

**Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional District School Committee
Minutes of Regular Meeting
September 14, 2023**

The regular meeting of the Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional District School Committee was held in the Three Seasons Restaurant. The following members, staff and others were present:

Joseph M. Hall of Bellingham, Chair	Dr. Michael F. Fitzpatrick, Superintendent-Director
Joseph A. Broderick of Blackstone	Christopher C. Pilla, Treasurer
Mark J. Potter of Douglas	Anthony E. Steele, Asst. Superintendent/Principal
Anthony M. Yitts of Grafton	Lorna M. Mangano, Business Manager
Edward D. Cray, III of Mendon	Nicole Ferguson, Business Manager
Paul J. Braza of Milford	Matthew Urquhart, Assistant Principal
Chester P. Hanratty, Jr. of Millbury	Katie Cunningham, Information Technology Instructor
Gerald M. Finn of Millville, Vice Chair	Ellie Poitras, Student Council Representative
Jeff T. Koopman of Northbridge	Elise Bogdan, Recording Secretary
James M. Mitchell of Sutton	
Tyler D. Bartlett of Upton	

Members Absent:

James H. Ebbeling of Uxbridge
Mitchell A. Intinarelli of Hopedale

Item 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by the Chair, Mr. Hall. Dr. Fitzpatrick was notified in advance that Mr. Ebbeling and Mr. Intinarelli would be unable to attend.

Item 2. Secretary's Report – A. Yitts

2.1. On a motion by Mr. Yitts seconded by Mr. Koopman, it was unanimously voted to waive reading of the minutes of the regular School Committee meeting of August 17, 2023 and to accept the minutes as written.

Item 3. Treasurer's Reports – C. Pilla

3.1. The Treasurer's Report was presented dated July 31, 2023. The report reflected an ending balance of \$4,448,300.82 for Total Funds, including \$1,230,193.95 in Project Funds, and \$3,218,106.87 in Local Funds. On a motion by Mr. Hanratty, seconded by Mr. Broderick, it was unanimously voted to approve the July 31, 2023 Treasurer's Report as presented.

3.2. The August 30, 2023 Treasurer's Report was not ready to be presented. The report will be presented at the next regularly scheduled School Committee meeting to be held on October 12, 2023.

3.3. On a motion by Mr. Hanratty seconded by Mr. Braza, the Regional District School Committee unanimously voted to approve the motion pursuant to section 16GT ½ of Chapter 71 of the General Laws to establish a Stabilization Fund in accordance with said statute and further to seek approval thereof by appropriating authorities of the member municipalities. Mr. Cray asked Mr. Pilla what is the goal of the stabilization fund. Mr. Pilla explained that it is a

mechanism for an organization like a regional school system to dedicate a financial account, similar to a savings account, to set aside money for unforeseen needs or capital improvement projects. It is a standard practice used in regional school systems. Mr. Broderick asked Mr. Pilla who would be responsible for overseeing the fund. Mr. Pilla, as the District School Committee Treasurer, explained how he would be the stabilization fund's custodian and would oversee it with recommendations from the School Committee members.

3.4. Treasurer Pilla presented the Committee with the PARS annual client review report verbally by sharing some financial highlights. Mr. Pilla gave a broad overview of the fluctuating market but indicated that the financial information shows a positive interest trend. Mr. Pilla indicated that he could e-mail the document to any member who wanted their own copy.

Item 4. Comments by Student Council Representatives - Ellie Poitras & Sosie DerKosrofia

Student Council Representative Ellie Poitras introduced herself to the Committee and explained that Sosie was on a bus back from soccer. Ellie provided an update on Council activities. The first two council meetings of the school year went well. The Council used their Instagram account to ask students to donate their old t-shirts to be used for dogs in need. The BVT Student Council used the donated shirts at their second meeting, where 90 students upcycled those into 150 dog toys that they would donate to a local animal shelter. The Council wants to give back by doing more community service projects. Council members volunteer at academic curriculum nights to guide parents, with members stationed throughout the building to offer directions and answer questions. The 2023-2024 Official Student Council shirts are on sale now as the Council is preparing for Homecoming and pep rally.

