

MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Mohawk's Building, Education, Sustainability and Trust (BEST)
Strategic Planning Steering Committee Meeting
September 21, 2016

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 recorded provide a brief overview that reflects the subject matter discussed and any decisions made. If any motions are made clearly state the motion and indicate who made the motion and who seconded the motion. Record who was in favor, opposed, or abstained. The names of any person(s) appearing before the committee are to be indicated.

Date: Wednesday, September 21, 2016

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Place: Superintendent's Conference Room at Mohawk

Committee Members in Attendance: Kate Barrows [Colrain]; Mick Comstock [Heath]; Sue Mitchell [MDEA]; Sarah Reynolds [Charlemont]; Martha Thurber [Mohawk SC – Buckland]; and Lark Thwing [Mohawk SC – Hawley].

Committee Members Not in Attendance: Karen Blom [Buckland]; David Newell [Ashfield]; Kim Orzechowski [Hawley]; Erwin Reynolds [Hawlemont]; and Leslie Rule [Plainfield];

School Committee Members in Attendance: Glenn Cardinal [Buckland]; Suzanne Crawford [Hawley] and Nina Martin-Anzuoni [Colrain]

School Administration: Superintendent Michael Buoniconti;

Others in Attendance: Linda DiTullio [Colrain]; Attorney Russell Dupere [Mohawk District Counsel]; Gloria Fisher [Heath]; Kevin Fox [Buckland]; Dena Willmore [Buckland]

Documents: Agenda September 21, 2016
Potential Regional Agreement Issues/Questions

Call to Order: Martha Thurber called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Discussion of Process/Potential Issues Involving the Existing MTRSD Regional Agreement and Mohawk's BEST Consolidation Scenarios:

Attorney Dupere opened the meeting by noting that virtually any scenario the BEST Committee proposes (based on the initial questions given him by Chair Martha Thurber) will require amending the existing Regional Agreement. He noted that, in particular, the Agreement is very specific with respect to the assignment of elementary students to specific schools and that the recently passed amendment allowing one or more towns to mutually agree to send/accept students specifically excludes instances involving school closure. With respect to integrating 6th grade into the Mohawk Middle School, he noted that such a change would, in effect, reassign students from all 4 existing elementary schools and affect all towns, thereby triggering the need all towns to vote. Mr. Dupere also said it would not be necessary to redesignate 7-12 member towns (Hawley, Charlemont and, potentially, Rowe) as 6-12 member Towns, as students from Rowe and Hawlemont Schools, which continue to offer PK – 6, could elect to enroll at Mohawk for Grade 6 through school choice.

He also said that changes would need to be made to the provisions affecting assessments for operating and capital costs. Town operating assessments could continue to be based on enrollments, regardless of where town's students were enrolled. Capital costs are more problematic, particularly if a town's elementary students were to be assigned to two different buildings. Would a town be assessed for capital costs at both locations? It was noted that both Heath and Colrain own their elementary schools and fully pay capital costs on those buildings. If those schools house only partial grade levels (e.g., PK-2), towns may be unwilling to pay the costs of maintain those buildings plus a proportional share of costs to maintain another building.

With respect to the possible “phasing” of operational changes, Mr. Dupere said he agreed it would make sense to take one year at a time – asking towns to amend the Agreement annually as necessary to implement the next phase – rather than seek to pass all amendments at once. While it might be possible to pass everything at once, with explicit “triggers” for specific provisions, he did not believe that would be the best option.

Martha Thurber then asked about informal comments Mr. Dupere had made following a meeting in Heath on Sept. 1 in which he expressed the opinion that within 10 years there would likely be many fewer schools in all of Western Mass. and many more consolidated locations. Did this mean he thought BEST should re-consider Scenario #1, which envisioned a single new elementary school located on the Mohawk campus? He said he thought that should be reviewed and the likelihood of state financing discussed with MSBA. He noted that DESE has continued to express support for additional consolidation/regionalization and that combining all four elementary schools into a single location would be consistent with that focus. He encouraged the BEST Committee to look ten years out and plan accordingly.

Citizen Comment: Citizen comments were encouraged throughout the meeting.

Set Date for Next Meeting: September 28 at 7:00 pm at Mohawk

Submitted by: Martha Thurber