

Our Mission is to prepare and support all students within a culture of excellence to do their best and to be their best, so that each can be a successful contributing citizen, able to adapt to change and to successfully respond to the future.

RSU 16

**Mechanic Falls * Minot * Poland
The 4th Regular School Board Meeting
for 2021 - 2022 was held**

Monday, November 8, 2021 @ 6:30 p.m.

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Minutes

Present: Mary Martin, Patrick Irish, Mike Downing, Jessica Smith, Laura Hemond, Joe Parent, Melanie Harvey, Christine Downs, Jennifer Tiner, Scott Tiner, Amber Lyman, Ed Rabasco, Steve Holbrook, Emily Rinchich, Alyssa Morrison.
Student representative: Anna Brettler.

Absent:

1.0 CALL TO ORDER: Mary Martin, Chair

Mary called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

Pledge of Allegiance & Mission Statement

Confirmation that remote attendees are able to hear all members. Explanation of chat features. Request for patience and understanding.

Welcome new board member, Alyssa Morrison from Mechanic Falls.

2.0 PUBLIC COMMENT: (15 minutes)

Mary Martin reviewed the public participation policy and guidelines, and reviewed the public participation pamphlet. The Educational Policy Subcommittee Chair, Ed Rabasco, reviewed the following public comment guidelines: The public comment period has been extended to 15 minutes total, instead of 10 minutes. Each speaker will have 3 minutes to speak. Mary Martin, as Board Chair, has the authority to call a recess if standards of the meeting are violated. There are expectations that comments and behavior will be civil and respectful. As an alternative, or in addition to this public comment period, Ed invited people to send emails, which allow more time for thoughtful consideration. He reminded everyone that Public Comment is not designed to be a question and answer time. The Board will listen to comments and reply at a later time.

Amy Hediger shared information about the timer operation, which is displayed on the projection screen, explaining the stoplight feature of green, yellow and red as time counts down.

Whitney King Buker (Minot) - shared concerns as a parent and individual about promoting the vaccine. She says we don't have to follow the SOP; it is a reference tool, a recommendation. She says masking protects children and is a way we don't have to do pooled testing and still allow children to go to school. She believes the way the SOP is written causes discrimination; that there are different rules for quarantining between pooled testing versus testing at the pediatrician. She feels that children of parents who don't want them to pool test are being discriminated against.

Elizabeth Martin (Minot) had 2 questions for the board. 1) What is the end goal for kids not to wear masks? 2) When was the decision to make volunteers have to be vaccinated?

Kate Fluette (McF)- speaking on behalf of her 2 daughters at ESS. Asks the Board to reconsider the policy in place for long-term quarantine or make an educational plan for students who have to quarantine longer than 10 days. Her daughter was quarantined for 30 days and experienced several issues with learning. Kate shared an article on the 10 leading causes of childhood and adolescent deaths and linked this to dangers of riding in buses and vehicles because chances of death are higher than COVID.

Mary Beth Taylor (Poland/selectboard) - wants to thank the Board for their patience and for following the science to keep our children safe. She thanked them for working with the towns for the budget referendum this year, making it easier for election officials.

Chuck Buker (Minot) - shared his experience over the last month with symptoms, PCP visits and testing for his 2 children. They have been close contacts, as well - one from busing. He says different rules for quarantining on buses don't make sense. He asks that the Board consider what makes sense when making decisions.

Robert (? McF) - was on the list to speak, but did not come forward when invited.

3.0 **RECOGNITIONS/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: (5 minutes)**

★ **Congratulations to** Optimist October Student of the Month - *Adalyn Martin, 6th grader at PCS*. Adalyn was selected for her demonstration of leadership, conduct and optimism.

Mary recognized the Whittier staff and students for efforts with the recent Tri-Town Family 5K. She read from the Whittier Wire newsletter where they thanked the volunteers and sponsors who made the event possible. Whittier is grateful for the kindness and generosity of the community. Mary read names of participants who placed in the race.

