

Multnomah Education Service District 2021-22 Hearing Minutes

Tuesday, May 18, 2021

6:00 pm

11611 NE Ainsworth Circle

Portland, Oregon

Via Go to Meeting

Present:

TSCC: Chair David Barringer, Commissioner James Ofsink, Commissioner Mark Wubbold, Commissioner Margo Norton, Commissioner Harmony Quiroz, Executive Director Craig Gibons and Budget Analyst Tunie Betschart

Absent: None

Multnomah Education Service District:

MESD Board Members: Chair Kristin Cornuelle, Jessica Arzate, Susie Jones, Denyse Peterson, Mary Botkin and Helen Ying

Staff: Superintendent Sam Breyer, Incoming Superintendent Paul Coakley, Director of Business and Operations Doana Anderson, Budget & Management Analyst Sara Bottomley and Executive Assistant MESD Board Secretary Heather

Chair David Barringer opened the public hearing and asked the Commissioners and staff to introduce themselves. He then asked if any Commissioners have business relationships with the district that could be perceived as a conflict of interest. No one did. Next, he asked the district to introduce staff and any board members present, make brief introductory remarks about the budget, and then the commissioners would ask a few questions. Following the questions, testimony from the public will be taken.

During the introductions, Superintendent Breyer introduced Mr. Paul Coakley, the incoming Superintendent. Then Superintendent Breyer thanked TSCC for hosting the hearing, saying this was his fifth and final year as Superintendent of Multnomah Education Service District. He has always enjoyed meeting with the commissioners and discussing their questions about the budget. He said he has always valued the services TSCC provides the district.

He went on to say two critical themes within the budget are relevant to the conversation. One is the kayos, uncertainty and flexibility required by the current pandemic over the last few months. MESD's budget requires guesswork because they operate under uncertain conditions with the component districts. In normal years staff must deal with uncertainties making educated guesses as they prepare the budget. However, during the pandemic, several things make that even more difficult. First, there is a great deal of educated supposition responding to these uncertain times, anticipating different funding flows. He said the second thing is in recent years, Multnomah ESD has built the systems and processes that allow them to be flexible and nimble during these uncertain times. This was very useful last year during the pandemic, and as they start to emerge and begin face-to-face learning again, it will be helpful then. He stated that the district is prepared to adjust according to the uncertainty. This is the strongest base budget possible at this time. He finished by

saying he was pleased to answer any questions the commissioner may have.

Next, the commissioners began their questions.

TSCC Questions:

Chair Barringer asked the following questions:

When we were here last year, the pandemic was all new to us, and we had no idea what was going to happen. A year has now come and gone. How have you been managing, and how has the pandemic impacted the district's forward progress? Did you receive any Federal stimulus funding?

Ms. Doana Anderson responded by saying MESD received a small amount of funding through the first round, Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief, ESSER I, and a total of \$2.1 million through ESSER II with about 25% allocated to specific programs. The ESD allocations for the third round of stimulus funds are still being determined by ODE. How they are moving forward will be answered in answers that follow.

Commissioner Quiroz asked the following questions:

The component districts and the communities they serve have faced an endless series of pandemic-related difficulties this year. Have any of those difficulties resulted in new enterprises for the ESD? Are there new or expanded opportunities in the ESD's future?

Superintendent Breyer answered, saying the pandemic caused shocks to MESD, but they handled it well. It created several new demands for the district, setting them up for the future. He said they would emerge stronger on the other end due to these demands. They are the largest school health provider in the state. Their health department influenced much of the pandemic response across the state. There was an incredibly high demand for their school-health services and the nursing staff on a local level. This allowed them to provide guidance on reopening documentation, supporting the school districts, essential support to the vaccination efforts, and a key component in coordinating the educator vaccine with local hospitals and local public health. This is an area they were involved in before, but the pandemic has emphasized this. A number of the districts are investing in school health in a way they haven't before. MESD's nursing staff is working every hour available to respond to conditions to keep the schools open.

Other areas for growth are the extensive system-type connections. Social-emotional and mental health supports have expanded with the pandemic. MESD is making several investments and coordinating in this area. The community is undergoing an incredible increase in street and gang violence activities. This has affected students served by MESD directly. The district has also provided staff and coordination to help combat this increase.

