

**Minutes of Regular Meeting  
April 15, 2021**

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

Joseph M. Hall of Bellingham, Chairman,  
Gerald M. Finn of Millville, Vice Chairman  
Paul J. Braza of Milford  
Joseph A. Broderick of Blackstone  
James H. Ebbeling of Uxbridge  
Chester P. Hanratty, Jr. of Millbury  
Jeff T. Koopman of Northbridge  
Julie H. Mitchell of Sutton  
Anthony M. Yitts of Grafton

Dr. Michael F. Fitzpatrick, Superintendent-Director  
Barbara Auger, Treasurer  
Anthony Steele, Asst. Superintendent/Principal  
Lorna Mangano, Business Manager  
Tom Belland, Vocational Director  
Dr. Matthew Connors, Vocational Director  
Michele Denise, Vocational Director  
Ed Evans, Academic Curriculum Coordinator  
Michael Norton, Electronics Instructor  
John Sefakis, General Advisory Committee Vice-Chair  
Mark Potter, Douglas Resident  
Ed Cray, Mendon Resident  
Diana Pedersen, Acting Recording Secretary

**Members Absent:**

David Bartlett of Upton  
Mitchell A. Intinarelli of Hopedale  
Douglas Position Vacant  
Mendon Position Vacant

**Item 1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairman Hall.

**Item 2. Secretary's Report - A. Yitts**

On a motion by Mr. Yitts, seconded by Mr. Hanratty, it was voted to waive reading the minutes of the regular meeting of March 4, 2021 and to accept them as written.

**Item 3. Treasurer's Report - B. Auger**

3.1. Treasurer Auger noted that she had two reports to present as the early schedule of the March meeting did not provide an opportunity to prepare the February report at that time. She called attention to the February 28 report, which had a cash balance of \$6,978,694.28, including \$6,344,691.24 in local funds and \$634,003.04 in project funds. She noted a correction that the cash receipts should have been listed as Chapter 70 funds, not Chapter 71, and explained that the negative interest income was actually an unrealized loss on the OPEB funds, which would show as back in positive territory on the subsequent report. On a motion by Mr. Hanratty, seconded by Mr. Braza, it was voted to approve the treasurer's report for February as presented.

3.2. Treasurer Auger then presented the March 31 report, which had a cash balance of \$6,978,235.09, including \$5,944,846.55 in local funds and \$1,033,388.54 in project funds. She noted that one member town paid its assessment in March instead of February and the grant income was healthy. The increase in project funds reflects the vote of the committee for a transfer at the March meeting. On a motion by Mr. Hanratty, seconded by Mr. Yitts, it was voted to approve the treasurer's report for March as presented.

3.3. The final report on the Little Beaver Enrichment Center Revolving Account was provided. Treasurer Auger noted that revenues and expenditures were equal to close out the program. Mr. Finn

asked for feedback from the staff on how this program worked. Mr. Steele noted that this program allowed the District to keep staff in the classroom rather than have them use leave time for needed child care. He said the program was well-received and appreciated by the staff. It was seen as a significant gesture on behalf of the administration, and a unique commitment in a unique situation. In response to a question, he explained that this type of program was not unique to Valley Tech during the pandemic. On a motion by Mr. Hanratty, seconded by Mrs. Mitchell, it was voted to approve the report as presented.

Item 4. Comments by Student Representatives - Isabella Caccavelli & Emma Conkey

Dr. Fitzpatrick reported that the student representatives were unable to attend due to sports and work commitments.

Item 5. Vocational Directors' Report - T. Belland, M. Connors, & M. Denise

5.1. Program Refinements: Mr. Belland reported on the need for new equipment and program refinements in the HVAC & R program due to industry changes, storage needs, and a planned evening program. He also noted that the Painting & Design program was transitioning to more artistry and sign making due to technology changes in that career field and the shop would therefore need a larger design and print lab. Dr. Connors provided an update on the new biotechnology lab. He advised that there remained only two hurdles to the final approval of that shop: a DESE interview with the Program Advisory Committee scheduled for May 11, followed by a DESE inspection. A final decision is expected by June 18.

