

April 18 Milford Board of Education Meeting

The April regular meeting for the Milford Board of Education took place at Mulberry Elementary. Principal Gary Schulte welcomed the board and the large audience and introduced groups of students to demonstrate a variety of talents including: music, writing and art. The 2nd graders performed two songs. Students presented examples of their biography reports on people of historical significance. Other students presented examples of their book reports complete with posters and students showcased their artwork.

Gifted Services

Coordinator of Gifted Services, Deborah Glynn, presented a PowerPoint reviewing goals and recommendations from the Committee on Gifted Education.

She explained the state mandates for testing students. Schools are required to test, but they are not required to provide services. There are many students who qualify for gifted services and the committee believes that it is important to provide appropriate material to challenge these students. Currently, teachers offer differentiated instruction when possible to meet the needs of gifted students. The committee recommended a plan to begin a new service next school year and intends to recommend additional services in the future when the district can afford it. The recommendation for 08-09 is for a 6th grade Honors Reading and Math class. The plan calls for current teachers to offer the program to students who qualify. Teachers are participating in professional development now and plan to continue in the summer to qualify them to teach the class. The committee believes this is a logical place to offer an Honors class because the 6th grade students will transition to the 7th grade where Honors classes are available.

Deb Glynn also shared information with the board that the Junior High Summit team took 1st place, for the 4th year in a row, at the Ohio Summit competition. She will present information about that accomplishment at the May meeting.

Transportation

Tony Dunn, Principal for Meadowview Elementary presented information from the Transportation Committee. He is co-chair of the committee. He explained that the superintendent assigned the committee with the responsibility of looking for ways to provide safe, effective and cost efficient transportation for students.

The committee recommends to the board that the district continue to offer busing at the state minimum level, but with some changes in how the system works.

1. Move to a 3-tier system from the current 2-tier system:
Instead of buses picking up students in two separate waves, the buses would not pick up and drop off in 3 waves. This will save the district approximately \$700,000 through reduction of management costs, bus costs and driver costs. Other districts including Forest Hills, Loveland and Fairfield use this type of a system. In order to make this adjustment, the school start times would have to change. The recommendation included changing the start time for the high school and junior high to 7:15 (the current start time is 7:50am). The last wave of schools to get transportation would not start the day until 9:05 am.

2. The second recommendation was to change the current practice of providing transportation for all special education students in the preschool. The committee recommends that students should receive transportation only if it is required by the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).
3. The final recommendation was to examine each route for non-public schools to determine if it is impractical to transport to some schools and utilize the option of offering a payment to parents instead of providing a bus.

The overall goal is to provide transportation to all students, but with an efficient system utilizing all cost saving measures possible. The district currently has a budget of \$4.5 million for transportation next year with the state minimums in place. If the board accepts the recommended changes, the budget would reduce to \$3.8 million. The point was made that diesel costs are now up to \$4.26/gallon and the buses use diesel fuel only. The district does not receive any additional funds from the state regardless of the cost for fuel.

Fred Ross, Area I Coordinator with the Ohio Department of Education provided additional details related to state requirements for transportation for special education preschool students and the option for payment in lieu of getting a bus.

Board President Debbie Marques said she has received numerous emails from people asking that the board make a decision soon about transportation and school start times for next year. She asked Dr. Farrell if he was ready to make a recommendation. Dr. Farrell said that he would recommend a 3-tier system at state minimums for the 08-09 school year. Many parents took the opportunity to offer their desires, comments and suggestions on other considerations for transportation.

Seipelt Elementary

Many parents discussed options for Seipelt Elementary. With no air conditioning, they complained that the school is too hot for kids to be effective learners. They asked for improvement with air conditioning and they certainly requested that Seipelt be included with the first tier of buses so that they would finish school earlier in the day before it gets too hot in the classrooms.

Dr. Farrell said the district is exploring using air conditioners from the former Main Middle School to offer some relief. The board suggested maintenance staff would install some this spring to test them to see if they provide some relief this year. Dr. Farrell said his hope is that air conditioners would help to lower the classroom temperatures and humidity during a 6-8 week period at both the start and end of the school year. The board has to consider the cost involved of moving the air conditioners and installing them and paying for the utilities involved with running them. Some parents said the old a/c systems were not effective at Main and they were extremely loud. Board member George Lucas said appropriate electrical wiring is available in the building and that Seipelt rooms are smaller with lower ceilings than Main, so the systems should work to improve the comfort level.

