



COUNCIL MINUTES

JOINT MEETING WITH MESA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 10, 2022

The City Council of the City of Mesa met in a Joint Meeting with Mesa Public Schools Governing Board at the Mesa Public Schools Curriculum Services Center, Building 2, 549 North Stapley Drive, on February 10, 2022, at 7:40 a.m.

COUNCIL PRESENT

John Giles
Jennifer Duff
Mark Freeman
Francisco Heredia
David Luna
Julie Spilsbury

COUNCIL ABSENT

Kevin Thompson

STAFF PRESENT

Lisa Anderson
Polly Bonnett
Chris Brady
Travis Cutright
Holly Moseley
Natalie Lewis
Jim Smith

MESA PUBLIC SCHOOLS ATTENDEES

Theresa Baca
Lara Ellingson
Dr. Andi Furlis
Marcie Hutchinson
Helen Hollands
Kasey King
Randy Mahlerwein
Arlinda Mann
Monica Mesa
Dr. Joe O'Reilly
Jenny Richardson
David Sanders
Kiana Sears
Scott Thompson
Justin Wing
Holly Williams

1. Welcome and Introductions.

Dr. Andi Furlis, Superintendent of Mesa Public Schools (MPS), thanked everyone for participating in the meeting. She stated MPS has a mission to know every student by name and serve them by strength and need to ensure by graduation they are ready for college, career, and community. She remarked the mission is not possible without amazing partners and relationships. She acknowledged the City of Mesa (COM) for joining in the mission. She displayed a PowerPoint presentation and provided an overview of the meeting agenda. **(See Attachment 1)**

Jenny Richardson, Governing Board President, commented on the difficult time to be in public service and expressed appreciation for those who are serving and are willing to work hard for

the COM and the citizens who live in the community. She led the Governing Boardmembers and MPS staff to introduce themselves.

Mayor Giles apologized that the MPS joint meeting had fallen off the agenda the last few years and promised to schedule them in the future because both organizations share the same constituents and the same mission. He shared his story about his father being a Mesa Public School Elementary principal for 30 years and attending many Mesa schools from elementary through high school. He commented the COM is not in the education business but has a combined interest in helping make MPS successful in serving the families.

Mayor Giles requested that the COM elected Councilmembers and staff introduce themselves.

2. Aggregate Expenditure Limit.

Scott Thompson, Assistant Superintendent of Business and Support Services at MPS, explained in his role as the logistics person he is responsible for getting kids to school, feeding them, ensuring the rooms are clean, getting them home from school, and dealing with the finances of the district.

Mr. Thompson stated the Aggregate Expenditure Limit (AEL) is defined in the Arizona Constitution, which limits how much can be spent on public education in Arizona. He commented that public education covering kindergarten through 12th grade is a large part of the General Fund and there was concern expressed that there should be guardrails on the spending. He added that no one at that time thought the limit would ever be reached. He reported the limit was hit for the first time in around 2000, again in 2007/2008, and are currently coming up against the limit in a big way. (See Page 6 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Thompson advised if the legislature does not override the spending limit, MPS will need to cut 16% of the budget, which totals \$73.8 million. He mentioned a major factor influencing the calculation is Prop 301, which provided education funding and has reached its shelf life; and while the legislature did pick up a Classroom Site Fund to continue Prop 301, they did not make it exempt from the aggregate limit. He added another factor is the high number of students who disappeared during the pandemic and have not returned. He noted the relevance of that is the calculation is based on last year's student count and the budget is based on an amount per student. He requested that everyone spread the word to help citizens understand the consequences of not overriding the AEL. (See Page 7 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Thompson stressed that the money has already been allocated and is not a tax increase. He mentioned legislature is looking at ways to circumvent this issue but needs to act before March 1, 2022.

In response to a question from Councilmember Spilsbury, Mr. Thompson noted the current situation is unprecedented so MPS has looked at different scenarios that could happen if the cuts were necessary, none of which are ideal.

Responding to a question from Councilmember Freeman regarding where the legislature stands on the issue, Mr. Thompson indicated that the state representatives are eager to fix the problem and need a two-thirds vote to pass. He spoke about the concerns around Prop 208.

Marcie Hutchinson, Governing Boardmember, stated the possibility of not being able to fully fund education in Mesa keeps the boardmembers up at night. She pointed out MPS is the biggest employer in the COM and the economic issues that would follow cutting \$73 million from the MPS budget.

Mr. Thompson commented that MPS utilized stimulus funding to keep staff employed during the pandemic to have the staff available when reopening. He discussed that MPS is a great place to work, and the retirement keeps employees loyal but is not able to be as competitive as others.