4.0 **AGENDA ADJUSTMENT:**

5.0 **PRESENTATIONS: (20 minutes)**

- PRHS trip to Japan, April 2023 - Kris Wright would like to launch this new EF Tours trip to Japan with lots of advance notice to students and families to allow them more time to manage the payment process. Detailed information, including the itinerary for this 9 day trip, was provided in the board packet.
- Adult Ed Information - Jenny Rose shared an overview of the Adult Education program, including location, process, staff roles. Administrative Assistant, Jeri Cook; Tutor, Terry Jensen; Career and College Advisor, Suzette Moulton; Sue Lasselle, Certified Teacher. There is currently a Business Skills Instructor vacancy, which they will be looking to fill, after upgrading 2012 hardware in the computer lab recently (shout-out to Linda and the IT team). The Adult Education program offers high school completion through diploma credits or HiSET completion. They also offer English language instruction, workforce credentials and career exploration services. Students can enroll anytime to work through individual learning plans. The mission is to ensure students have goals after graduation - and an understanding of next steps and support to accomplish them.

Questions:

Mary Martin asked if Jenny had any idea why numbers are higher this year. Jenny speculated that students seem to be more comfortable in returning this year and are accepting that this is the way things are for now.

Jen Tiner commented as an adult education colleague on how fortunate we are to have Jenny and the Adult Education team in our district.

6.0 **CONSENT AGENDA INTRODUCTION: (5 minutes)**

Approve 10-4-21 3rd Regular Meeting Minutes

Notification of Support Staff New Hires:

- Steve Easterling, Custodian - MCS
- Jonathan Mason, Bus Driver
- Mattingly Simaan, Coach, - JV Baseball
- Bill Flynn, Coach - Varsity Boys' Basketball

Notification of Retirement:

Notification of Resignations:

- Faith Hodgkiss, Education Technician III, Poland Community School

Sub Committees Minutes - October 2021

Motion by: Mike Downing to accept the consent agenda

Seconded by: Patrick Irish

Vote: Unanimous

7.0 ACCEPTANCE OF THE FINANCIAL SUMMARIES: (10 minutes)

Stacie updated food services numbers: In addition to the reimbursement for September of \$110,687.65, we also have \$109,548.00 more subsidy coming for October. Draft audit shows a loss to the program for FY21 of \$16,327.00 - the smallest loss in several years. The Auditor will be at next month's board meeting. Program is currently in the black \$71,033 as of 10/31.

Mary Martin asked about the large subsidy amounts. Stacie said subsidies have increased - and also meal participation has increased. She commended Ellen Dore and the food service staff who work hard to serve a large number of meals every day.

Motion by: by Steve Holbrook to accept the financial statement

Seconded by: Mike Downing

Vote: Unanimous

Approve the town supported school budget timeline as recommended by the Personnel & Finance subcommittee.

Ken Healey spoke about the public comment from the Poland Town Manager and a letter from the towns asking us to realign our FY'22-23 budget referendum timeline to coincide with each town's referendum and state election date on June 14, 2022. This was brought to the subcommittee for consideration. He said there are both pros and cons to this. He shared a draft response letter via email with board members earlier today. This letter consents to the change in timeline, while laying out the hardships to the RSU by doing so. It also asks for the towns' commitment in ensuring they will meet the legally required timeline for signing the Budget Validation Referendum paperwork.

Mary Martin reviewed the budget timeline for FY '23. She commented that we were not able to have a district budget meeting last year, but we hope to this year on 5/17/22. The overall budget process has already started with administrators. A budget committee (town and board representatives) will be established to prepare a budget proposal for board approval in April. Then district budget meetings and referendum.

Motion by: Mike Downing to approve the Budget schedule

Seconded: Steve Holbrook

Vote: Unanimous

Ken Healey asked if the board supports sending the aforementioned letter, or if there are any recommended changes. Jessica Smith explained why she felt it was important to respond to the towns with a formal letter from the Board. This letter consents to the change in timeline, which is really tight for us and asks for the towns' commitment in ensuring they will meet the timeline for signing the Referendum paperwork. This may require special meetings on their part.

Ed Rabasco asked for clarification - will this affect Town meetings?

Mary Martin said it mostly impacts the Board meetings.

