

**MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
STRATEGIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE (Mohawk's BEST)  
March 23, 2016  
MINUTES**

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, March 23, 2016      **Time:** 7:00 p.m.      **Place:** Colrain Central School

**Committee Members in Attendance:** Kate Barrows, Willow Cohen, Mick Comstock, Susan Mitchell, John Payne, Sarah Reynolds, Martha Thurber and Lark Thwing,

**Committee Members Not in Attendance:** Karen Blom, David Newall, Kim Orzechowski, Erwin Reynolds, Leslie Rule

**School Committee Members in Attendance:** Glenn Cardinal

**School Administration:** Michael Buoniconti [MTRSD Superintendent] Rachel Porter [Curriculum Coordinator pre-K to K] and Amy Looman [Colrain Principal]

**Others in Attendance:** Cyndee Boehmer [Shelburne], Ken Campbell [Buckland], Paul Cohen [Shelburne], Jan Jones [Corain], Jennifer Norwood [Colrain], Eileen Sanvageau [Colrain Select Board] and Mark Thibodeau [Colrain Select Board],

**Documents:**  
March 23, 2016, Agenda

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

**Citizen Comments:** Citizen comments were recognized throughout the meeting.

**Opening Comments**

Martha Thurber gave a brief overview of the BEST Committee, its goals and activities to date. Lark Thwing read the School Committee's Statement of Trust.

**Subgroup Reports:**

**Communications:**

Willow Cohen reported on a variety of activities discussed/begun by the Communications Subcommittee, including:

- Creation of a one-page information sheet about each District school, designed to highlight that schools strengths and unique qualities;
- Holding a "community open house" at each school to get more townspeople into the schools to see what the schools are doing and what activities the schools provide that might be of interest (e.g., art shows, theater productions);
- Creation of regularly released press releases to highlight school activities, teachers and student achievements;
- Creation of Facebook pages for schools that don't yet have them as another way to inform the community and "market" District schools.

Several of these ideas will be discussed with the District Leadership at the next meeting of the Education Subcommittee.

The group then discussed the importance of efforts to keep students at Mohawk by making sure that parents and students are aware of what the District schools have to offer. Martha Thurber emphasized that having a standard “exit survey” and process is critical. Glenn Cardinal noted the importance of getting information out before the exit decision is made. Kate Barrows suggested identifying a group of parents willing to serve as “references” for the schools. She noted that many parents contact such references as part of their decision process for pre-k and, later, for charter schools.

#### **Education:**

Kate Barrows reported on the Education Subcommittee’s meeting with the district Leadership Team on March 17. She said the DLT is working now to create a more inter-disciplinary curriculum, drawing from the positive experience of such an approach in the Middle School, as well as looking longer-term at ways to broaden course offerings and “project-based” courses to meet the needs of students interested in more hands-on types of learning.

#### **Finance & Facilities**

Lark Thwing reported that this subcommittee is working to determine which potential operating scenarios to examine more closely. The subcommittee is looking at both short-term savings and long-term operational sustainability. Part of the analysis is determining whether and to what extent portions of some school buildings might be made available to towns to meet their needs for space (e.g., library, senior center, senior housing). It was agreed that Subcommittee members should engage town officials in this discussion as soon as possible.

The Subcommittee also identified several areas where input from the District Leadership Team on the educational impact of various options is necessary, including: 1) adding 6th grade to the current Middle School at Mohawk and, if so, does dividing into “pods” of 6/7 and 8/9 (along the model of the current Middle School) make sense; and 2) what’s the “best” break point if elementary schools are to be divided between lower and upper segments.

#### **Transportation**

Superintendent Buoniconti reported that David Newall and Erwin Reynolds are looking first at the existing bus contract to see whether changes can be made to generate immediate cost savings. They then will begin looking at potential alternatives to conventional busing.

Discussion then turned to the existing Regional Agreement and whether/how it would need to be changed. Martha Thurber noted that whatever options were ultimately recommended, the Regional Agreement would need to be amended and/or replaced, which will require, under the current provisions, the unanimous consent of all towns.

Martha Thurber then asked for ideas/suggestions/input from the members of the Colrain community in attendance. Select Board members Eileen Sanvageau and Mark Thibodeau said that the District’s current operational format is clearly unsustainable from Colrain’s perspective. The town cannot afford continued large increases in school budgets. Major issues in the town currently are the impact of high (and rising) taxes on seniors with fixed incomes; the lack of broadband as a foundation for economic development and the uncertainty of MBI or other funding sources; and (related) the possibility of a downgrade in the town’s bond rating, which would make funding the town’s share of any internet build-out more difficult.

**Other:** None

**Adjournment:** On a motion by Willow Cohen, seconded by Lark Thwing, the BEST Steering Committee voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

Next Meetings:

Tuesday, April 5, 2016 at Mohawk at 7 p.m.

Thursday, April 14 at Sanderson (Ashfield) at 7 p.m.