

Minutes for the Meet and Discuss Meeting of the Ambridge Area School District held in the High School Auditorium on Wednesday, March 8, 2023.

I. Call to Order: Mrs. Romasco called the meeting to order at approximately 7:10 p.m.

The Meet and Discuss Board Meeting of the Ambridge Area School District is held on Wednesday, March 8, 2023. This meeting is being held to review the agenda for the regular monthly Board Meeting that will be held on Wednesday, March 15, 2023, at 7:00 P.M. in the High School Auditorium.

II. Flag salute-please rise: Mrs. Romasco asked all present to rise for the flag salute.

III. Notice: Mrs. Romasco read the following statement: This meeting is being recorded for District purposes. It is or may be published in part or in its entirety on the District’s website without the express permission of meeting participants.

IV. Roll Call

- Mrs. Kelly Romasco, President
- Miss Amy Fitsko, Vice President
- Mr. Matthew Zatchey, Treasurer
- Mr. John Carpenter
- Mr. Thomas Cephas
- Mrs. Cathy Fischer
- Mr. Robert Keber
- Mrs. Mary Jo Kehoe
- Mrs. Kelly Smith

Others Present

- Dr. Joseph W. Pasquerilla, Superintendent
- Mr. Barry J. King, Assistant to the Superintendent
- Ms. Megan Turnbull, Solicitor
- Mrs. June Mueller, Board Secretary

V. Sunshine Law

Mrs. Mueller read the following statement:

The Board of School Directors held Executive Session(s) on Wednesday, March 8th to discuss:

- Personnel matter(s)
- Information, strategy, and/or negotiation session relating to the negotiation of a collective bargaining agreement
- Matters subject to attorney-client privilege and other confidentiality laws

VI. Correspondence

No Correspondence

VII. Amendments to the Agenda/Approval of the Agenda

Mrs. Smith moved to accept the agenda, seconded by Miss Fitsko. All in favor.

VIII. Recognition/Presentation

Product Presentation by Nosy**Refinancing update by John McShane, Boenning & Scattergood****IX. Public Comment (Regarding Agenda Items Only)**

At this time, DISTRICT RESIDENTS may come forward to comment on agenda items only. Each person must state their first and last name and address prior to speaking. Each resident will be allowed three minutes and can speak only once. This period for public comment prior to the standing committee reports will be limited to one-half hour. Although not required, board members desiring to address questions or concerns may do so after the residents' comments/questions or at the conclusion of the committee reports. There will still be an opportunity for residents to comment on any business relevant to the Ambridge Area School District under Old and New Business at the end of the meeting.

Jamie

- Concerns with lack of transparency with notifying the parents of an incident that took place at the middle school.
- Asked what was the plan to keep our students and staff safe?
- Concerns with a blast that came out stating there was a gun found in a car in the high school parking lot.
- Asked if there was counseling offered to the staff members that witnessed the middle school teacher being hit by a student?
- Addressed the Board regarding showing up late to Board meetings.
 - Ms. Turnbull stated that at this time comments are to be on agenda items only and that there will be time for general comments at the end of the meeting.

X. LEGISLATIVE ACTION FOR THIS MEETING**Education and Technology**

Mrs. Smith and Mr. Zatchey

1. Settlement Offer for Government Entity Claims against JUUL Labs, Inc.

It is recommended to approve the settlement in the class action lawsuit against JUUL Labs, Inc. as presented and to authorize the execution of all necessary documents relating to the same.

2. Student Discipline 2022-2023-15

It is recommended to ratify the discipline agreement for student #6785346363 relevant to a Middle School student, effective March 3, 2023.

3. Student Discipline 2022-2023-16

It is recommended to adopt the recommended discipline for student #8505853997 pursuant to a private disciplinary hearing held on March 8, 2023.

Mrs. Smith moved to accept items 1-3, seconded by Miss Fitsko. The vote in favor was unanimous.