Motion by: Mike Downing to approve sending the letter to the three towns.

Seconded by: Steve Holbrook

Vote: Unanimous

8.0 SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: (10 minutes)

The current enrollment of Regional School Unit 16 as of November 8, 2021 is:

Elm Street School (254 – up 1)

Minot Consolidated School (232 – down 2)

Poland Community School (431 – down 2)

Bruce M. Whittier Middle School (289 – down 2)

Poland Regional High School (496 – down 5)

Total Enrollment 1702 – down 10 from 10/04/21

RSU 16 has received a very generous gift of money \$47K from the Poland Parent Teacher Organization, to help enhance the playground at the Poland Community School.

Attended the MSMA Superintendent and School Board Annual Conference on October 28th and 29th. The conference was remote again this year. Many great presentations were available to attend. I focused on the legal and school operations-based presentations.

Met with Town Managers for breakfast on October 20th. Our next meeting is November 17th.

The Optimist Club met for the first time since 2020 on October 21st. We recognized the Student of the Month Adalyn Martin, 6th Grader, PCS. It was great to have this meeting as close to normal as possible even though it was a small group.

Questions?

Mary Martin thanked the PCS PTO on behalf of the Board.

Patrick Irish asked Ken if he had any idea why we are down 10 students. Is this normal for the middle of the year?

Ken Healey says movement at this time of year is somewhat typical. He expects we will stay around 1,700 for the remainder of the year.

9.0 ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: (10 minutes)

Highlights/'bucket fillers': visits to Aaron Gagnon's music class; working with the elementary leadership team to look at NWEA scores/academic diversity; working with Kindergarten students.

Federal Funds: Amy pointed out that receiving federal funds at a district level is very different from individuals receiving a stimulus payment. She explained the process of receiving federal funds: Planning, grant writing, grant submission, grant approval. Then we have to spend the funds the way we said we would spend them. It is also necessary that grant funds *supplement* or increase the level of services versus *supplanting*, which means to replace. Supplanting (putting the money to taxes, for example) is not an allowable use of federal funds; Grants are written to supplement the local budget.

ESSER funds: On the 'checking of boxes'. In the Esser III grant, there was a box for us to affirm that our return to instruction plan describes how we maintain the health and safety of CDC recommendations. Did we change to masking to check that box? No. Our 1st plan was mask-optional. We could check the box, because that plan described how we would maintain the health and safety of our students. Then we went to pre-k through 6 masking, which still checked the box. Now universal. Wherever we go with this in the next year and a half with these funds, we will still be able to check that box - because our plan does describe how we are going to maintain health and safety.

New district nurse, Dotty Foster Bagley, has been acclimating to offices, subbing when necessary, helping with pre-k screening, contact tracing. She had a face-to-face meeting with our District Medical Advisor, Dr. Eric Dombroski from Pediatric Associates in Lewiston. He firmly believes that it is best to follow the SOP in order to keep students in our schools and in-person learning. He expects that Pediatric Associates will be having some vaccine clinics. They are following the Maine Association of the Academy of Pediatrics and have updated symptoms for symptomatic students in their office, which aligns to what our nurses use. A sore throat is considered a high risk symptom in both places. Dr. Dombroski will be readily available for Dotty if she has questions.

Quarantine length - we want to make sure we are following the SOP. DOE came out with a priority notice recently which stated that "public health policies such as quarantine length are determined by public health authorities and are based on the latest science from the US CDC and prevention." In Maine the public health authority is the Maine CDC. SOP is required. Masking is a local decision.

RSU 16's Facebook page serves as a way for us to communicate with families. Moving forward, our FB page will become a one-way communication. This was one of the topics at Maine School Management that she, Ken and Mary attended. Commenting for posts will be turned off for every single post going forward for a couple of months or longer. Emojis will still be accessible.

Amy reviewed the flow chart for close contacts. She confirmed that cafeteria and busing are not covered by universal masking. Those rules are made by the CDC.

Summary information for close contacts: 10/23 - 11/5, there were 244 close contacts. 86 or 35% had to quarantine. Everyone else qualified for one of the exemptions. Families, staff, nursing offices, administrators are doing a great job of keeping our buildings open. Other schools are having issues with closures.

