

MORTON UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709

November 14, 2023

Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Education of Morton Unit School District 709 held on November 14, 2023, at the Morton Education and Administration Center. **The meeting included the District Goals of Achievement, Communication, Climate, Facilities, and Finance.**

Call to Order and Roll Call – President Tim Braker called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

Members present: Mr. Tim Braker, Dr. Diane Krall, Mrs. Amanda Leman, Mr. Thomas Neeley, Mr. Andrew Roth and Mr. Jerry Rudd. Member Absent: Dr. David Cross

Audience Presentations: President Braker opened the podium for audience presentations. Dr. Ashley Fischer spoke first. Bryan Groth, Michelle Gaede, and Tamara Woodmancy read a statement by proxy for Jamie DeChaney- Sheridan. Tamara Woodmancy added her own thoughts with the remaining time. Additional speakers included Julie Peters, Heather McMeekan, and Michelle Gaede who read a statement by Amy Parr. Dan Countryman was the final speaker. Each community member was given five minutes to share his/her thoughts.

REGULAR MEETING

Administrative Reports

Superintendent's Report— Dr. Smock

- Dr. Smock acknowledged and thanked Veterans for their service.
- Dr. Smock recognized School Board Member Appreciation Day happening November 15, 2023. He thanked the Board for all that they do for our school district and expressed gratitude for their volunteer service. The Board enjoyed posters, cards, and notes of gratitude from students, teachers, and staff.
- Dr. Smock did a quick report on the Volleyball team's 4th-place State finishers in athletics and the best Marching Band best finish ever at the Grand Nationals Bands of America finishing 2nd in their class and 18th of 92 of some of the best marching bands in the nation.
- The Board will have a special meeting on December 19, 2023, to approve a bid that will be opened on December 13, 2023.
- Parent/Teacher conferences were split. The Upper Grades met with parents in October. The lower grades met on November 9th and 10th. The change was made in response to teacher and parent feedback. The Administration is seeking feedback and evaluation before setting the FY25 School Calendar.
- A survey went out requesting feedback on the new in-house food service program. Crystal Lohnes and her team are doing a great job. We will bring the Board feedback as we learn and make adjustments based on the feedback.
- We are working with the Negotiations Committee to make the process as efficient as possible for everyone.
- The Extra Curricular Committee put out two different surveys to gather feedback and streamline responses. SEL(Social Emotional Learning) and NME (Neurosequential Model in Education) for sports came up in the discussions. Mr. Jones will collaborate with Stephanie Brown to see how we can improve extracurricular experiences in light of SEL and NME learning. The committee will meet again, soon.
- Mrs. Deidre Ripka was recently named the Central Illinois Valley High School Principal of the Year as a part of the Illinois Principals Association Awards for Excellence. We are excited for her well-earned and much-deserved recognition. She is now eligible for the Illinois Principal of the Year Award.
- Dr. Troy Teater thanked the Board for their desire to serve and improve our District. The Morton 709 School Report Card was presented, reflecting excellence in education happening in the District. Dr.

Teater gave a full report on the School Report. Dr. Smock noted that the state is more concerned with the graduation rate than the academic indicators. Dr. Teater unraveled the mysteries of the data. Our students earned excellent in Science, Math, and ELA scores. The Board asked questions. Dr. Teater is working on areas needing focus with leadership and coaches. Kindergarten and 1st Graders during the COVID-19 pandemic are still catching up. We are focusing on intentional transitions between elementary to MJHS and from MJHS to MHS. Dr. Teater noted that Mrs. Ripka developed an attendance campaign to help combat chronic absenteeism. Dr. Smock noted that 2-3% more completed “5 Essentials Surveys” would have pushed the MHS into the “Exemplary” status. Nearly 25% of our students are classified as lower income, which is not always how our District is viewed. Fewer students are going immediately to college. More students are choosing the trades for their future.

President’s Report - Mr. Braker

- Mr. Braker read a public statement from the Board in response to the recent public comments during audience presentations. (The statement is attached to the minutes)
- President Tim Braker congratulated the Volleyball team, Cross Country athletes, and the MHS marching band on their recent successes.
- He noted appreciation for the excellent Veterans Day video that was created and shared to recognize our Veterans. It was extremely well done and thanked those who gave us our freedoms.
- He expressed appreciation for Dr. Teater’s presentation on the Morton 709 School Report Card, emphasizing that we are here to educate children.

Agenda Building -

- Mr. Rudd reported that constituents report they appreciate the two-way communication happening through surveys that ask for their input. They are enjoying the Care-U podcast. They appreciate the athletics-related communications, “The Potter Post”, and the videos being shared. Even when there are differing opinions, they appreciate the efforts for good communication.
- Dr. Krall noted the importance of responding to public comments. Dr. Krall noted that the Board wants to give thoughtful, well-documented, timely responses to those who are giving their time to come. Some rhetorical comments do not require a response. Public statements from the Board are another form of response.
- Mr. Neeley noted appreciation for the many notes of appreciation, support, and comments the Board has received from teachers and parents over the past couple of months. He was grateful for the Veterans Day video, too. Many sacrificed so we can freely speak even when there is disagreement. President Braker added, “It if wasn’t for Veterans Day, English would be a foreign language.” Mr. Neeley thanked Dr. Sander for continuing to serve.

Discussion Item(s) –

School Board Conference Selections

The Board reviewed their selections for the Joint Annual School Board Conference. The Board selected workshops in their areas of interest or based on their Superintendent’s committee areas of service. Some were selected to better understand the ever-changing landscape of public education, school funding, and school law.

