

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
of the
MERCER COUNTY SPECIAL SERVICES SCHOOL DISTRICT

MINUTES

BUSINESS MEETING
Tuesday February 2, 2021
4:30 pm

The monthly business meeting for the month of February 2021 was held this day virtually due to the Covid19 restrictions.

The Board of Education took the following actions:

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Board of Education President Camille Rainiero called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm.

OPEN PUBLIC MEETING STATEMENT: Ms. Rainiero read the following statement:

Notice of this meeting was posted on the main access doors of the Mercer Elementary School and on the website of the Mercer County Special Services School District, and sent by email to the *Times*, and mailed to the Mercer County Clerk, in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act and Administrative Code. Public attendees may make comment when recognized by the Board President during the time for public comment on the agenda. Written statements received by 11 AM today will be read aloud by the Board Secretary during the public comment period as well. A time limit of three (3) minutes applies to both oral and written comment. Written statements will be read until the time limit is reached. Duplicative written comments shall be summarized for the record. The public will be placed on mute by default during the meeting until recognized by the chair. The public may also place themselves on mute.

ROLL CALL:

Present: Camille Rainiero, Lisa Vena, Jan Lewis, Gerald Stockman & Stacy Morgan Santo.

Also Present: Dr. Kimberly Schneider, Superintendent, Deborah Donnelly, Business Administrator/Board Secretary, and Walter Bliss, Board Attorney.

2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Suspended

3. **PUBLIC SESSION:**

Public statements submitted by Chris Lada and Amanda Santos, were read by Ms. Rainiero.

Elizabeth Breden, parent said she feels there is a lack of communication to parents and staff. She said she sent several communications with no response. Parents were not notified of the staff layoffs. This will trickle down to the students. No response from the Superintendent from the Robbinsville Parents Group.

Ms. Rainiero read the following statement:

Mercer County Special Services School District (MCSSSD) has experienced a 10% decline in enrollment since the close of the 2019-2020 school year resulting in a loss of anticipated revenue of \$2.6 million for the 2020-2021 school year. While the District has implemented several cost-saving measures earlier in the school year such as a hiring freeze for all non-essential personnel, curtailing utility usage across the campus and implementing a purchasing freeze effective 1/15/21, it is not enough to close the budget gap for 2020-2021 and still remain fiscally responsible to our sending districts and Mercer County. The District is facing unprecedented times and will continue to provide the appropriate level of service to all of our students by adjusting class sizes in line with special education regulations, but we cannot continue to operate responsibly without the reduction in force. MCSSSD has a responsibility not only to our staff and students but to all those that support the district through the tuition payments of sending districts and the support of Mercer County.

Amber Dell, parent asked what are the states ratios? One of my teachers being laid off is my child's; just getting him to a point and now we have to start over.

Ms. Rainiero said the newspapers are not always accurate. Students will not be shoved into classes. We will continue to meet the class regulations.

Miss Dell said change is not always good for some students this should have been brought to our attention.

Lisa Pusillo, Teacher at JFC said I understand the reasons behind the decisions however my coworkers have been together we feel like we were blindsided on Friday. This is affecting their livelihood and passion. This was not handled the best way during a pandemic. We should have been forewarned. If we had been forewarned it would have been different this hurts us. Several mistakes were made, inaccurate information. Should have been going over more. I worry about my coworker's mental health. Should have been consulted or forewarned. I lost an assistant in my classroom. I have one of the most difficult classes, no one in my room that my children trust, personal issue but should be considered.

Roy Hamilton, parent said we are living under stressful situation to begin with this year. Ms. Buzgo has made it easier. I understand budgets, but this is too drastic and could have been done at the end of the year.

Martina Davis, parent said things happen; should not have to read it in the newspaper, lack of communication. Will programs be reduced?

Ms. Rainiero responded we still will meet needs, academics. No new teachers, they are being laid off because classrooms are over staffed. Students are not returning.

Adriene Stephens, parent said our children cannot adjust to their new environment or new teacher. It is not fair to our students.

Dr. Schneider said we need to manage our staff with notifications, so what seems like a delay - not intentional. We are in unprecedented times, our budget is strained our newest teachers which we have trained, I will need to help them find jobs. Teachers and principals will be planning for new placements, keep students with those teachers we are all sad about it. JFC third graders will stay with current building. We will re-employee/invite them back if enrollment increases. We are hoping all get vaccinated and have five days ESY; nurses and therapists have been vaccinated and are working with DOH to be ready.