Questions -

Emily Rinchich asked if we have any evidence of transmission occurring in schools student-student this month? Amy Hediger said we do have some transmission in a highly specialized program with a small subset of students and teachers.

Emily Rinchich - There have been no children who have been quarantined who have tested positive as a result of close contact with a student at school - that we know of?

Amy Hediger said not to her knowledge; this is more often occurring among siblings.

10.0 NEW BUSINESS: (5 minutes)

Approve trip for PRHS students to Japan - April 2023, vacation week.

Motion by: Ed Rabasco to approve the trip

Seconded by: Joe Parent

Vote: Unanimous

11.0 OLD BUSINESS: (15 minutes)

Review Covid-19 Return to School Plan, beginning with recommendations from Amy and Ken. Amy shared chart/data on cases in Maine - Dr. Shah says we are at a high plateau, equivalent to last January/Feb. Currently in Androscoggin County, about 56 cases per day. RSU 16: 37 positive cases in October - second highest case number since April 2021. Schools are the only entity that are held to this level of reporting.

Cumulative data: so far this school year, there have been 75 students and 16 staff members in RSU 16 with COVID 19.

Ken reviewed vaccination rates. Similar to the last presentation, staff numbers have stayed fairly steady with slight improvements (89.83%).

In regard to students being fully vaccinated: Slight increase for both PRHS and WMS. 22.7% for overall district.

Pool testing counts - all schools climbed approximately 5-8% since October 3rd.

Amy shared that as of 10/25/21, 400 PRHS students have been vaccinated and/or are participating in pool testing. 95 are not vaccinated and are not pool testing.

Amy shared information about our planned 5-11 year old vaccination clinic on Saturday, November 20th and explained the benefits of holding these clinics with families. Second shot on December 11th.

Ken spoke about a proposal for volunteers. In response to questions about how it was decided, he explained that in the absence of policy, the Superintendent has the authority by policy to adopt something and then inform the board. He and Amy recommend that the volunteer guidelines be aligned with staff, which requires vaccination or participation in pool testing by January 4th. Amy said the proposal is that regular, consistent volunteers would need 1.) proof of full vaccination, 2.) to participate in weekly pooled testing at the school, or 3.) to provide a negative antigen or PCR negative test result done within 24 hours prior to the volunteer assignment. Home tests are not accepted.

Mary confirmed that Amy is not talking about volunteers who come in once or sporadically, but volunteers who are in on a regular basis. Jessica asked if there would be any cost for them to participate in pooled testing. Amy said no.

Motion by: Mike Downing to accept the recommendation to include volunteers in pool testing.

Seconded by: Emily Rinchich

Discussion: Jessica Smith clarified that we are currently requiring vaccinations, but this would add a negative pool test or antigen/pcr test as another option. Ken said specifically not the home test.

Alyssa Morrison asked if this is the fullpcr, or could it be a rapid test;

The answer was antigen/pcr.

Vote: Unanimous.

Emily Rinchich asked to make a motion.

Motion by: Emily Rinchich to amend the return to school plan to reflect 'recommended but not required masking' in all district schools effective December 8th, when 5-11 year olds will be able to be fully vaccinated.

Seconded by: Alyssa Morrison

Discussion: *Steve asked if that includes all grades. Yes.*

Mary Martin asked Amy to tell us what the current plan says on masking.

Amy Hediger states that it says 60 days after the vaccine is readily available. How do we define 'readily available'? We did not decide that. She suggested that January 3rd would meet the 60 days.

Mary Martin - 60 days would bring us to after Christmas break.

Emily Rinchich - 60 days was set as an arbitrary time frame at a time when we didn't have all of the information. She said it makes more sense to align with the actual vaccination timeline, rather than the 60 days.

Ed Rabasco - does current universal masking override the 60 day policy?

Ken Healey said no, that is still part of the plan.

Ed Rabasco wanted to clarify that under that current 60 day plan, elementary schools would go to voluntary masking around January 3rd, but all other schools would still be masking.

