

Meeting Minutes, MQEC Board Meeting, Thursday, January 03, 2008

The meeting was convened by President Tom Cotton at 11:05 a.m. A quorum was present consisting of the following:

1. Bruce Messinger
2. Eric Feaver
3. Andy Holmlund
4. Harry Cheff
5. Lance Melton
6. Doug Sullivan
7. Darrell Rud
8. Mike Nicosia
9. Tom Cotton
10. Peter Marchi
11. Eric Burke

Member Jack Copps was absent.

Others in attendance: Aidan Myre, Jim Molloy, Marco Ferro, MEA-MFT, Bob Vogel, MTSBA.

Agenda Items:

1. Approval of Minutes from November 29

A motion was made, seconded and passed to approve the November 29 minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Report on Budget Data Collection, Mike Nicosia

Dr. Mike Nicosia provided the board with a brief update regarding those districts participating in the data collection process.

3. Discussion on data provided by Legislative Fiscal Division and legal options – Jim Molloy

The Board engaged in an attorney-client privileged discussion with its attorney.

4. What strategies would we use if there is a Special Session – Aidan Myhre

Aidan Myhre identified that there is a gap between the reality faced by schools and the perception of the public and policymakers regarding what is happening to schools. Aidan recommended transparency in communications, making sure to provide the public with an explanation of the problems and a solicitation of input on solutions.

MEA-MFT Motion – Eric Feaver moved the passage of the following motion:

MQEC shall:

1. Design and promote an adequate yet realistic school funding remedy for the consideration of the governor and the 2009 legislature,
2. Submit a school funding progress report to Judge Sherlock for his consideration, and
3. Provide advice and information to all member districts about budgeting strategies that may be employed for FY09 to avoid cuts in programs, staff and/or services. In doing so, MQEC and member districts shall engage in a concerted communications strategy designed to educate the public, legislators, legislative candidates and the governor's

office about the continuing budget problems that districts face and the need for further increases in stable and ongoing funding in the 2009 legislative session.

The motion was seconded by Erik Burke. Discussion ensued. Lance Melton moved a substitute motion as follows, which was seconded by Harry Cheff. Discussion ensued.

Whereas, the Legislative Fiscal Division has reported to the interim Education and Local Government Committee regarding impending budget problems for K-12 public education starting in the FY09 school fiscal year; and

Whereas, the data provided by the Legislative Fiscal Division specifies as follows:

- That 40 percent of Montana's school districts (170 school districts in all) would need mill levy increases just to maintain current budgets in July, when the 2009 fiscal year begins.
- That more than half - 52 percent - of the districts facing cuts next summer are already at or above their maximum budget, meaning they cannot have a mill levy and must cut their budgets.
- That budget cuts are anticipated in school districts of all sizes and circumstances, including school districts located in growing and economically vibrant areas of the state, such as but not limited to Bozeman, Helena, Butte, Billings, Whitefish, Great Falls, indicating that declining enrollments are not the entire problem.

Whereas, teacher salaries have dropped to 47th in the present year according to information presented by MEA-MFT to the Interim Education and Local Government Committee; and

Whereas, school districts will not have sufficient funds to address teacher compensation and to maintain current valuable programs and services benefiting children in our public schools;

Whereas, Montana does not have an adequate, long term sustainable funding solution for public education.

Be it resolved as follows:

1. That the MQEC Board directs Mike Nicosia and Aidan Myre to visit with representatives of the Governor's Office in pursuit of a solution or solutions that would add sufficient additional resources for schools in the FY09 fiscal year to ensure the preservation of existing programs and services in member school districts;
2. That Mike Nicosia and Aidan Myre report back to the Board regarding the progress of discussions referenced in 1 above at its next meeting on January 24, 2008.
3. That MQEC urges its members to engage in strategic communications efforts informing their communities of the impending harm in FY09 and urging legislative and community support for a solution.

Motion to amend passed 8-3 (Eric Feaver, Erik Burke and Andy Holmlund voted no). Motion as amended passed 8-3 (Eric Feaver, Erik Burke and Andy Holmlund voted no).

4. Remedy Committee Report – Bruce Messinger

Bruce Messinger gave an update of the Remedy Committee's progress. The committee has met once and is scheduled to meet again on January 16, 2008. No further action to report at this time.

5. Other items

a. Annual Membership Meeting, January 24, Front Street Learning Center

The board resolved to start the membership meeting at 10:00 a.m.

b. Continued Dialogue with the Governor's Office

Aidan and Mike will pursue continued communications with the Governor's office on issues affecting school funding and MQEC's efforts.

c. Comments from presentation at Education and Local Government Interim Committee Meeting

Tom Cotton and Mike Nicosia updated the board on their report to the Interim Education and Local Government Committee.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 1:50 p.m.