MESD will help coordinate summer engagement programs and opportunities for Outdoor school and Extended School Year activities as they look toward summer. These are some of the opportunities that have emerged for ESD due to the pandemic.

Commissioner Ofsink asked these follow-up questions:

Doesn't MESD provide extensive IT support to the districts? Did you see a substantial increase in this with IT becoming such an essential player in distance learning?

Superintendent Breyer said yes, they do provide backbone technology service to all the districts.

Information technology is an area where there was incredible increased demand. The network capacity was not a challenge as the district's network department had gotten out in front of this. The device distribution was the challenge. But, they did work to fill in gaps that exist in the community around the houseless population.

Can you tell us where the assistance in combating the gang violence in the community shows up in the district's budget? Is it the component districts requesting MESD's support in this process?

Superintendent Breyer responded, saying it is a blend of different things. Several programs work with incarcerated youth or youth involved in gang activities. However, with the Student Success Act technical funding, one of the district's support positions was to increase connection among mental health support systems. The person hired came from the criminal justice reform, so she had connections there as well. She will continue that work, and part of her time will be spent doing gang violence coordination. So this is a new part of an established program. Districts are requesting this support, so there is a possibility this will continue to grow.

Commissioner Wubbold asked the following questions:

What impact did the adjustment to remote work and distance learning have on your staffing levels and expenditures? Without classroom education, how have you been reaching your students, and how would you measure the success of those complex efforts? Will you be carrying any remote learning "lessons learned" into your future practices?

Ms. Anderson responded to the first part of the questions stating MESD worked to retain existing staff while following the direction given by Governor Brown and MESD Board.

In addition, MESD responded to uncertainties in revenue by:

- Participating in the Oregon Employment Department Workshare program
- Partially furloughing eligible staff from mid-May through late July 2020 through the Workshare program
- Implementing a hiring freeze for most positions while in Comprehensive Distance Learning mode
- Executing the second round of partial furloughs for a group of employees during the 2020-21 school year who work 1:1 closely with students in person.

Superintendent Breyer responded to the additional questions saying many of their programs were paused for a limited time. However, they provide many programs that continued to operate in-person classroom instruction throughout the past year. A few were limited in-person-learning programs. This is one area of specialization of MESD that has paid off in terms of the connections with families. The strengthened partnerships with families that have developed over the past year have helped provide responsive and individualized learning experiences for students in flexible and nontraditional ways. This has opened up opportunities and methods to better serve r students, which will carry forth past this year. Due to these family connections, with the return to in-person learning, 70% of families returned.

The measurement during the pandemic is difficult. The district does do student assessments according to IEP goals according to what areas need work. They are in the process of assessing that now. The additional education is where the extended school year will come into play for those who have not made progress on their IEP goals. The regular assessments are comparable across programs that have been paused this year due to challenging environments. The district has put time into social-emotional re-engagement rather than standardized testing. The work in the future will be how the district measures and defines the gaps created and then repairing them.

He continued by addressing the final piece of the question, saying the primary measurement of the district's

engagement is the response and feedback for the families and staff, which has been uniformly high throughout.

He spoke to the “Lessons Learned” by stating there are some students that remote learning has been more effective or has allowed the district to serve them in different ways. He gave the example that weather closures should not be an issue anymore since they can communicate via distance learning. Students that have difficulty in classrooms may be more successful using distance learning. The district is looking at this within their structural system and addressing it with their component districts. He said he feels some form of distance learning will be offered by most districts and also ESD.

Do you have any summer programming to help those students who have fallen behind during this distance learning?

Superintendent Breyer said they have a regular summer program every year to help students bridge the gaps. In addition, they are required to offer an extended school year for students that have not made sufficient progress in their IEPs. So those will continue this summer at an expanded rate.

Commissioner Norton asked this follow-up question:

Do you an assessment of how much additional participation you will see this summer?

Superintendent Breyer replied that they are still working through the final IEP reviews to determine the numbers but are sure it will significantly increase.

