

SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

**Madison Public Schools
Board of Education Regular Meeting
March 16, 2021
7:30 PM
Remote**

MEETING MINUTES

Full documentation of these proceedings can be found through on demand video located in the Meetings/Minutes section of the district website

1. Call to Order / Attendance

The public meeting of the Madison Board of Education was called to order by Chair Galen Cawley at 7:32 p.m. Mr. Cawley led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Galen Cawley, Greg DeSantis, Diane Infantine-Vyce, Cathy Miller, Tom Pellegrino, Emily Rosenthal, Katie Stein.

Also present: Craig Cooke, Ph.D., Superintendent; Gail Dahling-Hench, Assistant Superintendent; Liz Battaglia, Sped Director, Stacy Nobitz, Finance Director, Melanie Whitcher, DHHS Assistant Principal, Kathryn Hart, Polson Principal, Zoe Roos, Communications Specialist, Scott Murphy, Board of Selectman.

Various members of the public via Zoom.

2. School / Community Session - 7:30 p.m.

2.1. Public Participation

The board welcomes public comment. We receive comments both by email to board members via our Contact the Board page on the district website, or via public comment that we will hear this evening. Mrs. Rosenthal noted in advance of tonight's meeting, several emails from members of the public have been received regarding the budget in particular. Emails are shared with all board members as well as the administration, so I'll begin by briefly reporting on the six messages that we received in advance of this meeting, and then I'll open it up for public comments tonight.

We received one email requesting that COVID relief grant funds not be used to offset the Board of Ed budget, but rather be used to reduce or eliminate any proposed mill rate hikes.

We received another email requesting that we discuss and vote defined budget offsets for the grant funds received in order to avoid any property taxes being raised during this difficult year.

We received another email expressing their full support of the budget as written, and ask that the board stand by the budget.

We received another email asking that we keep the current budget increase intact, as is, stating that a 1.4% increase in the budget was a small increase for the work being done in the schools.

We received another message from a member of the public, requesting that we use the COVID relief funds the way they were intended, and not use them to reduce the operating budget.

We received another email stating support of a 1.4% budget increase for the Board of Education.

We do encourage and appreciate comments from the public via emails or public comment and will now open the meeting for public comment. Please state your name and address. Comments are limited to three minutes, in order to ensure that all interested parties have an opportunity to speak, and I will be keeping track of the time. We ask that you please speak on one topic, per public comment session, that you do not identify individual staff members or students by name. We are very happy to hear from our community, but at a business meeting, it should not be expected that we will respond. We will however do our best to follow up and contact you after the meeting, if you wish. If you would like to have your comments read this evening, please add them to the chat function or raise your hand and Wendy will unmute you.

Joan Walker

39 Stepping Stone Lane

I would like to put on the record that I'm in favor of the extremely reasonable conservative budget that was already voted on by the Board of Education, and passed with a bipartisan 7-2 vote. I'm in favor of this budget that was put forth to the Board of Selectmen who voted unanimously to pass it to the Board of Finance without change. I'm in favor of the Board of Education budget that was presented in a public hearing on March 3 reflecting a 1.4% increase from the current year budget. I want to talk about the importance of the process that I just mentioned that this budget has gone through. I believe as members of the Board of Education, you have a fiduciary responsibility to review this potential change that you may have tonight with legal counsel prior to requesting about that so you're fully aware of the impact it may have. If you vote to change the budget tonight you are embarking on unprecedented territory that may actually delay the referendum on the budget, and forever cloud the transparency of the budget process that our charter requires. This is not the first time changes have occurred after the Board of Education has voted to move the budget forth to the Board of Selectmen; in fact, that happened a few years ago. However, the change being considered tonight differs from that change from a process standpoint. Back then, the Board of Ed had voted on the budget, but it had not been passed to the Board of Selectmen or been presented in a public hearing. Per the charter, which is the constitution of our town, Section 10.5.a. states: *The Board of Finance shall hold a public hearing at which the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education shall present their budget recommendations. Interested parties are invited to comment.* This is done so the public has an opportunity to review the details of edits, comments in general or specific items. It is held by the Board of Finance so that they can hear these comments prior to their deliberations on whether they feel the town will pass the budget or need to look for potential cuts or additions during their workshops. It's an opportunity for them to listen to their constituents. If you choose to change the budget tonight, I would argue that for the Town Charter, it must go to the Board of Selectmen for review. The Board of Finance then needs to call another public hearing on a newly passed Board of Education budget. This must be done for the process to remain transparent. otherwise I think it will be considered a backdoor deal. Please do not bring up the vote to change the budget, as it sets a dangerous precedent that will delay the process to bring the budget to referendum, or it will remove the transparency that our charter demands. Thank you.

