

2021.2.9 - School Board Regular Meeting Notes - Live Notes

0:00:00 to 0:00:26

I. Call to Order

0:00:27 - 0:01:02

II. Roll Call

7:08 PM - 8 Present, 1 Absent (R. Dorsch)

0:01:03 -

John Kennedy announces board had a closed session before this meeting and will have another one on both Legal and Personnel along with a prior meeting last week on Thursday.

0:01:25 - 0:03:16

III. Board Reports

- **7:09 Marburger - Vo-Tech Budget \$122,000 Increase in budget but Mars share of this will actually drop since proportionally now sending fewer students compared to other districts - Based on 3 year average attendance. All schools have to approve a tentative budget that, in turn, gets put into district budgets. A full presentation will be made to the board next meeting.**

0:03:17 - 0:06:44

- **7:10 Planet Foundation K. Hagen - C. Valenta talks about Walk Around Mars - March 29-May 30th. Great response from local businesses with donors and sponsors. Dinner-to-Go, last day to order is Feb. 14th with dinners delivered 2/17/2021. Also, Farmhouse Cafe offered to help out with Walk Around Mars. K. Hagen explains a new scholarship in memory of Kimberly Young. M. Lenz explains that it goes to female graduating student going into education. Students go online and apply! Foundation meets next week.**

0:06:45 - 0:07:33

IV. Student Council

- **7:14 P. Beltran - PSE spring conference is virtual through Seneca Valley; Activity periods begin soon, and they look forward to meeting as a group soon.**

0:07:34 - 0:10:02

MAEA Comment

- **J. Graff speaks about ongoing negotiations. Great community and educational staff. Empathy for Dr. Gross and the Board. Committed to working towards a fair settlement and would like to negotiate in private. Want a contract that will not negatively impact education. Applauds students, families, and educators for doing the best they can in an unprecedented year (pandemic), relearning the job.**

0:10:03 - 0:27:24

Solicitor

- T. Breth Echoes Mr. Graff's words of praise. January met to negotiate 2020, then March. Last night, seven-hour session, rhetoric of the community does not echo the actual communications at the bargaining table. The parties have tried to find common ground. Parties are very close. Retirement/post-retirement healthcare. In early parts of contract, no financial resources with what teachers feel they are entitled too. Offered status quo of retirement incentive (8 years of healthcare) to compromise on package. Healthcare changes, understanding financial limitations, Board has offered status quo to district contribution. Association made it clear that a guaranteed planning period is a sticking point and paying teachers when they do not get a planning is a sticking point. Tuition assistance currently at 1900 and agreed to up that to 2400 in exchange for reimbursement if teacher leaves the district. Post season contribution to supplemental positions - does not address "playoffs" for music and other events that. In agreement, just discussing final agreement. LSI, teachers are asking to have input regarding LSI moving forward. Parties have discussed and are working on this committee, teachers asking for significant voice. School budget \$1.1 million for cyber tuition prior to COVID, then many more went to cyber because \$2.5 million went to that cost. School has paid \$1.482 million, expected \$2.5-2.6 million by end of year. District believes having labor unrest could push this higher. Over the past several years, average 3%ish on average. Concessions to work days each year. Concessions to early retirement incentives. Board understands wages are not where teachers would like them to be, it's why they have not asked for concessions in healthcare and early retirement. School district posted proposals from both on the website, hoping the public understands the wages. The district has looked at other school districts and compensations. Looking at Masters column, in Butler county Mars is 2nd. MIU#4, Out of 26 schools, top of Masters, Mars is 3rd. Seneca Valley, New Castle, Mars (third in the IU). Compared to Allegheny County, the healthcare and early retirement, those districts do not have that retirement incentive. Everyone wants to avoid a strike. One option is the possibility of going to fact finding. Still in window where it is permitted. Independent neutral 3rd party comes in, meets, sees presentations, discusses issues, and creates a recommendation contract report. If approved, basis for new collective bargaining agreement. Going to notify Brooke Witt for Fact Finding. Still can continue bargaining sessions. Asking teachers to withdraw strike notice. Mr. Breth agrees to stay around during public comments to answer questions.

