

Massena Central School Board of Education Update
August 9, 2019

The Board of Education Meeting for August 15, 2019 will begin at 6:00 pm in Room 314 of Massena High School. It is anticipated that the Board will go into executive session at 6:00 pm to discuss such topics as personnel on the agenda prior to the regular meeting.

Board of Education Student Representative

At the Board meeting on 8/15 we will be welcoming our new BOE Student representative Ieronhenehtha (Yellow - he - net - tah) Lazore.

School Resource Officer

We are excited to introduce our School Resource Officer Jody Daggett who will attend the BOE meeting on Thursday. Jody lives in Massena and had two children attend Massena Central School. He holds a BA in Speech Communication from SUNY Potsdam and served six years in the US Air Force and 22 years as a SUNY Police Officer. While at SUNY Potsdam for 20 of these years, Jody also served as an adjunct professor and executive board member for the Child Care Center. Jody has a wealth of experience working with young people and comes highly recommended for this position.

As discussed previously, Jody is a Village of Massena employee who will serve the school district under an intermunicipal agreement approved by the BOE in April. His position is funded through our federal Title IV Student Support & Academic Enrichment grant. The Village will provide a police car for his use to travel around the District as well as other equipment and clothing. They will also provide training including a school resource officer academy later this month. The District will allocate office space and various supplies.

We appreciate this partnership with the Village of Massena and want to thank Mayor Timmy Currier, Chief Adam Love, Sergeant Jason Olson, and the Village Board for their support. This program is integral to our goal in providing a safe learning environment for our students and staff.

Massena CSD Professional Development Plan 2019-20

In 2018, the District adopted the Professional Development Plan as required under NYS Commissioner's Regulations 100.2(dd). Each year the Board of Education is required to adopt the PDP and provide certification by the superintendent and Board President that the process was completed. Accordingly, the PDP is on the Board agenda for review and approval.

The Professional Development Plan is produced in a collaborative effort by the Professional Development Committee. The plan focuses on improving student performance and teacher practice as identified through data analysis. It contains each of the SED requirements including:

- implementing a mentoring program for new teachers;
- providing teachers holding a professional certificate with opportunities for completing 100 hours of professional development every five years;
- ensuring that level III teaching assistants and long-term substitute teachers participate in professional development activities,
- describing how all teachers will be provided professional development opportunities directly related to student learning needs as identified by multiple sources of data, including but not limited to school report cards; and
- providing professional development to all professional and supplementary school staff who work with students with disabilities.

District Goals 2019-20

In July, the building principals, Director of Curriculum, Director of Special Services and I met on retreat at the Nicandri Nature Center to begin preparing our District goals for the new school year. Since that time we have continued to expand and revise them with the input from all of our administrators and supervisors. A copy of the draft goals will be attached to the Board agenda for your review. The advancement of our Strategic Plan will continue to be a critical piece of our goals going forward. This includes improving student attendance, raising assessment scores, and increasing graduation rates. The goals will further focus on student centered learning, K-6 writing, restorative justice, school climate, capital project and improving student safety, among others. At the BOE meeting on Thursday we will present the draft goals and seek Board input prior to unveiling them to staff in September.

Capital Project - Massena Central School District

At the Board meeting on Thursday, I will update the Board on our building projects underway in the District. For the main project our key goal is to finalize the overall scope and budget soon so we can begin an informational campaign prior to the referendum in December.

School Calendar 2019-20

The school calendar for 2019-20 is on the Board agenda for approval on Thursday. It includes some regional-wide staff development days as well as half days for district trainings. A copy of the calendar is attached to the Board agenda for your review. I will discuss further at the meeting. We are also going to print with the full calendar which contains District policies and annual notifications to parents. It will be distributed this week through mail to all of our District families.

