

Tawas Area Schools
Regular Board of Education Meeting
December 14, 2020

The regular meeting of the Tawas Area Board of Education was called to order by President Ulman at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, December 14, 2020 through Google Meets or a teleconferencing method.

Roll Call:

Present: Edmonds, Freel, Bruning, O'Connor, Klenow, VanderVeen and Ulman
Absent: None
Tardy: None

Administrators Present: Klinger, Mochty, Suttle, Danek

Mrs. Ulman said there is one addition to tonight's agenda which will fall under Committee Reports, Personnel Committee update, and will be for an item regarding stipend/hazard pay.

POSITIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Mr. Klinger said Mrs. Danek and physical education/health teacher Brianna Griffiths will present tonight's positive highlight. Ms. Griffiths has taken on the lead role of the Building Healthy Communities committee this school year. Last year the committee received a grant for the staff well-being which they received the funds for in February. At the beginning of this school year they provided cups with each staff member's name on them and also provided staff with gift cards to use to promote their health and well-being. Each gift card is for a local business that might provide healthy food options, yoga, massages, hair and nail services, etc. Last week they learned of the new grant being awarded to provide quality teaching programs. Ms. Griffiths will be trained in EPEC, which is a P.E. curriculum (Exemplary Physical Education Curriculum) program for K-4th graders. She is excited to be trained in the curriculum and be able to put it in place with the students in the near future. Mr. Klinger thanked Mrs. Danek and Ms. Griffiths for the presentation and said he sees great benefits coming from the EPEC program as it has health, nutrition and physical activity pieces to promote the overall health for our students.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – INFORMATION AND PROPOSALS

Mrs. Ulman asked if there were any comments regarding the extended learning plan. There were no comments.

Mrs. Ulman asked if there were any public comments on agenda or non-agenda items. Mrs. Donna Klinger spoke regarding 4th grade class sizes. She indicated that this is the third year of high class numbers in 4th grade and they were told last year that a section would be added this year, but that didn't happen. She said she was on the school improvement team for the past 10 years and there has been a strategy in the plan for class size reduction which states class size should be reduced when class sizes reach 25:1. She also attended a conference last spring and the updated school improvement model stressed how important it is to teach the whole child, meaning they should be focusing on the child's emotional and educational needs. She feels smaller class sizes will enable teachers to focus on those goals and on building positive relationships with their students. She has seen her students try harder when they have those connections because they don't want to let her down. They were also more confident and successful. She feels that with the last three years of large class sizes she has been unable to build those relationships with her students and make the connections she needs to because there isn't time to spend with each of them. She said a section was added to 2nd grade 6 years ago part way through the year and it was a smooth transition. She is confident that if a section was added to 4th grade right now, the 4th grade teachers and Mrs.

Danek would do everything in their power to make it a smooth transition again. She also asked that the Board not wait next year to add a section if it's needed. Add the section before the school year starts instead of waiting to see what the class sizes will be. Mrs. Ulman thanked her for her comments.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Klenow, support by O'Connor to approve the minutes of November 9, 2020 as presented. There were no additions or corrections. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Freel, support by O'Connor to approve the special meeting minutes of December 7, 2020 as presented. There were no additions or corrections. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by O'Connor, support by Freel to approve the closed session minutes of December 7, 2020 as presented. There were no additions or corrections. Motion carried unanimously.

PAYMENT OF BILLS

Motion by VanderVeen to approve the monthly contractual and prepaid expenses for the general fund in the amount of \$755,744.88, and the lunch fund expenses in the amount of \$50,253.50. There were no sinking fund bills to be paid. He also moved to approve payment of presented bills for the general fund in the amount of \$32,121.86, as funds become available. There was no sinking fund or lunch fund bills to be paid. Motion supported by O'Connor. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

RECEIPT OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Klinger said he received a letter requesting an unpaid leave of absence from cook's helper, Corie del Rio. Ms. del Rio is requesting a twelve week leave, beginning December 1st, so she may assist her family in the loss of her mother, who passed away today following her battle with cancer. Motion by Klenow, support by Freel to grant Corie del Rio an unpaid leave of absence as discussed. Motion carried unanimously.

