

MORTON UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709

December 12, 2023

Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Education of Morton Unit School District 709 held on December 12, 2023, at the Morton Education and Administration Center. **The meeting included the District Goals of Achievement, Communication, Climate, Facilities, and Finance.**

PUBLIC HEARING: 2023 Levy Hearing

Call to Order and Roll Call – President Tim Braker called the Public Hearing to order at 5:33 p.m.

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

President Tim Braker declared the Hearing open for the purpose of answering questions or hearing comments from the public on the 2023 Levy Resolution. Ms. Lisa Kowalski, CFO, provided fund balances from the end of FY23 on June 30, 2023.

FY24 Truth in Taxation	
School Board Meeting – December 12, 2023	
All Balances as of 6-30-23	
Education Fund	\$24,151,319
Operation, Building and Maintenance Fund	\$9,554,199
Bond & Interest Fund	\$154,105
Transportation Fund	\$717,670
Municipal Retirement Fund	\$718,566
Working Cash Fund	\$3,487,344
Tort Cash Fund	\$423,082

There being no audience questions or comments, President Braker called for a motion to close the public hearing. Dr. Cross moved to close the hearing. Mr. Rudd supported the motion.

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Leman)

The FY23 Public Levy Hearing closed at 5:37 p.m.

REGULAR MEETING

Call to Order and Roll Call – President Braker called the Regular Meeting to order at 5:37 p.m.

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Leman)

Recognition of Excellence —

Dr. Smock started the meeting with introductions of student musicians, student athletes, an administrator, and a Board member. MHS Athletic Director, Scott Jones, introduced marching band co-directors, Craig Hatter and Katrina Fitzpatrick, MHS Head Cross Country Coach, Joe Zeller, MHS Head Volleyball Coach, Jordan Williams, and Red Wings Coach, Keri Gillette. The Coaches/Director introduced their student athletes and musicians to the Board. The students shook hands with the Board and Administration.

- Band – 2A Champions & Grand Champions, BOA Sectional Grand Champions & BOA
- Cross Country – State Medalists: Yonas Wuthrich & Josh Weeks
- MHS Volleyball – 4th Place at IESA State Finals
- Special Olympics Bowling – 4th Place – Maggie Getz
- Dr. Smock presented Mrs. Deidre Ripka to the Board, congratulating her on being selected Central Illinois Valley High School Principal of the Year by the Illinois Principal’s Association. He shared that she is now eligible for Illinois Principal of the Year. He noted it is well-deserved recognition for the great job she does at MHS. Mrs. Ripka expressed appreciation for the recognition noting that she has an excellent team that she works with every day.
- Mr. Simon Kampwerth, Jr., Immediate Past President of the Illinois Association of School Boards surprised School Board Member, Thomas Neeley, with recognition of his many years of leadership at the IASB. Mr. Kampwerth presented the Board of Education with a certificate of recognition for the Board’s role in supporting Mr. Neeley’s leadership at the State level.

Board Statement Regarding Audience Presentations – President Braker read the following statement:

Before we begin our public comments, I have a brief statement about recent events that have occurred at our meetings. We have had a group of people attend many of our board meetings this year who have come to advocate for dignity, respect, and anti-bullying campaigns in our schools. And, we are in favor of these principles and continually work to create an atmosphere of respect.

However, many of those same people have called for the removal of board members and administrators due to their religious beliefs. They have disrespectfully walked out while others were speaking, made hateful comments to others, and most recently verbally accosted a parent who was attempting to leave in peace. In our foyer, as that parent was leaving our meeting, members of this group screamed obscenities at the parent, calling him a “lying sack of sh__,” “a middle-aged, fat, white man,” and other insults, as he made his way to his car.

This type of behavior is in violation of policy 8:30 and will not be tolerated on school district grounds. With any further violations, we will begin to prohibit violators from attending our meetings. This is everyone’s only warning. Tonight we have a police officer present so that people may feel safe as they come and go.

Audience Presentations:

The following nine community members addressed the Board: Dennis Schlappe, David Griffin, Tammy Woodmancy, Heather McMeekan, Nathan Fay, Brian Groth, Leslee Shanks, Dr. Ashley Fischer, and Tammy Woodmancy spoke for Amy Parr. Each community member received five minutes to share his/her thoughts.

Administrative Reports

Superintendent’s Report— Dr. Smock

- Dr. Smock noted that the Business office updates are complete with the team moved back into their offices. He thanked them the Board for supporting that project.
- The MHS addition bid opening scheduled for 12/13/23 moved to 12/15/23.
- There will be a Special Meeting of the Board of Education on December 19, 2023 for bid approval. There is only one action item.
- **Technology in the Classroom Report** – Courtney Eddleman, Deidre Ripka, & Don Sturm presented on Artificial Intelligent (AI). It was an impressive presentation. Our MHS Team has been proactive in this arena, developing policy ahead of other districts and IASB PRESS services.
- **2024-25 School Calendar** – Dr. Joe Sander upated the Board on the Calendar Committee’s work on the 2024-25 School calendar. Teachers, an MEA Representative and Administration are all represented on

the committee. They looked at four different calendar options. They will submit the final choice to the Board of Education for Approval in January 2024.

