

Board Approves e-Learning Plan

The Mount Pulaski Board of Education conducted their regular meeting on November 16th at 6:00 PM with all members in attendance.

Prior to the regular meeting, the Board conducted a public hearing to discuss the e-Learning Plan. Being that there was no public comment, the hearing was adjourned.

Roll call was then taken for the November regular meeting at 6:04 PM with all members in attendance.

The Board voted 7-0 to approve the Consent Agenda, which included payment of bills, sales tax revenue report, minutes from October 19, 2020 regular meeting, minutes from October 19, 2020 executive session, minutes from the November 2, 2020 special meeting and minutes from November 2, 2020 executive session.

In Reports, the Board viewed a Zoom presentation by OPAA! concerning food services. OPAA! operates out of Missouri providing food services for schools in Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, Iowa and Illinois. OPAA! conducted a feasibility study this fall to determine if their services could provide profitable support for the Mt. Pulaski food service program. The presentation described services and outcomes for the district. The Board was very impressed with the presentation and asked Mr. Lamkey to take the next step forward in the process of considering OPAA! as a food service provider.

Superintendent Lamkey discussed a potential student survey, an agreement with the park district and the district's search for a future principal. After receiving feedback on the draft survey, Mr. Lamkey was directed to survey students on the effects of the pandemic. He will work to issue the survey before Thanksgiving. Mr. Lamkey then informed the Board that a draft agreement of park use had been submitted to the park board and the district was waiting for a response. The final highlight Mr. Lamkey reported on was the process of selecting a replacement for outgoing high school principal, Terry Morgan. Mr. Morgan retires at the end of this school year and the district will interview candidates for his replacement next month. The district had 20 applicants and narrowed the interview field down to 6 candidates. An interview team will meet with all 6 applicants on Saturday, December 12th to narrow the finalist field down for a Thursday, December 17th, interview with the Board Personnel Committee and Superintendent Lamkey. The Board hopes to hire Mr. Morgan's replacement at the January Board Meeting.

Under Unfinished Business, the Board revisited the consideration of an athletic co-op with Hartem. After further discussion, the Board determined that the arrangement did not offer MPCUSD23 incentive to pursue the opportunity. Mr. Lamkey was directed to contact Hartem and thank them for the offer, but at this time Mt. Pulaski would decline the co-op opportunity.

Next, the Board discussed the effects of COVID-19 on the school system with specific focus on metrics to extend the school day, athletics and rising COVID-19 numbers in the immediate area. Superintendent Lamkey offered different examples of metrics provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) when considering an appropriate time to extend the district's school day. The Board was in agreement that the current COVID-19 situation is too volatile to consider an extended school day. It was recommended that we revisit this concept before the holidays.

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The Illinois High School Association (IHSA) continues to be at odds with the IDPH about the start of winter athletic seasons. Mt. Pulaski Schools recently suspended all extracurricular and co-curricular activities due to rising infection rates behind the legal guidance of district attorneys and our liability insurance carrier. Our district once again will look again to bring these activities back once non-essential activities are recommended. This topic will also be revisited at the December 22nd Board meeting.

The Board adopted the e-Learning Resolution 7-0 which paves the way for the option of utilizing remote learning on days the weather forces the closure of school. This option could keep the district from extending the end of the school year by using emergency days.

Superintendent Lamkey provided the Board with a Tax Levy presentation. In this presentation, he described the process in which the district levies for and receives local revenues. He provided a look at recent tax rates, compared MPCUSD23 rates to other Logan County schools and provided an outlook to the upcoming Levy. The district is working to lower tax rates following the construction of the high school. Earlier this fall, the district abated \$140,000 of high school construction bonds which is a step toward lowering local tax rates. The tax levy will be adopted in December, but the actual extension and new tax rates will not be revealed by Logan County until spring.

Mr. Lamkey also expressed the need for the district to balloon levy so that none of our local new construction (wind farms) is missed as new revenue. Because school districts do not know how much property values will increase from new construction, they are forced to guess and guess high to make sure they do not lose an opportunity to receive revenues from new construction. The bottom line is that this balloon levy does not raise taxes on current property. Instead, it allows the district to fully collect new taxes on new construction. The district will conduct a “truth in taxation hearing” prior to the December regular meeting so the public has the opportunity to comment.

The district Personnel Committee was still working on addendums to the memorandum of understanding that corresponds with the Hilltop Return to School Plan 2.0. The committee hoped to get the plan to the Mt. Pulaski Education Association this week. The Board voted to postpone the approval of the MoU until the next meeting.

The Board then voted 7-0 to transfer funds (\$635,542) from the Education Fund to Capital Improvement Fund to pay for construction costs. The district has anticipated using Education Fund reserves to cover construction costs that exceeded the construction bond.

Hartem School District is sponsoring an addendum to the sales tax referendum that would allow Logan County Schools to use current sales tax funds to hire school resource officers and mental health professionals to work in schools. This referendum does not raise taxes; rather it allows the school district to gain flexibility in how they choose to spend these funds. Mt. Pulaski, Hartem and the Logan County Sheriff's Department have been collaborating together to create an opportunity of incorporating resources officers into the schools. Increased flexibility in the use of these revenues will benefit all schools and not require an increase in local funding. The Board adopted the resolution, 7-0.

Superintendent Lamkey then facilitated a discussion considering the school district applying for a tuition waiver for district employees. This waiver would allow the children of school district employees, who do

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not live in the district, to attend Mt. Pulaski Schools tuition free. The waiver, which would have to be approved by the General Assembly, would offer an added benefit to employees without attaching a cost to the district. The Board directed Mr. Lamkey to move forward with the waiver.

During the school district's recent troubles in replacing food service employees, the question arose about whether a high school diploma was needed as a prerequisite? After some discussion, the Board directed Mr. Lamkey to look into altering job descriptions for cooks and custodial staff to prefer a high school diploma, but not require. Mr. Lamkey will bring the adjusted job descriptions to the December Board meeting.

In a limited Personnel Report, the Board voted 7-0 to approve Harriett Folkman as a district cook. Mr. Lamkey also informed the Board that two more people accepted positions on the Food Service staff.

The Board then entered into Executive Session at 8:10 pm to discuss student discipline and employee topics. The Board returned from Executive Session at 8:35 pm.

Upon returning from Executive Session, the Board considered two action items. The first item was the approval of a separate paraprofessional job description that requires Certified Nursing Assistant licensure. The Board determined that the requirements of this job were different than that of other paraprofessionals and a new description was necessary to differentiate between the two positions. The Board approved the job description 7-0.

In the last action of the evening, the Board voted 7-0 to approve a \$1/hour stipend for the newly created Paraprofessional/CNA position.

The meeting adjourned at 9:26 PM. The next regularly scheduled Board meeting will be held on December 21, 2020.