

**MONTGOMERY TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION  
REMOTE MEETING**

**SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
Tuesday, October 6, 2020**

**Call to Order – By Board President Bursh at 6:07 p.m.**

Statement of Open Meeting and Public Participation - In accordance with the State’s Sunshine Law, adequate notice of this meeting was provided by mailing notice of meeting on October 1, 2020. Notice was provided to Board of Education Members, Montgomery Township Clerk, Rocky Hill Borough Clerk, Public Library, Township Posting, School Posting, PTSA Officers, Courier News, Montgomery News, Princeton Packet, Trenton Times, and The Star Ledger.

The Board reserves the right to enter into Executive Session during all meetings of the Board of Education.

It is the School Board’s intention to conclude this meeting no later than 8:30 p.m.

**ROLL CALL-Via Teleconference**

Phyllis Bursh – Present	Jinesh Patel - Absent
Christina Harris - Present	Ranjana Rao – Present
Amy Miller – Present	Dr. Biren Saraiya – Present
Michael Morack, Jr.- Present (left at 8 p.m.)	Shreesh Tiwari – Present

(Note: One Vacancy)

Also Present: Mary McLoughlin, Superintendent of Schools  
Damian Pappa, Director of Data Assessment & Accountability  
Kelly Mattis, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources  
Alicia M. Schauer, School Business Administrator/Interim Board Secretary

**SALUTE THE FLAG**

**BOARD RETREAT**

Ms. Bursh reviewed last year’s goals which were as follows:

- Goal 1: Maximize the social-emotional and academic growth of every student
- Goal 2: Ensure a learning environment that promotes excellence
- Goal 3: Strengthen stakeholder relationships to support and enhance student learning
- Goal 4: Optimize operational and financial resources to enhance student experience

Ms. Harris reviewed the “Portrait of a Graduate,” which has three sections: Ethical & Responsible, Socially & Emotionally Aware, and Career & College Ready.

Ms. McLoughlin reviewed the “Strategic Plan” which was completed in February 2017. The strategic planning process was developed to determine a common vision and direction for the future of our schools. The process engaged stakeholders from every corner of our community, including our community leaders, parents, teachers, support staff, students and administrators.

A strategic plan progress report was done on June 30, 2019, which is on our website.

A change that was made is the fact that high school students don’t have to take Physics First. The guidance and special education departments are working closely together along with I&RS (Intervention and Referral Services). There is bolstered alignment between the three.

The English Language Learners (ELL) program had professional training through the whole district. In-House mentoring program was extended to additional years past the first-year certification. We built partnerships between schools and the community. We started to grow and enhance our relationship with the Township. The bus drivers and custodians have a training manual.

Dr. Saraiya requested to know what was outstanding in the strategic plan. Ms. McLoughlin responded that the strategic plan was completed in three years instead of five years.

Instead of Physics First, students can now take the IPELS (Integrated Physical, Earth and Life Sciences) course. This was implemented two years ago.

Dr. Saraiya questioned how we know this is working. Ms. McLoughlin stated that students continue to take the course.

Ms. Bursh asked if there been any official review of the new science class? Does the new course satisfy the students’ needs, and how do they feel about the course?

Ms. McLoughlin stated that she didn’t believe the high school conducted a survey.

Ms. Bursh stated that the district should create a new strategic goal in the spring.

Ms. McLoughlin stated that a company ran the whole process for us, and it was a community goal.

A discussion ensued regarding the mission statement, and Ms. Schauer read Policy 2110, which is the Mission Statement and was board approved on December 15, 2009.

Ms. Bursh stated that we need to update this policy and requested that Mr. Morack, Jr. place it on the next Policy Committee agenda for review. Ms. McLoughlin stated that we need to have input from the stakeholders.

Ms. Miller read Goal 1: Student Success and its objectives.

A discussion took place regarding the Physics First program, and it was decided to make this as part of the goals.

Mr. Tiwari read Goal 2: Ensure a learning environment that promotes excellence.

Ms. McLoughlin stated that the district was researching changing our website to be ADA compliant. However, when Covid happened, we stopped looking into it.

Ms. Miller asked if this could be included in our referendum, and Ms. Schauer responded that she will research costs, discuss it with the OFF Committee, and possibly put it in next year's budget.

Goal 4: Optimize operational and financial resources to enhance student experience was discussed at this time.

Ms. McLoughlin asked if this is part of the OFF Committee goals.

Mr. Tiwari stated that salaries and benefits are the major part of our budget, which leaves little money left over for the benefit of the students. The board needs to reallocate resources to maximize benefits for students.

Goal 3: Strengthen stakeholder relationships to support and enhance student learning was discussed.

Ms. McLoughlin stated that the district is continually looking at students' interests and revamping our curriculum and course offerings to meet their interests. We also have a long-term technology plan. We offered new courses recently – anatomy and physiology. She stated that she doesn't know if we address the social/emotional part of the goals.

Goal 4: Optimize operational and financial resources to enhance student experience was discussed.

Ms. Bursh stated that teachers need to impress to students that all students can be successful.

Ms. McLoughlin stated that the district is looking at achievement gap. Assessments and comprehensive equity will be reviewed every year and will identify problem areas.