Comptroller's Audit 2019 - Corrective Action Plan

As you know the NYS Comptroller's Office performed a routine audit of District finances this year and presented their report in June. The focus of the audit was selected non-payroll disbursements such as dental benefits and utilities. The auditor found a few minor issues which were quickly resolved. The Comptroller's Report including the District's response is attached to

the BOE agenda. The Board of Education is required to approve a Corrective Action Plan which has been prepared and attached to the agenda.

[Here](#) is a North Country Now article about the Comptroller's Audit.

Opening of School

The administration and staff have been working diligently to prepare for a successful opening of the 2019-20 school year. New staff orientation will be held on Thursday, 8/22 to welcome our newest employees and acclimate them to District procedures and expectations. Board members are welcome to join us for lunch in the High School Cafeteria at 12:00 pm. Please let Candy know if you plan to attend the luncheon so we can prepare for the appropriate number of people. At the luncheon we will introduce our new staff.

Community Schools Coordinator Kristin Colarusso Martin and other staff and community partners are preparing for our second annual Ready 4 School event on 8/26 from 2:00-6:00 pm at the high school. Students will be provided with free haircuts, clothing, books, and school supplies to get ready for our upcoming school year. We will also have free hot dogs and hamburgers for families to enjoy. Our community partners will be present with children's activities, information and resources for parents. We hope to see you there.

[Here](#) is a North Country Now article about the event.

The District is also preparing for the Superintendent's Days on 9/3-4 where we will provide a variety of trainings and time for staff to prepare for the new year. Board member are welcome to join us on the morning of 9/3 for refreshments and the opening session in the high school auditorium at 8:00 am. I am excited about the start of the new school year and the initiatives we will be undertaking together.

Bus Request - 1 Each - Massena Recreation Commission/Louisville Recreation - Calypso Park

We recently received a joint request from the Massena Recreation Commission and Town of Louisville to rent two buses and drivers for a trip to the Calypso Park in Limoges, Ontario on August 6th. I provided preliminary authorization given the timing of the request and am asking for retroactive Board approval at the meeting. Their letter of request is attached to the BOE agenda.

Approval of Tax Rates 2019-20

School districts pass tax rates for the year in August after the towns have filed their final tax assessment rolls at the end of July and the County presents the school tax rates for each town. For the Massena CSD, the towns are Massena, Louisville, Norfolk, and Brasher. The school taxes will vary based on equalization rates which range from 100% in Massena to 80.5% in Brasher. A spreadsheet containing these various tax rates is attached to the BOE agenda. The Board will need to approve the tax rates for 2019-20 at this BOE meeting so the tax bills can be sent to residents in early September.

There are a few areas to note in the tax rates and taxable assessed values of the four towns which have property in the school district. The Town of Massena's taxable assessed value went up by \$3 million after a few years of decreases. This change saved our Massena residents money as our proposed 0% school tax levy increase for this year will actually be a 1.06% school tax rate reduction. The Town of Norfolk had a \$350,000 increase in taxable assessed value, so they will also see a 1.06% decline like Massena residents. The Town of Brasher equalization rate took another hit, down to 80.5% from 85.0% in 2018-19. From the state perspective this means the town is under assessing property values by 20% so with the drop in equalization rates their school tax increase for properties in the Massena school district will increase 4.47%. The Town of Louisville equalization rate also went down slightly to 87% from 89%. This is causing a 1.22% increase in the school tax rate for their properties in the school district. Business Manager Nick Brouillette will provide further information at the Board meeting.

We also have received three tax certiorari cases filed under Article 7 of the NYS Real Property Law in NYS Supreme Court. The first is from Walmart for the property they own on Smith Road near the old Aldi's. This is the former Walmart site. The second is the St. Lawrence Plaza where Hannaford's was located. These are both renewed challenges as they filed in 2018-19 as well. They asked for notably larger assessment reductions on all of their sites; the total is a \$5,576,500 reduction which is \$1,835,000 larger than the prior year. We also have a new tax cert for the old Aldi site where they are asking for a \$529,500 reduction from their current assessed value of \$829,500.

