

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

MINUTES

BUSINESS MEETING
Tuesday March 9, 2021
4:30 pm

The monthly business meeting for the month of March 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 Trenton 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, Yasmin Hernandez-Manno, Gerald Stockman and 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 #1

Ms. Rainiero read a statement from the Association of Student Assistance Professionals of New Jersey regarding the SAC position being eliminated.

Board Attorney, Walter Bliss read a statement regarding board related emails and use of private emails. Administration of OPRA and document retention of public records; use of private email for board business becomes a public document. I urge you to forward your emails to boe@mcsssd.us to be made part of public archive records to ensure compliance of OPRA. As a central source, Amy Nemeth Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent will be disseminating these emails.

Dr. Schneider said she was very excited over the weekend to hear the Mercer County Superintendents were able to complete DOH/DOE number of people in district to be eligible to receive vaccinations. Dr. Kim asked individuals to register as well. The pace of vaccinations is still slow, sites are receiving far less than demand. but we expect it to ramp up. Hopefully we will be in a different place for May. Hybrid half day through June, principals have information coming to you. Talk about September opening five days a week. There are talks of variances and additional vaccines in the fall. We must keep up with science and the pandemic teams meet for discussion.

Barry Federovitch, parent at Mercer High School said I am the parent of a 19-year-old autistic child who will be losing his aide due to budget cuts. He lost his grandmother, and he has become more violent. He attends classes more than any other classmates. This is not in the best interest to change an aide mid-year. Dismissal of aide may be detrimental. I ask you to reconsider until the end of the school year.

Kristen Robinson, parent of Logan sits on various committees, has been in district for 15 years and voted to stay virtual. We are now getting vaccinated. Please open before ESY. Stop blaming Trenton.

Stephanie Moore, Parent of an 11-year-old student at Mercer Elementary School who is autistic and ADHD. Her son is struggling with virtual learning. He has communication deficits and social skills or lacking. The virtual platform is overwhelming. Needs to be in person. It breaks my heart he wants to drive around to see other children. He wants to interact with his peers. Doctor Kim please answer why parents, teachers and staff have not been a part of the decision making, and not by those impacted. Why are there only half day options. He cannot handle an inconsistent schedule. What is the plan to get back full time? I don't get any letters. How do I know there are letters are on the website? Do you expect to be back for ESY full time? All over the State special education is open five days a week. Trenton is not the only area with high cases. Not going to get away with how poorly this district is running. Continue down this path and there will be no school left. I cannot send my child back to district.

Janet Cerullo, Parent of 19-year-old daughter said the virtual learning platform has been a failure, it has caused extreme emotional stress. My daughter is now taking more medications as she's been diagnosed with clinical depression. I see no indication of you prioritizing our children. Asking all board members, why you are here? The welfare of so many depends on it. Did you do it to give back to your community? How did you answer the call? How do you inform yourself of CDC and science? Have you made efforts to see how other districts are doing it? I just want to go on the record to say thank goodness for the teachers and therapists who have supported us. I am disheartened with how this has been handled throughout this pandemic.

Elizabeth Breden, parent of a daughter at Mercer High School said we have been in district for 14 years. I sent an email on February 16th to the Board of Education. I sent it because the majority of it was about communication. Suggested all have district emails addresses. This zoom meeting setup is perfect. Ms. Breden went on to say there is no SPAG in MCSSSD, a state requirement. We are lacking as parents in the district. We need full time ESY with less kids and more space and a chance to test your ability to open full time. My daughter cannot do virtual learning, we touch base with the teachers, and we do it together.

Amanda Santos, parent of a son in Mercer Elementary School said I have to be honest I wanted my child in district for inclusive education. My child's teacher is nurturing and proved me wrong. She has done well, however we need to find alternate placement if we cannot attend four days full time and five days ESY. You continue to place the burden of teaching and therapies on the parents while you collect a hefty paycheck.

Christine Parr, parent of daughter at Mercer High School who is 20 years old and will be graduating in June. My daughter cannot walk or talk. She is like a one-year-old, she needs physical and occupational therapy. My husband is not a licensed physical therapist and cannot do what is asked. How can Ewing be in session but Mercer cannot? She has been vaccinated. Teachers have been vaccinated. We need to get back for PT. What

has she gained? This is unconscionable, she is physically suffering. My husband is also at risk, he does not have the credentials. You should be ashamed, follow the science! Do not let my daughter suffer because of your incompetence.