Commissioner Ofsink asked the following questions:

Given that this is a time of leadership changes, what do board members see as the emerging priorities for the ESD, especially given the leadership transition? Does the Board have a process in place to gather feedback from the districts and the community on priorities and the new Superintendent’s skill set?

Superintendent Breyer said the Board had communicated some goals to him, such as extending the current Strategic Plan for one more year. The priorities in the existing strategic plan remain as board priorities - improving student achievement in the region, MESD continuing to provide regional leadership, community and stakeholder satisfaction, and staff support and morale. Each of these areas includes feedback mechanisms for the relevant groups.

The Board has centered equity as a priority and critical value of the MESD. In particular, the Board expects that MESD will be a model for equitable practices and provide support and professional development to districts in the region and potentially statewide. This priority is evident as indicated by the hiring of Dr. Paul Coakley and the expansion of the Director of Regional and Equity Partnerships to a full-time MESD position rather than the shared position that has existed for the past two years.

The Board also expects MESD to play a key role in helping the region emerge from the pandemic and helping identify and repair social-emotional and learning gaps for students.

Director Helen Ying added they are addressing the academic loss and social-emotional piece and priorities and the preferences already mentioned. She went on to say she is very excited about the “Grow Your Own Program.” They look for this program to help students become teachers and diversify the teaching staff within the division.

Director Mary Botkin added another area of focus is the youth in the criminal justice area, both those incarcerated and those involved in criminal or gang activity in the community. There has been a tremendous loss of life in the Helensview program through gang violence. The Board is concerned about those students and the impact the loss of life has on the students left at Helensview. She closed by stating too often, the students in these programs are seen as invisible. As a board, they need to help find a way of the poverty and despair they live with every day.

Commissioner Norton asked the following questions:

MESD is playing an important role in providing technical support for Student Success Act implementation by the districts. How has your liaison helped the districts this year, and how are the districts using the SSA funding? Did you find any areas in which you could provide regional support for these efforts?

Superintendent Breyer said the SSA is new to everyone. They supported planning over the last year. Each district has a plan within that. MESD's role with technical assistance is to provide the support that is common across several programs.

They are providing support in three main areas:

- Technical assistance to ensure districts can meet the planning requirements set by ODE
- Implementation support including Early Literacy programs, social-emotional and mental health support. Also included is increased training of classified staff and paraeducators. These are staff in direct contact with students. Districts have identified this as a key need so that MESD will be providing support for that training.
- Regional planning since the SSA requires districts to assess, reassess, and redevelop their plan every two to three years.

The shift to distance learning has heightened everyone's desire for Effective Instructional Technology Planning. As a result, SSA will f support for that as well.

Commissioner Quiroz asked the following questions:

How is the local educator workforce pipeline developing? What is MESD's role in this effort? How it funded, and what are the goals and outcomes of the program? How many people are participating?

Superintendent Breyer said this is another area where MESD anticipated the needs and funded it from their operational dollars a couple of years ago. It has been determined to be a regional need and will be embedded in the SSA funding assistance.

Within that, the goal is two-fold:

- Increase and improve the pipeline from the community into the school, so the workforce represents the community they serve.
- Increase the ability for the school districts to fill the positions they have open, particularly the hard-to-fill positions.

To accomplish this, MESD has convened a collaborative group that has worked over the past several years. It began with convening superintendents of the region and higher education leaders to agree that this was a priority. It has now moved into an ongoing workgroup that includes most of the public and private four-year institutions. The goal this year was to launch and scale up a paraeducator to the teacher pipeline. That is the workforce where districts have been most successful in diversifying.

If MESD can create a direct connection there, community members will be moving them right into the classrooms, an effective connection between the schools and community. That has scaled up very effectively. There is a cohort with more than 60 educational assistants who show the potential for becoming outstanding teachers in their home districts. Some come from current paraeducators in Multnomah County, and some came from community-based organization partners, primarily the Latino network. All of these are potential educators of color. Most districts have invested in this Grow Your Own program.

Partners like Meyer Memorial Trust, Regional Educator Network, and Oregon Department of Education have provided funding for that program. Now they are developing a retention and support strategy within the structure to help them navigate the system as work continues.