Ms. Bursh suggested having ACI Committee work on the achievement gap.

Ms. Rao questioned how we get parents to be more active.

Ms. Harris stated that it is hard for children to express themselves, and we need parents to keep in touch with teachers to give input on their children.

Ms. Morack, Jr. left the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

The board agreed to the following district goals:

1. Provide deeper student-teacher-parent connection to allow for continued excellent academic education and emotional well-being of students regardless of mode of instruction during COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Restructuring science program for 2022-2023
3. Curricular changes to incorporate diversity and inclusion
4. Prioritizing the district's financial resources to drive innovation in ongoing student education
  - a. Continually look at student interests and revamp our curriculum and course offerings to meet their interests
  - b. The district has a long-term technology plan

Ms. Bursh read the Board goals as follows:

1. Continue to improve frequent communication with district
2. Improve website for Montgomery and utilize this as a resource to provide updated communication for the community
3. Monitor and provide frequent feedback on performance for new board members and staff
4. Focus and training on eliminating racism and increasing inclusiveness
5. Training opportunities in diversity, equity and inclusion
6. Training opportunities in the collaborative model and shared decision-making in process
7. Training opportunities in communication (e.g., with the community, district and one another)
8. Training opportunities in how to request and understand data regarding mental health, student achievement and behavior/discipline
9. Training opportunities in understanding the delineation of roles and responsibilities (superintendent and board)
10. Communication strategy both with administration and public
11. More cohesive interaction within the board so that all are on point

Dr. Saraiya suggested asking new board members for feedback after they have their new board member orientation. He suggested the district needs more effective communication not necessarily more frequent.

The board decided to put the following goals on the October 27<sup>th</sup> agenda for approval:

Goal 1: Create a communications plan in collaboration with district leadership and within the Board of Education

Goal 2: Providing timely and effective feedback to Board members, especially new members, including roles and responsibilities

Goal 3: Training Board of Education members on diversity and inclusion

Ms. McLoughlin shared information with the Board and public regarding the starting of hybrid instruction on Monday, October 12<sup>th</sup>. The district is excited to welcome back our students on Monday. A small fraction of the parents didn't respond to the survey regarding virtual or hybrid learning, and we currently have about 50% students learning virtually and 50% of students will participate in hybrid learning.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. Richard Specht, Montgomery resident, stated that it was an exciting discussion, and he's looking forward to working with everyone. He stated that the school website is part of communication. We need to have technology to make sure that it's ADA compatible. His concern is content rather than how it's being created. He's also concerned about community members who don't receive the district emails. He looked on the website for reopening information, and didn't see it stated anywhere that we were reopening on Monday. How does the board see the process unfolding regarding the goals? Do you see the goals going to the committees and then to the stakeholders? Will the committees take responsibility for these?

Ms. Barbara Preston, Rocky Hill resident and Montgomery News editor, requested a photo and biography of Mr. Specht. As for 10/12/20 opening, how many students will be attending in person and how many will be virtual? How many teachers will need to have accommodations? Do you have enough substitute teachers? The website should be a priority, especially during COVID. People charge a lot of money and understand the ADA component, but there are platforms that can be purchased. The district's website person should report directly to a high-level person such as superintendent or assistant superintendent.

Mr. Specht stated that the district uses Blackboard, and it is a content management system. It is a known content management system. The content itself should be the higher priority.

Ms. Bursh stated that the board will send the goals to committees for wordsmithing and for providing objectives for each of these goals. When the committees are done reviewing, we will get approval from the majority of the Board to be able to send out to the rest of the stakeholders. The Board will be working on this and will figure out how to distribute this information to the rest of the stakeholders.

Ms. Bursh stated that Ms. McLoughlin answered that 50% are virtual and 50% are in person. All of our teachers are covered, and we can give you numbers tomorrow.

The numbers included all grades from pre-k through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Of 83% of our students, 2,224 responded and wanted virtual and 1,469 responded that they wanted hybrid learning. There was a total of 3,719 which responded out of 4,467. Therefore, 748 have not yet responded, and the schools called each of their parents of the people who didn't respond.

Ms. Miller questioned if more older students wanted hybrid? Ms. McLoughlin responded that 60% of older students requested virtual learning while 40% requested hybrid learning, and it is consistent across the board.

Ms. Schauer stated that Mr. Specht has been appointed by the board, but he's not a board member yet. We hope to swear him in at the October meeting.

Ms. Bursh told Mr. Specht that the Board is excited to have him join them and hope he can join them quickly.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE PRESIDENT**

Ms. McLoughlin stated that she is looking forward to having our students return on Monday.

Ms. Bursh announced that the New Jersey School Boards Association annual convention will be held at the end of October. She encouraged the Board to attend this virtual conference and to notify Ms. Schauer if they wanted to attend. It is a wonderful experience, and she suggested that new Board members attend. It is three days long, and there is a lot of information given in the workshops. It's all virtual and you can pick and choose which workshops to attend. Looking forward to students returning on October 12<sup>th</sup>. Thank you for the patience and board members for their concentration during this process.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Dr. Saraiya motioned to adjourn at 8:38 p.m. seconded by Ms. Rao. Upon call of the question, the motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
Alicia M. Schauer