

**PORTAGE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS  
REGULAR MEETING  
DECEMBER 6, 2023**

The Regular Meeting of the Portage Area Board of School Directors was called to order. Members and others present were: Susan Berardinelli; Jason Corte; Matthew Decort; Kathy Hough; John Jubina; Jacob Myers; Nancy Sherbine; Brian Shope; Christian Smith; Pete Noel, Superintendent of Schools; Jeff Vasilko, Business Manager; Troy Eppley, Director of Special Education; Jeremy Burkett, Junior Senior High School Principal; Jennifer Pisarski, Elementary School Principal; Dennis McGlynn, Esquire and Denise Moschgat, Recording Secretary.

**RECOGNITION OF VISITORS**

Tammy Rodgers, elementary school art teacher, relayed to the board that the elementary art students would participate once again in SAMA art show held in Altoona. Students from Cambria, Bedford and Blair Counties will participate. Opening day is February 3, 2024 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Mrs. Hough asked where it was being held in Altoona and Mrs. Rodgers replied that it's on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, near the theater, across from the post office. Mrs. Rodgers mentioned that while it a little bit further to travel, hosting it at their museum in Altoona has the advantage of more hours.

**NOTICE TO PERSONNEL**

There may be reductions and/or reassignments of personnel due to fiscal circumstances.

**DISTRICT POLICIES**

Policy 306 Employment of Summer School Staff – Second Reading  
Policy 307 Student Teachers/Interns – Second Reading  
Policy 317.1 Educator Misconduct – Second Reading  
Policy 325 Dress and Grooming – Second Reading  
Policy 805.3 Use of Force – Second Reading

**INFORMATION ONLY**

1. Memorial Bench. Mr. Noel brought to the board's attention a letter from Mrs. Harrington stating her wish to put a bench in the elementary school playground in honor of Michele Coukart. She stated that it was Mrs. Coukart's wish to have a bench placed there and that she would work with others to do the fundraising to purchase the bench and she asked the district to maintain it. Mr. Noel noted that he will work with Mrs. Harrington to move forward.
2. Mustang Math Academy. Mr. Noel explained that the board will consider hiring professional staff for the academy. The administrators at taking a 'field of dreams' approach and hope as they build and promote the academy, more students will participate. He further explained to the board that the Mustang Math Academy will offer enrichment and enhancement to students in math through face-to-face and virtual instruction. The funds for this academy will come from ESSER money.

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3. Van Bids. Mr. Noel explained that no bids were submitted again for the vans. Mr. Vasilko stated that the district can now go out and buy vans since it tried twice for bids but did not receive any.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR PERSONNEL (6:42 p.m. – 7:17 p.m.)**

**ROUTINE MATTERS**

**NEXT REGULAR MEETING**

The Committee of the Whole Meeting will be held **January 10, 2024**, beginning at 6:30 p.m. in the elementary school auditorium, 84 Mountain Avenue, Portage, PA with the Regular Meeting immediately following.

**APPROVING THE MINUTES**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0

The Administration recommends approving the November meeting minutes. A copy of the minutes was distributed with the advance agenda.

**ADDITIONS, DELETIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0

The Board moves to approve the written agenda with any noted additions, deletions or corrections as discussed.

Routine Matters, Line Item 7, Single Audit, REMOVE as it will be approved in January  
Routine Matters, Line Item 14, Bids for Vans, REMOVE as the district received no bids  
Personnel Matters, Line Item 1, Supplemental Math Instructors, ADD Kaitlin Cawley  
Personnel Matters, Line Item 3, Letter of Resignation, ADD, due to retirement

**REPORTS**

Vo-Tech Operating Committee representative **Mr. Jason Corte** reported that on November 17, 2023 the vo tech hosted a Grand Galla to reveal the \$1 Million grant to upgrade equipment for several programs. The equipment will be top notch and the students are already utilizing it. Student tours are starting soon.

