

MUHLENBERG SCHOOL DISTRICT
Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes
October 7, 2020
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Call to Order

The Committee of the Whole Meeting of the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District was called to order on Wednesday, October 7, 2020 at 6:30 PM by Board President, Mr. S. Wayne Hardy via remote access using Zoom.

Members Present

President – Mr. S. Wayne Hardy
Vice President – Mr. J. Tony Lupia, Jr.
Secretary – Mr. Thomas W. Gross
Treasurer – Mr. Richard E. Hoffmaster
Member – Mr. Garrett E. Hyneman
Member – Mr. Randall R. Madara
Member – Mr. Mark J. Nelson
Member – Mr. Otto W. Voit, III
Solicitor – Mr. Brian F. Boland, Esq.
Recording Secretary – Mrs. Patricia L. Law

Members Absent

Assistant Secretary – Mrs. Cindy L. Mengle

Administration Present

Superintendent – Dr. Joseph E. Macharola
Assistant Superintendent – Dr. Alan S. Futrick
Business Manager – Mr. Shane Mathias
Director of Physical Plant and Transportation – Mr. Ken Patterson
Director of Special Education – Dr. Shawn Rutt
Supervisor of Special Education – Dr. Tyler Herman
Behavior Analyst – Mr. Zachary Milch
Director of Technology – Mr. Daniel Houck
Director of Federal Programs – Mrs. Cathy Shappell
Director of Food and Nutrition – Mr. Carey Kline
Community & Family Outreach Coordinator & Interpreter – Ms. Elizabeth Laviena
Athletic Director – Dr. Tim Moyer
High School Principal – Mr. Michael Mish
High School Assistant Principal – Ms. Lori Morris
High School Assistant Principal – Mr. C. Eric Schaeffer
Middle School Principal – Dr. Jeffery Ebert
Middle School Assistant Principal – Dr. Felicia Gonzalez
Elementary Center Assistant Principal – Mrs. Shannon O'Donnell
Elementary Center Assistant Principal – Mrs. Ginny Hornberger

Visitors (*Note: This is who appeared to be attending via Zoom and may not include everyone*)

Linda Figueroa	Amanda Bayer	Amy Rohrbaugh	Andrea Stern
Kyle Crater	Angela Haas	April Kreiser	Awilda Goodwin
C. Rothkiske	Carly Antosy	Cathy Liszcz	Chad Thiele
Christine Garner	C. J. Palumbo	Coleen Russo	Collen Shillady
Cristina Lillis	Crystal Chwatek	Liz Chapman	Erika Watson
Gary Pumphrey	Haniffe Skeete	Hao Duong	Jackie Bellanca
Janet Gift	Janet Howard	Jen Doyle	Frank Ranaudo
Jenny Neuheimer	Jill McIntyre	Jillian Zerby	John Althouse
Jolyn Casper	Jonathan Hobbs	Kaitlynn Girard	Karen Snyder
Karin Kahler	Kathi Wolfe	Katie Foltz	Katie Iannocchino
Kay Adams	Kayla Garcia	Kerry Hendel	Kim May
Kristen Bagenstose	Kristina Antonellos	Kylene Sanders	Laura Klawiter
Lisa Chlebowski	L. Ricards	Michelle Merkel	Michelle Stewart
Angela Szczecina	Dan Fair	Marci Harr	Michele McCammitt
Ashley Reed	Penny Vojtasek	Robert Rohrbach	Samantha Armstrong
Sarah Brown	Wendy Hromick	Shannon Painter	Sharon Kile
Sharon Lountzis	Stephanie Jablonski	Tara Pacharis	Teresa Pietrusewicz
Yahaira Feliciano	Michelle Chavoya	Alison Wallace	Becky Ellis
Joanne Pyott	Paul Miller	Beth Youse	Mark Dietrich
Nina Hook	Jennifer Rahn	Delilah Rodriguez	Michael Merkel
Teri Baller			

Educational Presentations

A. Physical Plant Update - Mr. Kenneth Patterson

Mr. Patterson reported:

- An update on the insurance claim for water damage to Muhlenberg Community Library from August 2 torrential rains: the claims adjuster finished his statement of loss which has been reviewed by the Muhlenberg School District's insurance broker, the Rigg-Darlington Group, and Melissa Adams, Director of the Muhlenberg Community Library. The insurance carrier, C. M. Regent, is reviewing the statement of loss and the District should have a final written report and distribution of monies within a week. Ms. Adams said repairs have begun. The MSD's policy does have a \$25,000 deductible.
- Maintenance and custodial staff continue to keep the buildings and grounds operational for staff members and for athletic practices and games. Staff member areas of occupation and common areas are cleaned and disinfected daily. Any areas used by student athletes and coaching staffs are cleaned and disinfected after use as well as in between usage for facilities shared by different sports. Both crews continue to do a great job and Mr. Patterson is proud of their efforts of maintaining the facilities as they have been working hard each day since the shutdown in March. They will continue to monitor the recommendations and guidelines being set forth by the federal and state health agencies and PDE for the Muhlenberg School District.

- Results of the PM of the Electrical Transformers throughout the District that was completed in August. Mr. Patterson received the report containing the results of the PMs, which had recommendations for minor repairs of the transformers that serve the Middle School and the Intermediate School. Mr. Patterson is working with a local electrical house to address those repairs over the course of the next few months. The rest of the transformers all tested well and Mr. Patterson will continue this procedure with the next recommended sampling taking place in July of 2021.
- An infrared testing PM of the electrical distribution panels took place in the school buildings in September and Mr. Patterson received a detailed report of this PM which indicated there were three bad circuit breakers and one bad connection – one at the Elementary Center, one at C. E. Cole and one at the Middle School. All recommended repairs were completed. Overall, it was a very favorable report of the distribution of electric in the District considering there are over three hundred electrical panels in the District.
- The three new 10-Passenger Vans ordered in February 2020 have arrived. After the required lettering, they will be introduced into the fleet to be used by District personnel.