0:27:25 - 0:29:32

7:35 Dr. Gross clarifies public comment -

- If we do not answer, please do not be offended. We may not have readily available what is needed to be able to accurately answer the question. We will answer what we can. If requires more research, we will keep track and then get communication out via website to answer those questions. It seemed somewhat awkward at times. The questions are too deep sometimes. The easy questions, if we can answer, we will do that. Typically it is for just comment. We are going to start

providing more in-depth answers by scripting behind the scenes and go back afterwards and follow with communication through the website.

0:29:33 - 0:33:19

7:37 Dr. Gross speaks about wellness policy and asks to table it.

- He takes blame for not explaining it as well as it should have been. The example turned into a negative connotation of what we are trying to do with the wellness policy. Apologizes for confusion. EXPLANATION: Currently it guarantees every child gets a recess. What we are trying to do is protect the staff. Wherever you explicitly state something and then it doesn't happen, it can compromise ourselves. For example, if a student needs to be calmed at a counselor and it ends up taking up recess time one day, it won't come back on the counselor (not guarantee). Last week's explanation was not accurately communicating why. If parents/teachers/community have been happy with how we have operated recess, it will continue. We just don't want to be handcuffed by an absolute guarantee--table to clarify language.

0:33:20 - 0:34:01

7:42 pm Mr. Kennedy states that for tonight up to one hour will be made available for public comments. Decision made by the board and Dr. Gross. Can be about agenda items or negotiation topics that we can answer.

V. Public Comment

0:34:02 - 0:38:18

- 7:42 Heather Raybold - Agenda 8 Programs. Asking for program overview conducted by district employees. First, asking for overview of MTSS with a report posted on website addressing "system-wide implementation , what is process, what strategies is Mars providing, support for Tier 3 math students, etc.". We learn very little by ½ page on website or explaining the strategies or Tier 3 students in Math. This would help keep rumors down about (such as Special Ed teachers providing services to Tier 3 students who are not special ed students, minimal access to evidence-based programs for Tier 3 students, few if any universal screeners, no Tier 3 services available at the high school). In a 5-10 minute presentation those rumors could be squashed. Next month, Special Ed could be an overview. Time to update parents on the districts extension on district's corrective action plan and what steps Mars is taking to correct these issues. Happy to send a list of other programs to update-- PBIS is one. District leaders are behind times with educational philosophies. Once we get past covid, he can begin to change that.

0:38:19 - 0:41:40

- 7:46 Lisa Kumpfmiller - Moved to Butler County 19 years ago for lower taxes, AND MASD was best in Butler County. Teachers care about students and want what is best for them. Did not move to district because it was not raising taxes, that should be the norm and not the exception. The only way to bring people in is to

keep top-notch programs and not eliminate programs when teachers retire. Doing two jobs has been a lot to ask with LSI, and some teachers at the high school have even had to teach classes they never taught before. Said kind things about teachers. Asked why negotiations were public by district. Pleading to have positive negotiating sessions. Angers me that teachers have pretty much called teachers liars and that solicitor has called expectation for teachers to have comparable salaries as others in the area as unrealistic. Why was proposal of 2/4/2019 not provided to teachers the night before. Seems it took a threat of strike to get a proposal from the district. Thanked all of her daughter's teachers. Keep up great work!

0:41:41 - 0:43:54

- 7:49 pm Jennifer Miller - Concept of planning time, and explaining why needed and what it is. Teachers need time to collaborate with colleagues to provide quality education for students. Her kindergartener will not have library, art, and PE. The teachers at the primary center do not have that time to communicate, collaborate, plan. Teachers now providing this, instead of specialists, no longer have time to collaborate and provide excellent quality education. Just talking about a planning period where teachers can collaborate with their colleagues so teachers can do the quality education we know they provide.

0:43:55 - 0:46:10

Dr. Gross agrees that planning times are important. He said if we can find a way with the existing structure, please let us know. Right now it is a scheduling issue. I think we can, with more folks involved, we can find ways to make that better. It is not intentional, but is a fallout of the schedule. We need to seek teacher input. I agree with comments that it is important.