RECOMMENDATIONS & REPORTS FROM THE ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Klinger said we have been in the process of seeking an athletic director since Mr. Unke resigned from the position in September. At this time, Mr. Suttle is recommending that the board hire Mr. Charles Wren to fill the current athletic director vacancy. Mr. Wren received his Bachelor's degree from Spring Arbor College and earned his Masters' degree in educational leadership from Eastern Michigan University. He comes to us with coaching experience in multiple sports including softball, soccer, baseball, basketball, and football. He has also been officiating for the MHSAA for the past 42 years. He is a newly retired teacher and former administrator in multiple districts throughout Michigan with his most recent experience in West Branch. Mr. Klinger said it is the recommendation of administration to hire Mr. Charles Wren as the athletic director. Motion by Klenow, support by O'Connor to hire Mr. Charles Wren as the athletic director for Tawas Area Schools. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

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Committee Reports – Mr. Klinger said the curriculum committee met on November 23rd to discuss a presentation by Mr. Suttle and Mrs. Mochty regarding an idea about the school yearbook being incorporated into another class that would provide a cross curricular experience. The skills needed to create the yearbook could also be meshed into several current courses such as Creative Writing, Digital Photography, Multimedia, etc. Some of those skills could also lead to developing a digital newspaper, updating the TV screens in the building and updating the kiosks. Mrs. Klenow said

this could be an exciting class and would benefit the students that take it. Mrs. Ulman asked who is updating the kiosks currently since she believed the multimedia class had been discontinued. Mr. Klinger said Keith del Rio has been receiving a stipend to perform those updates. Mrs. O'Connor added this would be a good opportunity for the students to learn journalism skills in this class which could also provide job options for students down the road. Motion by Klenow, support by Freel to add a yearbook curriculum to an existing course allowing for a cross curricular experience while producing the yearbook. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Klinger said the personnel committee met on November 23rd to discuss three items including the sub bus driver shortage, possible proration of coaching salaries if seasons are reduced due to COVID related closures, and the 4th grade class sizes. The committee supported increasing the hourly wage paid to substitute bus drivers who are retired Tawas employees from \$13 per hour to \$15 per hour. It is very difficult to fill these substitute positions and our only sub right now is a retired Tawas employee. Motion by Klenow, support by Edmonds to raise the hourly rate of pay for retired Tawas bus driver employees from \$13 per hour to \$15 per hour when serving as substitute bus drivers. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Klinger said with the uncertainty of our sports seasons possibly being adjusted, reduced or even cancelled, the committee discussed how coaching salaries should be handled. The committee discussed and is recommending that the proration of coaching salaries reflect the percentage of the season the coach fulfills. So if a coach has completed 30% of their season, they would receive 30% of their coaching salary. Motion by O'Connor, support by Klenow to compensate coaches for the percentage of the season the coach fulfills if the season is shortened. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Klinger said the personnel committee also discussed the 4th grade class sizes and the challenges of trying to predict grade level numbers, the impact the current pandemic has had on the district's overall enrollment and how the district is supporting the 4th grade with 30 students per class. He said there are currently 30 students per class with 22-24 in person and 6-8 students attending remotely. There are two educational assistants providing a total of 280 minutes of daily support. There is also a middle school educational assistant that has been reallocated to provide more support and the adjusted schedule has added over fifty minutes of more planning time each day. Several factors were considered, including that the foundation allowance is still unknown, and using the staff that are currently in place to adjust assignments or move staff around between grade levels to offset some numbers. They discussed that if we were to adjust teaching assignments the change in schedules could cause more uncertainty, stress and anxiety. At the conclusion of the discussion the committee supported additional support that we already have in place for our 4th grade classes and didn't feel realigning schedules or hiring a new teacher was necessary. Mr. Klinger asked if any of the committee members would like to share any other information with the board from that meeting. Mrs. Freel said we have lost about 49 students this year and there is no guarantee those students will return to us, and if they don't, it will be a loss to the district of around \$380,000. She said she understands the teacher's angst, and she prefers smaller class sizes as well. She feels the sustainability of hiring a new teacher now is risky and unfair to a new teacher as we might end up in a layoff situation if we lose that \$380,000. She knows it's not an ideal situation but nothing about this year is. In addition, we are in the middle of a pandemic and consistency is a key to success for any child and putting them in a new classroom with a new teacher is not good for the students.