Questions/Comments/Concerns:

Mr. Hoffmaster asked how long it would be until the Library is opened again. Mr. Patterson replied he was not sure. He said from the estimate he saw from the flooring company, there is an awful lot of work to be done. Mr. Patterson said the first step is the abatement of the asbestos that was found in the old flooring tile. He said that will be at least a two to three week procedure; and, after that, they can begin to lay the floor and new tiles. Mr. Patterson said he did not have an estimate of time.

Mr. Lupia asked if an outside contractor was hired to remove the old carpet tile and asbestos. Mr. Patterson said the flooring company brought in a contractor to take care of the asbestos. Mr. Lupia asked if that is included in the insurance claim. Mr. Patterson said yes. Mr. Lupia asked what the name of the electric company was that Mr. Patterson is working with for the transformer repairs. Mr. Patterson said he is working with Twiford Electric. He said that is the company that did a lot of the PM work and who will do the follow-up.

Comments by Dr. Macharola:

Dr. Macharola said as everyone is aware, the Muhlenberg School District has opted for virtual learning until the end of the first marking period; and, it is time for the District to truly evaluate where it needs to be and where it needs to go after this. He said the District polled the community in terms of parents/guardians, students, grades 7 -12 and all teachers. There was a one hundred percent return rate from the teachers and over fifty percent from parents and students. Dr. Macharola said the DSM5 rate is thirty percent. He said anytime people are surveyed and the percentage is less than thirty percent, it is probably not a valid survey and anything above thirty percent is a valid interpretation. Dr. Macharola asked Dr. Futrick to review the survey.

Dr. Futrick said surveys were sent to parents/guardians, students and staff. A separate survey was sent to teachers and support staff. A survey was sent to parents/guardians with a fifty-two percent response rate; and, a survey was sent to all students in grades 7 through 12 with a fifty-four percent response rate. Dr. Futrick said the first question to parents was, "How likely are you to send your child back to school if the School Board elects to return to a full in-person setting." He said about half of the parents said they are very likely to send their child back to school if it is a full in-person setting; eighteen percent are somewhat likely. Dr. Futrick said about two thirds of the parents indicated that if the Board did elect to come back in-person, they would send their child back to school. He said on the other side, there is a third of the parents that said they were very unlikely to somewhat unlikely to have their child come back to school. He said staff members were asked, "considering the current phase in Pennsylvania (Berks is moderate), how safe would you feel with your students returning to school in a full in-person setting to classrooms with social distancing." Dr. Futrick said more than half of the staff members said they felt very unsafe because the buildings are small. At Cole and the Middle School, it would be very difficult to social distance. He said students were asked, "How comfortable would you be with coming back to school." Three quarters of students said they would be very comfortable or somewhat comfortable returning to a full in-person setting. Dr. Futrick said it lines up with what was heard from parents – about thirty percent said they would not send their children back; about a quarter of students are very uncomfortable with coming back to school. He said next parents were asked, "From a safety perspective, which of the following settings do you feel would be best for your child?" Dr. Futrick said a majority of parents said a virtual setting is the safest setting for their child – forty-four percent indicated virtual, about one third said a full in-person and approximately one quarter said a hybrid setting. Parents were then asked, "If we would come back, what are the factors that would prevent you from sending your child back to school in a hybrid or full in-person setting?" Dr. Futrick said parents were given a number of choices and thirty-eight percent of parents said there was nothing that would prevent them from sending their child back to school; however, when broken down, one third of parents said social distancing concerns would prevent them from sending their child to school. He said the one that was most alarming was "other health considerations" – eleven percent of the District's students have "other health considerations" which needs to be factored in when making a decision going forward beyond the first marking period. This would certainly determine whether parents would want to send their child back. Dr. Futrick said students were asked, "Which of the following do you feel would be most appropriate for you to learn?" He said half of the students said full in-person setting. Dr. Futrick said virtual education is hard. It is difficult for a student, but from a teacher's perspective, they are working extremely hard to pull off this education – outreaching to students, trying to get them involved, trying to motivate them and keep them engaged – that is difficult. He said it is difficult for students to socialize because they like to be with their friends and their teachers. Students overwhelmingly said full in-person is something they would feel most comfortable with. Dr. Futrick said the next question for parents was, "From an educational perspective, which would best fit your child?" He said two thirds of parents felt, from an educational perspective, that a full in-person setting would be best for their child. Nothing beats being in front of students from an educational perspective. Dr. Futrick said twenty percent of parents said a virtual setting is appropriate for their child, and another twenty percent said hybrid is appropriate for their child.

Dr. Futrick said the last question for staff, "From an educational perspective, considering the current phase in Pennsylvania (moderate) which of the following would you consider most appropriate for your students to learn?" He said more than half of the staff said a virtual setting would be the most appropriate, followed by a hybrid setting and a full in-person setting. Dr. Futrick said this information could give the School Board and community a better understanding of how students, parents and staff feel.