Commissioner Ofsink asked the following question:

How has the Cascade Technical Alliance work evolved this year? Does the new budget have any new or expanded CTA initiatives? Are more non-education districts taking advantage of these services?

Ms. Anderson fielded this question saying, CTA's work has evolved tremendously in the past year. In July, following the retirement of Rick Wahlstrom, Stuart Long assumed the role of Chief Information Officer at the head of the CTA partnership. Following this change in leadership was a rapid pivot to support complete work from home for all staff and educators and support online education offerings to all students. CTA supported state and regional efforts to access computers and broadband connectivity for the underserved. Multnomah ESD also endorsed the adoption of integrated Learning Management Platforms such as Canvas and Google Classroom to help schools deliver effective online instruction.

Lastly, MESD supplied critical data to connect teachers and staff to the Portland metro mass vaccination efforts. In general, they supported nearly every area of school operations this year due to the reliance on technology for connecting to learning or work in the face of the pandemic. CTA did not significantly increase the base of service offerings or clients this year as most budget and staff resources were dedicated towards these online work and education efforts.

Chair Barringer asked these follow-up questions:

Superintendent Breyer, we would like to thank you for your work for the ESD these last four years. We have seen the reestablishment of good working relationships with the component school districts. And together, you, Doana, and Sara have created a reliable financial team. We have seen the benefits to all. Can you tell us what you would hope we would be talking about at next year's hearing?

Superintendent Breyer replied saying, it has been a pleasure to serve the community as Superintendent of MESD. The agency had come farther and accomplished more than he had hoped nearly five years ago. He recognized the financial team - Doana and Sara saying they deserve a lot of credit for the financial success of the district. He went on to say that a number of the financial process and the trust built with the districts began the year before he arrived when Doana Anderson started that work. Her effort and transparency have been incredible. In addition, Doana adding Sara Bottomley to the team added to the strength of the district, taking it to another level.

He said he hopes next year MESD is talking about forward-thinking expenditures in terms of participating and planning. He went on to say he hopes the district is focused on closing the gaps

that have always been present in the educational system. He believes MESD has a critical role in bridging the gaps that lead to helping to repair, reassess, teardown, and rebuild a number of the systems that lead to the learning gaps. Next year he hopes the Commission will see a continuation of that, with increasing staffing, funding, and strategy around fixing these gaps.

He closed by saying he is happy that Dr. Coakley is coming in as the next Multnomah Education Service District Superintendent. With the existing staff and Dr. Coakley's leadership, he is confident MESD will be in a great place when TSCC returns next year.

Chair Barringer asked Dr. Coakley what he would like to see TSCC Commissioner asked about next year during the hearing.

Dr. Coakley commented that he had enjoyed listening to the hearing and had taken a lot of notes. He said he feels the pandemic has put a spotlight on the inequities in the community. He said he is excited about learning more about the work of the district and creating consistency and continuing the excellent work to close the gaps for all students.

Chair Barringer said he would like to thank everyone all for their informed contributions to the discussion. MESD always gives very thoughtful answers at the TSCC hearing. Next, he asked Heather if anyone from the public joined the hearing.

Ms. Heather Severns said no one from the public had joined the hearing.

Chair Barringer then closed the hearing and opened a regular meeting of the Tax Supervising and Conservation Commission to certify Multnomah Education Service District's ved budget process. He asked if the commissioners had any questions or comments to make concerning the budget.

Commissioner Wubbold thanked Superintendent Breyer for his outstanding work for the district in the past five years. The complexity, diversity difficulty of the work you do is very impressive. We all wish you the very best of luck in your next adventure.

Mr. Gibons said the budget was all balanced. He thanked Sarah and Doana for their quick responses and willingness to answer questions. The budget was well put together. He advised the Commission to certify the budget without any recommendations or objections.

Commissioner Norton moved to certify that the Commission had no objections or recommendations to make regarding the approved budget process for Multnomah Education Service District. Commissioner Wubbold seconded the motion, which passed with a unanimous vote of the Commissioners.

There being no other business, Chair Barringer closed the meeting.

Approved By Commission
June 8, 2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CPS', written over a horizontal line.