Leah Pray, President of MCSSETA began reading a statement on behalf of MCSSETA (attached), time had run out and the statement was finished being read by Tina Jablonski, Vice President of MCSSETA who further read a resolution for a vote of no confidence in Dr. Schneider.

For the past 16 years, the members of the Mercer County Special Services Educational and Therapeutic Association (MCSSETA) have been providing the county's most vulnerable students with the individualized support and instruction despite a lack of leadership and collaboration from Superintendent Dr. Kimberly Schneider. For over a decade and a half, MCSSETA has worked to keep the school district functional for the sake of students and their families. However, Jan. 29, 2021, marked the breaking point. That's when Dr. Schneider blindsided staff, students, and district families by announcing a district plan to lay off 19 classroom assistants effective March 4 and 12 teachers effective April 3. While MCSSETA anticipated discussions about layoffs for the 2019-2020 school year, layoffs while a school year is still in progress are not only rare but educationally unsound.

Just this past week at Mercer Elementary School, the district had to recall some laid-off staff members when they realized they had seven children with autism in 3 classes and 13 children with behavioral challenges in another. These numbers exceeded limits set forth in New Jersey school administrative code. As a result, students were shuffled in and out and back in again to classes causing angst for these vulnerable children and undue stress on their parents and educators. Dr. Schneider's 16 years as superintendent should have prepared her to avoid this type of oversight.

Dr. Schneider seems to show no interest in getting to know the district's students or staff. She rarely visits buildings. There's no evidence of her guiding or supporting new building-level administrators resulting in a constant churning of school leadership. According to the NJ Department of Education's latest School Performance Reports, only about half of the district's administrators have at least four years of experience in the school district. The state average is 77 percent. Further compounding the problem are the qualifications of the administrative staff she hires. The average number of years of public school experience for district administrators is 7.5 years compared to the state average of 16 years. A prime example of her incompetence is her selection of a Human Resources manager with no experience who was serendipitously hired when she applied to be a substitute teacher.

Dr. Schneider's communications skills have also caused undue confusion and disruption for parents and staff. Parents did not learn about the impending layoffs of 31 staff members until they saw it in the newspaper and on the evening news. The shuffling of students at the Mercer Elementary School this past week was further complicated by lapses in communication with staff and parents. Many parents are struggling with virtual instruction and have expressed frustration to staff that they feel that they have no voice in district decisions. As a result, some parents have pulled their children out of the school district, further exacerbating the district's budgetary and enrollment problems.

Dr. Schneider's fiscal mismanagement is evident from her inaction to enact budgetary adjustments at the end of the 2019-20 school year when 41 students graduated and enrollment remained stagnant. Had she acted to lay off staff at that time, they would have had the opportunity to seek jobs in other school districts instead of being laid off mid school year. She makes no attempts to attract new students or obtain grants or outside funding to keep school programs intact.

Dr. Schneider is out of touch with the student population entrusted to her. She does not seem to recognize the detrimental effects of instability and extended virtual instruction on academically, emotionally, behaviorally, and physically challenged students. She has resisted engaging parents and staff on school building reopening plans and continues to push for severe mid-year staffing cuts which will have a disastrous effect on already fragile students and families.

Additionally, Dr. Schneider continually rejects staff input on district innovations which could improve instruction and student outcomes. She has invested scarce budget dollars in curricula not suited for the student

population and has made no visible attempts to forge partnerships with area businesses, foundations, or community groups to expand district opportunities for students.

