

# Multnomah Education Service District

## 2022-23 Hearing Minutes

Tuesday, May 17, 2022

6:00 pm  
Via Go to Meeting

**Present:**

**TSCC:** Chair Harmony Quiroz, Commissioner James Ofsink, Commissioner Mark Wubbold, Commissioner Margo Norton, Commissioner Matt Donahue, Executive Director Allegra Willhite, and Budget Analyst Tunie Betschart

**Absent:** None

**Multnomah Education Service District:**

MESD Board Members: Chair Jessica Arzate, Vice-Chair Denyse Peterson, Kristin Cornuelle, Samuel Henry, Mary Botkin and Helen Ying

Staff: Superintendent Dr. Paul Coakley, Executive Assistant to Superintendent and MESD Board Secretary Heather Severns, Director of Business and Operations Doana Anderson, Senior Program Administrator for Business and Operations Sara Bottomley, Human Resources Director Dr. Deon Logan, Director of Student Services Todd Greaves, Director of Regional Equity Initiatives and Partnerships Reiko Williams, and Director of Strategic Engagement Laura Conroy

Chair Harmony Quiroz opened the public hearing by welcoming everyone to the hearing and briefly introducing the duties and responsibilities of the TSCC. She asked the Commissioners and staff to introduce themselves and state if they have business relationships with the district that could be perceived as a conflict of interest. Each commissioner and staff member introduced themselves and stated they had no conflict of interest with the district. She asked the district to introduce the board members and staff present. Then she asked if Superintendent Coakley would like to make brief introductory remarks about the budget. She stated that following Superintendent Coakley's introductory remarks, testimony from the public would be taken.

Superintendent Paul Coakley said it is difficult to ensure they are doing all they can to support students in these challenging times. The MESD team has done a great job prioritizing the strategic plan and ensuring they are supporting students across the region. They have emphasized equity and will be working to move that forward next year.

Chair Quiroz asked if there was anyone signed up to give public comment. Executive Director Willhite and MESD Board Secretary Heather Severns reported that there were no citizens signed up to speak at this hearing, and no written comments were received.

With that, the commissioners started their questions.

**TSCC Questions:**

**Commissioner Ofsink asked the following questions:**

Dr. Coakley, this is your first budget process as superintendent. Can you share what you have learned about MESD this year? Anything that you found surprising? What are your priorities for the coming year?

Dr. Coakley discussed the strong relationship between the MESD and the component districts. They received positive feedback from the surveys sent to the districts about the support from MESD during the pandemic. The budget has allowed them to meet students' needs and be flexible. He commended staff for their ability to pivot quickly, continuing to serve students virtually, and providing programs that support students. He concluded by stating the team is highly qualified, and his work is centered around ensuring those connections remain strong, and MESD can continue the work to meet the wide range of student needs.

**Commissioner Wubbold asked the following questions:**

Board of Directors, you plan to revisit your strategic plan early next fiscal year. The education system is facing difficulties in several areas (responding to an ever-changing pandemic/post-pandemic environment, increasing student need); how do you foresee this informing the next iteration of the strategic plan? And how does this FY 23 budget align with your strategic goals?

Chair Jessica Arzate answered, saying the staff has done an excellent job of adapting. The process has been very collaborative with Dr. Coakly's leadership, his financial team, and the MESD Board. They have anticipated challenges with gathering community input and have been strategic in the timing and process of engaging the community.

Dr. Coakly added they had collected data analyzing the agency's strengths and challenges this year. They are in the process of doing an equity audit. They plan to use the collected information to guide the strategic plan. They want to refine the current method using representatives from the entire organization, district representatives, and parents of the students they serve to help produce a plan that addresses the issues of the community they serve and their challenges.

**Chair Quiroz asked the following questions:**

The budget mentions an increase of 46 FTE, and we hear from many districts about the challenges of hiring in the current climate of labor shortages. Are you geared up to hire all these people? Are they permanent or temporary positions? How do you plan to fund these positions in the long-term if they are needed? How will you choose which positions to continue supporting when one-time dollars, such as ESSER funding, start drying up?