High School/Junior High Start time

Other parents went to the podium to offer suggestions on switching the high school and junior high with some of the elementary schools so that high school students start later than younger students. They referenced studies that have been done that indicate a later start time for teenagers is better for them and younger children already are awake as early as 6am and ready to start their day.

The board asked the Director of Transportation Karen Hall and consultant Margie Wells if it was feasible to switch the upper grades with the elementary grades. They said administration did not ask them to run that scenario through the computer system so they did not. They will run tests of the routing to see if it is possible to use a 3-tier system and pick up high school/junior high students later in the morning. The one point that they made is that with elementary schools, the routes are more condensed to nearby neighborhoods. With the hs/jh, the buses have to cover all 49 square miles. It takes a longer period of time to complete those routes. The board also said that it wants to make a plan that will remain consistent from the start of the school year through the point in time when financial budgets will allow the district to restore busing to the full K-12 service and not just the state minimum. Since the district will begin the year with state minimum service, it does not want to change school start times mid year if a levy passes and the district can restore busing to the full K-12 service.

After much discussion, the board approved a motion to offer transportation with a 3-tier system with start times that will be determined. Transportation directors and the committee will review all options to see what works best for as many students as possible and what is the most cost efficient way to operate.

Substance Abuse Policy—Student Code of Conduct

Several parents requested an opportunity to present to the board information about the high school's Athletic Student Code of Conduct policy. Students and parents sign the contract accepting the rules and punishment for violating the zero tolerance policy for drug and alcohol use. Parents argued that the consequences in the current policy are different for violations in season vs. out of season and for those students participating in extracurricular activities other than sports. The parents were asking for the board to review the code of conduct because they say it is discriminatory, and the punishment for a first offense is too harsh.

Board member Gary Knepp said he believes the policy is flawed and should be reviewed. He said a student code of conduct should be equitably applied to all students and the punishment should be proportionate to the offense.

The board made a motion to have the Superintendent Athletic Advisory Committee review the policy, identify the flaws, put in safeguards and allow for an adjustment to the amount of punishment for each offense.

The board took a 5 minute recess.

Athletic Report

The meeting resumed with an Athletic report from Board Vice President George Lucas. He offered the following report on spring sports:

Baseball is 9-1 and 5-1 in FAVC league play...they are in 1st place in the Buckeye Division

Softball is 6-4 with a 3-5 record in the FAVC—they are in 4th place in the division

Boys Volleyball is 5-0 and has won all games of each match

Boys Track won the Buckeye Division league meet

Girls Track team currently has a couple of students ranked in league competition

Boys Tennis is 5-3 and 3-0 in the FAVC—tied for 1st in the Buckeye Division

Financial Report

Treasurer Randy Seymour asked for approval of budget reports and provided information about continuing meetings with the Ohio Board of Education and the Audit Team to continue to review the district's budget. The district requested an additional 30 days to complete its report to the state as a requirement of a school in Fiscal Caution. The report to the state will include planned budget cuts for the next two years.

Superintendent's Section

Dr. Farrell reviewed the 1st reading of some policy adjustments including public involvement at board meetings and summer school. The summer school policy now includes the option for non-public school students to register for summer school classes and for non-resident students to pay a higher fee.

Board member, Gary Knepp asked to expand the summer school offerings to offer not only remediation courses to help students catch up on credits, but an enrichment program to provide students with ways to get ahead in the summer. Class offerings would be supported by tuition fees of the students.

Board approved student handbooks for the schools and accepted a donation of mulch from Bzak Landscaping, Inc for the district to use at the schools.

Human Resources

Board approved retirements of people who have dedicated many years of service to the students and community of the Milford School District.

Retirees include:

Linda Bowles, teacher, McCormick Elem., Gloria Causey, teacher, Smith Elem., Judy Miller, teacher, McCormick Elem., Linda Wolverton, teacher, MHS, and Rose Wagner, bus driver.

The board approved resignations and approved a 2-year contract for Nancy House who will be an Assistant Principal at Milford HS next year.

Curriculum/Instruction/Assessment

Dr. Farrell and Dr. Kathy Frye provided information to the board about the planning that is underway to offer a summer program for 8th grade students who are at risk. The district is working with Great Oaks, the University of Cincinnati, Mt. Healthy City Schools and Deer Park Schools to provide a science-based summer program to help identified students enjoy a good learning experience. The program includes support from the Cincinnati Nature Center and funding for staff and expenses from Great Oaks and UC. Teachers currently are working on the curriculum to finalize plans for the students. Each district will select 15 students to take part in the program.