0:46:11 - 0:52:13

- 7:54 Greg Mason - Reminder that what is best for our children should be guiding principle for education leaders. Originally understood that public comments should be 60 minutes total (if 20 at beginning, could it be 40 at end? Instead of 30/30). Asked if there is a way to fix the sound issues. Would help with transparency if we could clearly hear you. Concerned with curriculum lacking. Is there a way to offer K-8 world languages? There are a lot of things Mars does not offer that other similar schools do. Could we have caps on activities fees? Looking for more support on MTSS. Cafeterias - have we figured out how to space students more? Dr. Gross said as much as feasible. Is there a way we could do a K-12 one-to-one technology program for K-12 and have them pay insurance, but give them options for parents who need devices that maynot qualify for free/reduced lunches but are still having troubles with your fees. Dr. Gross agrees that it is difficult to get devices out on short notice and heartbreaking that often those without are left without.. We try to meet need with what we have on "our carts". Maybe looking at other funding sources through grants. Greg Mason appreciates the thoughts from Dr. Gross and reminds that we are in a diverse area and some need more support for equality of opportunity in

education. Dr. Gross expanded afterwards: certainly not the kid's fault and no academic repercussions in place.

0:52:14 - 1:01:31

- 8:01 Julia Konitz - Question on agenda about approving minutes. Questioning January 12 approval of settlement and general release agreement with IKM, Inc.. Remembers this being middle school architects, and wonders what this is and how much settlement is for. It is still on their website but obviously we did not do all of these things here at Mars.. Dr. Gross says it was a dispute over paying of fees \$90,000 - many issues involved. "Did this mean we paid them for work they did not do?" Tom Breth responding: Under Dr. Shipley, they had done work, Dr. Shipley paid it and IKM, Inc. thought they were due more compensation. Went to remediation and the \$90,000 was a compromise. She also said there was more ESSR funding, and asking if the \$400,000 deficit could be applied to teachers. Tom Breth explained compounding is the problem. It is a million over the course of years, so this amount would not meet the challenge. He is hoping that the first and second year of the contract can adjust that problem. Said how much she supports the teachers and special education teachers. Explained many tasks special education teachers do. DePretis explained all the scenarios they have been running. "It all goes somewhere in a very large picture manner, if that makes sense."

1:01:32 - 1:08:32

- 8:09 Jeff Maple - is there a plan to replace the HS STEAM teachers that left and were not rehired? Dr. Gross mentions that the programs were not cancelled, they are still offered, so "more of a reshuffling". Also said they did not have the enrollment to keep all periods taught of those courses. Dr. Gross said that he talked to groups of teachers at the school, and realized the adjustment focus to Tech Ed - more Engineering focused. Jeff Maple asks that even though a course is offered, it doesn't mean that it is in fact offered only 2 teachers available to teach all of the sections. Dr. Gross: I don't believe anything has been cut in terms of offerings, but if point of time where key critical courses cannot run then we will take a look. Mr. Maples: Even though a course is offered it doesn't mean it is available - worried as son gets older that higher end STEAM courses need to be there as well as the introductory. Looking for those higher-end STEAM courses being offered, and not just introductory. Says Mrs. Rossog is working with him on this hotspot issue. Jeff Maple is offering his assistance. C. Valenta commented that L. Rosswog presented, and is bringing Python 1 and Python 2 for the upcoming school year. Looking to invest and offer for upper-level students. Jeff Maple is concerned that with 2 teachers, how can they be offered without cutting the current courses?

1:08:33 - 1:10:09

Board Comments:

8:17 - M. Lenz - Recording board meeting important, again brought up that with technology available to us we should be able to provide recordings of each board meeting so people can hear actual words of board members

1:10:10 - 1:11:03

8:18 - J. D. Ferguson - Complimenting Judy Bippus, new secretary, for doing well with her on-the-job training. Has done a masterful job.