Item 5. Vocational Department Presentation - Katie Cunningham

5.1. Katie Cunningham, Vocational Instructor, gave the Committee an overview of the Information Technology Department in a PowerPoint presentation. The department has two highly qualified instructors (Katie Cunningham and Jeremy Pandolfo). Their diverse background and expertise allow for a well-rounded technical program. Freshmen students engage in hands-on projects to introduce them to the world of technology, programming, and innovative problem-solving. The 9th-grade curriculum includes PLTW Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) coursework, PiTops projects, VR game development, and creating smart IoT device homes. Sophomores continue to explore technology through structured coursework and hands-on experiences. The 10th-grade curriculum often includes CompTIA IT Fundamentals (ITF+) coursework and Dell Tech Crew program participation, which offers practical insights into IT operations and support. Juniors delve deeper into networking and gain a more comprehensive understanding of networking technologies and practices. The 11th-grade curriculum centers on Cisco Networking Academy (NetAcad) coursework, CompTIA Network+ certification preparation, and projects such as network rewiring to apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios. Seniors dive into advanced topics within the information technology field, focusing on cybersecurity and ethical hacking. The 12th-grade curriculum includes PLTW Cybersecurity coursework, Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) exploration, and an introduction to ethical hacking. It is a culmination of their IT education, preparing them for possible cybersecurity, network defense, or ethical hacking careers. Student enrollment trends are up almost 60% since

2019-2020. The vocational program participates in community projects such as Blackstone Senior Center: Monthly Tech Crew Visits; Millville Food Pantry: Repair/Upgrade; Grafton Municipal Cyber Training; Blackstone-Millville Senior Center: Tech Crew Visits; and Blackstone-Millville Senior Center: Technology Management. This is an in-demand program with a consistent interest and waitlist. Mr. Yitts asked Ms. Cunningham about the graduate focus for the alums of the Information Technology program. Ms. Cunningham said that about 80% go to college for Computer Science, and 20% go into training programs or enter the workforce employed by local computer companies through their Co-op. Mr. Broderick asked Ms. Cunningham about AI use and if they've had to address its use. Ms. Cunningham has had students use it appropriately for problem-solving. Ms. Cunningham shared that AI-powered ChatGPT had recently released a curriculum piece, which they are aware of and may consider incorporating into their curriculum. Dr. Fitzpatrick also thanked Ms. Cunningham for assisting the District with an integration position over and above her required teaching responsibilities.

Item 6. Business Manager - L. Mangano

6.1. Ms. Mangano shared an FY23 district financial audit update with the Committee. In mid-July, an audit by Hague, Sahady & Co. audit firm (BVT auditors since FY16) began. The audit firm shared that there are no audit findings. Mr. Yitts asked Ms. Mangano if the financial software system needed to be upgraded. Ms. Mangano replied that it currently is sufficient. Dr. Fitzpatrick thanked Lorna for assisting the auditors and balancing daily work responsibilities. He also conveyed appreciation for the Business Office's recognition of the priority to file with the Department of Revenue, which will subsequently impact the District's certified excess & deficiency balance.