Personnel and Salary Schedule and Labor Relations Mr. Cephas and Mrs. Smith

***ALL NEW HIRES, PENDING RECEIPT OF SATISFACTORY AND CURRENT CLEARANCES, SATISFACTORY DRUG SCREENING, TB TESTING, RESPONSES BY CURRENT/FORMER EMPLOYERS TO ACT 168 SCREENING, AND PDE CERTIFICATIONS IF APPLICABLE.**

1. Resignation

It is recommended to approve the resignation of Ben Fiore from his position of Boys Varsity Soccer Coach, effective February 20, 2023, with regret.

Mr. Cephas moved to approve item 1, seconded by Mr. Zatchey. The vote in favor was unanimous.

XI. COMMITTEE REPORTS (NON-VOTING AGENDA ITEMS)

Education and Technology

Mrs. Smith and Mr. Zatchey

1. Category 2 E-Rate Funding

It is recommended to approve (using Category 2 E-Rate funding) the purchase of Wireless Access Points for State Street Elementary School and Ambridge Area Middle School. The total cost of the project is \$50,866.00. Pending Universal Service Administrative Company Schools and Library Divisions (USAC SLD) approval, the E-Rate program will pay approximately 80% (\$40,692.80) of the total cost. The Ambridge Area School District will pay approximately 20% (\$10,173.20) of the total cost.

2. Food Service Orientation

It is recommended Leigh Anne Holman attend the Orientation Part 2 to School Food Service Operations in Harrisburg, PA from May 3 through May 4th, 2023. All expenses (registration, fees, travel, lodging, meals) will be paid as per Board Policy 531, Job Related Expenses. The total cost for will be approximately \$659.58.

3. Adventures in Education Club Field Trip

It is recommended that Larry Knopsnyder, an American Cultures Teacher at the High School, be authorized to take 10th-grade students in the Adventures in Education Club to St. Augustine, Florida from November 6-9, 2023. There will be no cost to the District, with the exception of the cost for the substitute teacher. Parents or guardians will be required to sign permission and release forms. Chaperones will be required to have current clearances and TB testing.

4. Geneva College Agreement

It is recommended to approve an agreement between Geneva College Department of Communication Disorders and the Ambridge Area School District for the purpose of a Geneva College student's field and clinical experiences for the fall of 2023.

Finance and Budget and Building and Grounds

Mr. Carpenter and Mr. Keber

1. School District Monthly Bills and Salaries

It is recommended that the monthly school district bills in the amount of \$1,284,421.19 and the monthly school district personnel salaries in the amount of \$1,933,004.69 be paid.

2. Cafeteria Monthly Bills and Salaries

It is recommended that the monthly cafeteria bills in the amount of \$55,989.08 and the monthly cafeteria personnel salaries in the amount of \$137,777.01 be paid.

3. Budget Transfers

It is recommended to approve budget transfers for March 2023.

4. Proposed 2023-2024 Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit Budget

It is recommended the 2023-2024 Beaver Valley Intermediate unit General Operating Budget in the amount of \$1,608,913.00 be approved. It is further recommended the Board President and Secretary be authorized to execute the DECO-779 Resolution form concerning the BVIU budget.

5. Gifts in Kind

It is recommended to accept the donation of \$1,000.00 from Mentoring Partnership in honor of Zappula Lewis's selection as a member of the Inaugural Steelers All-Peer Team! The donor has received no goods or services in return for this gift.

6. Gifts in Kind

It is recommended to accept the donation of a Gaga Pit for Economy Elementary Playground from the Economy Elementary PTA. The donor has received no goods or services in return for this gift.

Athletics and Public Relations

Mr. Zatchey and Miss Fitsko

Steering and Rules and Legislative

Mrs. Kehoe and Mrs. Fischer

1. Policy 204 – Attendance –Third Reading

It is recommended, as a third reading to update School Board Policy 204 – *Attendance* to require the attendance of all students during the days and hours that the school is in session, except that temporary student absences may be excused by authorized district staff in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, Board policy and administrative regulations.

XII. President’s Address

Nothing to report.

XIII. Superintendent’s Report

Congratulations to the student in the musical, it was an outstanding performance.

I am looking forward to all the spring concerts and spring sports.