The Mercer County Special Services Educational and Therapeutic Association thereby offers the following:

WHEREAS, over the last ten years of Dr. Schneider's leadership, student enrollment has decreased by nearly 30 percent;

WHEREAS, Dr. Schneider has not made evident any marketing plan or concerted effort to attract more students from Mercer County or nearby counties in Pennsylvania to the school district to increase student enrollment;

WHEREAS, Dr. Schneider has not been a visible presence in school buildings and has limited interaction with students and staff in an educational setting;

WHEREAS, Dr. Schneider has exhibited a lack of leadership for her administrative staff resulting in excessive turnover of principals and other administrators and a lack of stability for staff and students;

WHEREAS Dr. Schneider has demonstrated incompetence in budgetary planning and fiscal management of the Mercer County Special Services School District;

WHEREAS, according to Dr. Schneider's Superintendent's message from the district website "Our primary goal is to prepare challenged children and adults to become productive members of society in a highly cost-efficient manner," yet she has failed to exhibit any understanding of what is needed to prepare students or cost efficiency;

WHEREAS, Dr. Schneider seems to have no understanding of New Jersey school administrative code as related to students with special needs;

WHEREAS, Dr. Schneider has failed to communicate with staff and building administrators or included them in any district decision-making or collaborative projects;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, for the reasons stated above and more, we, the members of the Mercer County Special Services Educational and Therapeutic Association, are undertaking a vote of no confidence in Superintendent Dr. Kimberly Schneider.

Ms. Rainiero responded by saying she has seen a list of marketing plans and efforts. You may want to rethink your statements next time.

Meredeth Nuva, parent of Joseph who spoke saying he misses being in the building. I want to go back to school, said Joseph. Ms. Nuva went on to say you are failing him, he thrives in school. I am completely disappointed in the board. My house has turned into a school for my son. 2 weeks ago, he developed seizures. His teachers were praying for him. You were letting them all down. You are appointed, you are on notice, you have our attention and the worst place to be is at the attention of a special needs parent. Look to full day hybrid, you are letting them down.

Ashley Openheimer, parent of a daughter at Mercer Elementary School read a letter from her daughter asking for help. I'm 10 years old I am not able to verbalize, but I'm always laughing, I love everything and everyone, I love school and to be with others who are like me. When I am not in school I'm sad. I do not see everyone using the computer and I feel left out. Mom keeps telling me to stop walking on my toes. I cannot hold things like I used to. I was doing better when I was in school. I need someone to help me I cannot concentrate on the computer screen. Lately I am sad, I don't want to laugh or eat, it's been too long. Please fight for me, you are my hope to happiness again.

Chris Lada, parent of son with multiple delays. We are probably going to transfer to Burlington soon because they are open. Open the school, what are you waiting for? No one will blame you; this is the easiest decision of your life... open the schools!

Ms. Morgan Santo commented as a new board member I am not able to meet in person or visit the schools during the pandemic. I am glad people came forward. I have taken it to heart.

Mr. Stockman added to Ms. Santos's comments and said he would like a copy of the letter from the union. We have heard an earful from the public and the union for which I supported for a period of time we need to go virtual.

4. Approval of the February 2, & March 2, 2021 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 2/2/21 only	

5. Bills to be Approved and addendum totaling \$3,834,579.18 authorization of transfers within program areas as approved by the Superintendent.

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			

6. Board Secretary/Treasurer’s Report for January 2021

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			

7. Correspondence & Communications:

Deborah Donnelly, SBA gave a presentation on the 2021/2022 Regional Day School Budget

8. Committee Reports: None

9. Superintendent’s Report:

PERSONNEL:

Recommend Board approve the following:

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

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			

- Professional Employment Agreement between Board of Education for the Mercer County Special Services School District (MCSSSD) and Mercer County Technical Schools (MCTS) and Deborah Donnelly as School Business Administrator/Board Secretary for the period July 1, 2021–June 30, 2024 (Attachment 9-A1)

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			

MISCELLANEOUS:

Recommend Board approve the following:

- Approval to submit application for HRSA Year 2 funds for 2021-2022 Early Hearing Detection and Intervention grant in the amount of \$33,233.00 for Mercer County SCHS to provide Case Management services. Application is due 02/25/2021.