The Town of Massena is mainly responsible for dealing with these assessment challenges. Under the law, if a pre-trial settlement is not reached, the petitioner has four years in which to file a notice of issue with the court to take the case to a non-jury trial to be adjudicated. For those maybe unfamiliar with the process, these are normal proceedings and we will work closely with the Town of Massena for the best possible outcome. We will keep you posted.

Change to BOE Meeting Calendar

I would like to propose a change to the Board of Education meeting calendar for December by moving the meeting from 12/5 to 12/19. This request is due to the Capital Project referendum vote (which we propose to hold in early December), as well as a Junior High music concert scheduled for 12/5. I hope this works for everyone's schedules.

Other News

St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES Title I Newsletter

Attached is the St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES Title I Newsletter for September, 2019. It has some great tips for parents as they prepare their children to go back to school.

Albany Update

The following information is from NYSCOSS Deputy Director Bob Lowry about some key state legislation impacting public schools.

Religious Vaccination Exemption Update

As you all know, legislation eliminating the religious exemption for vaccination requirements was passed by both houses and signed by the Governor on June 13. This occurred after the topic had been debated publicly and privately over most of the legislative session. The Council had recommended a delayed implementation for the bill, so families had time to adjust. The bill was amended to require unvaccinated students to at least have the first dose of each vaccine before attending school instead of being fully up to date. This was not the optimal language change, but it was better than the original proposal.

We know that this issue has become a nuclear football for some of you. Vaccine hesitant individuals have been urging supporters to meet with superintendents to urge them to write to the courts, legislators, and the Board of Regents opposing the new law.

These advocates also attended the Board of Regents meeting in July seeking regulatory imposition delaying the law and we expect this to occur again in September. It is a state law, however, and the Regents do not have power to contravene it. Also, regulations governing school immunization requirements are approved by the State Health Department, not the Regents and State Education Department. Nor can school district officials, who take an oath of office to uphold state laws, choose to disregard this law.

The vaccine hesitant individuals have also filed a lawsuit on behalf of 55 families seeking an injunction against the law. They [lost in court](#) during their first attempt but a hearing on their appeal will be held August 14. We will keep you updated as the legal proceedings run their course. We understand that SED, the Health Department, and Office of Children and Family Services are working additional guidance which is to be released any day. We will share it as soon as it is released.

Here are the guidance items issued by the two state agencies to date:

- [June 18](#)
- [July 22](#)

Guidance continues to be expanded as more questions and concerns arise, both from parents and school leaders. Some newer concerns revolve around ensuring nonpublic school students being transported on school buses are vaccinated, issues with transporting to Amish programs, and obligations to students with IEP's who can't attend school due to lack of vaccination records. We are continuing to work with SED to resolve these issues while also avoiding having this law impose additional costs on schools.

Stop-Arm Camera Bill Signed

This week the Governor signed legislation authorizing camera installation on buses for the purpose of ticketing drivers that illegally pass a school bus. Some of the news coverage has given the impression that it is a school district decision whether to install the cameras. But the legislation requires the local municipality to approve their use and pay for the cost, if the cameras are to be

utilized for ticketing purposes. Municipalities are required to enter agreements with school districts—neither they nor school districts can proceed without the other. This will present challenges for many school districts, especially those districts that overlap multiple municipalities.

While we supported the legislation, we favored proposals from the Governor and Senate which would have assigned decision-making authority to school districts and, once the final version passed the legislature, we urged the Governor to seek a chapter amendment to strengthen the ability of schools to install cameras for ticketing purposes without having to rely on local governments. We were not successful in this part of the endeavor.

Questions about the reporting can be directed to schooltransparency@budget.ny.gov.

District Upcoming Events

8/15—Board of Education Meeting—6:00 pm—HS Room 314

8/19—JV/Varsity Sports Begin

8/22—New Staff Orientation—7:30 am—HS Library

8/26—Ready4School—2:00 pm—HS lobby & cafeteria

8/26—Modified Sports Begin

9/3-4—Superintendent Days

9/5—Classes Begin