5.2. Exploratory Report: Dr. Connors reported that the Exploratory process was slowed down this year due to the pandemic. He said that it was completed on April 5<sup>th</sup> and freshmen were in their first shop cycle this week. Of the 316 freshmen, 283 were placed in their first choice shop, 13 got their second choice, 11 got their third choice, and only 9 have been placed in anywhere from their 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> choice. Those remaining 9 are still being processed to determine the best placement for them. A shop distribution chart was shared.

5.3. Current District Projects: Mr. Belland explained that it was a difficult year for projects due to pandemic restrictions and protocol, but that nevertheless 230 projects have been undertaken. He shared estimates of the savings realized by these projects and played a slide show on some of the external and internal projects that have been completed or are underway, including renovations to a school van by Auto Collision Repair and ongoing work on the Mendon Legion Post by construction shops.

5.4. Co-Op Update: Mr. Belland reported that co-op placements were also impacted by the pandemic restrictions, but there are currently 64 participants and much interest by members of the junior class. He shared information on a new job connection page on the website and noted that the job market is strong for the construction and manufacturing trades.

5.5. General Advisory Update: General Advisory Committee Vice Chair John Sefakis reported that the various program committees have reviewed budgets, equipment, and industry certifications. They have considered the impact of the new biotechnology program, and changes to Frameworks and curricula. The 450 members have been meeting in small groups via Zoom to observe the necessary pandemic protocol.

5.6. On a motion by Mr. Hanratty, seconded by Mrs. Mitchell, it was voted to approve the General Advisory Committee member list.

5.7. Mrs. Denise provided a handout on the current status of enrollment and admissions and noted that the number of upperclass applicants for admission was the largest yet. She advised that the staff has been amazing at creating virtual events. When asked by Mr. Broderick about the number of upperclass applicants, she explained that typically the school is able to enroll about 10 new sophomores. There has been much greater family movement this year, resulting in 74 upperclass applicants. The staff will look to get creative to try to fill some of the under-subscribed shops with more of these applicants. Dr. Fitzpatrick extended special thanks to Mrs. Denise and noted that the school continues to experience high interest in a declining enrollment environment throughout the district.

#### Item 6. Business Manager's Report - L. Mangano

6.1.a. Ms. Mangano reported on identified savings from appropriations available to provide funding for the replacement of a projection system which was damaged by a power surge during inclement weather. She noted that the district has since mitigated exposure to this type of loss through the purchase of additional power surge protectors. On a motion by Mr. Hanratty, seconded by Mr. Braza, it was voted to transfer available funds totaling \$15,322 as detailed in the suggested motion identified as Item 6.1 (a).

6.1.b. Ms. Mangano identified savings available to provide funding toward the continued implementation of 1 to 1 computer devices for students and for certain vocational program computer devices, which require specialized software, that have reached the end of their expected useful life. On a motion by Mrs. Mitchell, seconded by Mr. Hanratty, it was voted to transfer available funds totaling \$81,000 as detailed in the suggested motion identified as Item 6.1 (b). Ms. Mangano indicated that she may be back with more transfer requests in coming months and Dr. Fitzpatrick noted that should be expected given the fluid status of pandemic relief funding and all the variables we face.

6.2. Ms. Mangano reported that there have been no new donations at this time.

#### Item 7. Assistant Superintendent-Director's Report - A. Steele

7.1. Principal Steele provided a tier status update. He noted that the school advanced to Tier 3 two weeks later than anticipated due to an up-tick in Covid cases. That decision seems to have worked and there are currently no cases of in-school transmission. While we are awaiting the DESE Commissioner's advice on when all high schools should be back, the early unofficial indication is that high schools will be expected to return to full in-person learning by May 17. Mr. Steele noted that the required spacing is doable for some things, but the school's square footage simply cannot accommodate all 1,200 students at 3-feet apart. He stated that Tier 3 is the maximum capacity under the current rules and BVT is likely to finish the year at Tier 3. He expects that about half of Massachusetts high schools will need to seek waivers for this reason.