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Superintendent **Mr. Pete Noel** welcomed new board members saying that he looks forward to working with them. He offered to meet with them at their convenience. He also advised the board that Lydia Dobrowolsky-Casale highlighted the hard work the staff put in on the curriculum update at the state Curriculum and Instruction conference. He read to the board Mrs. Dobrowolsky-Casale's email complimenting the staff on their excellent and inspiring work. Mr. Noel thanked the board for approving the review and update to curriculum and thanked the staff for putting in the work. The district is currently exploring new Student Information Software systems by visiting other district's who use them. He will bring more information back to the board as he gets it. Our school police officer now has an Originating Agency Identifier number which means he can now file citations with the local magistrate. He thanked Denise for getting the application pushed through. The final designs are being completed by EADS for the stadium locker room project. He expects that this month the advertising for bids will go out and in January bids should start coming in. He checked with Kyle Fritz, the project manager, and he still feels that the August completion date will still be in place. He and other administrators and staff will participate in a Zoom meeting with Care Solis which would help facilitate mental health services for students. He noted that in rural areas sometimes having access to services is difficult and this company can offer alternative methods of therapy such as teletherapy through a nationwide network. This could also be a step towards an employee assistance program. Finally, Mr. Noel reported that on Saturday, December 16 staff will be on hand to distribute family Christmas packages to student household through the Mustang Family Christmas project. There are 75 boxes filled with personal care items, snacks, gloves and a small toy as well as a limited number of winter coats provided by the Women's Club and the Nights of Columbus. Mr. Noel thanked everyone who participated in making the holidays a little less stressful for families.

Director of Special Education **Mr. Troy Eppley** welcomed the new board members and is looking forward to working with them. The systemics supports grant through PATAAN is on the agenda tonight. This grant will benefit the autistic support and life skills support classes. The amount of the grant is approximately \$9,900 for materials, curriculum and training for the teachers and paraprofessionals in those classes. The consultant for Action Driving will be offering an online program for guide selection for accommodations/modifications. He will come back to talk with all staff members.

High School Principal **Mr. Jeremy Burkett** welcomed the new board members and invited them to stop in the high school at their convenience to see what's happening. He thanked Mr. Squillario for his service to the board saying he will be missed. He welcomed Erik Thrower as the supervisor of grounds and maintenance and noted he is a great addition to the staff. Students and staff participated in a Run, Hide Fight lock down drill which went well. The band will be participating in parades and the winter concert will be Sunday, December 10. Progress reports will be going out soon. Thank you to Mrs. Smith for coordinating and organizing all the Christmas decorating in the building. Winter sports are gearing up.

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Elementary School Principal **Mrs. Jennifer Pisarski** welcomed the new board members and invited them to visit the building at any time. She added that Mr. Squillario will be missed. Students and staff in the practiced an emergency drill where they reviewed their rally points outside the building. It was well received and Mr. Fatula will be back to practice actually going to the rally point once the weather is better. Parent-Teacher conferences were well attended. The students who wished to participated in a safe-touch presentation. The Santa Shop will be held this month as well as a blood drive. Santa is visiting with the ES students on December 19. The public winter concert will be Friday, December 15 at 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Students and staff will participate in the 10 Days of Christmas by dressing in different themes. The school-wide positive behavior trainings through the IU are going very well.

School Solicitor **Dennis McGlynn, Esquire** briefly explained his job as the district's solicitor noting that he has been in this position for 28 years. He explained that most of the items he discusses with the board will happen in executive session and during the regular meeting he will report that during the regular meeting. He also explained the purpose of the Sine Die meeting which means "without setting another date" and how the reorganization meeting was run and how monthly committee of the whole and regular meetings are conducted.

Business Administrator **Mr. Jeff Vasilko** introduced himself to the new board members and thanks Mr. Squillario for serving adding that there will be no more phone calls from him! He advised that the auditors will be at the January meeting to discuss the audit and that there are no problems but that because of ESSER money, there were some additional things that needed done. The elementary school sound system upgrade is on the agenda for board consideration and a loaner is in place now until we can get a new system in. It will be paid for through the CoStars program. The 2024-2025 budget process starts now. This is a tax increase year. The district is on an every other year increase schedule which helps with the Basic Education Funding as the state wants to see that districts are received adequate local contribution. Also on the agenda is the Act 1 Budget Opt Out Resolution stating that the district will not raise taxes above the index. And so far, the district has incurred about \$163,000 in expenses in the stadium rehabilitation and locker room project.