President's Report - Mr. Braker

Board Statement Regarding Audience Presentations – President Braker read the following statement:

There seems to be some confusion regarding audience presentations. They serve two purposes – to comment on agenda items and to make general comments to the board which could become agenda items in the future.

The Open Meetings Act ensures that the public has the opportunity to 1) make comments to the board at a certain time and 2) to witness the meeting, except when the board is in closed session.

The public comments segment is not intended for the board to interact and/or have a discussion with the general public.

I have been getting feedback that the board seems indifferent to the items that are being presented to the board. But, as a result of the public comments, we have had several very general responses and several policy discussions regarding the input we received.

There have been many situations presented to the board that involve students and personnel. The board and the admin team cannot comment publicly on either.

There have been suggestions for policy changes as well. Our policies are all enacted with approval from legal counsel and suggestions from the Illinois Association of School Boards.

Just because a presenter does not get the change they prefer does not make the board wrong or indifferent.

As an example, we will be receiving bids on modifications to the high school tomorrow. I am sure there will be people that think we went too far, and others may think that we didn't go far enough.

There are many opinions and preferences, but at some point, the board and the admin team have to make a decision and move forward knowing that no everyone will feel heard.

Unfortunately, with over 3100 students and 500 plus employees there will be issues that arise.

But, I can assure you that the board and admin team is committed to all students having a safe and impactful experience at 709, and it is our responsibility and commitment to make sure all reports of injustice are taken seriously and investigated.

Going forward I want the board and admin team to continue to look for ways to ensure that we are providing a positive experience for all students in District 709, and to continue to share the steps the district is taking to make this a reality with the public.

Agenda Building -

Additional comments made by Board Members supported the statement read by President Braker. The Board discussed the current policy surrounding Audience Presentations. The Board desires feedback from the community as a part of free speech and giving the community a chance to give their input. Mr. Neeley shared that some boards have two audience presentation times in the agenda. One for items related to the agenda. One at the end of the open session before the Board enters into closed session.

Discussion Item(s) –

Public Comment Process Review – The Board discussed the importance of Public Comment. The custom is five minutes per speaker. The Board discussed flexibility in time granted to keep the meeting length reasonable. The Board discussed the value in hearing public comment on agenda items before a vote. They discussed a possible second Public Comment time in the agenda, to allow a speaker to stay for closed session for further discussion of closed session topics. The Board discussed not want to see the audience called names and yelled at during a meeting. Board guests deserve respect and civility. The Board discussed listening to community grievances, but and protecting those who attend Board meetings. They will discuss it briefly at the December 19, 2023, meeting.

Action Item(s) –

Approve 2023 Levy Resolution

Mr. Rudd moved that the Board of Education approve the submission of the 2023 Levy Resolution. Dr. Cross seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Leman)

Motion carried.

Approve Bond Resolution providing for the issue of not to exceed \$6,000,000 General Obligation Limited Tax School Bonds, Series 2024, of the District for the purpose of increasing the Working Cash Fund of the District, providing for the levy of a direct annual tax to pay the principal and interest on the bonds, and authorizing the sale of the bonds to the purchaser thereof.

Dr. Smock shared with the Board some information from the Bond rating call he participated in with Ms. Lisa Kowalski, CFO. The Business Team was busy gathering other information and Ms. Kowalski did a fantastic job leading. We hope for the best interest rate to maximize the funds received. January 25, 2024, we should complete the process to acquire the needed working cash funds.

Mr. Roth motioned move that the Board of Education Approve the Bond Resolution for the District to issue Working Cash Fund Bonds in an amount not to exceed \$6,000,000 for multiple capital facility projects. Dr. Cross seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Leman)

Motion carried.

Consent Agenda –

Dr. Cross motioned to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Mr. Rudd supported the motion.

- Approve Personnel Report
- Treasurers Report – October 2023
- Approve Minutes of the November 28, 2023, Regular Meeting; the November 28, 2023, Closed Session Meeting
- Approve Bills & Payroll

	Bills 12-01-23 12-04-23
Ed. Fund (10)	\$104,751.88
Bldg. Fund (20)	\$52,742.24
Trans. Fund (40)	\$13,998.30

Roll Call: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Leman)

Motion carried.

Closed Session – The Board did not hold a closed session.

Adjournment –

Mr. Neeley motioned to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Dr. Cross.

Voice Vote: Yea 6 Nay 0 Absent 1 (Leman)

The motion carried with a voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

Recorded by,

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Smith, Recording Secretary

Jerry Rudd, Secretary

Tim Braker, President