7.2. Mr. Evans reported that the pandemic necessitated a pause in requirements relating to the use of Student Opportunity Act funding, which must be used to close the achievement gap for students with disabilities. Now the state is requiring schools to identify how those funds will be used. A report detailing the district's response was shared. Mr. Evans explained that the plan is to increase co-op opportunities for students with disabilities and to provide laptops for such students needing extra help with math. On a motion by Mr. Broderick, seconded by Mr. Finn, it was voted to authorize the spending of the Student Opportunity Act funds as described by the District and as mandated by the Massachusetts DESE.

7.3. Mr. Steele noted that there appears to be uncertainty by state officials on whether to require students to take MCAS tests this year. BVT's strategy is to be ready for if or when it is imposed. He anticipates a vote to approve making the 11<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS optional, but indicated BVT is prepared to move forward either way and acknowledged the staff who have committed to this endeavor. Mr. Evans said there is a 5/3 - 6/11 window to administer the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade ELA and Math MCAS, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade Science tests would be in June. Mr. Broderick asked about the SOA stipulation relating to MCAS scores, and Mr. Evans explained that the strategies using SOA funding would not be expected to impact MCAS scores this year, but in subsequent years. Mr. Steele said he is confident our students are up to the challenge and he hopes to test.

7.4. Mr. Steele reported that it was mutually agreed with NEASC to advance the planned decennial accreditation visit by six months. That visit is now planned for December 5, 2021.

7.5. A request by the Robotics Team for out-of-state travel to the FIRST Robotics Competition was shared. Mr. Steele indicated that the date and location have not yet been set, so approval would be contingent upon those details. On a motion by Mrs. Mitchell, seconded by Mr. Braza, it was voted to give contingent approval for the Robotics Team to travel to either RI or CT in May or June for the FIRST Robotics Competition.

At the close of Mr. Steele's report, Dr. Fitzpatrick noted that he has received compliments from state officials and others regarding Mr. Steele's capable performance during the pandemic.

#### Item 8. Budget Report - J. Mitchell

8.1. Budget Subcommittee Chair Mitchell asked Dr. Fitzpatrick to share information on various finance committee presentations on the District's budget that have recently been made.

8.1.a. Dr. Fitzpatrick reported that Mr. Steele presented at the Douglas Finance Committee meeting March 9<sup>th</sup>. He indicated that officials there felt the need to challenge the budget request and he cannot be optimistic about their recommendation.

8.1.b. Mr. Yitts reported on a virtual meeting with Grafton on March 10<sup>th</sup>. He said officials were impressed by our grant numbers, were interested in the new biotech program, but stressed the need to maintain traditional trades. He said our budget has the support of the fincom.

8.1.c. Dr. Fitzpatrick reported that the meeting with Upton officials on March 11<sup>th</sup> went well and displayed consistent professional relations with our host community.

8.1.d. Mr. Koopman reported that the March 17<sup>th</sup> meeting with Northbridge went well and was a positive meeting.

8.1.e. Mr. Braza concurred with Dr. Fitzpatrick's report on the Milford Finance Committee chair coming to BVT to review the budget request.

8.1.f. Mr. Hanratty reported on the meeting with Millbury officials March 22<sup>nd</sup>. He noted there was concern that the budget was up, but the state's increase in their required minimum contribution was explained. They were interested in BVT's roof repair projects, and the new town administrator has recently toured.

8.1.g. Dr. Fitzpatrick explained that Mrs. Mitchell was unavailable for the March 30<sup>th</sup> meeting in Sutton, but it was a very professional exchange with a senior fincom group. He described it as lively, but positive.

8.1.h. Mr. Broderick said the budget was not a hard sell in Blackstone at their April 14<sup>th</sup> meeting as there are fewer Blackstone students and the request is lower than the previous year.

#### Item 9. Superintendent-Director's Report - M. Fitzpatrick

9.1. The superintendent reported that he recently presented to MAVA trainees at the MAVA Leadership Academy II.

9.2. On a motion by Mr. Hanratty, seconded by Mr. Finn, it was voted to approve the request for a one-day liquor license for the fund-raising annual gourmet dinner.