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			

- Revised and/or New Policies, Regulations, or By-Laws - First Reading (Attachment 9-B)

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

BYLAWS

NONE

POLICIES

P4125 Employment of Support Staff Members (M) P6360 Political Contributions (M)
 P8330 Student Records (M)

REGULATIONS

NONE

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

BYLAWS

NONE

POLICIES

NONE

REGULATIONS

NONE

Abolished -- Policies, Regulations, or By-Laws P3431.1

Family Leave (M)
 P4431.1 Family Leave (M)
 P3431.3 NJ Family Leave Insurance Program P7430 School Safety (M)
 R7430 School Safety (M)
 P2415.01 Academic Standards, Academic Assessments, and Accountability (M) P2415.03 Highly Qualified Teachers (M)

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			

REPORTS:

Recommend Board approve the following:

- Fire and Security Drill(s) for the month of February 2021 (Attachment 9-C)

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			

- Harassment, Intimidation & Bullying as of February 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
February	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	0	0

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			

- Enrollment Data as of February 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	502				

	01/31/2021	02/28/2021
Mercer High School	244	244
Mercer Elementary School	194	189
Regional Day	7	7
Joseph F. Cappello School	61	62
TOTAL:	<u>506</u>	<u>502</u>

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			

11. **NEW BUSINESS**

Recommend Board approve the following:

- a. Approve to continue to contract with Frontline Central for the implementation of Frontline Central Software at an annual subscription cost of \$11,805.72 and Absence & Substitute Management and Time & Attendance in the amount of \$14,228.17 and Employee Evaluation Management with Evaluation Frameworks with Danielson 2011/2013 in the amount of \$8,058.33 for a Total of \$34,092.22 beginning July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022 (Attachment 11-a).

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			

- b. Approve the addendum to the contract between Mercer County Special Services School District and the Irvin Raphael Bus Company (Attachment 11-b).

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

c. Approve the addendum to the contract between Mercer County Special Services School District and the George Dapper Bus Company (Attachment 11-c).

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			

d. Recommend the Mercer County Special Services School District approve to request proposals for Health Insurance Provider, according to N.J.A.C. 5:34-2.1 et seq. and N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-5(a)(10), as Extraordinary Unspecifiable Services for the 2021/2022 school year.

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			

e. Approve the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide to provide professional development on March 18, 2021. The presentation will be "Trauma-Informed Return to Learn Webinar". All Mercer Elementary School staff members will be provided with ready-to-use techniques. The cost of the half day training not to exceed \$500.

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			

f. Approve the presentation “Music Play for All Young Children”. Jim Gill will present this virtual workshop. All staff members at Joseph F. Cappello will be provided with Professional Development in-service on May 11, 2021. The cost of the half day training not to exceed \$1,500.

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			

g. Approve the BusBoss Support Agreement and the Districtpatrol Service & Support Agreements. Effective March 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021 in the amount of \$1,560 and July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022 in the amount of \$6,240 (Attachment 11-g).

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			

h. Approve the affiliation agreement between Mercer County Special Service School District and Mercer County Technical Schools (Attachment 11-h).

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			

i. Approve the affiliation agreement between Mercer County special Services School District and The College of NJ (TCNJ) (Attachment 11-i).

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			

j. Approve personnel consulting services of Lewis Goldstein for the period 2/23/2021 to June 30, 2021 at a rate of \$500 per day; not to exceed \$20,000.

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			

k. Approve the closeout of Mike’s Roofing Incorporated t/a VMG Group for the Roof System Replacement at the Joseph F. Cappello School (Attachment 11-k).

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			

l. Approve to submit the Regional Day School Budget for the 2021/2022 school year in the amount of \$342,510 to the New Jersey Department of Education (Attachment 11-l).

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			

m. Approve 48-month Lease with Xerox to replace an inoperable copier in the Administration Copy Room. The Lease payment of \$187.51 per month and Cost per Copy Maintenance are under NJ State Contract G2075, NJ Contract/Blanket #40469 (Attachment 11-m).

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			

n. Approval of Transportation Contract(s), Bids, Renewals and Addendum (11-n).

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			

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

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			

p. Approve an anonymous donation of an iPad – Serial Number DMQHWVHHDFHW to be used by a student at the Mercer Elementary School

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			

12. Public Session# 2

Anna Olivero, parent of 9th grader at the Mercer High School said our son has been thriving since he has been here. We did not expect COVID and have handled as we have issues since then. Districts around are open, we are not. This is detrimental to our kids. I have had to change my son's medication. This hurts us all not being open. Why? Other districts around with special needs have been in even hybrid. I want my son back in school. Unfortunately, his teacher and one-on-one were let go so there will be another transition back to strangers. All teachers know that. This is difficult for all of us. The fact that as parents we have no idea of your plans, do you? Stop comparing us to Trenton. Other districts are back; we need to be back for our children.