XIV. Solicitor’s Report

Nothing to report.

XV. Old and New Business

It is now time for old and new business. Any DISTRICT RESIDENT who desires to comment on any business relevant to the Ambridge Area School District should now come forward. Each person must state their first and last name and address prior to speaking. Each person will be allowed three minutes and can speak only once. This period for public comment prior to the standing committee reports will be limited to one-half hour.

Eric Couch, Freedom

- Upset because he learned of the teacher being assaulted at the middle school by his son.
- Feels there needs to be more done by the School Board and the district itself to stop the violence in the schools. We owe that to our kids.
- He fears for his son to go to school.

Shaun Duguay, Ambridge

- Is concerned that this is the first he is hearing of a teacher at the MS being assaulted.
- Concerns with Senior Project this year and the kids not having a teacher to guide and help them through their senior projects.
- Feels vaping in the schools has become a major problem and asks the school to look into getting the monitors that are placed in school bathrooms to detect vaping.
- Suggested using monies for the JUUL settlement to purchase these monitors.
- Concerns with fights happening in the Senior Lounge.
- Feels the staff is not being held accountable.

- Mrs. Romasco spoke with Dr. Zupsic and Dr. Zupsic assured the Board that Senior Projects are being covered.
- Dr. Pasquerilla will speak with Dr. Zupsic to make sure this is being taken care of and that correspondence will be sent to parents.
- Ms. Turnbull stated that the communication sent by the district regarding the incident at the middle school was all that the district could share due to legal constraints being this is a personnel issue and the district could not share names due to privacy issues. This is a matter of public safety. The district did its' best with the communication that was sent.

Jennifer Miketa, Ambridge

- Feels she should not have to worry about her son once she drops him off at school.
 - Feels rules should be in place across the board for all students.
 - Stated that people are leaving the district because of school safety.
 - Asked the board to do what was right for every student.
- Mrs. Romasco stated that the current Board has spent a lot of time reviewing school safety policies and procedures and they have put a lot of safety measures in place. The Board takes the community's concerns seriously and wants to make the district a safe place.
 - Mr. Carpenter stated that the Board has worked to put SROs in place.
 - Mr. Carpenter also has his kid in middle school too and does understand the parents' concerns and wants them to know they the concerns do not fall on deaf ears.

Cindy Wargo, Baden

- Could parents know more information without giving students names?
 - Feels the student involved in the MS issue should be expelled.
 - Feels cell phones should be locked up during the school day.
 - Cell phones are part of the problem.
 - Why isn't the dress code enforced.
 - Wanted to know why there can't be an open discussion on discipline issues during the board meeting.
- Mr. Cephas stated that by law the district has to provide free education to all students in the public school district. That is the law. Kids need to be educated.
 - Mr. Cephas stated that the discipline issued follows the handbook.
 - Ms. Turnbull stated that students who are expelled due to discipline issues are sent to alternative placements for their education.
 - Ms. Turnbull also stated that there are also guidelines and laws in place when it comes to special education student discipline.
 - Mr. Cephas said we are not the only district facing discipline issues, when you turn on the news you see a lot of districts faced with the same discipline issues.
 - Mr. Cephas feels we as a community and parents must come together and build a bridge to fill the gap and to teach the students right from wrong. Parents must do their parts at home.
 - Mrs. Romasco stated that the Board meeting forum is not an open discussion as would be a town hall meeting, there are times for public comments but the Board does take the concerns seriously and will take longer for comments.

Mathew Fitzgbbons, Freedom

- Feels there should be a partnership between the parents and the district.
- Frustrated with students who are repeat offenders and the disruption to other students.
- Could there be more done with these repeat offenders?
- Feels there should be additional resources so that the students that want to learn can learn.
 - Mrs. Romasco stated that the frustrating part is that the community doesn't get to know the discipline that was followed.
 - Ms. Turnbull stated that when you see a student discipline as a Board action, it is longer than just a 10-day suspension.
 - Ms. Turnbull also stated that the maximum expulsion is one calendar year and after that then the student must return to their public school.