Ms. Stephens said it is not about money it is about the teachers.

Ms. Davis said she is upset it is her child's last year and because of covid19 she has lost out in her last year.

Dr. Schneider said we are aware some students need additional services after high school. Your child’s case manager can help.

Huzeif Reshed, parent said our children are behind, we are stressed out; my son is behind 2 years now because he stays home. I understand the situation. Thank you to the teachers; now being home, we know their value.

Anna Olivero, parent, said my child's teacher is on the list. I have worked hard the last nine years with MCSSSD. He had a hard time with transition and worked hard to make education successful; after hard work to get kids where they need to be. Who runs the class? We were not notified. Is not capital reserve money to keep the kids there until the end of the year. Someone didn't balance the budget We did not plan on the pandemic. To layoff is not an option to me. There has to be a better option. Don't you have a contract with sending districts. Push them. Why aren't we back in the buildings? Other districts are and have been in session since September why aren't we in session?

Dr. Schneider responded if we have 6 students, there will be a teacher; will be an experienced teacher. In terms of sending districts, they are our partners; at this point we have not had intakes to account for the graduates from the prior year. Sending districts learned how to keep students in districts. We are not returning to the buildings because 50% of our students are from Trenton with very high transmission rates. Trenton pushed back to a physical opening of May 4, 2021. Not on site-based issue. Some classes only have three students while code says nine. Maybe districts have decided to keep district students in district. Classrooms with not enough students, not sustainable in the long run our tuition rates would be so large we would have to charge back to sending districts. We tried to keep staff as long as possible, so if we don't act now, we may not have a school in two years.

Ms. Olivero asked how is Burlington County doing it without an uptick in cases?

Dr. Schneider responded 50% of our student population and 10% of our staff population are living in the Trenton. Trenton district will be closed until May.

Mr. Stockman expressed concern that a parent noted a letter was sent to the BOE and he had not received it, Ms. Vena noted she did not receive as well.

Ms. Breden added this needs to be addressed.

4. Approval of January 12, 2021 Regular Board Meeting Minutes

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo		X	X			
Stockman	X		X			
Lewis			X			
Vena					X	
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

5. Bills to be Approved and addendum totaling \$3,544,968.83 and authorization of transfers within program areas as approved by the Superintendent.

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman		X	X			
Lewis			X			
Vena	X		X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

6. Board Secretary/Treasurer’s Report for December 2020

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman		X	X			
Lewis	X		X			
Vena			X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

7. Correspondence & Communications - None

8. Committee Reports - None

9. Superintendent’s Report - None

New/Special Projects: None

PERSONNEL:

BE IT RESOLVED That the Board of Education does hereby approve the following appointments, reappointments, adjustments, resignations, terminations, retirements, leaves, transfers, suspensions, and requests for expedites and emergency certification for the School Year 2020 – 2021 as recommended by the Superintendent.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That the Board of Education submit to the County Superintendent, as required, applications for emergency hiring and the applicants’ attestations that they have not been convicted of any disqualifying crime pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq, N.J.S.A. 18A:39-17 et seq, or N.J.S.A. 18A:6-4.13 et seq.

Recommend Board approve the following:

- Appointments, Resignations, Leaves, Retirements, etc. (Attachment 9-A)

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman			X			
Lewis	X		X			
Vena		X	X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

MISCELLANEOUS:

Recommend Board approve the following:

- 2021-2022 MCSSSD School Year Calendar (Attachment 9-B)

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman		X	X			
Lewis	X		X			
Vena			X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

- Revised and/or New Policies, Regulations, or By-Laws - First Reading

First Reading -- Revised and/or New Policies, Regulations, or By-Laws

BYLAWS - none

POLICIES – none

REGULATIONS - none

Second Reading -- Revised and/or New Policies, Regulations, or By-Laws

BYLAWS

0167 Public Participation in Board Meetings

POLICIES - none

REGULATIONS - none

ABOLISHED -- Policies, Regulations, or By-Laws – none

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman		X	X			
Lewis	X		X			
Vena			X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

- Approval to submit application for HRSA Year 2 funds for 2021-2022 Early Hearing Detection and Intervention grant in the amount of \$33,233 for Mercer County SCHS to provide Case Management services. Application due 02/25/2021

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman		X	X			
Lewis	X		X			
Vena			X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

REPORTS:

Recommend Board approve the following:

- Fire and Security Drill(s) for the month of January 2021: none

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman		X	X			
Lewis	X		X			
Vena			X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