Maureen Lewis
35 Buck Hill Road

I understand that the budget is up for review tonight and I found that very concerning because the budget had already passed and I feel that it's a very lean and acceptable budget. I'm asking all the Board of Education members tonight to please be unified and stick with our existing budget. Thank you.

Katie Stein has a letter to read, but is experiencing computer difficulties. The letter will be read later in the meeting.

3. Board of Education Student Representative Report
Isabelle Vagell and Eric Dillner

Eric reported Trimester 3 started Monday. Winter sports is coming to an end as most teams have had their last day of regular season play. The hockey tournament begins on Thursday and spring sports begin on March 27. The online VIBE performance occurred two Saturday nights ago, featured many senior soloists, and every musical group had an opportunity to perform. Senior prom has been solidified for June 5, along with the junior prom on May 14.

Isabelle talked about the exams at the end of the first trimester that were held during the school day and spoke to the regular exam schedule that just occurred. Teachers used one hour for teaching and one hour for a less formal assessment – a much more pleasant experience! Tents are back up in the courtyard at Hand (with heaters) and we can now have lunch outside. The virtual How to Pay for College webinar is this Thursday from 6-7:30 p.m. QPR (suicide prevention and awareness) training for parents and students is scheduled for March 23. Next Wednesday is the school day as a team. All in all, school is going well.

4. Superintendent's Report
Craig A. Cooke, Ph.D.

Dr. Cooke noted that as a result of Governor Lamont's executive orders put in place on April 19, we are hoping to resume in person access to our meetings. Art Sickles is working to have that happen in the Hammonasset Room (or another location if need be) where we can conduct hybrid meetings. Dr. Cooke expressed his appreciation to the Health Department and the Town for their efforts with administering the vaccine. Round 1 was completed in two weeks (half the time expected) and the second round for the first 200 is scheduled on April 1. Heather Dobson has scheduled people so they are easily covered within the building and we hoping to schedule from 12 – 4:30 with the upcoming second rounds in order to avoid staff coverage issues. Due to the holiday on April 2, we do not anticipate needing to adjust the school day; however, the next 200 shots will occur on April 8 and we do feel we will need to make April 9 a distance learning day.

Dr. Cooke reported on the results of the Hand survey regarding returning to school five days a week - 94% replied. Of those, 658 students indicated they return to five days a week, 140 would remain in cohorts and approximately 97 would be in full remote. We extrapolated to 100% and concluded that on any given day, 775 students would be in the building. Due to the fact the building was built for 1,200 students, we feel students can return safely and are anticipating a return date of March 29. We will communicate that to families and ask for a final decision regarding attendance. After we begin this model, we will only require a week's notice of a student's intent to return in person.

4.1. Building Project Update

We have a meeting scheduled next week with the CT Office of School Construction at which time we will apprise them of our plans. We are in the process of updating the educational specs and will share that with the Board in the near future. Dr. Cooke spoke to the enrollment projection report which the Board has received – the district is at a low point with enrollment that will increase over the next 10 years with higher birth rates and home sales and in town. We continue to investigate the potential land purchase with a target date of finalizing that by end of the month.

5. Board Member Comments

Diane Infantine-Vyce

I'd like to say that I'm thrilled about the prospect of Hand going back all in, and I wanted to share this for consideration. I know that a lot of the Hand students have certain families who have opened up their circles to other families, ones that they see a lot, as well as certain students on athletic teams. I was wondering, in an effort to sort of minimize transmission risk when they're in the same classroom that, and I know it would be a big undertaking for the teachers for the individual classrooms, but when they're doing their seating charts, it might be a good idea to allow the students to sort of self-select within their own circle so that if they are sharing within a three foot space with someone else it's someone that they've already been open their circle to. And then if someone does end up testing positive, it would be less people having to quarantine.