Ms. Rainiero said all your comments are well taken and I understand what you are going through. For clarification two of our board members have been teachers, and 2 of our board members have special needs children of their own, so they do understand where you are coming from. When comparing to other school districts, we have more medically fragile students. We are doing our best.

Tom & Heather Patricelli, parents of son who has been in district since the age of 3 in Early Intervention. We live across the street from a Hamilton school. I am seeing nonverbal kids in regular education. Back when he was diagnosed it was suggested that he go to this school. So many nonverbal kids are being retained in district. New parents walking away in tears are not being taught the way this district can teach. Are we encouraging new young parents to come to this school? If school was closed, you are not going to get enrollment. I have seen projects at other schools. It is very difficult for parents to take kids out to stores. This school has helped us to take him out in public. We are denying them the ability to learn. Not letting these people work, we are stuck with no brains. I am listening to these kids on the computer and not sure how they're getting anything out of it. We are not helping anybody by keeping the teachers back. Our teachers are great, you do not get this attention at other schools.

Lori Cuddy, Teacher at Mercer High School said I am concerned that on April 19th we are still only offering our students and families two half days per week. We have the time now to rethink this and offer our students more because this is what our students and families need and deserve. After being remote for an entire year we have seen in our students an increase in anxiety and depression, increased behavioral issues, increased seizures, decreased social skills and of course decreased academic skills. Why are we not having our students return to school for full days in April? Of course, it would take some effort in scheduling but that is what we have been doing since the district opened. Creative scheduling to meet the individual needs of our students. These half days only present an issue for our working families. Furthermore, why are we not in the buildings on Wednesdays? Cleaning can be done after the students leave as it was done in the past. If we opened the building on Wednesdays, we could have week one hybrid A week two hybrid B etc., this is what our sending districts have been doing for special needs students since September. I'm asking you to take a good look at scheduling and give our students more time in the schools; this is what they need and deserve.

Ayala Rahimi, Child Study Team, part of our job as CST members is to communicate with sending districts about each student and coordinate and meet for the IEP. The districts are dismayed and angry that we may not be opening for full time in person ESY. The directors have told them to look at alternative placements. These are the professionals that will place students either in our district or elsewhere for the future. Burlington is open. Districts don't want to pay for hybrid ESY. There are 3 MD classes opening in Lawrence and Hopewell. This is just the tip of the iceberg. This will greatly impact our numbers for not only ESY but for the future as well. Staff here at MCSSSD have met and I have not heard one person say we should not go back. By July, anyone who wants the vaccine will have it. The staff is ready to go back to full time in person why isn't administration?

Nick Pappano, Speech Therapist at Mercer Elementary School, I have worked in this district for 42 years. I have worked in every one of our schools over these many years. I would like to ask for a copy of "the list of things" that Dr. Schneider has done to market our district. MCSSSD still does not have proper signage even

after trying to get this approved by the BOE and Dr. Schneider. Ms. Rainiero, BOE President mentioned that we have medically fragile students in our schools. Burlington County Special Services School District is in session (schools open) with students who have severe medical issues.

Ms. Rainiero asked Dr. Kim to make the marketing plans available to staff.

Dr. Schneider said we have been reporting it at Board Meetings.

Michele Carmignani, Social Worker at Mercer High School, for the past 23 years. First, I would like to thank all of the parents that spoke tonight and the union for all of their hard work. I would also like to thank Ms. Morgan Santo and Mr. Stockman. I appreciate how you listened and showed compassion to our students, their families and our staff. We feel like you heard our concerns. In addition, I would like to comment on the elimination of the SAC position at the high school. At this time, our SAC provides individual counseling for 34 students in addition to her other duties. Who will be taking on her responsibilities? The high school CST has already been working this year without having replaced a CST who retired last year. We have taken on additional classes and student and family needs during a pandemic. We cannot meet the needs of the 34 students that will lose their counselor, due to the elimination of the SAC position.

Ms. Rainiero responded Mercer County Special Services School District will be exploring an outreach to take on SAC services. More to follow.