Mr. VanderVeen said he knows we are down 40-50 students across the district, but he asked Mrs. Danek what the class sizes are at Clara Bolen. She said there are four sections in each of the grades

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K-3, with 100 in kindergarten, 84 in 1st grade, 82 in 2nd grade, 83 in 3rd grade and three sections of 4th grade each at 30 for a total of 439 as of today. Mr. VanderVeen said they didn't have MSTEP scores this year to compare but the board did have classroom performance at Clara Bolen and the middle school to review and the tests this fall shows a big reduction in scores from last spring to this fall. COVID has played into all of that with a long summer break due to the pandemic and less effective remote education last spring. He knows there has been a debate over the number of students per class and what the magic cutoff number is to see a measurable increase in student performance. Based on his research a "large reduction" in class size is considered 7-8, which is what we would be seeing if we added another section to 4th grade. He said we have also been discussing the emotional well-being of the child, and mental support, and those things aren't as effective when you have the large class sizes. He said special ed students are now placed in general ed classrooms with support from the special ed teachers, but only about 30 minutes per day, which spreads the general ed teacher even thinner. From a financial standpoint, we are looking to be in the black this year, but each year should be treated separately, and we need to take into consideration the district vision to try and provide the best education that we can, especially while the students are in the lower grade levels. Mrs. O'Connor asked Mr. Klinger if we have aides in the 4th grade classrooms. Mr. Klinger said we have two educational assistants providing 280 minutes of daily support and a third educational assistant was added while the 5th -8th grade students were learning remotely. Now with the 5th-8th grade students returning to in-person instruction that assistant's schedule has been readjusted but they will still go to Clara Bolen one or two days a week for some additional support. Mrs. Bruning said she agrees with Mr. VanderVeen, especially with the fact that the students need all the emotional support they can get at this time. She doesn't feel the students would be affected by a change to their schedule and thinks the smaller class sizes would bring up test scores. Mrs. Ulman said she just took a data driven decisions course through MASB this weekend and they stressed that consistency is very important, especially now, for our students. She would be concerned if we hired a new teacher that we might not be able to keep them on in the fall. The committee discussed taking a teacher that has relatively small class sizes right now and moving them to help lower the 4th grade section numbers, but again, she feels that consistency for the student is very important. Financially, we do have the funds right now, but we have no idea what our foundation allowance will look like next year. At this point we are planning on a decrease in both student numbers and foundation allowance for next fall which makes adding a section at this time more unsettling. Mr. VanderVeen said there are strong feelings on both sides of this issue and he doesn't want to micromanage the superintendent or the committee but he doesn't feel the committee represents the board as a whole in this case. Mrs. Freel said she fears it is micromanaging because each board member might have something they are passionate about and go against a committee recommendation. She said she doesn't feel any board member should follow the superintendent's recommendation blindly, but they need to take the information and make the best decision. The superintendent is hired to guide the board with their professional knowledge. She is proud that she hasn't had to lay anyone off in her 9 ½ years on the board and she hopes that continues after she's gone. Mr. VanderVeen said he would like to be able to hire and add a new section at the semester rather than waiting any longer. Mr. VanderVeen made a motion to post and hire a fourth section of 4th grade. Support by Edmonds. Yes: Bruning, Klenow, Edmonds, VanderVeen. No: Freel, O'Connor and Ulman. Motion carried.