- Harassment, Intimidation & Bullying as of January 2021

Month	Investigations	HIB	Non-HIB
July	0	0	0
August	0	0	0
September	0	0	0
October	0	0	0
November	0	0	0

December	0	0	0
January	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	0	0

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman		X	X			
Lewis	X		X			
Vena			X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

- Enrollment Data as of January 2021

	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June
2019-2020	497	498	548	546	546	551	544	559	563	561	561	560
2020-2021	428	428	496	501	503	505	506					

	12/31/2020	01/31/2021
Mercer High School	241	244
Mercer Elementary School	195	194
Regional Day	7	7
Joseph F. Cappello School	<u>62</u>	<u>61</u>
TOTAL:	<u>505</u>	<u>506</u>

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman		X	X			
Lewis	X		X			
Vena			X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

11. **NEW BUSINESS**

Recommend Board approve the following:

- a. Approve to accept the NJDOE Certified Tuition Rates for the school year ending 2019/2020. Based on administration’s financial analysis, recommends the Board of Education to approve a waiver of 50% to each sending district (Attachment 11-a).

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman			X			
Lewis		X	X			
Vena	X		X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

b. Approve Play Therapy Training Institute to provide professional development training on February 24, 2021. Heidi Kaduson, Ph.D., LLC will present "Play Therapy for Pervasive Developmental Disorders". This is a private 6 hr. live webinar. Joseph F. Cappello certified staff and Mercer Elementary School members will be provided with ready-to-use techniques. The cost of the training not to exceed \$3,000.

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman			X			
Lewis		X	X			
Vena	X		X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

c. Approve PESI to provide professional development training on March 18, 2021. Victoria Grinman will present "Treating Traumatic Stress in Kids", all JFC staff members will be provided with ready-to-use techniques. The cost of the half day training not to exceed \$3,500 (Attachment 11-c).

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo						
Stockman						
Lewis						
Vena						
Hernandez-Manno						
Rainiero						

d. Approve the Revised Budget Planning Schedule (Attachment 11-d).

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman			X			
Lewis		X	X			
Vena	X		X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

- e. Approve the Resolution to adopt a Maximum Travel Budget for 2021/2022 (Attachment 11-e).

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman			X			
Lewis		X	X			
Vena	X		X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

- f. Approve Cy Masterpole to provide professional development training for the District’s school nurses. The purpose of the training is to provide yearly recertification training of American Red Cross CPR/AED. The training will be held on Tuesday, February 23, 2021. The training will be limited to the seven (7) school nurses, the cost not to exceed \$450.

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman			X			
Lewis		X	X			
Vena	X		X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

- g. Miscellaneous Equipment Disposal List (Attachment 11-g).

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman			X			
Lewis		X	X			
Vena	X		X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

- h. Approve the Student Affiliation Agreement between Rider University and Mercer County Special Services School District (Attachment 11-h).

Bd. of Ed.	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Morgan Santo			X			
Stockman			X			
Lewis		X	X			

Vena	X		X			
Hernandez-Manno						X
Rainiero			X			

12. PUBLIC SESSION #2

Jorge Merino, Teacher at Mercer Elementary School said he worked his way from being a sub, to a one on one, to a teacher. He has worked with every population that MCSSSD serves. The Mercer community harbors truly professional and collaborative teachers. I have been able to learn and grow as a teacher and a person. The passion and drive to be the best teacher possible for the students we serve has resonated during this time of virtual learning. In addition to this being hard on his students, his family will now face a major challenge due to the loss of income.

Raquel Albarracin, School Psychologist asked the Board to recognize that this decision will significantly impact many of our students who have experienced significant trauma in their educational and personal lives. The only solution to our district's economic position cannot be a reduction of force. I ask you to see that this will create many ripples.

Thamika Lightbourne, Classroom Assistant at Joseph Cappello School said I received a call on January 29th regarding my termination. This job is my only source of sustaining my livelihood. I have seniority and was not offered an opportunity to go back to a one-on-one assistant. I enjoy my job and enjoy working at MCSSSD. I want to have a positive impact on the students. When you love what you do, too much is not a burden. It is important to me to make a difference. Please reconsider my termination and recheck the seniority list.

Mr. Stockman responded as a Board Member I can further explore the possibility to bring her back.

