclusive program service model such as ours. And, Mindy Wilson has been asked to sit on a statewide committee that is working to move all preschool programs to an inclusive model. As a result of our initiative and forward thinking, Hillsdale ISD is being recognized statewide as a model for how to deploy inclusion. Two other ISD's have visited our Emotionally Impaired Program and are now working to replicate our model so as to not isolate and segregate students in local districts . . . and in alignment with IDEA. Other organizations have learned strategies from our staff that can successfully support Emotionally Impaired students in the general education setting. Our ISD team has also presented on our ground breaking CEIS work. The ISD staff wrote a grant to create a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, or MTSS, coordinator position last year. This was after years of working in general education classrooms where 80% of special education students are supported. Research shows that special education students will perform as well as the general education students. If we don't support Tier 1 work, then special education will never serve these student's needs for success. To address this concern, the ISD Board approved the position for MTSS coordinator. Stacy Ansel has completed amazing work this year in three school districts, as she has supported the building of a true Tier 1 and 2 system for support for all students. Several ISD Directors have requested to see our grant and are working to set up systems modeled after our work.

In conjunction with Michigan Rehabilitative Services and Jackson College, the ISD has created a community program to support sophomores with IEP's, to explore career center programs. The completion rate of students with IEP's at the ISD tech center has been historically low, thus a collaborative program was designed to support these students and increase their success in tech center programming. This team has presented at several state conferences to explain this ground-breaking, community collaborative program.

Over the past five years, there has been tremendous innovative work in this county. Despite the constant push back from some local districts on compliance with the laws and regulations of IDEA, this ISD team has worked tirelessly to increase the knowledge and understanding of the laws, to train and support staff and administrators with evidence-based strategies, and allow all kids in Hillsdale County with IEP's to have the right to their education in the Least Restrictive Environment. I'm very proud of my work as the champion for students with disabilities in this county. I'm passionate about supporting students and would love to continue the opportunity to support Hillsdale County as their Special Education Director.

Given the accomplishments I just discussed, I am shocked and saddened to hear Superintendent Reehl's recommendation not to renew my contract. While I take criticisms of my job performance seriously and always strive to improve, I find these particular concerns unfounded or based on my disagreements with certain individuals over our priority to follow the laws that govern special education. I hope that this Board recognizes the great work my team and I have done and chooses to renew my contract over Superintendent Reehl's recommendation. Thank you."