Mr. Klinger said the personnel committee met again on December 10th to review the Superintendent's evaluation results and allowed for discussion and clarification that might be needed on any of the categories within the evaluation and then schedule some meetings to follow up on comments within the evaluation. At that meeting, the committee asked Mr. Klinger if there was any stipend or COVID-19 hazard pay for employees of the district. Mr. Klinger told them

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that the State did provide for a teacher and support staff COVID-19 grant which was referred to as the hazard pay grant. Certified staff and non-certified staff could qualify for the grant. It was almost presented as if this would automatically be given to our staff but when it was rolled out it said that teachers and support staff had to qualify for reimbursement or a stipend. Teachers must meet three criteria to qualify for \$500, and support staff had to meet two criteria to qualify for \$250. Mr. Klinger told the committee that this grant did exclude certain employees in the district, including administrators, Central Office staff and supervisors. The committee then discussed providing some sort of a stipend for those individuals that weren't included in the COVID-19 grant. The committee discussed monetary values for those stipends and recommended \$1,500 for administrators and \$750 for the others. Mrs. Klenow asked if this would be a one-time payment. Mr. Klinger said yes. Mrs. Freel clarified that these certain employee groups were excluded from the grant and this was the committee's way of providing them a stipend as well. Mrs. Ulman said these individuals would also need to meet the State's criteria in order to qualify for the stipend. Mrs. O'Connor said the committee felt with all of the extra hours of work involved for these people they felt it was important to recognize them as well. Motion by Freel, support by O'Connor to add hazard pay for the groups that were mentioned in Mr. Klinger's presentation, that being the administrative staff, the Central Office staff and the heads of the departments. The criteria should be consistent with that of what the certified staff had to meet and the amounts should be consistent with Mr. Klinger's presentation to the board. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Klinger said the budget committee met on December 10th to review the general fund budget amendments. The information presented took conservative estimates from June and provided more actual amounts on pupil FTE, Categoricals, salaries, benefits, revenues and expenditures, that provide an updated picture of the district's financial position. The amendments will be presented under New Business later on the agenda. Mrs. Klenow thanked Mrs. McCoy and Mrs. Huitema for their work on the budget amendments.

Legislative Report – Mr. Klinger said the governor extended the Emergency Health Order through December 20th. This extension will allow for state health officials to review COVID-19 testing data coming from the Thanksgiving holiday. We expect to hear by the end of the week whether the order will be lifted after the 20th or if it will be extended. Also, House Bill 6207 has been introduced by legislators that would make further revisions to the Open Meetings Act and allow for a temporary extension of virtual meetings from December 31, 2020 to March 31, 2021.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Klinger said we need to pass a standard resolution every year prior to January 1st so that we may collect taxes during the summer months. This provides funds so we don't need to borrow money to meet our expenses. Motion by O'Connor, support by Klenow to adopt the Annual Summer Tax Resolution as presented. A roll call vote was taken and the resolution was adopted unanimously.

Mr. Klinger said we are required to revisit and reconfirm our Extended Learning plan each month. It discusses how instruction is being delivered for our K-12 students, that we are providing a free and appropriate education for our special needs students, and provides the weekly two-way communication rates. Mr. Klinger reviewed the December plan. We are currently offering face to face and remote learning opportunities at Clara Bolen. The middle school and high school moved to a remote learning phase beginning November 13th following a building outbreak of COVID cases and the community wide spread. Middle school students returned to both face to face and remote learning options today, and high school students continue to be in a remote

learning phase through this week. Mr. Klinger said we continue to offer extra supports for our special needs students and can allow them to come to the building if needed for that support. Mr. Klinger said the percentage review of weekly 2-way interactions shows a low of 98.2% to a high of 100% over the four-week period. These numbers reflect all students, both face to face and virtual learners. Motion by O'Connor, support by Bruning to approve the extended COVID-19 learning plan reconfirmation update as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Klinger said a conservative budget was adopted in June for the 2020-2021 school year and is being amended tonight. At that time, we assumed FTE of 1198 and a \$7,311 foundation grant. Since then our FTE "Superblend" was calculated at 1199.19, even though we have had a loss of students, and the foundation allowance was restored to the prior year of \$8,111. New categorical calculations and federal GEERS, CARES and COVID relief funds have increased our revenue estimates by approximately \$1.4 million. Any other categorical changes will be reflected in our June amendment. Expenses have also been updated to reflect current contracts, replacing estimates with actual numbers, and several additional expense lines have been updated due to the receipt of federal funds along with any other changes known at this time. The amendment shows an overall decrease in deficit spending from (\$-1,267,415) to a budget surplus of \$424,286 prediction. Although this gives a better picture of the 2020-21 budget, there are still many items that remain estimates and a final amendment will be presented in June. Mrs. McCoy added that we have received one-time funds this year and we have no idea how that will roll into next year. It is very unusual to see such a dramatic swing in our budget at this time of year.

