

**MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Mohawk's Building, Education, Sustainability and Trust (BEST)**  
**Strategic Planning Steering Committee Meeting**  
**September 28, 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:** 7:00 p.m.

**Place:** Superintendent's Conference Room at Mohawk

**Committee Members in Attendance:** Kate Barrows [Colrain]; Mick Comstock [Heath] (arrived 7:20, left 8:30); Sue Mitchell [MDEA]; John Payne [Shelburne]; Sarah Reynolds [Charlemont]; Leslie Rule [Mohawk SC – Plainfield]; 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]

**School Committee Members in Attendance:** Glenn Cardinal [Buckland]; Jason Cusimano [Shelburne]

**School Administration:** Superintendent Michael Buoniconti (arrived 7:30)

**Others in Attendance:** Kendra Canaday [Colrain]; Jason Canaday [Colrain]; Clara Herzig [Colrain]; and Holland Herzig [Colrain]

**Documents:** Agenda September 28, 2016  
Minutes from August 31, 2016 Meeting  
Comments from Staff Input Sessions

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

**Review and Accept the Minutes of the August 31, 2016**

This item was passed over. Approval for the August 31 minutes will be voted at the next meeting, along with minutes from September 21 and from this meeting (September 28).

**Transportation Update**

Martha Thurber provided an update on the activities of the Transportation Subcommittee, as she had attended the Subcommittee's meeting on September 22. Based on its initial explorations, Subcommittee has voted not to pursue options that involve either parent-provided transportation or "cluster" pickup points. Parent-provided options cannot be completely reliable and cluster pickups may be a hardship on parents/students who lack options for transporting students to pickup points at the required times. Subcommittee members Erwin Reynolds and Charlie Stetson are continuing their research into the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the District's purchasing its own diesel fuel (to save excise taxes) and either storing it at the current bus lot (leased by the busing contractor), at a District-owned facility on the Mohawk campus or, potentially, at the Buckland Town Garage on Sears St. in conjunction with a co-purchasing plan with the Town of Buckland. The Subcommittee is also focused on assessing the feasibility/cost-effectiveness of Mohawk's leasing, maintaining and operating its own buses.

Glenn Cardinal asked whether there is any fuel cost-adjustment clause in the current contract. Superintendent Buoniconti said there is but it is difficult to trigger.

**Report on September 21 Staff Input Sessions**

The Committee then began a lengthy discussion of the comments received from elementary and middle school educators on several components common to multiple operating scenarios under review.

(See <http://mtrsd-best.weebly.com/uploads/8/3/9/5/83954794/educatorsfeedbackscenarios160912.pdf> to view all comments received.)

From the BSE sessions with PK-6 educators –

- ***PK-Only***

Key Benefits Seen: Most staff saw no educational benefits. Among the few cited were a focus on PK learning and keeping some local school presence.

Key Concerns: Lack of older student role models; number of transitions to new schools; fewer available support services; lack of support/interaction/resources for teachers and students

- ***PK-2 Only***

Key Benefits: Specific focus on early education; sharing of resources/collaboration for teachers; keeps youngest children closest to home; potential for more than 1 class per grade; no need to focus on standardized testing

Key Concerns: Lack of older role models/buddy systems; no older siblings at the same school; hardship for parents to get children to multiple schools; loss of school community; potential loss of services/resources; less parent involvement

- ***All Grade 3-5 in a single school***

Key Benefits: Greater pool of peers/variety for friendships; better opportunities for teacher collaboration/team teaching; older students could form relationships before entering middle school; more opportunities for needed interventions

Key Concerns: Longer bus rides; class size (potential over-crowding); more school transitions; stress on families with students at multiple schools; loss of local school cultures/traditions

- ***All Grade 6 to Mohawk Middle School***

Key Benefits: Potential for better student retention; added enrichments/extra-curricular activities; larger peer group for friendships; educational advantages of being taught by subject specialists;

Key Concerns: Exposure to high school social/emotional issues; loss of Grade 6 leadership opportunities; time on bus and riding with older students; some Grade 6 students are “ready,” for middle school, some are not

From the Mohawk Grade 7-8 educators –

- ***All Grade 6 to Mohawk Middle School***

Key Benefits: Most Grade 6 students are ready for broader personal/educational experiences; greater opportunity for true “middle school” activities and programs of their own; more specialized teaching/ team teaching; access to broader activities/sports

Key Concerns: Space constraints at Mohawk; lack of adequate resources, such as technology; impact on existing team teaching model; need for transition planning for parents and students

The Committee then discussed the potential impact of transportation costs on various scenarios. The Transportation Subcommittee will be asked to provide input on the feasibility and potential savings of delivering all students (to Mohawk or a combination of Mohawk and BSE) in a single run rather than separate elementary and MS/HS runs as currently. Members noted that parent concerns about the safety of younger students would need to be addressed were this option to be pursued. The Committee also discussed potential capacity issues if all Grades PK-5 students were to be consolidated at BSE.

Superintendent Buoniconti noted that he and Principal Joanne Giguere had done a complete walk-through of the building and determined a capacity of 350 students. BSE currently serves 279 students (including 25 6th graders) and all other elementary schools (Colrain, Heath and Sanderson) serve a total of 296 students (including 22 6th graders). The Committee then discussed the possibility of adding a wing to BSE rather than constructing a new facility at Mohawk. Superintendent Buoniconti noted that he view that there were significant efficiencies to be gained through the easy sharing of staff and resources at a single unified campus. Having all elementary students in a single location would generate strong efficiencies as well, but less so than a single PK-12 campus.

Based on educator comments and the Committee’s subsequent discussion:

On a motion by Lark Thwing, seconded by Sue Mitchell, the Committee VOTED to withdraw both PK-only scenarios (#2 and #3) from further consideration.

On a motion by Sue Mitchell, seconded by Leslie Rule, the Committee VOTED to rescind the vote taken on July 26, 2016, and reconsider Scenario #5 (all PK-12 on at Mohawk, with elementary classes in a to-be-constructed building or wing). Sarah Reynolds cautioned that towns would need to be convinced to fund new construction. Martha Thurber noted that the Regional Agreement would need to be amended to address new capital spending for any consolidated facility, giving all towns the chance to vote.

The Committee also agreed to further discuss two possible new Scenarios: #8) all Grades PK-5 at an expanded BSE; and #9) All Grades PK-2 consolidated into an Early Learning Center (to be located at either Colrain or Sanderson), with Grades 3-5 at BSE and Grades 6-12 at Mohawk. These will be reviewed at the next meeting.

**Citizen Comment:** Citizen comments were encouraged throughout the meeting.

**Set Date for Next Meeting:** October 6 at 6:00 pm at Mohawk

**Submitted by:** Martha Thurber