Dr. Macharola said based upon the survey, research and observations of what this means, if the Board would want a recommendation, administration is prepared and ready to engage in whatever would be chosen. He said but whatever would be chosen would require some understanding given the District's capacity and ability to deliver. Dr. Macharola said a hybrid would not work, due to how the District is set-up. It would if some things are done. He said the pros are that sixty-three percent of the parents feel an in-person educational setting is most appropriate for their child to learn and thirty-eight percent said that there is nothing that would prevent them from sending their child back to school, but it must be realized that there is a percentage out there that have enormous considerations. Dr. Macharola said the cons to this are (and no one wants to see the children back to school more than him, but safety is number one) that seventy-four percent of the staff feel that it would be unsafe to return to a full in-person setting. He said thirty-four percent of parents identified social distancing concerns as a factor for not sending their child back to school; and thirty-four percent of the parents are unlikely to send their child back to school. That is over 1500 children that would not return to school. At least ten percent of the children in the District have pre-existing conditions and would not return – that is over 400 children. Dr. Macharola said 12% of the parents identified other health considerations as a reason they would not send their child back to school (that is the 400 plus). He said the implications of returning to a full in-person setting while providing an MSD education to those who remain in a virtual setting, which would be over thirty percent (1500) children, would cost the Muhlenberg School District \$16.5 million if they would attend an outside cyber school. Dr. Macharola said charter school legislation must be attacked and addressed in Harrisburg because, as it stands right now, it will not be healthy for most of the 500 school districts. He said based on what the District's per pupil cost, it would be \$16.5 million. If that would be prorated from now, it is \$13.5 million. If the District uses Edgenuity (the District's cyber school program), it would cost \$3.5 million for primary teachers. The District would have to find in-person teachers to deliver this instruction to address what would already be a challenge on the cyber side. Dr. Macharola said there would be dramatic scheduling changes for students and staff, which would require reassigning, adjusting and addressing the teaching staff. One third of them would be delivering instruction from a virtual standpoint. This would take time given the very tight capacity of staff and faculty. He said there is another consideration – the District's maintenance people have been just incredibly outstanding. The custodians, the outside maintenance people, supervisors and Mr. Patterson have all be doing an outstanding job.

Dr. Macharola said the District has over 4,000 students based on the additional 600 students enrolled over the last few years. The reason District is number eighteen in the county based on its per pupil cost is because the District is still educating as if it still had 3400/3500 students. Classroom sizes are now twenty-seven to one (average ratio), social distancing would put it at a thirteen/fourteen to one ratio, and that in itself would be a challenge in terms of capacity and having teachers in the classroom with the students. He said the District would also have to hire custodians to properly clean and disinfect. Currently they are doing a wonderful job, but that is because only staff is in the buildings. Dr. Macharola said the county is dealing with a teacher shortage and a substitute teacher shortage. On average last year, eighteen teachers were out for personal reasons or illness. That is four or more per building. Based on the current staffing in the District, and it is very lean, only 1.3 teachers could be absent in a building at a time. He said teacher burnout is a concern. It has been a difficult time for teachers, but if the District goes full in-person, this could be an issue. He said to do a hybrid model the District would have to make adjustments and they would be colossal adjustments. One item on the agenda is \$213,000 for computers for the teachers, which would be paid for by CARES money, not taxpayer monies. Dr. Macharola said the appropriate instruments must be in the hands of teachers – they need new computers, which will help them to deliver instruction. He said if the District would choose a hybrid model, it would get sixty percent of the students back into the classroom. It does not matter what type of schedule – a child could be in school for one day, out for three days and the other day would be for cleaning. It would be segments of children coming to school at a time. Dr. Macharola said the reason he said sixty percent is because all of the District's special needs children and English Language Learner children would have to be in school, which is about 1400 children that would have to be in school every day. The remaining children would alternate on a specific schedule. He said the District would find a way to make it work. Given the status in the county is moderate and, because of the increasing number of COVID cases in Berks County, transportation would be an issue just as it would be if the District would be full in-person. Thirty-eight percent of parents said they would send their child to school anyway. Dr. Macharola said fifty-three percent of teachers feel it is very unlikely that they would be able to deliver the same quality of instruction. Why? They would be delivering synchronous education during the day, every day and responsible for asynchronous education. This would be an additional four to six hours a night so those students who are not in school would not be left in limbo. He said the District could not allow what happened in the spring. It was a new adventure for everyone in the state; it was uncharted waters. Dr. Macharola said there are concerns about the load that would be put on staff and students who would be working in the evenings. He said fifty-three percent of teachers feel unsafe with the hybrid model; thirty-four percent of parents identified social distancing concerns just as they did with a full in-person setting, and twelve percent of the parents had other health considerations. This is 400 plus children who have pre-existing conditions that would be prevented from returning to school with the current state of COVID-19. Dr. Macharola said with the implementation of the hybrid model, more cleaning would be necessary. The District would need an additional twelve custodians to clean the buildings because they are packed. Utility closets were being used as classrooms prior to COVID-19. He said there is no wiggle room in the buildings. This would cost approximately \$451,000. The District will need additional computers, cameras and new infrastructure to support synchronous learning, which would cost an additional \$465,000.

Dr. Macharola said the District would also need long-term substitutes. He said this was done in another District where he was superintendent and it worked out; his only concern is that there is not a pool to draw from. If the District were to hire sixteen long-term substitutes, permanent long-term subs to be on staff daily in each of the buildings, the District would be able to cover the absenteeism that would occur. That cost would be \$688,000. Dr. Macharola said this is what would be needed for hybrid to work. This is the only way it would work because the District has a lean staff, lean support staff, maintenance staff, and administrative staff.

