

**MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
STRATEGIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE  
May 10, 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:** Tuesday, May 10, 2016     **Time:** 7:00 p.m.     **Place:** Heath Elementary School

**Committee Members in Attendance:** Kate Barrows [Colrain]; Karen Blom [Buckland]; Willow Cohen [Mohawk SC – Shelburne]; Mick Comstock [Heath]; Sue Mitchell [MDEA]; Erwin Reynolds [Hawlemont]; Sarah Reynolds [Charlemont]; Martha Thurber [Mohawk SC – Buckland]; and Lark Thwing [Mohawk SC – Hawley]

**Committee Members Not in Attendance:** David Newall [Ashfield]; Kim Orzechowski [Hawley], John Payne [Shelburne]; Leslie Rule [Plainfield]

**School Committee Members in Attendance:** Glenn Cardinal [Buckland]; Budge Litchfield [Heath], and Ken Rocke [Heath]

**School Administration:** Superintendent Michael Buoniconti

**Others in Attendance:** Gloria Fisher [Heath]; Mary Holan [Heath]; Shiela Litchfield [Heath]; Kerrie McNay [Heath]; Deb Porter [Heath]; Robyn Provost-Carlson [Heath]; and John Sears [Hawley]

**Documents:**

May 10, 2016, Agenda  
April 14, 2016 MTRSD Mohawk's BEST Committee Draft Minutes  
April 21, 2016 MTRSD Mohawk's BEST Committee Draft Minutes

**Call to Order:** Martha Thurber called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**Review and Accept the Minutes of the April 14, 2016 and April 21, 2016 Meetings:**

On a motion by Sheryl Reynolds, seconded by Sue Mitchell, the Committee voted to approve the minutes from the April 14, 2016 meeting.

On a motion by Martha Thurber, seconded by Lark Thwing, the Committee voted to approve the minutes from the April 21, 2016 meeting. Kate Barrows [Colrain]; Willow Cohen [Mohawk SC – Shelburne]; Sue Mitchell [MDEA]; Erwin Reynolds [Hawlemont]; and Sarah Reynolds [Charlemont] abstained.

**Review of Activities/Progress to Date:**

Martha Thurber opened the meeting with a review of progress to date, focusing first on the short-term objective of attracting and retaining students so as to reduce charter/choice expenditures. Among the progress noted:

- Completion of marketing flyers for each of the five District Schools;
- Climate survey for parents, students and staff currently underway;
- Principals have been asked to document their procedures/findings for exit interviews of students/parents leaving their schools to help in forming retention strategies;
- In-depth review of existing curriculum is currently underway by District Leadership Team/BEST Education Subcommittee in an effort to understand and respond to student/parent feedback on course offerings and methods of instruction

- Meeting with MSBA officials who expressed willingness to be flexible on clawback provisions of existing school-related debt;
- Initial potential restructuring scenarios identified and financial analysis has begun
- Ongoing efforts to identify sources of public & private grants/funding for specific needs (e.g., Mohawk Tech Fund is about 60% of the way to its goal of \$35,000)

Progress on longer-term lobbying goals includes:

- Superintendent Buoniconti's Rural School Assn. has held two meetings with strong participation
- School Committee members and Mohawk students attended MASC Day on the Hill to lobby legislators on sparsity aid, charter school reform, transportation reimbursement and SPEC costs.

Ken Rocke and Budg (HETF)e Litchfield, School Committee members from Heath and members of the Heath Education Task Force, then discussed that group's efforts and progress. They began by noting that Heath's focus was on determining how best to educate Heath children going forward, given the level of declining enrollment in the Heath Elementary School. They said long-term solutions need to involve not just Heath and not just Mohawk, but the larger rural western Mass. region. HETF members have been visiting nearby local elementary schools to see which might best fit the needs of Heath students were the Heath school to close or reduce its scope. They have visited Colrain, BSE and Hawlemont and will visit Rowe. Among their thoughts thus far:

- It will be important to maintain an elementary education component in each town
- If Heath students move to another school, they should be kept together, at least in the early years
- Ideally there will be a procedure that can allow for a "test run" of a year or so, prior to a full commitment
- Parents need to have stability and choice

Key points of the discussion that followed:

- Heath resident Mary Holan said she thought the BEST proposal to move 6<sup>th</sup> grade to Mohawk was a good one, but felt strongly that lower grades (pre-K to Grade 2/3) need to remain in the local school. She also expressed concern that some town by-laws, like those requiring 4-acre building lots, made it hard for poorer people to purchase homes in Heath.
- Gloria Fisher noted that one key for Heath and for the District is getting access to high-speed internet. The group then discussed lobbying efforts underway to free up broadband funding.
- John Sears said transportation costs and reimbursement levels also were key; Lark Thwing cited the need to identify more transportation vendors so there is competition for the Mohawk contract;
- Martha Thurber noted Heath's recent vote against allowing amendments to the existing Regional Agreement upon approval by 2/3rds of towns rather than requiring unanimity and asked whether there were flaws in the proposed amendment or was Heath committed philosophically to unanimity. Shiela Litchfield said Heath believed consensus is essential; because of past experiences, there is not enough trust to abandon consensus. Lark Thwing noted that all towns will need to agree to whatever proposal is ultimately made by BEST.
- BEST and the HETF need to remain in continuous communication and work together so that one group's solution is not antithetical to the other's. It was agreed to share minutes on a regular basis.

LKaren Blom then asked for an update on the Colrain Education Task Force. Kate Barrows said Colrain had passed over the 2/3rds amendment primarily because some residents were uncertain of its ramifications for smaller towns. She said that while the Coalrain group has met a couple of times, it was still struggling to get members of the town and town officials engaged in the process.

#### **Mohawk's BEST Subcommittee Reports:**

Subcommittee reports were covered in the overview of progress presented earlier by Martha Thurber.

**Other:** None

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

**Schedule Next Meetings:**

The next BEST meetings will be:

May 18, 6pm, BEST Facilities & Finance, at Hawlemont School in Charlemont

May 19, 6 pm, BEST Communications, at Hawlemont School in Charlemont

May 19, 7 pm, BEST Committee, at Hawlemont School in Charlemont

May 25, 6 pm, BEST Communications, at Mohawk

May 25, 7 pm, BEST Committee, at Mohawk

June 1, 6 pm BEST Facilities & Finance, at Mohawk

June 1 6 pm BEST Communications, at Mohawk

June 1, 7 pm, BEST Committee, at Mohawk

**Adjournment:** On a motion by Lark Thwing, seconded by Sheryl Reynolds, the Subcommittee voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m.

Submitted By: Martha Thurber