1:11:04 - 1:11:08

VI Approval of Minutes

- **8:19 - Carries**

1:11:09 - 1:11:38

VII - Personnel

- From Addendum 1: Accept the Resignation of Jina Coleman (Special Education Secretary) effective March 11, 2021. **Dr. Gross mentions that we are sad to lose this person, she is a “tremendous asset”**
- **8:19 - Carries**

1:11:39 - 1:12:04

VIII. Finance

1. Approve Payable List - Bills to be paid in February 2021.
2. Approve the Other Funds Payable List- Bills to be paid in February 2021.
3. Approve the Treasurer's Report for November 2020.
4. Approve the Cash Receipts Report for November 2020.
5. Approve the Paid List - Bills paid in November 2020.
6. Approve the Other Funds Paid List- Bills paid in November 2020.
7. Approve the Account Summary Report for the Revenue and Expenditure Account for November 2020.
8. Approve the Mars Area High School Athletics Report for December 2020.
9. Approve the Student Activity Fund Report for December 2020 for the Mars Area High School.

- **8:19 - Carried**

1:12:05 - 1:12:34

IX. Policies

1. **8:19 TABLED** - Approve the posting of the following revised policy to the Policy Manual:
---246 School Wellness--- **Motion to table carried**

1:12:35 - 1:13:36

X. Buildings and Grounds

1. Motion to accept the proposal of Nicklas King Mcconahy dated January 29, 2021, for professional real estate appraisal services relating to PennDOT's SR228 realignment project affecting the District's properties.
 2. Motion to accept the proposal of Herbert Rowland and Grubic, Inc. (HRG) dated January 25, 2021, for professional engineering services relating to PennDOT's SR228 realignment project and the Three Degree Road widening and improvement project affecting the District's properties.
- **8:20 Explanation of those, PENNDOT - widening of 3 degree road and has other implications. Motion of both carries.**

1:13:37 - 1:14:12

XI. Other

1. Accept Maria Staresinic as an assistive volunteer judge for the online forensics tournament.
 2. Approve the request of Primary Student A to miss more than ten (10) days of school to renew his VISA
 3. Approve: Elementary Student B to miss more than ten (10) days of school to compete in national horse showing events.
 4. Approve High School Student C to participate in Mars Area Cyber Academy.
 5. Approve the Job Description for Business Management position.
 6. Approve the Job Description for Administrative Assistant for Transportation and Student Support position.
- **8:20 Carries**

1:14:13 - 1:15:15

XII. Public Comment

- **8:21 Brittnee Madigan asked to speak (BUT DID NOT SPEAK)**

1:15:16 - 1:18:22

- **8:23 Greg Mason - Seems to be a change in the way minutes are taken. Starting this summer, I noticed that the minutes state the total compensation for teacher new hires. This is for paraprofessionals and educators. Why is there that change? Dr. Gross says that, "In some districts it is put that way, for transparency." He explained that it is to be clear. It shows total commitment to that individual. We wanted to be like other districts. Greg Mason hopes they do that for other contracts and individuals (like a social media consultant or administrators). Dr. Gross said they can post anything about my salary that they want to. Greg Mason said, it seems something changed in the board between May of 2020 and July of 2020. Would encourage the board to be transparent with everything about money.**

1:18:23 - 1:20:34

- **8:26 Julia Konitz - Concerned with the minutes having such little transparency. She suggests looking at Montour for meeting minutes. Things are on there for what has happened in the different funds. For example, the different funds building funds, and how much the roof costs. How much turf cost (totals). Montour would be a great template, since we are of similar size. This would be good especially since there are talks of cuts due to cost.**

1:20:35 - 1:22:57

- **8:28 Jennifer Miller - Asking for possibility of district-based cyber and the possible savings there COULD be for the district. Dr. Gross says it is absolutely on the table; working with Mr. Graff and association to make it a possibility.**

1:22:58 - 1:28:41

- **8:30 Ruth O'Donnell - Listening to solicitor, reference to Seneca Valley, and Mars fees compared to theirs for families. Looking at some kind of cap for these costs. Echoed disappointment with the statement made by the board with the offer posted last week. She pleads to get this offer settled. Happy to hear of additional sponsor for the PMEA events that will be part of the compliment. Singing praises**

to Mark Rogers for spending countless hours with her son. Also questioning about the comments of losing classes. Those teachers being lost through attrition - evidence is in the music department with Mr. Rogers. He is 7-12 band now, and had to resign from marching band because there are only so many hours in a day. She is a teacher and says, "We have never worked harder than we are working now in our entire lives." Asked about contract and step freezes. Mr. Graff clarified how many steps (20 steps). Joe Graff explained is 20 step but because of previous contract step freezes there are many teachers who have been here over 20 years but are still not at the top of the schedule. J.D. Ferguson clarified there were some years where teachers went off step and ended up not being quite as sequential.