Certain teams already practice together so it would make sense to group them together. And the other thing I would like to say is, with regard to the budget coming up and the, the grants that were, we are going to receive that I personally would like to see the grant money us towards COVID-related expenses that are already in the budget.

Dr. Cooke spoke to the process of contact tracing, in answer to Katie Stein's question. Zoe Roos is our go to person and whose job has shifted the most. Every single administrator's job has been impacted as well. Hand administration lost Valentine's Day and the weekend after due to contact tracing. Mr. Henderson contacted me Sunday morning and spent a good part of his Sunday this past week contact tracing. Collectively, their efforts have enabled us to keep the district open. Dr. Battaglia noted every case also goes through Stephanie Lesnik who has been available around the clock and is ready and willing to administer vaccines. All the school nurses are available and ready to assist as well.

Dr. DeSantis read a letter received from **Bridget Newton of Sheffield Drive.**

Dear Members of Madison Public Schools Board of Education,

I am the mother of two sons at Daniel Hand High School and one son who receives special education at Polson. I sub occasionally as a nurse within our school system. However, I am reaching out to you today to share my perspective of COVID's devastating impact on the mental well-being of our children as a nurse in Yale's Pediatric Emergency Department.

It is my understanding that MPS has received grants and federal funds intended for COVID relief in the schools. It is also my understanding that the Board of Finance would like to reduce the operating budget of the schools with the expectation that these grants and federal monies would fill in the deficit. I implore you to please advocate for our students. Ensure that this money is used in the way it is intended. Though children have been relatively spared from the physical symptoms of COVID, they are most certainly suffering from the disruption in their school routines, the lack of socialization with peers, as well as from the absence of sporting events and other recreational activities. The isolation of

physical distancing has wreaked havoc on the mental health of our young people. It will take time, caring, and will absolutely take financial support to begin to address the behavioral health needs of our students impacted by COVID.

I have been a pediatric emergency nurse for thirteen years. In that time, the demands of our behavioral health patients have always been a challenge. Pre-COVID if we had 5 children in the department presenting with psychiatric needs at any one time, that would be considered overwhelming for the staff to manage. Over the last year my colleagues and I have witnessed an unprecedented mental health surge. Now we are routinely boarding 15 children ranging from ages 6-15 years old awaiting inpatient psychiatric beds. Last week we surged to as many as 21 children either awaiting psychiatric evaluations or admission. To put that in perspective, our entire pediatric emergency department only has 20 regular rooms primarily intended for medical patients. This situation is unsustainable.

We are not just dealing with an increased number of children seeking behavioral health care coupled with a systemic lack of inpatient psychiatric beds. COVID has compounded the problem exponentially. Imagine you are a suicidal 14-year-old presenting to the emergency department for psychiatric care. Now imagine that you have tested positive for COVID or that you are quarantined for having been in close contact with a COVID positive person. The inpatient units will not accept you. This means you remain in the emergency department for the duration of your quarantine period. Can you even imagine it?

This scenario has led to many already psychologically fragile children boarding in the emergency department for 10 or more days. They are confined to one windowless room with a staff member watching them 24 hours a day to ensure their safety. They can only leave their room to use the bathroom. The emergency department is no place for these children. They receive no meaningful counseling or treatment. We provide only a safe holding area until they are cleared for admission. This is a despicable reality.

The schools need that COVID relief funding to tackle the very real issues our students are facing. I do not want to meet another child in crisis in the emergency department. These students need intervention in the schools before they reach crisis level. Use that money the way it was intended. Address the academic and social losses our students have endured. Invest in additional counseling, team building, and programs that will inspire and uplift them. Our children deserve better than what they are currently experiencing. Please help them mend. Please show them they are worth the investment in their mental health and overall well-being. I make this plea as a mother and as a nurse.