Randy Dawson, Ambridge

- Feels the problem started on day one of converting the Junior High into a Middle School.
- Mr. Dawson stated his children attend the Junior High and there were no fights.
- Does not believe that the middle school building is not designed for the number of students.
- Concerns with Senior Project.
- He was told that Mrs. Bogati would be assisting the seniors with their Senior Project but that the students are not receiving guidance and communications.
 - Mrs. Fischer stated that she was on the committee when the district was looking to convert the Junior High into the Middle School
 - Mrs. Fischer 100% agreed with Mr. Dawson and felt that the middle school building did not have room for all the students and that Economy Elementary had more room for redistricting purposes.
 - Mr. Zatchey suggested offset bell schedules or looking at having separated wings.
 - Dr. Pasquerilla stated he does understand the frustrations but that the laws protect the rights of students and the district follows the appropriate laws in regards to student discipline.
 - Dr. Pasquerilla stated the district does have programs in place such as Positive Steps, School-Wide Counselor, Social Worker and SROs.
 - Dr. Pasquerilla also stated that everyone comes from different spots and views but that the Law is the Law and all students have the right to an education. I will try to continue to provide the best experience and provide as safe as possible environment for all students but we cannot change the law. As a parent, I see both sides. Within the resources we have we are holding folks accountable, including myself. Sorry to all if this is not the exact response you are looking for. I cannot guarantee there will not be another fight but we will try to do our best for all students.

Marcie Fedash, Ambridge

- Concerns with the Middle School and High School student behavior and safety
- A graduate, class of 99, and things have changed. Students were afraid of their principals and teachers, today that is lacking.
- Feels there should not be admin posting on social media with students.

Joe Musser, Harmony Twp.

- Appreciates that every kid needs an education but feels that if a kid assaults a teacher they should not be allowed to come back to the school, they should be in a placement not here.

Eric Couch, Freedom

- Concerns with cell phones in the classroom.

- Concerns with the pictures and videos students are circulating.
- Concerns with all of the student disciplines that he sees on the agenda – which leads him to wonder how many discipline issues are there that are less than the 10 days that the public will see on the agendas.
- The problems at the middle school need to be addressed by the Superintendent.

Savanah Fischer, Harmony Twp.

- Has her degree in Special Education.
- Has substitute at the Middle School.
- Feels that social media is the way kids communicate and is used as a positive way to communicate with the kids such as posting homework assignments, building a connection with the students, and also helping students build a report with an authoritarian. Ms. Fischer has an Instagram account that she uses to connect with her students.
- Suggested all educate themselves on the rules and regulations of discipline for special education students and the policies in place to protect these students.
- Some students do not have the support system that some do at home.

Regaen Kerr

- Stated that her daughter is being harassed at the middle school and her daughter stated that the only days in school that she feels safe are the days that Dr. Pasquerilla is acting as principal.

Carrie Jenkins-Akella, Baden

- Asked if these discipline incidents are tracked and if they are shared with the public.
- Asked if other school districts are having the same discipline issues.
 - Dr. Pasquerilla stated that the discipline occurrences are tracked and reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). We look at these occurrences at building levels and hold meetings with staff and counselors. I do not know if these issues are occurring in other districts.
 - Dr. Pasquerilla stated that there are committees that review safety, strategic plans, and goals. The district has a comprehensive and strategic plan in place. The Administration set goals, and action steps and conduct safety drills during professional development days with all staff. Each year the admin team reviews visions and goals and builds on that each year based on data given instruction. The district held an active shooter drill this school year for all staff. Our Health and Safety Plan is on the district website.

Eric, Baden

- Stated that at the beginning of the school year when the student handbook comes home with the policies and procedures, as a parent, he acknowledges and signs that form and teaches his kids right from wrong. The district should follow guidelines on dress code and cell phones.
- Needs to feel his kids are safe when they are at school.

Cindy Wargo, Baden

- Thanked the Board for letting the public have a conversation.

XVI. Motion to Adjourn

At approximately 9:20 p.m. Mrs. Smith moved to adjourn the meeting and back into Executive Session, seconded by Mrs. Fischer. All in favor.