Ms. Rainiero said yes, it is a reduction in force, we are hoping our numbers go up then we can hire our staff back. We have a \$ 2.6 million anticipated revenue loss. We have also contacted the other Mercer County School Districts that have interests in hiring. If we can find a way to find the money and raise enrollments we will try.

Ms. Vena said I have been a board member since 2008. It brings tears to my eyes to hear all the love and compassion of our staff, but what can we do if we do not have the numbers? We need our students back to get our teachers back.

Melissa Andrie, parent said my son is in Mr. Merino’s class. My son has switched so many schools it has been a journey. Mr. Moreno has been his only connection. My son has the potential to go far with the right person. This will be another traumatizing thing for him to process, he doesn't understand cuts. Class has seven students an all participate. His trauma is unfair. It takes time to build a connection.

Ms. Duncan, parent said my son is also in Mr. Merino’s class. He is the best teacher my son has ever had, and we have been through different schools.

Lisa Pisullo, Teacher at Mercer Elementary School said I have been a teacher for 34 years. I have seen our district flourish. We have helped broken students. It does not help our district to send our staff to other districts. We are telling parents you are taking away their support system. BCSSSD is open. We make excuses. We are here for our students; we need to put our students first. We are putting 15 kids in a class on Chromebooks. We are willing to give our students to other districts. We have to do better.

Ms. Rainiero responded we are hoping this is temporary.

Mr. Stockman said I am a new board member. This is an emotional impactful meeting. The emotion is sincere. AP has more insight; do you have any suggestions for the Board?

Ms. Pisullo responded I will with meet you. We need to help our students. I have shared my ideas and will continue to do so, so we can come together with same interest in mind.

Ms. Vena asked if there was any staff putting in for retirement that would help keeping staff on?

Mr. Stockman asked if there was something specific, we are not doing?

Leah Pray said this should not be discussed in a public quorum. We can certainly set up a meeting with the Association and the board.

Heidi Musick, this is my 7th year as the SAC substance abuse counselor aka student assistance counselor for the District and I am being RIF'd. My position is a crucial and comprehensive program for high-risk behaviors. In addition to being the SAC, I have served as the trained anti bully specialist for the past three years. I also collaborate with the child study team to best support our students. Over the past seven years I've been able to support these beautiful students in so many ways. It is essential for the students, their guardians and staff to have me the substance assistance counselor available to them.

Kathleen Poinsett, 21-year assistant. People say we were blind-sided. Proposed meeting would promote communication. If we are in the know I hear better.

Janet Pultorak, Classroom Assistant at MHS said I love the kids very proud to be part of the Mercer family. Shocked I was on the list. I was just diagnosed with breast cancer, I had surgery need treatment and I will lose my benefits. My husband has been laid off December 31st so no benefits. All in the family is now under my benefits. What am I to do? How can I pay cobra even with unemployment? Look into furlough so we can keep our benefits.

Vivian Christopher daughter at Mercer High School. My daughter has regressed during the pandemic, when back in class it will be a bigger issue. The district will not be prepared for those kids that have been at home. I don't think it's fair and may result in lawsuits. I am witness to the love these teachers have for their students.

Dr. Schneider said class size must match code. Since before the pandemic we have had decreased enrollment and not getting students back. The pandemic has exacerbated that but did not get those students back. Classrooms must be staffed according to code.

Anne Marie Pizzullo if we close five classes, we have to move students so we will be up to 12 students/class.

Gabrielle Raccosta, Teacher MHS especially in building where we have closed 3 classes.

Mr. Kadambi, Parent said I understand the budget issue; you do not have enough incoming students. My son's teacher has done a great job with him, who will take over for the kids, what is their teaching methodology what is the transition?

Ms. Rainiero replied we have to speak with administration and address the parents.

Megan Mazzanna, Teacher at MES said I heard lack of enrollment and chargebacks, why can't students get back in the classroom? It was heartbreaking to learn, we need a plan to get back into school.

Ms. Mazzanna said no one was informed to be anticipated, I understand the 30/60-day notice, but not told to be prepared.

Teresa Parise, Teacher at Mercer Elementary School, said I have been in District since 2012. I provide health insurance for my autistic child and an ill husband. Why haven't I been offered an alternate position?

Ms. Rainiero said the Board members were notified this week.

13. ADJOURNMENT

A Motion by Jan Lewis and Seconded by Gerald Stockman to adjourn the meeting passed by unanimous voice vote, (5) aye's (0) nays. Meeting was adjourned at 6:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Deborah Donnelly". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Deborah Donnelly
Business Administrator/Board Secretary