Sincerely,
Bridget Newton, RN, BSN, CPN

6. Audience Response to Information Presented (Ref. Bylaw #9540.10)

Ryan McMillan
24 Lenore Drive

I have two children that attend Ryerson. I'm also a volunteer, multi-year member of the Ryerson PTO and so I have a unique perspective to see firsthand the effort, dedication and resolve that our teachers have had on our children. Not only were they there to guide them during this extremely difficult year, but their efforts have enabled many parents to continue to go to work. That's a very important responsibility in society that our parents have been able to go back to work. The federal government has recognized this interest expense related to change as needed to the teaching experience, and teacher's safety from the pandemic. The thought of diverting the funds for those uses to provide a lower tax burden is insulting to every teacher and administrator that has gone above and beyond to help our students and their parents, shame on the Board of Finance for suggesting this and I encourage the

Board of Education to unanimously send a strong message to our teachers and our students by not making any cuts.

7. Board of Selectmen Liaison
Scott Murphy

The Board of Selectmen met on March 9. Mr. Murphy reported the Board received three large donations – one from Madison Little League and two from Neighbor to Neighbor – one for the COVID Relief Fund and one for the MYRS Discretionary Fund. The Board also discussed the facilities assessment study conducted by DRA, as well as a master plan for the Town. This would tie into the strategic plan, which would look at 36 buildings over the next six to nine months, along with Island Avenue. At the next Board of Selectmen meeting, we will discuss hiring Collier’s to assist us with the RFP process.

Mr. Murphy reported he and Erin Duques will be reviewing a potential master plan recommendation with the facilities group and Bill McMinn, utilizing either DRA or alternately putting out an RFP. Scheduling software for the Town of Madison will also be reviewed, enabling all rooms, buildings and facilities to be under one system.

A permanent Facilities Committee is under consideration in order to gain focus on all Town facilities which will be done collectively with the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance, Board of Education and the public.

8. Review of 2021-2022 Budget

The Board discussed utilizing a portion (\$100,000) of the \$1.2 million received in COVID-related grants to offset the budget, debating what exactly those funds should be applied to. The Board discussed the process for altering its budget after being submitted to the Board of Selectmen. The Board then voted as follows:

MOTION: by Marino, seconded by Infantine-Vyce to reduce the 2021-2022 budget by \$100,000 by using third year grant funds to offset previous COVID expenditures in the 2021-2022 budget. Mrs. Marino accepted a friendly amendment to make it a recommendation.
AYES: Marino, Infantine-Vyce, Cawley
NAYS: DeSantis, Stein, Rosenthal, Pellegrino, Miller
ABSTAIN: None
MOTION FAILS: 3-5

9. Consent Agenda (Ref. Bylaw #9540.2 and #9540.8) – No Consent Agenda

10. Board Committees / Liaison Updates (Ref. Bylaw #9450)

10.1. Curriculum and Student Development

Members: Diane Infantine-Vyce, Chair; Greg DeSantis, Catherine Miller

The committee has not met; the next meeting is March 23. Dr. Infantine-Vyce asked the Board to please advise her of any questions or issues the committee should look into or present on before the end of the school year.

10.2. Communications Committee

Members: Tom Pellegrino, Chair; Diane Infantine-Vyce, Greg DeSantis

The committee has not met; the next meeting is scheduled for April 6 as part of our quarterly rotation.

10.3. Facilities Committee

Members: Emily Rosenthal, Chair, Happy Marino, Katie Stein

The committee has not met.

10.4. Finance Committee

Members: Katie Stein, Chair, Happy Marino, Tom Pellegrino

The Finance Committee met prior to the Board of Ed meeting this evening and was given an update on the Food Services program, which has a revenue loss of approximately \$375,000 this year. This is due to a number of factors, most of which are COVID-related as well as the absence of students buying lunch. The administration has utilized grants to offset this loss and we recognize there are fuel savings and a reduction in force which also helped to balance the loss. The committee also had a robust discussion around COVID-related grants and the ESSER grant which extends through the fall of 2023, as well as the American Rescue Fund, which extends through the end of the calendar year of 2024. Dr. Cook shared the financial plan to utilize these grants to help support students. Both grants have different processes. With regard to the ESSER grant, consultants will come to the district to see how the money is being utilized. We have not received details about the American Rescue Fund as it is so brand new. Stacy Nobitz walked us through preliminary year-end projections. Our next meeting is April 27 at 5:30 p.m.