IASB Conference Resolution Discussion

The Board of Education reviewed the proposed resolutions with IASB Delegate, Mr. Jerry Rudd, in preparation for the IASB Annual Conference per Board Policy 2:120. The Board determined how Mr. Rudd would cast the one vote per item allowed by each district. They discussed and came to a consensus on each resolution.

Tax Relief Grant Presentation- Ms. Lisa Kowalski, CFO

Ms. Lisa Kowalski, CFO, requested approval for the submission of a state Property Tax Relief Grant that would lessen the burden on local taxpayers and shift more burden to the State. Eligible districts are based on a ranking of a value that is their Adjusted Operating Tax Rate divided by the Average Operating Tax Rate for districts within each organization type (Unit, Elementary, HS). The grant is due January 8, 2024. We have applied in the past and have not received it. Ms. Kowalski recommends we continue to apply for the grant to the benefit of the taxpayers and the District if we would receive the grant.

Action Item(s) –

Approve 2024-25 Proposed Budget & 2023 Tentative Levy

Ms. Kowalski, CFO, was present to answer questions. Mr. Rudd moved that the Board of Education approve the 2024-24 Proposed Budget & 2023 Tentative Levy. Dr. Krall seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Dr. Cross)

Motion carried. The tentative budget and levy were approved.

Approve Teacher Evaluation Plan Updates

Dr. Sander was available to answer any questions after the Board was able to review the updates. Changes in the law required a response and updates, including Tenure Changes Public Act 103-0500 (SB1872) and Public Act 103-0085.

Mr. Roth moved that the Board approve the Teacher Evaluation Plan updates. Mr. Rudd supported the motion.

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Dr. Cross)

Motion carried.

Approve Extra Duty Position Additions

Dr. Sander was available to clarify any questions regarding the Extra Duty Position requests from the Extra Duty Committee that met on October 3, 2023. The Board discussed the additions on October 17, 2023.

Dr. Krall motioned to approve the Extra Duty Positions. Mrs. Lemman seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Dr. Cross)

Motion carried. The Board approved the Extra Duty Position additions as requested.

Consent Agenda –

A motion was made by Mr. Neeley to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. It was seconded by Mr. Roth.

- Approve Personnel Report
- Approve Maintenance Grant
- Approve \$30,000 Anonymous Donation to Jefferson School
- Approve Treasurer Report – August 2023 & September 2023
- Approve Minutes of the October 17, 2023, Regular Meeting; the October 17, 2023, Closed Session Meeting
- Approve Bills & Payroll

	Bills 10-20-23 10-23-23	Bills 11-03-23 11-06-23	Payroll 10-13-23	Payroll 10-27-23
Ed. Fund (10)	\$489,000.02	\$291,635.79	\$998,160.27	\$949,450.48
Bldg. Fund (20)	162,742.54	27,967.93	49,944.86	49,317.82
Trans. Fund (40)	23,898.47	11,653.67	32,674.26	31,531.04
IMRF (50)			52,008.98	46,675.92
TORT (80)	9,577.50			

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Dr. Cross)

Motion carried. President Braker thanked the anonymous donor of \$30,000 to Jefferson

Closed Session –

A motion was made by Mr. Rudd, seconded by Dr. Krall that the Board of Education enter closed session for the discussion of **Negotiations and Personnel. (5ILCS 120/2 115 ILCS 5/18)**

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Dr. Cross)

Motion carried. The Board entered closed session at 7:50 p.m.

A motion was made by Mr. Rudd to re-enter open session. Mr. Roth seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Dr. Cross)

Motion carried. The Board re-entered open session at 9:23 p.m.

Adjournment –

A motion was made by Mrs. Leman to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Rudd.

Voice Vote: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Dr. Cross)

The motion carried with a voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 9:24 p.m.

Recorded by,

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Smith, Recording Secretary

Jerry Rudd, Secretary

Tim Braker, President

Morton 709 Board Statement for November 14, 2023

On behalf of the Board of Education, I would like to make a statement relative to a number of public comments that were made at the last few board meetings.

First of all, with respect to bullying and harassment, our stance has never changed. We are intolerant of any disrespect or mistreatment of students, and all students are to be treated with respect and dignity. We will respond to every report of mistreatment of students. Board Policy 7:180 has been reviewed and approved by the State of Illinois, and we have taken steps to communicate with our faculty and staff to ensure that our policies are followed and incidents are reported. We continually provide professional development on this topic for our teachers and staff.

According to our administrative team, the term “bullying” does not always define the disrespect that we seek to correct in our students, and we are not experiencing an increase in these behaviors. It has always been a continual effort, throughout the years, to educate our students in how to treat one another respectfully and how to behave when we disagree with one another.

We review all of our policies on a regular basis, and we are making an honest effort to review some of our pertinent policies in order to make improvements, where needed. This review has included considerations for suggestions from those speaking in the audience presentations. When amending our policies, we must ensure that they abide by the First Amendment and are neutral with respect to all groups and topics. We will continue to review our policies and discuss them openly, and we will continue to ensure that they are properly followed.

There have been a number of times, during the audience presentation segments of our meetings, when false innuendos and mistruths have been spoken publicly. The board will not be responding or reacting to inflammatory and unfounded accusatory statements. But, our lack of response should not be construed as accepting them as true.

Whenever corrective action is taken with an employee, that is done privately. The board and administration will never divulge conversations or actions with our employees that are disciplinary or remedial in nature. Just because the public does not hear about such steps does not mean they did not occur. The Board acknowledges that mistakes have been made relative to our policies, and we have worked to correct and remedy those errors.

And, finally, no administrator or board member will be resigning. And no administrator or board member will be removed.