**REPORTS: A. FINANCIAL, B. INVOICES (GENERAL FUND, CAFETERIA FUND AND ATHLETIC FUND), C. TAX COLLECTORS**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0  
(Roll Call Vote)

**A. Treasurers' Reports**

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| A. General Fund                              | Page 2 |
| B. Cafeteria Report                          | Page 3 |
| D. Elementary School Activity Fund           | Page 5 |
| E. Junior / Senior High School Activity Fund | Page 6 |

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|--|-----------|
| H. Athletics                             | Page 9    |
| I. General Fund                          | Page 10   |
| J. Capital Reserve Fund                  | Page 10.1 |
| K. Capital Projects Fund                 | Page 10.2 |
| L. Investments/Pledged Collateral Report | Page 11   |

|                                       |                       |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>B.</b>                             |                       |
| <b>General Fund Invoices</b>          | <b>\$1,479,419.52</b> |
| <b>Cafeteria Fund Invoices</b>        | <b>\$78,752.84</b>    |
| <b>Capital Reserve Fund Invoices</b>  | <b>\$0.00</b>         |
| <b>Capital Projects Fund Invoices</b> | <b>\$15,460.66</b>    |
| <b>Total Invoices paid</b>            | <b>\$1,573,633.02</b> |

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>C.</b>  |                    |
| <b>Mrs. Molnar - Cassandra Boro –<br/>Property, Per Capita, Occupation</b> | <b>\$0.00</b>      |
| <b>Mr. Layo - Portage Boro –<br/>Property, Per Capita, Occupation</b>      | <b>\$36,641.51</b> |
| <b>Mrs. Molnar Portage Township –<br/>Property, Per Capita, Occupation</b> | <b>\$5,834.19</b>  |
| <b>Berkheimer Tax Administrators<br/>PASD – EIT (Current)</b>              | <b>\$42,752.84</b> |
| <b>Total Taxes</b>   | <b>\$85,228.54</b> |

**APPROVING ACCELERATED BUDGET OPT OUT RESOLUTION**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0  
(Roll Call Vote)

RESOLVED, that the Board of School Directors of Portage Area School District, makes the following unconditional certifications:

1. The school district's various tax levies and other revenue sources will be sufficient to balance the school district final budget for the next fiscal year (2024-2025) based on maintaining current tax rates or increasing tax rates by an amount less than or equal to the Act 1 index applicable to the school district as calculated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This conclusion is based on the school district preliminary budget or other information available to the School Board.
2. The applicable adjusted index for the next fiscal year is 8%, and the School Board will not for the next fiscal year increase the rate of its real estate tax, or any other tax for the support of public education, by an amount that exceeds the applicable index.

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3. The School Board has to date and, in the future, will comply with the rules set forth in School Code §687 for adoption of the school district proposed and final budgets for the next fiscal year.
4. The School Board understands that the school district will not be eligible to use Act 1 referendum exceptions for the next fiscal year.

**APPROVING UPGRADES TO THE ELEMENTARY AUDITORIUM SOUND SYSTEM**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0  
(Roll Call Vote)

The Administration recommends approving the Upgrade Package from Open Systems Pittsburgh in the amount of \$31,000 for upgrades to the sound system in the elementary school auditorium.

**APPROVING LETTER OF AGREEMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PLAN**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0

The Administration recommends approving the Subrecipient Letter of Agreement and the Technical Assistance Plan for Systemic Supports to disburse funds for training and supports in the learning support classrooms.

**APPROVING APPLICATION AND CERTIFICATE FOR PAYMENT**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0  
(Roll Call Vote)

The Administration recommends approving Application and Certificate for Payment number 1 in the amount of \$76,446.90 for the stadium bleacher rehabilitation project along with Allegheny Restoration Inc.'s statement in the amount of \$2,916 for permitting for the project.

**APPROVING CHANGE ORDER**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0  
(Roll Call Vote)

The Administration recommends approving Change Order #1 to change protective coatings for concrete surfaces at the football stadium for the bleacher rehabilitation project. This change order results in an increase of \$18,450 to the project.