Dr. Macharola said virtual learning is the safest of all. Of the teachers surveyed, 97% rated the instructional delivery as positive. Ninety-six percent of parents were pleased with the services provided by their child's school (Elementary, Intermediate, Middle School or High School). Ninety percent of students said they were pleased with the services provided by the school and eight-nine percent felt positive about their educational experience in the first quarter. Seventy-six percent of parents were satisfied with the educational experience in the first quarter. He said he was sad that there was twenty-four percent who were not satisfied but he understood why. Dr. Macharola went on to say fifty-six percent of the staff, at the current rate, felt virtual was the most appropriate setting for students to learn; and, forty-five percent of parents felt the virtual setting was the most appropriate. He said forty-seven percent of students were not satisfied with their experience with technology – the District must improve on that; and, forty percent said their current educational experience was very hard. Dr. Macharola said his heart ached for students and their families and if anyone is feeling depressed or feeling sad or feeling despair, reach out because one life lost is one too many. Especially when the wrong decision is made. No one wants an apology. Dr. Macharola said he understood the pressures on students. He said he was very disheartened and asked the team to work on improving the educational experience with technology and virtual. Dr. Macharola said as the team dug into this, they found high school students were failing at a higher rate. The workload for students may have to be adjusted. He said it is the same at the middle school; students are failing at a much higher rate. Dr. Macharola said there is teacher burnout but there is student burnout too. He said there is nothing like being on campus and in-house learning. Some children learn much better virtually. Dr. Macharola said he is a traditionalist and there is nothing like that one-to-one interaction, but the pandemic is real. He said it is hard and sadly, COVID-19 has put public education into a new chapter. It will never be the same and he believed that thirty percent of parents would continue virtual no matter what because it will fit into their lifestyle; but traditional education and a strong public education is essential. Dr. Macharola said there needs to be charter school legislation and Harrisburg needs to step up to the plate and quit punishing public schools.

Dr. Macharola said virtual is the safest given the moderate condition of the county, but he said he wanted everyone to know the facts about all options. He said in order for this to work any other way, the District would have to come up with close to a million dollars. Dr. Macharola said he is concerned that if parents do not want to send their children back to the full in-person setting or if they do not send them to MSD's cyber school or the District is unable to reassign teachers (which would take some time); the District would stand to lose \$13.5 million. Dr. Macharola said it is not about money when it comes to life. He said he wants everyone to be safe.

Comments/Questions/Concerns:

Mr. Nelson said the Board did the right thing by going virtual for the first quarter and for waiting to see what would happen; however, nothing has really changed. Berks County is still averaging thirty to forty new cases with sixty-nine yesterday. He said he does not think the District should be considering going back to full in-person. Mr. Nelson said it would not be the same full in-person as it was before this all started. He said he understood that kids want to be back in the classroom, but they will not be having one-on-one time with the teachers like they used to, they will not be playing with their friends

like they used to, they will not be interacting with their friends like they used to because they can't now and, that is unfortunately the way it is. Mr. Nelson said he wants the kids to be back at school and he wants everything to be back to normal, but that is not happening yet. He said he does not see that there is any choice but for the District to stay virtual for the near future. Mr. Nelson said the Board could always re-evaluate because there is nothing that says they must make a decision right now with specific dates; if things are looking better in the middle of November, they could make a decision then to bring students back, but now is not the time to do that.

Mr. Voit said Mr. Nelson had good points, and in this conversation, there were no good or bad comments. He said when weighing his decision, he would take into consideration that coming back to school is right for education, but on the other hand, people are getting sick; while at the same time kids are having other issues as a result of being home all the time. Mr. Voit said he felt he was caught between a rock and a hard place. He said at some point in time, the kids will be back. He said that Dr. Macharola mentioned there was a lot of planning that needed to be done. Mr. Voit said if he had a magic wand, he would have the kids come back right after the New Year because that would allow sufficient time to plan everything. He said as a Board, they should encourage the administration to come up with a going full-time game plan describing what it would be like when it would be implemented. Mr. Voit said while the Board will not agree on the time when the students would come back, at least they could agree on the process to come back. He said the Board should get that ball rolling so that when they collectively agree with administration that it is time, they would be able to implement the plan and get it done.

Mr. Hoffmaster asked when the kids do return to school, will the school require temperature checks and how will students ride on the buses. Has that been discussed with the BCIU yet. Dr. Macharola said those are some of the health and safety considerations that the District will have to look into for implementation. He said mask wearing is critical – all students will have to wear masks. Dr. Macharola said he hears from other districts that it is a challenge every day and then the adults worry as well. He said he fully agreed with Mr. Nelson and Mr. Voit. The administration would have to get a process together. The survey helped administration to gauge this to be able to distribute the information. Dr. Macharola said the nurses have been doing an incredible job just with the staff in the District. He said he has asked the nurses to perform optional temperature checks but has not made it mandatory. Many staff members do check-in for a temperature check, which the nurses do. Dr. Macharola said those are all of the precautions the District would have to perform as part of its plan and is something that would have to be discussed with the District's Pandemic Team. He said the District has to be prepared to engage; but his concern is the District is not postured to engage.

A process is needed. Dr. Macharola said that health concerns would be critical especially for the 400 kids that will not be able to come back because they have pre-existing conditions. The District still has an obligation with those children depending on where they are going to be. Dr. Macharola said there would definitely be things the District would have to address and identify. He said the main thing was getting virtual education to work in the Muhlenberg School District; and health considerations are paramount here.

Mr. Hoffmaster said he agreed with Mr. Voit. He said there are many things the District must do to make kids safe with the possibility that they will not be able to return this year

Mr. Hyneman said he continues to hear the experts talk about a second wave of the virus as the cold weather approaches; so, he said it seems to him that the timing is not very good. He said his son and his family are at Governor Mifflin and they are doing something a little different from Muhlenberg, but every day he says a silent prayer that they will be okay. He said if the District is going to do this, he feels that it may be better to wait to see what happens when the weather gets cold. Experts in this field say there is going to be another wave; therefore, he very much agreed with Mr. Nelson and Mr. Voit. Mr. Hyneman said he personally did not feel this was the time to bring kids back into school.

Mr. Voit asked if the District has any given thought to not bringing everyone back at the same time when it is time to bring students back. He said perhaps bring the high school back, get it up and running and then bring the middle school back and so on. He said this is why he thought it would be good to see a plan.

Dr. Macharola said he understood how Mr. Hyneman felt. He said there are some districts that have done that (stagger the return of the grades), but this is a tight school district. If the District must stagger, it will. There are parents who said they have more than one child in the District with the older children helping with the younger children, so he is not sure how that would work. Dr. Macharola said that is something the District would have to look at and possibly entertain.