Ms. Anderson explained that the projected increase is in Special Education programs. MESD is reviewing component district selections against the initial projections to confirm the actual size of the increase.

Addressing the ESSER funding portion, she said MESD is making minimal use of ESSER for funding new positions. Currently, ESSER funding is only being used to support some temporary roving substitute teacher positions for the SPED programs.

Dr. Logan addressed the hiring challenges by stating they plan to be strategic in the recruitment process. They are partnering with local and regional universities and community colleges to understand the qualifications of graduates. They are using the component districts' websites to post available positions. They also have a staff member focused on recruitment, attending job fairs, and working on getting entry-level positions filled. He touched on the "Grow Your Own" program getting folks into the roles and supporting them with funds from the

Grow Your Own dollars to help them move to positions such as school nurses.

Can you share the extent of the current vacancies? What does this look like today?

Ms. Bottomley responded by saying when preparing the proposed budget, the district compares FTE to the January numbers. So, by now, the MESD has filled some positions in the current year. The majority of the job opportunities are in Special Education. This area will be where the district will evaluate the need for additional FTE.

Dr. Logan added that they currently have about 30 positions to fill. Having a more focused, intentional recruiting process, he is certain they will be able to meet those needs.

Ms. Mary Botkin added that MESD has a cohesive board working together to make MESD an excellent place to work. The board is supportive of the needs of the workforce.

**Commissioner Donahue asked the following questions:**

Most reports on return to the classroom talk about student struggles at all grade levels, particularly about special needs students who did not always do well in the remote learning environment. This is a large service area of MESD. What did you find with your returning students, and how are you addressing the problem over the summer and next year?

Mr. Greaves said the MESD had implemented many mitigation measures to address students struggling at all grade levels, especially for students with special needs and challenges. Much instruction has been in-person five days a week, maintaining a low student-to-teacher ratio at all schools and programs. The nation and the state of Oregon continue to struggle with the recruitment and retention of teachers and education assistants, and MESD continues to address this issue through marketing, recruitment, hiring, and retention of certified and classified staff throughout the year. With the need for individualized learning increasing, meaningful instruction has been at the forefront of all education. MESD has been able to provide mental health support as well as behavioral support and intervention. Teachers continue to receive high-quality professional development focused on the response to intervention, trauma-informed care through an equity lens, collaborative problem-solving tools, mental and behavioral health involving suicide prevention supports, instructional best practices, and differentiated learning.

Returning students have genuinely benefited from in-person instruction within the schools and programs. When there have been occasions requiring a pivot to remote learning due to lack of staffing from COVID-19, students continue to receive instruction, learning activities, and active case management from their teachers and support staff within their schools. Regarding the summer, MESD will provide Extended Year Services and Recovery Services for all students kindergarten through age 21 by utilizing additional funding from the Oregon legislature specifically for K-8 and high school academics. The MESD has already been approved by the Oregon Department of Education for this funding.

Mr. Greaves concluded by stating that for next year, the agency has already been addressing its upcoming waitlists for incoming students, which indicates growth within the Social-Emotional Skills Programs, Functional Living Skills, Alternative School, and the Wheatley School, (an Alternative Behavior school).

**Commissioner Norton asked these follow-up questions:**

When meeting with the representatives of the school district serving on the ARTS tax Committee, they are all concerned about the decline in enrollment. There were varying opinions on when

enrollment would level out and move forward. We know that enrollment declined substantially in the current fiscal year. What's the forecast for FY 23? Do you think the enrollment decline is temporary or longer-term? Districts are proposing staffing cuts due to the enrollment decline; do you see financial or service effects due to these changes in your client budgets?