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**APPROVING AGREEMENT FOR LEGAL SERVICES**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0  
(Roll Call Vote)

The Administration recommends approving the Legal Services Agreement with Dillon, McCandless, King, Coulter & Graham, LLP for the 2024 calendar year. This district would be billed at an hourly rate of \$170 and no monthly retainer will be required. *Mr. McGlynn commented that this is a reasonable rate.*

**APPROVING MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 8-0-1  
Voting Yes: Decort, Corte, Berardinelli, Jubina, Sherbine, Shope, Smith, Hough  
Abstaining: Myers

The Administration recommends approving the Memorandum of Agreement with the PAEA with revisions to Article XVI, Section B and Article XVII, Section B relating to New Employee Salary Schedule Placement and Unused Sick Leave respectively.

**APPROVING REQUEST TO HOST SNOWBALL DANCE**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0

The Cheer boosters request permission to advertise and promote the Snowball dance being held on Saturday, December 16, 2023 at the Royal Ballroom.

**ADOPTING DISTRICT POLICY**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0

The Administration recommends adopting Policy 624 Taxable Fringe Benefits.

**APPROVING STUDENT OBSERVER**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0

The Administration recommends approving Isak Kudlawiec as a student observer in Mr. Tyler Johnson's room beginning in January. Mr. Kudlawiec attends UPJ.

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**PERSONNEL MATTERS**

**HIRING SUPPLEMENTAL MATH INSTRUCTORS**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 8-0-1

Voting Yes: Decort, Corte, Berardinelli, Jubina, Sherbine, Shope, Smith, Hough

Abstaining: Myers

The Administration recommends hiring the following pool of individuals as supplemental math instructors for the Mustang Math Academy for the remainder of the 2023-2024 school year. The number of individuals needed will be dependent on student enrollment in the academy. Salary will be paid from ESSER funds.

Amy Burkett  
Tina Lutz  
Nicole Hunt

Ashley Myers  
Nicole Panick  
Kaitlyn Cawley

**HIRING ASSISTANT RIFLE COACH**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0  
(Roll Call Vote)

The Administration recommends hiring Sierra D. Crum as rifle assistant coach beginning with the 2023-2024 school year. Salary will be based on the current contract between the district and the PAEA for extra-curricular activities.

**ACCEPTING LETTER OF RESIGNATION**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0

The Administration recommends accepting, with regret, the resignation due to retirement of Annette Lutz as an elementary school teacher effective the last day of the 2023-2024 school year. Mrs. Lutz requests, per the terms of the contract, to be paid for any unused sick time. The administration requests permission to advertise for this position.

**ACCEPTING LETTER OF RESIGNATION**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0

The Administration recommends accepting, with regret, the resignation of Siarra Crum as the athletic director/athletic trainer effective December 29, 2023.

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**BOARD REQUESTS / USE OF FACILITIES**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0  
(Roll Call Vote)

Request for Approved Travel:

| <b>Requester</b>           | <b>Destination</b>                       | <b>Date(s)</b>    | <b>Approximate Cost</b>   | <b>Budgeted Y/N</b> |
|----------------------------|--|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Mary Kenny and Gayle Price | STEELS Network for new science standards | February 28, 2024 | \$210.00<br>(substitutes) | Yes                 |

Requests for Use of Facilities:

| <b>Requester</b>                  | <b>Purpose</b>       | <b>Facility</b>           | <b>Date(s)</b>  | <b>Rental Fee/ Amount</b> |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Braedon St Clair                  | Adult Basketball     | Len Chappell Gymnasium    | As can be arranged through the athletic office              | \$10/hour                 |
| Denise Moschgat, PAHS Theater     | Rehearsals/Show Week | High School Auditorium    | January 14-April 20<br>Tuesdays & Thursdays<br>5:30 to 7:30 | No Charge                 |
| Denise Moschgat, PAHS Theater     | Spring Production    | High School Auditorium    | TBD   | No Charge                 |
| Matthew Hill/Elementary Wrestling | Wresting Practice    | Elementary Wrestling Room | November 20, 2023<br>To March 30, 2024                      | No Charge                 |

**MOTION TO MAKE THE AGENDA PART OF THE MINUTES**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0

**MOTION SHOULD BE MADE TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**

Motion Decort Second Corte Vote 9-0

Time: 7:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew R. Decort, Board Secretary

Denise Moschgat, Recording Secretary