9.3. Dr. Fitzpatrick provided an update on the MSBA Statement of Interest regarding repairs to the front steps. He indicated that the Statement of Interest was needed to keep BVT in line for state reimbursement, but conversations were still ongoing as to whether that was the best way to proceed.

9.4. Dr. Fitzpatrick reported that the School Committee traditionally contributes to an annual scholarship award, and that former long-time School Committee Member Bob Snow of Upton has continued his support for that endeavor with a \$200 donation. He encouraged the members to consider their ability to contribute.

9.5. A listing of SkillsUSA medalists at the District V Conference was shared. The superintendent called attention to the remarkable medal count of 101 and noted that the students are now preparing for the state competition.

9.6.a. The retirement notification of School Counselor Susan Milewski was shared. Dr. Fitzpatrick noted that Ms. Milewski has been a counselor since 1999 and will retire effective October 31, 2021.

9.6.b. Dr. Fitzpatrick reported that Mendon representative Dennis Braun has relocated to Florida and submitted his resignation from the School Committee effective April 1, 2021. The official notification to the Mendon Town Clerk was shared and at least one capable candidate has indicated interest in the position.

9.6.c. Dr. Fitzpatrick reported that long-time Douglas representative John Lavin III submitted his resignation effective April 1, 2021. He shared the official notification to the Douglas Town Clerk and said he was aware of at least one capable candidate for that position as well.

#### Item 10. New Business

10.1. A listing of FY2021 grants and donations to date was shared. The current total is \$2.8 million with several other grants under consideration. Dr. Fitzpatrick said we are looking at an all-time high grant total.

10.2. The District recently received notification from Fallon Health Direct, one of its health insurers, that they will no longer be offering the plan effective with the open enrollment on April 1, 2022. This will leave the District with only one health insurer for active employees. Mr. Finn asked if it was the District's intent to provide a second option or stay with just one health plan. Dr. Fitzpatrick

advised that no negative feedback has yet been received to this surprise development, but they would need to examine options.

10.3. The superintendent reported that BVT alumnus Sean Fitzpatrick, a West Point graduate, recently earned his Masters degree at the Air Force University. He was subsequently promoted to Major and he continues to credit BVT for his success.

Dr. Fitzpatrick also reported that Rohit Kaushik, a senior from Hopedale, has been named the MAVA Markham Award recipient as the top vocational technical student in Massachusetts, and that Sofia Yitts, a junior from Grafton, will sing the National Anthem at SkillsUSA.

Item 11. Items for the Good of the Committee:

The traditional sampling of news clippings and correspondence was provided for the committee to review individually.

Item 12. Next Regularly Scheduled School Committee Meeting - J. Hall

The next regularly scheduled School Committee meeting will be held on May 20, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in the Cafeteria.

Item 13. Meeting Closure:

13.1. The meeting was declared closed by the chair at 7:35 p.m.

13.2. On a motion by Mr. Braza, seconded by Mr. Broderick, it was voted to adjourn at 7:35 p.m.

Listing of materials used in the meeting:

- Item 2.1. Minutes of Meeting of March 4, 2021
- Item 3.1. Treasurer's Report dated February 28, 2021
- Item 3.2. Treasurer's Report dated March 31, 2021
- Item 3.3. Account Level Operating Statement for the Period 7/1/2020 through 4/8/2021
- Item 5.7. Admissions Status Report 2021
- Item 6.1.a. Suggested Motion for Funds Transfer
- Item 6.1.b. Suggested Motion for Funds Transfer
- Item 7.2. Student Opportunity Act Documentation & Suggested Motion
- Item 7.5. Request for Out-of-State Field Trip for FIRST Robotics Competition
- Item 9.5. Listing of Skills USA Medalists at District V Conference
- Item 9.6.a. Retirement Notification of School Counselor Susan Milewski
- Item 9.6.b. Notification to Mendon Town Clerk of School Committee Member Resignation
- Item 9.6.c. Notification to Douglas Town Clerk of School Committee Member Resignation
- Item 10.2. Notification of Fallon Health Direct Plan Discontinuation
- Item 11. Items for the Good of the Committee packet dated April 15, 2021

Respectfully Submitted by,

Anthony M. Yitts, Secretary