6.2. Donation Approvals: no new donations were received.

Item 7. Capital Planning Subcommittee Progress Report - J. Hall, Chair

Mr. Hall informed the Committee that the Capital Planning Subcommittee met in the newly renovated DLC at 4:30 p.m. on September 14, 2023. The agenda included addressing unfortunate disinformation circulated by outside individuals. Review BVT's original Master Plan in relationship with other identified improvements. Update status report of self-constructed athletic fields. Oil tank removal project and state reimbursement. An update on upgrading the Culinary Arts-Kitchen grease traps and reimbursement by the Town of Milford. A report on the Solar Farms' Contracts (subsidized at 11%). Discuss new grant pursuits to address the greatest needs and minimize future debt considerations. Shape position re-stabilization accounting recommendation by District Treasurer. A tour of the recently (self-renovated) simulator centerpiece; all state-of-the-art equipment obtained 100% via competitive grants and industry donations. Mr. Hanratty asked the Committee to consider whether more projects should be included within a bond, given the need to address many projects across the facility. Mr. Pilla clarified what could be covered under a bond. The District School Committee is planning to pursue a bond endeavor to repair its roof and replace its aging rooftop AC/Heat units that are approaching end-of-life, making every effort to be within a maximum borrowing threshold not to exceed \$10 million. No bond decision has been finalized at this time.

Item 8. Assistant Superintendent-Director's Report - A. Steele

8.1. Mr. Steele shared with the Committee that the Cooperative Education Program (Co-op) at BVT is off to an incredible start with 100 students out on Co-op. As BVT develops a plan to increase its cooperative work placement opportunities within the school and the community, Mr. Steele asked the Committee, as a courtesy, to consider the idea of allowing out-of-state travel for Co-op up for their consideration and discussion. Recently, BVT students living in border towns have asked about pursuing potential out-of-state (Rhode Island and Connecticut) Co-op opportunities. A discussion ensued, and the Committee was in agreement that if and when the student, parents, and the Administration were aligned, it would be acceptable for a student to pursue an out-of-state Co-op opportunity. Mr. Koopman pointed out that other vocational schools must have these scenarios come up. Mr. Koopman said if that were a vote, he would vote yes. Mr. Hanratty agreed with Mr. Koopman. The Committee appreciated the courtesy of having the discussion. Given that there was no objection to pursuing out-of-state travel for a Co-op opportunity, the Committee suggested consideration be given to drafting a policy, protocol, or guidelines for out-of-state Co-op for the Co-op manual.

8.2. Mr. Steele informed the Committee that the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) had recently announced new developments. District 2 (BVT is District 2) and District 4 met at Hudson High School earlier in the day. Mike Denise, BVT Athletic Director, represented BVT. The meeting covered emerging new MIAA rules, the formation of co-op teams, and how the MIAA wants to navigate transgender and nonbinary student-athletes in MIAA sports.

8.3. Principal Steele and Assistant Principal Matthew Urquhart spoke to the Committee about a new school-wide initiative, "Respect Across the Curriculum." Mr. Steele explained that when he and the Admin team reflected on the past school year, what went well and what didn't, and analyzed student discipline. We recognized that all disciplinary issues would have been avoidable had the students involved been respectful (to themselves, the building, others, etc.). Respect Across the Curriculum is a tried and true concept. It was effective when we introduced it in 2000, and this campus-wide improvement initiative will help us maintain our school culture which is built on respect. It's a simple formula. When you are here on campus at 65 Pleasant Street, be respectful. The Committee appreciates the ongoing effort and the initiative and thanked Mr. Steel and Mr. Urquhart.

8.4. The Committee received a revised 2023-2024 school year calendar. The revision was in regards to the Hanover Theatre not able to accommodate a graduation on May 23, 2024. The new graduation date of May 30, 2024, is noted in the revised calendar.

8.5. A letter from Mr. Steele to parents and guardians regarding the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title I Regulatory Alert was shared with the Committee. For the 2023-24 school year, the district will be allocating a total of \$66,224 for direct Title I services.

8.6. Mr. Steele shared the U.S. News & World Report: MA High School 2023-2024 rankings with the Committee. Mr. Steele reported that BVT is the top ranked regional vocational

technical system in the Commonwealth.

Item 9. Signatory Authorization - J. Hall

9.1. On a motion by Mr. Finn, seconded by Mr. Hanratty, it was unanimously voted to empower the Business Manager, Nicole Ferguson, as an authorized signatory for the Regional School District commencing November 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024 as it pertains to District purchase orders, contracts, grants, and other legally binding documents between the District and any/all outside agencies.

