

**MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
STRATEGIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE
August 11, 2016
DRAFT 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: Thursday, August 11, 2016 **Time:** 7:00 p.m. **Place:** Superintendent's Conference Room - Mohawk

Committee Members in Attendance: Kate Barrows [Colrain]; Karen Blom [Buckland]; John Payne [Shelburne]; Sarah Reynolds [Charlemont]; Leslie Rule [Plainfield]; Martha Thurber [Mohawk SC – Buckland]; and Lark Thwing [Mohawk SC – Hawley].

Committee Members Not in Attendance: Mick Comstock [Heath]; Sue Mitchell [MDEA]; David Newall [Ashfield]; Kim Orzechowski [Hawley]; Erwin Reynolds [Hawlemont]

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

School Administration: Superintendent Michael Buoniconti; Principal Amy Looman [Colrain Central School]; Business Manager Mike Kociela

Others in Attendance: None

Documents:

August 11, 2016, Agenda
July 26, 2016 MTRSD Mohawk's BEST Committee Draft Minutes

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

Review and Accept the Minutes of the July 26, 2016 Meeting:

On a motion by Karen Blom, seconded by Leslie Rule the Committee voted to approve the minutes from the July 26, 2016 meeting

Subcommittee Progress Reports:

- **Facilities & Finance – Review new Building Consolidation Scenario #7 and Updated Scenarios #1, #3-A and #4:**

Lark Thwing presented a review of the Finance & Facilities meeting that took place immediately before this meeting. At that meeting, Mike Kociela presented revised financials for Scenarios #1, #3-A, #4, which illustrated how the savings generated by each scenario would have affected FY17 assessments for each District town. Mike Kociela also presented a new Scenario #7, which assumes that Heath chooses to leave the District and both Colrain and Sanderson (along with BSE) continue to operate full pre-K to 5 programs, with 6th grade integrating into the Mohawk Middle School. At the base level of analysis (staffing only), this Scenario would generate savings of approximately \$682,000 (had it been implemented in FY17 vs. the current FY17 budget).

Glenn Cardinal asked if the financial impact of integrating Grade 6 into Mohawk could be separately quantified. Mike Kociela said on purely a consolidation of classes basis, there would be a savings of one teacher; however, the actual cost savings would depend on how the 6th grade educational program would be implemented, e.g., through an adaptation of the "team teaching" model currently used for Grades 7 and 8, which would require different staffing.

The Committee then discussed the likely need to “phase in” the components of its recommendation, regardless of the nature of that recommendation, agreeing that the integration of Grade 6 into the Middle School seemed the most likely first step. This would free up space in the elementary schools for consolidation at that level. Superintendent Buoniconti noted that enrollment in the District for this school year (September 2016) was unexpectedly up, moving from an anticipated 1,016 to 1,051, a 7% increase from the low point in 2013. This potentially brings into question the capacity of BSE to absorb students through consolidation. He will have BSE capacity numbers for the Committee at the next meeting. Implementing only the transition of 6th grade to Mohawk in the first year would allow for time to assess more fully whether the enrollment increase is a “blip” or something more. Karen Blum suggested talking with local real estate agents to get their perspective.

Leslie Rule noted that the key to making the 6th grade transition successful is thorough planning, a clear “vision” of what the District seeks to achieve as a result, and open communication with parents about how the transition will be implemented. Implementing the 6th grade transition in FY18 would allow time to assess the impact of Heath’s decision on the placement of its students (within or without the District) and to adjust BEST’s recommendations, if necessary, to meet changing demographics. Several members noted the impact that access to broadband would have on the potential for population growth.

- **Education – Highlights of meeting with District Leadership Team on August 5, 2016:**

Martha Thurber reported on the meeting between the Education Subcommittee and the District Leadership Team on August 5. The group reviewed the 6th grade to Mohawk concept, discussing the pros and cons of a 6-7-8 cohort, versus a 6-7, 8-9 model. There was agreement that the current Middle School “team teaching” model should be employed rather than simply moving existing 6th grade classrooms to the Middle School. The group also discussed the concept of keeping only a pre-K presence in some schools. Some questioned the difference between a pre-K only environment and daycare. Others noted the added value that interaction with older students brings to existing pre-K classes. All agreed that additional analysis and discussion with staff was essential. The groups also discussed ideas for gaining feedback from staff on the educational consolidation options now under review, focusing on the best timing and methodology for getting input from staff. Ultimately, the group agreed that the DLT would organize the session(s) during the first available Wednesday PD time in September. All pre-K to Grade 7 teachers would be invited to participate and session(s) would be run under PLC protocols. BEST Education Committee members will observe the sessions.

- **Communications – Highlights of August 11, 2016 meeting:**

Glenn Cardinal has successfully raised funds necessary to print the long-planned Mohawk posters. He also worked with Business Manager Mike Kociela to set up an account for the deposit and use of donated funds. Posters will be available next week. The group then discussed whether there is a need to re-print the school brochures. There is a need for more Mohawk and BSE brochures at the Village Information Center in Shelburne Falls. Martha Thurber will check with school Principals to see if other schools also need more. Karen Blom and Glenn cardinal will then raise funds to cover the cost of this effort as well. The group also expressed the need for a link to the new BEST website to be posted on the home page of the Mohawk site. Karen Blom also would like to have a “Get Info” button prominent on that page for people interested in learning more about the District. She will discuss changes to the Mohawk site with Virginia Wiswell in the Mohawk IT group. The Communications Subcommittee will now meet jointly with the Mohawk Communications Subcommittee since many of its members and goals are common.

- **Transportation – Highlights of August 4, 2016 meeting:**

No report.

- **Fundraising & Revenues:**

Sarah Reynolds reported that the group's major need is to identify someone in the community with the time to devote to developing an alumni/ae website. It was suggested that reunion organizers be contacted to see if any of them might help. Facebook pages for various Mohawk classes also may be a source of interest.

Discussion of Timeline for Proposals:

Chair Martha Thurber reiterated her commitment to presenting recommendations prior to year-end 2016, noting that the Communications Subcommittee needs to focus on a plan for the nature and location of public meetings to present the recommendations. Lark Thwing noted that because the largest savings are generated under Scenarios that assume Heath leaves the District for Grades pre-K to 6 (or 5), the timing of recommendations from Heath's Education Task Force is critical to BEST's efforts. Martha Thurber said that the Heath School Committee reps felt the Heath Education Task Force would have its recommendations ready for presentation to the Heath community by November. There was broad support for the idea of "phasing in" the components of whatever Scenario ultimately is recommended, likely beginning with the transition of 6th grade to the Middle School, but dependent upon the feedback received from staff.

The Committee then agreed that it was necessary to await several inputs prior to meeting again. These include: feedback from staff on Scenario components; the Superintendent's assessment of BSE's capacity; and revisions to the Scenarios that reflect revised enrollment data. In the meantime, Martha Thurber will work with Mohawk Attorney Russell Dupere to develop a checklist of what would need to happen to implement BEST's recommendations if Heath leaves the District (pre-K to 6) or if Heath stays.

Other:

None

Citizen Comment:

Citizen comments were encouraged throughout the meeting.

Adjournment: On a motion by Lark Thwing, seconded by Leslie Rule, the Subcommittee voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Submitted By: Martha Thurber