Ms. Bottomley said ADMw for MESD's component districts is down 3% in the current year and is forecast to be down another 3% for FY 23. PPS, the agency's largest component district, is reporting the most significant loss of students at the elementary level and has attributed the decline to several factors, including decreasing birth rates and enrollment patterns. Some of this overall decline in Multnomah County may be longer-term in nature.

While there is some impact from the reduced State School Fund revenues on the operating budget, MESD is not yet seeing any significant reduction in component district demand for MESD's services. Component districts are finding ways to maintain their current level of services, such as taking fewer resolution dollars in pass-through funds and using those dollars for services offered. In fact, for FY 23, the agency is responding to district requests for additional MESD programs. As a regional provider of services, the ESD offers economies of scale to the component districts.

On a related note, she added that MESD is helping coordinate an east county regional campaign to re-engage students who became "lost to the district" during the pandemic.

**Commissioner Wubbold asked the following questions:**

We're interested in hearing more about the Regional Equity Initiatives and Partnerships program. This program was introduced in 2019, and this year adds an administrative assistant to support the program. What have been some key accomplishments in this program since its inception? What further work and efforts can we expect in the coming year? How are you measuring success for this program?

Ms. Reiko Williams responded by saying the MESD board supports equity, and she highlighted the equity work the board has endorsed this year. This includes:

- Adopted conversations involving race protocol agreements, conditions, and tools to be used with all staff
- Launched several initiatives which include training, policy development, collaboration, and resource allocation
- Initiated an organizational equity audit
- Facilitated administrator monthly professional development for racial equity
- Collaborated with a media group to develop agency videos centering on an organizational commitment to equity
- Facilitated the expansion of an agency-wide equity page and curated resources and information for the page
- Convened a group of regional equity directors to share resources and information
- Worked closely with human resources regarding recommended improvements to culture and climate
- Provided support to the Equity and Inclusion Advancement Committee of employees
- Launched the Focus on Diversity Film and Lecture series
- Adopted an Equity Lens to examine who is most impacted by decisions and practices and ensure those most affected are at the table when decisions are made

She stated that equity is not a program but should be reflected throughout the ESD. Equity is a process, commitment, and value. Equity initiatives involve coaching leaders and upholding a lens of

equity in decision-making. In the coming year, you will see equity leadership teams in each building and program, improved hiring and diversifying workforce efforts, and enhanced and expanded professional development opportunities within MESD and throughout the region.

She went on to say evaluating success is organizational. Everyone is responsible for working toward equity goals and practices. The district needs to encourage feedback from all stakeholders. The equity audit will inform the strategic plan and help MESD collectively and clearly state its equity values and commitment.

Can you point to some instances where applying the equity lens resulted in a decision?

Ms. Williams said she did not have a specific example but feels it is essential to operationalize the equity lens when developing policies and programs.

**Chair Quiroz asked the following questions:**

MESD is one of the largest school health providers in the state, and schools are investing in school health services more than ever. Last year MESD saw an increase in nursing requirements from many school districts. Is this trend expected to continue? How does MESD expect to fill this need?

Mr. Greaves said this trend would continue for at least the 22/23 school year. Districts have maintained and even expanded staffing in some situations. MESD has initiated and continued recruitment and hiring for the 22/23 school year to fulfill all requests. The agency will utilize any resources and additional funding provided by the legislature for marketing, recruitment, hiring, and retention of health professionals. Districts have discovered the importance of having a nurse or a school health assistant within their schools and districts as they are highly skilled and can actively support a safe and healthy school population.

**Commissioner Ofsink asked this follow-up question:**

Do you feel confident that you will be able to continue to provide staffing at the increased demand?

Mr. Greaves said looking at the data from the last 5 to 6 years, the agency is possibly in its best position, especially regarding registered nurses. Continued messaging, relationships and collaboration with the component districts will ensure the districts receive high-quality service that supports both the districts and the nurses.

**Commissioner Ofsink asked the following questions:**

The pandemic has shown us that technology allowing for remote access is more important than ever. What changes do you intend to make related to network and technology services? What is the long-term plan for funding future asset replacement needs?