Mr. Lupia asked if Dr. Macharola has received any feedback from other schools in the county that have students in the classroom. Is there any word on illness or people infected and how they are doing? He said recently he drove by Spring Ridge Elementary, the parking lot was full, and there were school buses. Dr. Macharola said he asked the other superintendents who have students back in school; and, they all said things are going well for them. He said he would have to trust that they are being candid about that but they are not up against the City of Reading. Spring Ridge is not an urban area. Dr. Macharola said to really understand this, people must accept some things that are hard for those who that have been here for a long time to understand. Muhlenberg is an urban school district. It is not a suburban school district; it is not a rural school district. He said the Muhlenberg School District has urban city issues; and, everyone says that is not the case; but none of the issues here will be able to be addressed if people keep thinking that is not the case. Dr. Macharola said the Muhlenberg School District is sixty-eight percent economically disadvantaged; and, sixty-four percent minority. The District is geographically right up against the north side of the city. Some of the other districts are not the size of the Muhlenberg School District and their students do not reflect the environment or culture that Muhlenberg has. It is different. He said the District has to be mindful of that and must be able to address that. Dr. Macharola said he hears that things

are going well for the districts that have students in class; however, when they have a COVID case it is chaos because they must shut the buildings down and parents are not accustomed to this. Districts must switch on a dime from going in person to virtual; sports teams must stop practicing when there is a COVID case. He said the Muhlenberg School District had two COVID cases and thankfully, the students were not in school because the District would have to shut down for some time following CDC guidelines. Dr. Macharola said so things are going okay for those districts, but they do have to close down when

they have positive COVID-19 cases. He said the District has had thirty-eight employees who have been out due to COVID related issues, which affects staffing. Schools that are open are not like Muhlenberg - packed to the max - they have plenty of room and they are able to do things. He said he is hearing positive things.

Mr. Lupia said he is also concerned; and, asked if there would be enough room to spread the kids out if ten percent of the students did not return? Dr. Macharola replied, no; and he agreed with Mr. Nelson – it would not be the same should they come back.

Mr. Madara thanked Dr. Macharola and Dr. Futrick for the survey. He said there was a little over fifty percent who responded, so the numbers that are being quoted may not even be accurate and probably most of that survey was a lot of emotion. Mr. Madara said social distancing is almost impossible at the Middle School and C. E. Cole – how would that be fixed? In three months or in six months, how will the District fix that? He said it would not work. Mr. Madara asked if the teachers needed computers because of this change or were they needed before. Dr. Macharola said they needed them prior to this. He said prior to Mr. Madara coming on the Board, the students did not have access to technology and the Board invested wisely in the Blueprint for Success, the District pilots, and technology for all students over the past seven years. Dr. Macharola said what happened is COVID-19 related. Mr. Madara said he is supportive of the computers because if the District is going to be virtual, teachers will need the right equipment. He said another point with the survey, Dr. Macharola mentioned hiring long-term substitutes, but if the District would go back, no one knows how the staff and teachers will react to that. He said a lot of them have apprehension of being back full-time, in-person. That could be another hidden problem, which cannot be addressed until the District makes a decision. Mr. Madara said he did not feel the District should go back to school full-time in- person until it can handle some of these issues. Dr. Macharola thanked Mr. Madara for his comments and said he agreed.

Mr. Gross said he agreed with Mr. Voit's comments and the District must work on a plan to get the students back. He said it should be done in stages and the District should learn from other school districts - their mistakes and their successes. Mr. Gross said the District shouldn't wait until it gets a favorable survey as he does not think that would happen. He said the District should move forward and make a game plan. Dr. Macharola agreed and everyone made reasonable statements. He said he always believed that the kids should be back and to plan for that; follow the Department of Health, follow the Department of Education and be very cautious of social distancing. Dr. Macharola said the two positive COVID-19 cases of employees were in the tighter buildings and no kids were here. The Department of Health did follow-up with the District and said the District followed the procedures and protocols to the tee. He said there are many concerns and all eighteen superintendents and the director of the IU meet regularly and discuss this.

They are learning from each other as to what works and what doesn't work. Dr. Macharola said the survey is what it is and the Board could take away the information that it provides; keeping their perspective. It is a perception, but what is not a perception is the implication of what is needed if the District was anything other than virtual at this time.

Hearing of Visitors - Muhlenberg School District taxpayers and residents have an opportunity, at this time, to comment on matters of concern, official action, or deliberation, which are or may be before the Muhlenberg School Board. The Board retains the option to accept all public comment at this time. Presentations should be limited to two minutes per person. In the event that the Board determines that there is not sufficient time for residents or taxpayers of the School District to comment, the Board may defer the comment period to the next regular meeting.

Frank Ranaudo – 2828 Mannerchor Road, Temple – Mr. Ranaudo said he has two children in the District. He said when it was mentioned that parents were satisfied with virtual learning, and speaking for himself and his wife, in comparison to the virtual learning the students received at the end of last school year – anything is better than what they received at the end of last year. Mr. Ranaudo said so if everyone is saying they are satisfied with virtual learning, what are they basing it on? If the hybrid option was not a viable option, why was it even put on the survey. He said if kids are playing sports and parents were required to sign a waiver to release the school from liability if they get COVID, why can't parents have that same option if they send their kids back to school. Parents would be required to sign a waiver stating they know the risk. He said shouldn't it be the parents decision to decide what is best for their child.