10.5. Personnel Committee

Members: Violet McNerney, Chair, Diane Infantine-Vyce, Catherine Miller

Dr. Infantine-Vyce reported in Dr. McNerney's absence. The Personnel Committee has not met, but an initial meeting to establish dates is setup to begin the NAGE contract discussion.

10.6. Policy Committee

Members: Happy Marino, Chair; Violet McNerney, Emily Rosenthal

The committee met this evening. Happy Marino reported the committee further discussed policies 5120.4.2.5 and 4119 based on previous questions to Shipman & Goodwin regarding policy language as well as the mandated reporting of sexual assault. The committee addressed several board member questions around these policies, in particular the order of voting as 5120.4.2.5 refers to 4119. These policies came back to committee so they'll move forward to full board after the next policy meeting. The committee reviewed five policies in the 2000 series recommended for rescinding - 2000, 2120, 2131, 2210 and 2220. Dr. Cooke acknowledged the need for an organization chart in response to an audience question, but agreed it should not be required by policy. The administration and committee members agreed these policies should be rescinded and to pass them on to the full board. The committee also discussed the policies contained in the board packet tonight for a third reading and agreed to vote on them as a group, unless any board member objects during the discussion portion of the motion. During Public Comment, Dr. DeSantis suggested repealing and replacing policies in the same motion to ensure there are no double policies with different numbers. The committee also spoke to the practice of including the original policy in the packet whenever a replacement policy is sent on to the Board.

10.7. LEARN Liaison

Katie Stein

No report.

11. Action Item: Action Item: Motion to approve the following policies

MOTION: by Infantine-Vyce, seconded by Miller to approve the following policies:

- #1370 Non-Discrimination (Community/School Relations)
- #4118.1 Non-Discrimination (Personnel)
- #5020.1 Non-Discrimination (Students)
- #4116.1 Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment
- #5120.4.2.4 Title IX/Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment
- #4120 Reports of Suspected Abuse or Neglect of Adults with an Intellectual Disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder

AYES: Cawley, DeSantis, Infantine-Vyce, Marino, Miller, Pellegrino, Rosenthal, Stein

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED: 8-0

12. Motion to approve the minutes of the March 2, 2021 Board of Education Meeting (Ref. Bylaw #9540.9)

MOTION: by Pellegrino, seconded by Stein to approve the minutes of the March 2, 2021 Board of Education meeting as amended.

AYES: Cawley, DeSantis, Infantine-Vyce, Marino, Miller, Pellegrino, Rosenthal, Stein

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED: 8-0

13. Old Business

14. Future Agenda Items

15. Meetings/Dates of Importance

16. Action Item: Motion to enter into Executive Session to discuss Security Initiatives, Transportation Contract and Chartwell's Contract

MOTION: by Stein, seconded by Infantine-Vyce to enter into Executive Session to discuss security initiatives, the transportation contract and Chartwell's contract and to invite Craig Cooke, Art Sickles and Bill McMinn to join Executive Session.

AYES: Cawley, DeSantis, Infantine-Vyce, Marino, Miller, Pellegrino, Rosenthal, Stein

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None
MOTION CARRIED: 8-0

Return to Regular Session

17. Discussion and Possible Action: Transportation Contract

MOTION: by Stein, seconded by DeSantis to approve Addendum #7 to the Transportation Contract.
AYES: Cawley, DeSantis, Infantine-Vyce, Marino, Miller, Pellegrino, Rosenthal, Stein
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None
MOTION CARRIED: 8-0

18. Discussion and Possible Action: Chartwell's Contract

MOTION: by Infantine-Vyce, seconded by DeSantis to approve Amendment #5 to the Chartwell's Contract.
AYES: Cawley, DeSantis, Infantine-Vyce, Marino, Miller, Pellegrino, Rosenthal, Stein
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None
MOTION CARRIED: 8-0

19. Adjournment

MOTION: by Infantine-Vyce, seconded by Stein to adjourn the meeting at 9:59 p.m.
AYES: Cawley, DeSantis, Infantine-Vyce, Marino, Miller, Pellegrino, Rosenthal, Stein
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None
MOTION CARRIED: 8-0

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