Lisa Pusillo, Teacher at the Joseph Cappello School. First, I would like to tell the parents that I feel your pain and sympathize with you. The staff wants to get back to school physically as we know that we need to be with our beloved students to be as effective as possible. We chose to work with special needs children and are very dedicated to the children and our jobs- we put our heart and soul into our jobs every day. We, the staff, make a difference and that's what keeps us at the district.

I would like to share, for those of you who were not familiar with the district back then what it was like when I became a teacher here 15 years ago around the time Dr. Schneider was appointed to be our Superintendent. At that time, we had an entire behavioral school called Regional Day. Our classrooms in the other 3 schools were full. The district was thriving.

I have seen a decline in our district ever since. We have a lack of leadership, support, communication, strategic planning, and marketing. I was a member of the last marketing committee and we were working on a video before the pandemic. We thought if we could market to the young population, then we could keep the children with us. That's the only marketing project that I know of in recent years. We never see board members or upper administrators visiting our schools. Our doors are open, but how can you understand us if you don't even know what goes on in our schools? I think possibly people would be more invested in our district if they were elected and not appointed. Our staff is dedicated but can't do anything if not heard by the decision makers. Without communication from the top down, we can't do anything, and we feel helpless. That's why we had to do what is right. The "no confidence" vote percentage is astonishing, but Brian Hughes who oversees our district does not seem to care either as he doesn't even attend most of the county meetings. Where is his support?

I am so deeply saddened and disheartened by this entire situation. Thank you.

Mr. Stockman responded by saying I would love to speak to the staff but not at this meeting. I am hearing troubling stats and I intend to explore and question further these people. This evening has gone further than past meetings.

Jeanine Cular thanked Mr. Stockman for his support. I said I've been in the district for 21 years and I can say that it finally feels like we are being heard and that his support is welcome and appreciated more than anyone could know. I piggy backed on what Nick Pappano said about the list of marketing strategies that Ms. Rainiero referred to as having been implemented by our district. Ms. Cular request to also see this list for clarification because after being on numerous marketing committees made up of co-workers, over the years...our hard work

always got turned in/suggested to administration and then it stopped and went nowhere, not being implemented or further discussed. I also said that Dr Schneider stated that we do not market our district at a recent County Commissioners meeting so it seemed as if her statement contradicted the list that Ms. Rainiero mentioned that she has seen.

Karen Burke, MHS Nurse asked to follow up on the SAC position and if this service will be providing counseling? What is the cost difference?

Ms. Rainiero said you will hear more about it in April.

Vance Bachman, Teacher at Mercer Elementary School. I have worked for Mercer County Special Services School District for over 20 years. Many of the staff, myself included, are struck by the irony of the situation we currently find ourselves in. We are all hearing news reports on a daily basis from across the country that there are teachers' unions fighting against returning to school for in-person instruction. However, in Mercer County Special Services School District, the opposite is occurring. Our instructional staff, our teachers, therapists, case managers, behavior specialists, behavior support teams, and paraprofessionals recognize the great importance of opening our school buildings for in person instruction. In contrast, it seems that the school administration does not recognize the urgency of this matter, and how crucially important it is for our students to be back in school for in-person learning as soon as possible. I think it bears repeating so it is clear to our school community and the community at large: while many unions across the country are fighting against teachers and students returning to the classroom, the educators and therapists of Mercer County Special Services are pushing to return to school so we can work with our students in person. We ask the board and district administration, please, do not delay the hybrid reopening again. In addition, it's important to note as caring, dedicated educators, we absolutely recognize the seriousness of the pandemic, but we also see that many school districts across our county, state, and country have successfully and safely remained open for full day in person instruction during this difficult time. Please give us the same opportunity to provide safe in school educational and therapeutic services, which are so critical for the wellbeing of our students and their families. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ms. Rainiero said we do realize the importance of returning to school. We are trying to do it in the safest way possible we will take all comments and speak to administration and do the best we can. Thank you.

13. Adjournment:

All in Favor: Ayes: Nays: Abstain: **Time: 6:10 PM**

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			

Respectfully submitted by:



Deborah Donnelly
Business Administrator/Board Secretary