Achievement testing begins on Monday. Thousands of tests are in the elementary schools for administration. The results of the tests are included in the Ohio Local Report Card and determine the rating for the district and schools.

Items For Discussion:

1. Fiscal Caution—As of March 27, the Milford School District was declared a district in Fiscal Caution. The district is working on its recovery plan to get out of Fiscal Caution. The recovery plan includes another attempt at an operating levy and budget cuts for next school year.
2. Re-districting proposal for Seipelt Elementary. The district is reviewing attendance boundaries to determine if it is feasible to move students living in the Pebblebrook Apartment complex out of Seipelt and split them between Mulberry and McCormick elementaries. This will help to better balance the student populations in the schools. The district is considering offering an Open House at McCormick Elementary to give parents and students a chance to visit that school before the boundary change takes effect. The plan is to continue to review school boundaries and make adjustments when necessary.

Proposed Budget Cuts

Dr. Farrell presented information about the proposed cuts to the budget for next year. Cuts include personnel, programs and services. Board member Dave Yockey expressed his concerns that the district is eroding away all of the progress made in the classrooms. He asked if there is any way to make budget cuts in other areas to preserve the classrooms. Dr. Farrell said administration will continue to review budgets for additional savings. They will review possible plans to improve savings on utilities.

The district is working with high school teachers to try to determine a plan to offer more opportunities for intervention when students need it and not when they are too far behind. Dr. Farrell is working with teachers to develop plans that include guided study and writing labs to help students improve in areas in which they need help.

Dr. Farrell said the district is reviewing the effectiveness of the Success Academy. He said the program works very well, but now they are exploring a partnership with Great Oaks to offer additional enrichment opportunities for students to work on career building skills and not just credit recovery. In the afternoons some students go to community service projects or jobs. The plan is to bring in staff from Great Oaks to help those students with career skills. At the same time, Success Academy teachers could go the high school to help students with credit recovery. They could stay at the high school, but catch up with their classmates without having to enroll in the Success Academy program.

Communication Committee

President Debbie Marques said the Communication Committee is planning a Community Forum for Wednesday, May 21 from 6:30-8pm at the Miami Township Civic Center. The Committee is working on making improvements to communication efforts and is looking to establish an education foundation for the district.

Public Participation

Several people took the opportunity to speak to the board about a variety of issues in the district. Several of the speakers were teachers who shared the details of their daily schedule. They pack so many things into the course of their day and say it would not be beneficial for students to have teachers be responsible for 6 classes in a 7 period day. Most teachers with core subjects have 5 classes and a duty period and a planning period. The teachers say they cannot get everything done that they need to do now. If they add another class to their list of responsibilities, their teaching will suffer and the overall education for the students will suffer as well.

Teacher Randy Vaughn is the chair of the North Central Evaluation team. He said Milford High School is accredited again for this year after receiving a very positive review from qualified teaching professionals. He said the report provides high praise from educators who compliment the programs, staff and opportunities for students. Mr. Vaughn said it would be very difficult to achieve accreditation in the future if teachers are continually asked to do more with less.

Teacher Linda Wolverton is retiring this year and she says Milford Schools is so fortunate to have so many dedicated, talented and passionate teachers who want to do so much for their students. She said she continues to hear from graduates who let her know of their success after college and they thank her and other teachers for giving them such a strong foundation in education to help them prepare for college and a professional career after college.

A Seipelt parent says she is considering moving from the district because she doesn't believe her son is reaching his full potential. She said he is gifted, but the district cannot provide the services he needs. She fears she will have to send him to private or parochial school to get the services he needs.

Dr. Farrell said now is not the time to pack up and move out. He said, don't give up on Milford. This is the time that we must work together as a team to continue to provide an excellent education. Milford has excellent instructors and successful programs for students.

Teacher Shelly Graf spoke and invited the Central Office team and Board members to visit the classrooms so that they can see for themselves the typical day for a teacher. She offered to coordinate the program to encourage board members to sit in on a classroom for the day to understand all of the demands a teacher faces each day. Debbie Marques said she would like to have the opportunity to get that experience.

Debbie Marques asked for a motion to adjourn to executive session at approximately 11:30 p.m.