Dr. Macharola said the hybrid setting was included in the survey because it is a standard model that is being utilized across the country in areas that have COVID. He said he explained earlier why it would not work at Muhlenberg, but had to include it on the survey as a viable model because people would ask why it was not on there. Those are the models, there is some scaffolding, which is what Mr. Voit was talking about earlier, that is occurring in some of the other school districts and the District is going to look at that. Dr. Macharola said the District is also looking into using a waiver. If a parent signed a waiver, got ill and perished, the school would not be liable. He said he did not like the thought of that, but he said Mr. Ranaudo made a point. Dr. Macharola said if the Board would decide to have the students return to school, then he would request that the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the principals, assistant principals and all administrators to be held harmless in the event that anyone contracts COVID-19, becomes ill, has to be hospitalized or perishes. Dr. Macharola said he believed he heard the Board saying to get the ball rolling but it is not time yet for the students to return. He said as far as the parents being satisfied, that is a perception based on last year and he said he could not agree more. The District cannot go back to last year, and it did not. Dr. Macharola said he appreciated what Mr. Ranaudo had to say and his words did not fall on deaf ears.

Brenna Hafer – 627 Euclid Avenue, Temple - Ms. Hafer said she has a kindergartener who has an almost three hour break. She said she understood this is the beginning of the school year and things could change; however, she is also a mental health worker and she is on the cusp on losing her job because she cannot leave her daughter home alone to educate herself. Ms. Hafer said she also has a high school son who had no classes that week so that students could catch up. She said her son is in all honors classes and she is upset that he is sleeping all week because he has nothing to do. Ms. Hafer asked if there were any suggestions for working parents.

Dr. Macharola said it is a tough position for working parents. People who are mental health workers are very much needed at this time. He said the District must get better at this and he was concerned. He said he believed that Principal Mish had a good reason for tailoring back at the high school. Dr. Macharola said he would ask Mr. Mish to contact her; however, it was his understanding that education was still happening but it was tailored down so that the kids who were overwhelmed could catch up. He said he felt the strategy had merit, but if he were a parent, he would wonder what was going on. Mr. Mish said the teachers are available every single period, every day. He said the purpose for this was so students could get up to speed since many of the students at the high school are currently not doing well - at an alarming rate.

Looking at that data, administrators felt it was crucial to allow students to make-up work and have individualized time with their teachers. Mr. Mish said he felt this would benefit all of the students. He said that from speaking to his colleagues around the county, he felt it was very similar to their situations as far as seeing a spike in students who are not passing. Mr. Mish had many students who reached out to him and to teachers that they felt overwhelmed and could not complete their work. He said some students have jobs or are helping to care for younger siblings. Mr. Mish said they made a decision that they felt was in the best interest of the majority of students in the high school. He said they would reassess and then make a decision about how to move forward.

Tracy Ibrahim – Montrose Avenue, Laureldale - Mrs. Ibrahim said she has a daughter at the Middle School with a pre-existing condition and when filling out the survey she noted that it would be best for her daughter to be full-time virtual, but mentally it would be better for her to be back in school. She said her daughter filled out the survey to return to school. Mrs. Ibrahim said she allowed her daughter to attend cheerleading because she feels as though she is a prisoner in her house. She said there is only about twenty something students participating and is very different from a building of nine hundred students. Mrs. Ibrahim said the middle school is doing a very good job with virtual and teachers respond quickly and offer help. She said she felt the teachers were going above and beyond; the help is there if is needed.

Dr. Macharola thanked Mrs. Ibrahim.

Rebecca Heiser – 3611 Chestnut Street – Ms. Heiser said she felt the virtual learning was going well; could be better, but so could in-person learning. She said she has three children – one in first grade, one in seventh grade, and one in eleventh grade. Ms. Heiser said both of her older children have IEPs and are struggling. She said her eleventh grade child is enrolled at RMCTC in the welding program. She asked how her child is supposed to learn welding and gain a trade through virtual learning. Ms. Heiser said he would be graduating next year, and he will not have any qualified skills by doing virtual learning.

Dr. Macharola said he agreed. He said this is the down side to this.

Ms. Heiser asked if the RMCTC could possibly go to a hybrid setting and students continue virtual at the home school.

Dr. Macharola said that is being considered but Muhlenberg shares the RMCTC with the Reading School District. He said the districts are great partners and whatever would be needed for Muhlenberg, they would do. Mr. Lupia said there is a CTC meeting coming up and Ms. Heiser is welcome to ask the question then.

Mr. Hoffmaster thanked Mr. Mish for his comments and felt it was a good idea because he was getting numerous questions about that.

Robert Sanders – 100 Hickory Avenue, Temple – Mr. Sanders said his child is in second grade and has been out of school since March. He said when the decision was made for children to go virtual he thought that there would be a resolution or back-up plan. It is now October and he is hearing that the District is just starting to get the ball rolling, but there has been enough momentum since March and he thought there would be a plan in place. Mr. Sanders said his childcare costs have increased 100% because he must find a place for his child to go. He said now since all of the other school districts and most of them in Berks County are going back to school and are virtual, his child care options are off the table due to low numbers. Mr. Sanders said he wants his child to be safe but he is being forced, like many parents, to choose between finances, keeping his job or trying to keep his child safe. He said it is hard to do both at this time.

Dr. Macharola said it is hard and the District has been looking at this for a long time, from every angle. He said the District must look at all of its variables with a capacity to deliver. This was not something new that the District just started right now. Dr. Macharola said when the Board went virtual, it was the right decision for safety reasons and because the county was moderate. He said this is being discussed at this time because this is the Board's monthly meeting; but if the Board must call a special board meeting some time down the road then that is what would be done. Dr. Macharola said the District is definitely working on this but there are huge considerations that the District was thrown into with COVID-19 that no one would have known about. This is all new uncharted waters.

Mr. Sanders asked what benchmarks were needed to be met for the possibility of going to a hybrid setting or going back in-person. He said the way he is looking at it, his child will be home virtually indefinitely and it makes it very hard as a parent to plan especially financially. Mr. Sanders asked how much longer would his childcare costs be double and what is needed to make the decision to go back to school hybrid or in-person.