Motion by O'Connor, support by Bruning to adopt the resolution to amend the 2020-21 general fund budget as presented. A roll call vote was taken and the resolution was adopted unanimously. Mrs. O'Connor thanked Mrs. McCoy and Mrs. Huitema for their hard work on the budget amendments.

Mr. Klinger said the personnel committee met on December 10th to go over the results of the superintendent's evaluation. Mrs. O'Connor spoke on behalf of the personnel committee and said Mr. Klinger received an overall evaluation rating of 84.1% which falls in the "effective" range. She said it has been a trying year for a lot of reasons. Mr. Klinger has spoken with each board member to get feedback in any area they felt he needed to improve on. She believes the board plans to conduct the superintendent evaluation in December each year moving forward and when the evaluation is complete it is customary to extend the superintendent's contract for another year. Mrs. O'Connor made a motion to accept Mr. Klinger's evaluation as presented, and extend his contract for an additional year. Support to the motion by Klenow. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously. Mr. VanderVeen said he doesn't want anyone to feel like this was a gloom and doom evaluation score. He said the board rates the superintendent on a 1 to 4 range with 1 being minimally effective and a 4 being highly effective. If Mr. Klinger had received all "3" ratings, he would have received a score of 75% but he received an 84.1% which puts him in the mid to high range of effective, which he feels reflects that he is doing a good job. He wants to be sure that is the message they are sending. He also said there is board policy that says the board members are supposed to assess themselves and he thinks maybe the board should begin to do that. Mrs. Freel added that Mr. Klinger did a nice job this year and she rated him high. She feels that with all of the challenges thrown at him this year, especially with COVID-19, he was forced to handle things that a 20-year or 30-year superintendent wouldn't know what to do with and he has managed those challenges very effectively. Regarding board self-assessment, the personnel committee discussed a tool that MASB has available for boards to assess themselves, and then MASB comes in and gives suggestions where the board can improve. She would recommend the board do that and feels it could help create a more cohesive board. Mrs. O'Connor

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said she didn't realize she relayed a "gloom and doom" rating and said in fact she had given Mr. Klinger a 91.3% rating. She felt Mr. Klinger did a great job this year.

Mr. Klinger said as part of the continued MiCIP process building administration and the MiCIP team have taken feedback from the staff and taken the next step after creating the district vision statement. They have now proposed updated building mission statements to help support the overall district vision statement. Following are the proposed building mission statements: "Clara Bolen Elementary will provide a safe, nurturing and supportive learning environment for all students by fostering positive relationships and meeting the needs of each individual learner, while instilling a love of learning to ensure lasting accomplishments and self-worth." "Tawas Area Middle School will provide a safe, inspiring, and rigorous learning environment by creating positive relationships and encouraging respectful and responsible behaviors for each student." "Tawas Area High School will provide a safe, supportive, and rigorous learning environment that affords all students educational opportunities that help to produce functioning members of society." Motion by Klenow, support by Bruning to approve the building mission statements as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