Item 10. Superintendent-Director's Report - Michael F. Fitzpatrick

10.1. Dr. Fitzpatrick shared a decennial accreditation report with the School Committee. A globally recognized standard of excellence, NEASC Accreditation attests to a school's high quality and integrity. The Committee on Technical and Career Institutions, at its June 25, 2023, meeting, reviewed the Decennial Accreditation report from the March 21-24, 2023 visit to Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School and voted to award the school continued accreditation in the New England Association of Schools & Colleges. BVT's Two-Year Progress Report is due no later than February 1, 2025, and a Five-Year Focused Report will be due no later than February 1, 2028. The Committee was impressed with many of the programs and services.

10.2. The Committee was provided with Dr. Fitzpatrick's draft goals for FY24.

10.3. Dr. Fitzpatrick asked the members to review the preliminary FY24 Subcommittee Delineation of the 2023-2024 school year and to verbally express their interest in serving or continuing to serve on each subcommittee and indicated an updated/revised document would be prepared for the next school committee meeting if needed.

10.4. The FY24 Team Leader Appointments were shared with the Committee.

10.5. A historical overview of the performance award program at BVT and the 2024-2026 Teachers' Contract Performance Award Program was shared with the Committee.

10.6. The Alumni Newsletter, the Connect, was available at the meeting.

10.7. An FY24 Grants To Date (as of September 6, 2023) document was shared with the Committee. The FY24 in-progress total is \$595,582.

Item 11. New Business

Dr. Fitzpatrick informed the Committee that he is in receipt of notification of resignations from Lisa McKinley, Teacher Assistant and Edyta Szatkowski, Financial Aid/Compliance Coordinator. Dr. Fitzpatrick shared a newspaper article titled, Chicopee school officials boost salaries of teachers, teaching assistants and other school staff mid-contract and acknowledged the School Committee's previous support for the new teachers' contract, which continues to be insightful.

Item 12. Items for the Good of the Committee:

The monthly compilation of news clippings and correspondence packet was provided at the meeting for members to review individually.

Item 13. Next Regularly Scheduled School Committee Meeting - J. Hall

The next regularly scheduled School Committee meeting will be held on October 12, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.

Item 14. Meeting Closure:

14.1. The meeting was declared closed by the chair at 7:54 p.m.

14.2. On a motion by Mr. Broderick, seconded by Mr. Braza, it was voted to adjourn at 7:54 p.m.

Listing of materials used in the meeting:

Item 2.1. Minutes of Meeting of August 17, 2023

Item 3.1. Treasurer's Report dated July 31, 2023

Item 3.3 Suggested Motion - BVVR, Stabilization fund = G.L. c. 71, § 16G 1/2

Item 5.1. Vocational Department Presentation: Information Technology

Item 8.4. Revised 2023-2024 School Year Calendar (New Graduation Date: 5/30/24)

Item 8.5. ESSA Title I Regulatory Alert

Item 8.6. U.S. News & World Report: MA High School rankings

Item 9.1. Suggested Motion for Signatory Authorization - Nicole Ferguson, Business Manager

Item 10.1. NEASC Accreditation Summary

Item 10.2. Superintendent Draft Goals

Item 10.3. FY24 Subcommittee Delineation (draft)

Item 10.4. FY24 Team Leader Appointments

Item 10.5. FY24-26 Performance Award Program

Item 10.6. Alumni Newsletter, the Connect

Item 10.7. FY24 Grants' Status Report as of September 6, 2023

Item 11. Notification of Resignations – Lisa McKinley, Teacher Assistant and Edyta Szatkowski, Financial Aid/Compliance Coordinator. Also, a newspaper article titled, Chicopee school officials boost salaries of teachers, teaching assistants and other school staff mid-contract

Item 12. Items for the Good of the Committee

Respectfully submitted by,

Anthony M. Yitts, Secretary