Dr. Macharola said they would have to see some changes with the data. He said some of the other schools in Berks County went back to school while in the moderate phase and most of them are outside of the city. Dr. Macharola said the District would look at the information. He said he thought it was very possible that the District would be virtual into Thanksgiving. The District will have a plan in place to come back and it may require scaffolding which will be difficult to be done due to the capacities in the buildings already being maxed. He said the District has been extremely frugal and delivered a world winning high school, which was accomplished on pure initiative, strategy, good thinking and an investment. Dr. Macharola said no one saw COVID-19 coming and Mr. Nelson made a good point – full in-person will not be the same for kids - and they will get used to that. He said his heart ached for Mr. Sanders' family and understood he was only asking for clarity. The District will get through this but must be mindful of its revenues and resources. He suggested Mr. Sanders call his office if he would like to talk further.

Mr. Lupia said he has been reading lately about different neighborhoods that are starting block-parents, which is a parent/neighbor who will allow students to come into their home to use the Wi-Fi while parents are at work. He said it is sort of like a babysitting service/classroom type of thing. Mr. Lupia suggested parents talk to one another to see if there is a parent who would volunteer to open their home to allow children in their home. Students would get to see their friends and learn virtually.

Dr. Macharola said it is a nice idea – the buddy system; but he suggested that anyone doing that should be sure to know who the parent is because parents would not want their child in an abusive situation. He said they should consider that only if there would be a strong connection between the neighbors where they really know each other.

Amanda (did not identify herself) – Amanda said she has two daughters and this is their first year in Cole. She said one is autistic and the other one has an IEP as well. Amanda said one of her daughter's teacher is phenomenal but the other one she is less than satisfied with. Amanda said her daughter is a bright child and had a physical education class that was longer than actual learning in the classroom. She said her daughter was in class fifteen minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes in the afternoon, and then had forty minutes of gym. Amanda said as a parent of children that have disabilities and a learning disorder, it is frightening. She said she knows the teachers are doing what they can but it is difficult for a mother with newborns to assist when one child is jumping from one class into another and another is dealing with a comprehension issue. Amanda said she has tried to create a schedule for her to follow, but she needs in-person help. She asked if there was not anyway to get children with learning disabilities and autism back into school so they can get the learning that they need. Amanda said it is scary that her children are being swept under the rug because they are not getting the help that they need.

Dr. Macharola requested she contact Dr. Rutt. He said he was happy that she is pleased with one teacher but unhappy that she is not pleased with the other teacher.

Amanda said she did contact Dr. Rutt and they are working on a plan for her daughter but is having difficulty with it. She said the teachers are great, but she needs more help.

Dr. Rutt came on and requested Amanda contact him in the morning.

Board Business

Personnel

1. Acceptance of Resignations

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District accept the following resignations:

- a. Ms. Chelsea Moyer, Communications/English Teacher, Muhlenberg Middle School, effective November 6, 2020.
- b. Ms. Diane Keebler, Technology & Engineering Teacher, Muhlenberg Elementary Center, effective upon release from the Muhlenberg School District per PA School Code.

2. Administrative Appointment

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the following administrative appointment:

- a. Mr. Kyle Crater, Principal (K. Venza), Muhlenberg Elementary Center, effective upon release from current school district as per PA School Code, at a prorated salary of \$109,750.

Comments/Questions/Concerns:

Dr. Macharola said Kyle grew up in the Muhlenberg School District and is a graduate of Muhlenberg High School! He received his Bachelor's Degree from West Chest University; and his Master's Degree from Cabrini University.

Kyle was a physical education teacher at Northwest Middle School in the Reading School District from 2008 through 2015. In 2015, Kyle became an Assistant Principal at Amanda E. Stout Elementary School, which is also in the Reading School District and in 2018 was named principal at Amanda E. Stout Elementary School.

Kyle still lives in Muhlenberg. He is married and has three lovely girls.

Dr. Macharola said he was very excited to have Mr. Crater come on as the new principal at MEC; and he was excited to have someone with some principal experience in that chair. Dr. Macharola said this would be a benefit to the community. He said it is nice to tell someone welcome home. The Reading School District had nothing but praise for Mr. Crater. He said he is looking forward to his service and dedication to the children in the Muhlenberg School District; to empower them and to build the staff. Dr. Macharola congratulate Kyle for this appointment.

3. Request for Leave of Absence/FMLA Leave

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the request for a Leave of absence/FMLA leave for the following employees:

- a. Mrs. Tara Pacharis, Family Consumer Science, Muhlenberg High School, Leave of Absence/FMLA, effective on or about January 15, 2021, through on or about April 6, 2021.
- b. Mrs. Sarah Brown, ESL Teacher, C. E. Cole Intermediate School, Leave of Absence/FMLA, effective on or about January 19, 2021, through on or about May 19, 2021.
- c. Mrs. Ashley Reed, Third Grade Teacher, Muhlenberg Elementary Center, Leave of Absence/FMLA, effective on or about December 23, 2020 through on or about March 29, 2021.
- d. Mrs. Erika Watson, Music Teacher, Muhlenberg Middle School, Leave of Absence/FMLA, effective on or about March 17, 2021, through the end of the 2020-2021 school year, returning the first day of the 2021-2022 school year.

4. Professional Salary Adjustments for the 2020-2021 School Year

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the Professional Salary Adjustments for the 2020-2021 school year as presented.

5. Substitutes for the 2020-2021 School Year

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the listing of substitutes for the 2020-2021 school year as presented.

6. Completion of Probation

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the completion of probation for the following classified employees:

- a. Ms. Anna Limandri, Instructional Assistant, Muhlenberg Middle School, completion of probation as of September 8, 2020, and recommended for permanent employment as of September 9, 2020.
- b. Ms. Cathy Salesky, Clerical Assistant, Food and Nutrition Department, completion of thirty (30) day probation as of October 1, 2020 and recommended for permanent employment as of October 2, 2020.