INFORMATION & PROPOSALS

Administration – Mrs. Danek said the midyear benchmark assessments were conducted earlier this year to meet deadlines with the Extended Learning Plan. They started assessments this week and will complete testing the first week of January so they can report those results at the January meeting. The elementary PTO met virtually to discuss the success of their fundraisers over the last few years and voted to spend some of the funds to purchase and install two water bottle filling stations. They would also like to show staff appreciation throughout the year and provide two grade level field trips each year, as soon as we are able to travel again. Mrs. Mochty said they are missing the students in the building and she sent prayers to the del Rio family in the loss of Brenda today. Mr. Suttle said NWEA testing has been ongoing for the past two weeks in the middle school. The coffee is going out to families from the fundraiser. He said it was great to have the students back in the middle school today after being gone since November 13th even though it was a challenging and tiring day. He also sent thoughts and prayers to the del Rio family. Mr. Klinger said today was a very challenging day with the loss of a staff member and events like these present hardships but he is so appreciative of the team that we have. He said during these tough times Tawas Area Schools stepped up again to do some amazing things. The relationships that we have built with different stakeholders allowed us to bring people in to provide some support systems for our staff and students and we will continue to provide that for the next several days. He said the administrative team has been strong and he asked that everyone continue to send thoughts and prayers to the del Rio family as they work through this loss. We have built partnerships with AuSable Valley Community Mental Health, local clergy and social workers and counselors from neighboring districts and outside agencies who have all stepped up to make themselves available to us for support. Mr. Klinger said tonight is Mrs. O'Connor and Mrs. Freel's last board meeting and he offered his sincere gratitude for their service, time commitment and dedication to the district for the past several years. They served with dedication, grace and seriousness and he is grateful for their leadership as stewards of the district. He said they will be missed. He also wished everyone happy holidays.

From the Board – Mrs. Edmonds thanked Ms. Griffiths for her grant work and said the health and wellness of our students is even more important now than ever. She thanked Mrs. Klinger for sharing her concerns tonight and said she felt like they are going in the right direction now with adding a section to 4th grade. She also sent thoughts and prayers to the del Rio family and to the staff as well on their loss of a co-worker. Mr. VanderVeen was happy to hear the Clara Bolen

PTO would be donating the water filling stations and are planning to provide more field trips for the children. He also sent condolences to the del Rio family and thanked Mrs. O'Connor and Mrs. Freel for their dedication and investment of many years of service to the district. Mrs. Bruning agreed with the prior comments and was happy to hear the PTO used feedback from parent surveys to help decide how to spend some of their funds. She welcomed Mr. Wren and thanked Mrs. O'Connor and Mrs. Freel for their service. She will miss their input and knowledge. She also offered her condolences to Ms. del Rio's family. Mrs. Klenow said she was approached by some parents in regards to their students attending IRESA tech programs. They complemented the IRESA teachers and said what a nice job they do with the students. She is excited about the yearbook class and is confident it will be successful. She sent her condolences to the del Rio family and said Brenda was loved by the students and she will be missed. She also thanked Mrs. Freel and Mrs. O'Connor for all the years they have served on the board and said they were appreciated. Mrs. Freel sent condolences to the del Rio family, friends and coworkers. She thanked the people of Tawas Area Schools who gave her the opportunity to serve the community. She said education is a lifelong journey and she has learned a lot while serving on the board and has grown as a person. She wished the school well and hopes the district continues down the path they have been on and continues to be the best in the area. Mrs. O'Connor extended her sympathies to the del Rio family and said Brenda was a beautiful lady, always there to help others. She will be remembered in many positive ways. She encouraged the newly elected board members, along with any current members to take advantage of the classes MASB has to offer. It is part of a board member's responsibility to learn their role and be good stewards. She said it has been an honor to serve on the board and she wished the district and the board countless continued years of educational growth. Mrs. Ulman said she took several MASB classes two weekends ago and she found them all to be very helpful for her continued growth. She wished Dana McGrew the best in his retirement as the superintendent of IRESA. She said she wants to continue to learn her job as a board member and desires to be the best she can be. She looks forward to the board setting goals for themselves. She also looks forward to the outcomes from the new PE curriculum. She thanked Mrs. Klinger for her input and appreciates different viewpoints. She welcomed Mr. Wren and is anxious to see the results of the NWEA testing. She offered her condolences and prayers to the del Rio family. She also thanked Mrs. Freel and Mrs. O'Connor for their vision, their history and their friendship over the years.

ADVANCE PLANNING

Mr. Klinger said the reorganization of the board will occur at the January board meeting. He said we may need to schedule a workshop or committee meeting to continue moving forward with some of the goal setting pieces discussed in and around his evaluation.

Motion by Freel, support by O'Connor to adjourn at 8:48 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.