Amy Hediger said that is why we revisit it every month.

Ed Rabasco asked Ken for thoughts on why Lewiston Middle School is going remote.

Ken Healey says they were late to pooled testing, and they have a number of positive COVID cases in staff, and, therefore, not enough staff to have in-person learning.

Jessica Smith asked if Emily would consider amending her motion to change the date to after Christmas break knowing that a lot of families will be utilizing the school vaccination clinics.

Emily Rinchich would like to keep the motion as is, because the vaccine is widely available, kids are already getting it, and science shows there is a level of protection after the first shot.

Amy Hediger - the next board meetings are 12/13 and 1/10.

Steve Holbrook asked if masking is automatically nullified on January 3rd?

Mary Martin said the way we have it now, it would be just elementary, as Ed pointed out - because masks were optional for MS and HS at that time, but are now mandatory. But we will revisit this in December.

Ken Healey - Emily's proposal is that on December 8th everyone would be mask optional - not just elementary.

Steve Holbrook - But the way it is now back when we voted on it, it went to a certain date.

Amy Hediger and Mary Martin replied that the end date was for elementary, but there was no end date for MS and HS. We would be looking for another motion at the December meeting or today for that end time.

Ken Healey said determining 'readily available' is difficult. He and Amy would need to look at all the data, but January 3rd is the earliest they would like to see it.

Next meeting is December 13th.

Amy Hediger would like to be able to look at data on vaccinations and pool testing, and we don't have that with elementary school students yet. She would like to have better numbers for who is participating in one or the other, or both first.

Christine Downs feels it is a little premature to consider this. When we made the decision, it was before cases started rising in the community and State. Since October 22nd, there have been 10 cases at the HS and 4 at the MS. They have had access to vaccines for quite some time and are masked.

Emily Rinchich - Cases started rising there after we required masking - not sure we can make the correlation that masking is stopping the spread. There has been almost no transmission happening in the school - with times when kids are unmasked (playground, lunch, breaks). To continue to have restricted measures in place when there's no data to show we are accomplishing anything, we need to have an end date. We are just moving the goal post.

Ed Rabasco feels the opposite - it shows the policy is effective. We are ahead of it and we should stay ahead of it. He asked for confirmation that the administration is not recommending a change to the current policy.

Ken Healey - No, we've stayed with the original one. The earliest he would like to see anything happen would be the first week in January.

Joe Parent - beyond the vaccine being readily available, the actual number of students that partake is a big consideration. Setting a date based on availability doesn't make sense to him because students may not even get vaccinated.

Alyssa Morrison asked what we would do if the data doesn't change (vaccine numbers, pool testing). Would we keep moving the goal post further and mask longer? She agrees with Emily that it seems arbitrary. Parents have the vaccination choice now. It seems coercive to say we will continue to mask until you choose to pool test or vaccinate, even though you are opposed.

Mary Martin - we will continue to visit this, and if there is a point where we feel we can safely take the mask mandate away, we are all anxious to do that.

Alyssa Morrison said the point is, it doesn't seem terribly effective.

Amy Hediger asked to go back and think about cases at this time in 2020 when we had few cases and we were hybrid and masked. Data shows we are clearly at a high plateau and we need to start trending down. What would it look like if we weren't masking? Edward Little started with no masks, but has now gone to masking because cases were so high. She asks for data to show that not masking does work.

Emily Rinchich - In Florida, cases were astronomical at the start of school. There wasn't widespread masking, and their cases have plummeted precipitously. She thinks there is some data that mask mandates don't necessarily work.

**Vote: 3-12 (Amber, Mary, Jessica, Jen, Laura, Mike, Scott, Steve, Christine, Ed, Joe, Melanie, (Anna no) Patrick yes, Emily yes, Alyssa yes
= 208 for, 797 against. Motion does not carry.**

12.0 POLICIES: (10 minutes)

Approve 1st & Final Reading of below policies as presented by the Educational Policy Subcommittee at their October 25th meeting:

- JKAA Use of Physical Restraint & Seclusion
- JKAA-R Procedures on Physical Restraint & Seclusion

Amy explained that the changes are basically because some of the law has changed. Maine's new law broadens the definition, but narrows the circumstances in which you are able to use it. The bottom line is that school officials cannot physically prevent a student from being able to move. Includes physical escort assisting a student down the hall - a student must be able to feel they are voluntarily moving. Seclusion is also a key part - ie. if a student is in a room, they should feel like they can leave the room. Holly Day has shared this with the administrators, and staff undergo training every year.