7. Co-Curricular Appointments

Resolved, that the Board of Directors of the Muhlenberg School District approve the following co-curricular appointments:

- a. Ms. Morgan Burr, Junior High Field Hockey Assistant Coach (M. Williams), effective September 22, 2020, at a salary of \$2,447 (year 1).
- b. Mr. Alberto Santiago, Volunteer Junior High Football Assistant Coach, effective September 22, 2020.

- c. Ms. Madison Button, Volunteer Junior High Field Hockey Assistant Coach, effective September 24, 2020.

8. Co-Curricular Resignations

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District accept the following co-curricular resignations:

- a. Mr. Christopher Thomas, Varsity Girls Basketball Assistant Coach, effective September 22, 2020.
- b. Ms. Adara Wagner, Junior High Field Hockey Assistant Coach, effective August 23, 2020.

9. Sports Event Monitors for 2020-2021 School Year

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the following Sports Event Monitors for the 2020-2021 School Year at the pay rate of \$10.50:

- a. Mr. Dan Brady
- b. Mr. Ian Laxton
- c. Mr. Gabriel Sharp

10. Termination of Employment

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the termination of the following employee:

- a. Ms. Stephanie Wagner, Cafeteria Worker, effective September 29, 2020.

11. Administrative (MAA I and MAA II) Salary Increases for the 2020-2021 School Year

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the Muhlenberg Administrators' Association (MMAI and MAII) salary increases for the 2020-2021 school year.

12. Co-Curricular Assignment – Academic Challenge Advisor

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve Ms. Stacia Richmond, Academic Challenge Advisor, Muhlenberg High School, at a salary of \$1,901 (year 8).

Management

1. 2020-2021 Membership to National School Boards

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the district's annual (2021) membership to the National School Boards Association in the amount of \$4,165.

2. Act 80 Days for 2020-2021 School Year

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District authorize the submission of Act 80 Days for the 2020-2021 school year to the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Physical Plant and Transportation

1. Approval to Dispose of M8 Passenger Van

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the disposal of a 1997 Ford Econoline 9-passenger van due to safety reasons.

Budget and Finance

1. Approval of Financial Reports

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the following financial reports and that they become part of the permanent record of the meeting:

Fund	Treasurer's Report	Financial Report	Bills Paid Month	Investments	Budget Transfers
General	Aug 2020	Aug 2020	Sept 2020 Ck#48550-48715 V#26482-26542	Aug 2020	
Cafeteria	Aug 2020	Aug 2020	Sept 2020 Ck#6853-6890 V#2823-2827	Aug 2020	
Capital Reserve (Fund 32)	Sept 2020	Sept 2020			
Capital Projects Fund (Fund 39)	Sept 2020	Sept 2020			
Activity	Aug 2020	Aug 2020			

Education

1. Approval of River Rock Academy Agreement

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the agreement with River Rock Academy for secondary and elementary student services for the 2020-2021 school year as presented.

2. Settlement Agreement and Release

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the settlement agreement and release for the following student as presented:

- a. Student No. 34183

3. Student to Complete Senior Year as a Non-Resident Student

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the request for the following senior to complete the 2020-2021 school year as a non-resident student:

- a. Student No. 30520, grade 12, Muhlenberg High School

4. Purchase of Band Instruments

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the purchase of the following band instruments for C. E. Cole Intermediate School at a total cost of \$4,465 (Capital Reserve fund):

- a. One Prelude Student Trumpet - \$377
- b. One RS Berkeley Small Baritone Harp - \$869
- c. One Jupiter 700 Series Tuba - \$3,219

5. Berks County Intermediate Unit Special Education Agreement and Schedule "A" Agreement

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the Special Education Agreement and Schedule "A" Agreement with the Berks County Intermediate Unit to provide special education services as presented.

6. Student Tuition Agreements for the 2020-2021 School Year

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the following student tuition agreements for the 2020-2021 school year as presented:

- a. Student #39082, New Story
- b. Student #37824, New Story-New Holland

7. New Story Contract Amendments

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the New Story contract amendments for the following students as presented:

- a. Student #31134
- b. Student #38475
- c. Student #36470
- d. Student #38549
- e. Student #38532
- f. Student #39082
- g. Student #37824

8. Certificate of Support Students

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the enrollment of Certificate of Support Students, PA School Code 1302, for the 2019-2020 school year as listed.

9. C. E. Cole Intermediate School TSI (Targeted Support and Improvement) Plan

Resolved, that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the C. E. Cole Intermediate School Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) Plan as presented and in compliance with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Education required guidelines.

10. Purchase of HP ProBook Laptops

Resolved. that the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District approve the purchase of HP Probook Laptops for professional staff at an estimated cost of \$210,330 (COVID-19 funding and other federal government funding).

Minutes

Review minutes of the Committee of the Whole Meeting of September 9, 2020 and the Regular Meeting of September 9, 2020.

Old Business

New Business

MSD/RMCTC Board Visitor of the Month

October	Mr. S. Wayne Hardy
November	Mr. Randall R. Madara
December	Mr. Thomas W. Gross
January	Mr. Otto W. Voit, III
February	Mr. Mark Nelson
March	Mr. Garrett Hyneman
April	Mrs. Cindy Mengle
May	Mr. Richard E. Hoffmaster


Review of Board Meetings and Calendar of Events

October 7	7:00 PM	Committee of the Whole Mtg and Regular Board Mtg
November 4	7:00 PM	Committee of the Whole Mtg
November 11	7:00 PM	Regular Board Mtg
December 2	6:30 PM	Annual Reorganization Meeting; Committee of the Whole Meeting; Regular Board Meeting

Adjourn Meeting

Moved by Mr. Hoffmaster and Mr. Voit, that there being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting be adjourned. Meeting adjourned at 8:11 PM.

Attest:



Thomas W. Gross
Secretary