Mr. Sascha Perrins responded, saying pre-pandemic MESD had invested in a dark fiber network infrastructure that allows the agency to quickly and inexpensively expand capacity. When bandwidth needs significantly increased during periods of limited in-person instruction, MESD increased the core network capacity to 100Gbps. The total cost of ownership of this infrastructure is less than the previous infrastructure. Additionally, the dark fiber network is rearchitected as a metro-wide mesh network. This structure allows for greater resiliency when district fiber connectivity is impacted by accidental fiber cuts due to construction, auto accidents, or other damage.

Has the district maintained the targeted service level with the current staffing levels, or was it necessary to increase staffing?

Mr. Perrins said they have been able to do this with the current staffing level. The component districts were very satisfied with the service they receive and are currently expanding the requests for this service.

Relatedly, cybersecurity is an increasing challenge for many public entities. Can you talk to us about MESD's cybersecurity investments? Is this a service that is provided in some way to component districts? Do you have sufficient contingencies in place should MESD or a customer district become compromised? Do you have enough in reserves or insurance to address any issues that come up?

Mr. Perrins said they are confident they are managing the cybersecurity aspect of their technology. Cascade Technology Alliance is investing in three FTE, two at Northwest Regional ESD and one at MESD, to support cybersecurity issues at MESD and in partnership with the component districts. The vision is to have a cyber-service that can work alongside the larger districts' technology staff and provide complete security analysis followed by remediation. MESD has purchased additional cybersecurity insurance over and above what is provided through PACE. The agency is making significant internal changes, including the rollout of next-generation anti-virus tools and multi-factor authentication to all MESD computers and staff to further security posture and maintain cyber coverage.

**Commissioner Norton asked the following questions:**

The budget mentions a new summer leadership program for Outdoor School - what are the estimated costs for this new program, and what are you hoping the new program will achieve? We understand this is being funded by one-time ESSER dollars, as are the 46 FTE positions. How do you decide how to use this money, and how will this program be funded when ESSER dollars expire?

Ms. Bottomley explained that ESSER dollars do not fund the FTE. Most of that will be financed through services provided to the districts, some by grants, and one position is through the Operations Fund. The only ESSER-funded positions are four floating teachers hired to substitute in various areas to mitigate the issues with teachers out due to illness.

Mr. Perrins said the summer leadership program is one of the Equity initiatives. The summer leadership program for BIPOC students in FY 22 is estimated at \$105,000. During the summer of 2021, the MESD partnered with one of its program sites to facilitate a leadership program for BIPOC students to engage with peers and environmental careers, gain confidence, and deepen their connection to their community. Students had opportunities to learn from BIPOC community-based organizations and leaders in the environmental field that shared their experiences and inspired students to take on leadership within their community. To recruit high school students, the program worked with CTE coordinators and counselors at area high schools. In addition to the participation incentive, students received PCC credit. A forthcoming grant through OSU Extensions is expected to allow the work to continue once ESSER dollars expire.

Chair Quiroz thanked the district for the robust discussion and contributions during the hearing. Then she closed the hearing and opened a regular meeting of the Tax Supervising and Conservation Commission to certify Multnomah Education Service District's 2022-23 Approved budget. She asked if the commissioners had any questions or comments to make concerning the budget. There were none. She checked again to see if anyone had signed up to comment. No one had signed up to give testimony.

She asked that Executive Director Allegra Willhite give staff recommendations for the certification letter.

Ms. Willhite said staff found the budget estimates reasonable for the purposes stated and the budget to comply with Local Budget Law. She said staff have no recommendations or objections to the fiscal year 22-23 budget. She thanked MESD for their quick responses and willingness to answer questions.

Chair Quiroz called for a motion.

Commissioner Ofsink moved to certify the MESD Budget with no recommendations or objections as recommended by staff. Commissioner Wubbold seconded the motion, which passed with a unanimous vote of the commissioners.

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