Motion by: Steve Holbrook to accept both policies as written

Seconded by: Mike Downing

Vote: Unanimous

13.0 REPORTS TO THE SCHOOL BOARD:

Student Representative: **(5 minutes)**

Anna has submitted her application to Northeastern, early action, for Biochemistry. She attended an after school guidance help session. She shared some of the Senior celebration proposal topics that were submitted (due 10/29). Student-led conferences are this week. She commented on the 10th annual Whittier 5K: Jake Twig and Dominic Antonelli placed closely in 1st and 2nd - both are seniors at PRHS. She also wanted to bring our attention to Kyah Brown (16, Junior from Poland) who was crowned Miss Maine Teen USA 2021 this past June. November 23rd-30th, she will be competing for Miss Teen USA 2021 with a platform of Hunger in Maine, working with the Good Shepherd.

Melanie had a question about the vote above regarding Emily's motion. She wondered if we had to vote to keep the plan as is. She thought we had to vote every month to continue it.

Mary Martin said that we do not.

Report of the School Board Chair: **(5 minutes)**

- MSMA Fall Conference - When Mary chooses workshops, she tries to focus on content that addresses questions being asked by the Board. She commented that the challenges we face are not different from the challenges that others are sharing. She feels very good about where we are and how we function as a Board.
- Board Goals - we usually have them done by now. The Education Policy Subcommittee will look at goals and make some recommendations at the next meeting for the whole Board.
- Attendance - if there is anything in the board attendance chart that is incorrect, please let Lauren know.

14.0 ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION:

A Team Reports

Scott Tiner referred to the MCS report - wondering if there are safety concerns with the phone issues they are experiencing. Ken says it is not a safety concern at this point. It is not a 'modern' system, however, in comparison to others; we are looking into it to try to resolve it as quickly as we can.

Mary noted feedback about positive comments about conferences and high attendance overall. Connections are being made with families.

PRHS - vaping. Mary commented that this is obviously a widespread issue based on awareness campaigns she has been seeing. She asked Cari about steps she is taking, and whether or not she has the resources she needs to take those steps. Cari replied that a few years ago in response to an uptick in vaping, they reached out to Healthy Androscoggin who was able to provide some resources. This year they have reached out again, but there is less staff and funding available. They were able to provide materials and resources for leadership teams to review and develop, however. They also have a Drug and Alcohol counselor. Most referrals being made this year so far are concerning this issue. Very concerning, but they are hoping to do something schoolwide before Christmas.

Special Education: Mary commented on the report that 18% of our student population is identified. Is this close to the state overall average? Holly replied yes. Most schools are up in the 17-18% range for identification. We would like to see 15% here. Mary asked about the 22 students out-of-district - how does it compare to previous years. Holly said Special Education will be up next month to present and will look more closely at this piece. Down about 8 students from years past. Significant changes at the HS level, with a strong team there. Middle school numbers are dropping. Will be looking next at the elementary level to bring those students back.

Mary asked for more information on the PCS report and an ongoing need for a second counselor. Amy said the National model calls for a ratio of 1:250 counselor:students. Looking at school needs, they agreed it was a wise choice to use ESSER 3 funds for a second counselor. The grant will cover this year and next year, but the Board will see it as a request for FY '24's budget, as it is a top priority for PCS.

15.0 COMMUNICATIONS:

16.0 HANDOUTS: LRP Publications - October & November 2021

17.0 EXECUTIVE SESSION:

18.0 REMINDERS:

19.0 ADJOURNMENT:

Motion by: Steve Holbrook to adjourn at 8:34 p.m.

Seconded by: Mike Downing

Vote: Unanimous

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth devildog Healey