1:28:42 - 1:32:11

- 8:36 Amy Nassif - Thanking teachers, her students have been here since Kindergarten. Even when her daughter went to HS private school, the middle school teachers remain in contact with her. Her current middle school student allows her to speak to the teachers. She is happy with all interactions. When she first started coming to board meetings in 2009, she has been asking for meetings to be recorded and posted. She feels that would help with transparency and meeting minutes and discrepancies that were happening. Asking district to record and post meetings now that it is already in Zoom. Avoid discussions and rumors offline when it can be accessed as it was spoken.

1:32:12 - 1:37:08

- 8:40 Jennifer McAfee - Thanking Dr. Gross for tabling the recess issue, her son constantly had recess taken and that right was taken from him in kindergarten. She has willing parents who would help their children at night rather than having their recess taken. Recess is not supposed to be taken according to American pediatrics. Happy to see that the policy is revisited, and her son does not deserve to have his recess taken. Mrs. McAfee is pleased to hear that there is hope of contracts getting settled, and is also happy to hear almost all taxes have been collected. Surprised at 20 step salary schedule, has less where she works. She explained all the various jobs that teachers do. She has had a great experience with LSI and told all the things teachers have done for her children this year, and looks forward to us developing our own Cyber program. Please settle the contract.

1:37:14 - 1:38:40

XIII. MAEA Comments

- 8:45 Sharyn Lipnick - Association would like to recognize the Musical students!! They have shown that "the show must go on" and explained that students, teachers, parents and support staff have proven that "the show must go on" as well. We are so proud of our students.

1:38:41 - 1:42:28

- 8:46 Joe Graff - Thanks Dr. Gross for conversations and candid conversations. Described appreciation of Tech Ed staff at high school for time Dr. Gross gave for discussions and acknowledged accomplishments and hard work of Mr. Rogers ("he is a good egg:). Thankful for extra time board gave to parents to express

their concerns. He is appreciative of the entire board and has a personal connection with at least 8 or 9 of them, having their children at some point going through middle school. Thanked Mr. Breth for positive words tonight towards Mars staff. Echoed that we have a fantastic staff, and he is willing to work with Dr. Gross about the Cyber school within Mars. "I believe in the teachers in this district. In our math department, there is a disagreement between the association math department and the Board. Mr Breth did talk about only one step in our salary schedule, but there are 120 different steps in the contract, and the Masters is just 1. Our math is looking at 30 years. Mr. Graff said he is very grateful, and the conversation in the room has been nothing but positive. We try to focus on the common ground, and pretty confident that can be found in the next couple of weeks.

1:42:29 - 1:45:01

XIV Administration Comment

8:50 Dr. Gross - Thanking J. Graff for being there. We are going from Good to Great. We continue to build these relationships in a positive direction. Despite the black cloud, it will go away sooner than later. Thanking T. Mineard, T. Kolson, and A. DiLorenzo, "You only are as good as what you got." Can't say enough about the support he has. Those principals (and Travis) are dynamite! We are continuing to move; attitude is everything, keep moving.

1:45:02 - 1:50:22

XV. Board Comment

8:52 M. Lenz - Heard great things about the musical... It would be great to showcase; Acknowledging Mrs. Flowers for Planet Preschool at the High School - that would be a great program to showcase. Grateful that the community wants to be involved and proud of that.

8:54 DePretis - Glad to hear public comment; Thanks to teachers again; You can serve on negotiations and still appreciate teachers-- regardless of where we sit, it is not an "us vs. them" scenario.

8:55 C. Valenta - I can tell you, we definitely want to find an agreement that works for everyone. I'm asking everyone not to be focused on one area, but look to ways we can meet needs of all the best.

8:56 DePretis - Commented that support staff also negotiating, and they appreciate their efforts.

8:56 JD Ferguson - Let's not make negotiating hours a contest. Happy Valentine's Day.

8:57 S. Wick - Appreciates Dr. Gross and his positivity that he brings, and his mindset to move forward in a great way.

1:50:23 - end

XVI.Adjournment