Kiana Sears, Governing Boardmember, emphasized it does not matter where anyone is on the partisan scale, the fact remains that the AEL needs to be fixed. She mentioned that as the deadline for candidate petitions gets closer, leaders cannot wait to see what happens before reacting.

In response to a question posed by Vice Mayor Duff, Mr. Thompson explained that this is an unprecedented situation, adding the funding is there and has been allocated for education. He stated he does not have an answer to what happens to the money that has already been collected to be used for education because even if a law is passed to overspend the budget without consequences, it is uncertain whether that law could legally override the state constitution.

Dr. Fournalis pointed out per state statute, schools must provide 180 days of instruction.

Mr. Thompson explained that charter schools are considered exempt from the AEL because they did not exist in 1980. He noted in Arizona, charter schools accommodate approximately 20% of the student population with 80,000 attending traditional public schools in Mesa.

Discussion ensued relative to where Arizona ranks in educational spending and the desire to change the mindset toward education.

3. Literacy Initiatives in Mesa Public Schools and the City of Mesa.

Dr. Fournalis emphasized MPS is focused on literacy initiatives, which is an area that has shared expertise and interest with the COM. She stated a question she regularly asks leaders is: "How are our kids and how do we know?" She indicated coming out of a pandemic, children have more social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs. (See Pages 8 and 9 of Attachment 1)

Dr. Fournalis shared statistics comparing how MPS students performed on the Arizona English Language Arts assessment in 2021 to the state numbers which represent the percent passing by grade level. She emphasized the importance of this data because literacy is a marker that determines the quality of a child's life, and children who can read have a far better chance in life than those who cannot. (See Pages 10 and 11 of Attachment 1)

Dr. Fournalis reported MPS has a goal aligned with the strategic goal of achieving college and career readiness by increasing the percentage of students who are proficient in grade-level standards in literacy, math, and science. (See Page 12 of Attachment 1)

Dr. Fournalis stated MPS has made strategic investments to ensure appropriate training of teachers and leaders in the science of reading and is committed to a two-year training period. She mentioned implementing a consistent phonics program for K-3 grade that could spill into 4th grade based on student data and using a specialized curriculum for special education students who have challenges learning to read. She added a recommendation will be brought forward at the next governing board meeting on February 22 to purchase new materials for students K-8 for Language Arts and K-12 for mathematics since the last adoption of curriculum materials was 2003. (See Page 13 of Attachment 1)

Dr. Fournalis outlined the next steps that will be followed to continue focusing on literacy by providing opportunities within MPS and beyond. (See Page 14 of Attachment 1)

Dr. Fournalis introduced Library Director Polly Bonnett to expand on efforts being made through the Mesa Public Library.

Ms. Bonnett remarked that literacy is a community effort, and the library is here to support and to work with students on strengthening their literacy skills and help them reach their grade level reading achievement.

Ms. Bonnett explained parents bring their children to the library and sit side-by-side with their children, which creates the perfect opportunity to help parents see the importance of literacy and the expected markers the children should be meeting at each grade level. She listed the ways that the library can assist. (See Page 16 of Attachment 1)

Ms. Bonnett highlighted the following areas where the library can make a difference: (See Pages 17 through 20 of Attachment 1)

- Outreach
- Collections
- Programs

Ms. Bonnett discussed THINKspot, which is an innovative space to provide access to resources, training, and networking to help children create content and interact with adults and students to promote further learning opportunities.

4. Broadband Initiatives & Opportunities for Collaboration.

President Richardson introduced City of Mesa Chief Information Officer Travis Cutright to discuss the digital divide and how the COM is addressing the issue. (See Page 23 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Cutright presented a map showing the existing public Wi-Fi locations, areas of the city that are identified in the census tract as low to moderate income, and the areas with internet connectivity issues based on a 2017 survey. (See Page 24 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Cutright explained the heat map details the households that have limited access to internet connectivity, which almost overlays the area of low to moderate income. He mentioned there

are several phases of the project to address the 10-square miles, beginning with expanding the @Mesa Wi-Fi and then building out a grid of private cellular towers that will be owned by the COM. He added the towers increase the coverage to a square mile. He stated with the expansion of @Mesa Wi-Fi and deployment of infrastructure, most of the areas identified will have internet connectivity. He noted along with deployment of infrastructure, routers would be provided to ensure a stronger signal for high-speed internet connectivity. (See Pages 25 through 27 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Cutright outlined the next steps, which have been accelerated to complete by the next school year. (See Page 28 of Attachment 1)

City Manager Christopher Brady continued by saying the COM is committed to providing the mass infrastructure and connectivity, which will be funded through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars. He asked that MPS create the policies and distribute the routers to those who need them. He remarked that COM will also work with non-profits in the area, but the first opportunity goes to MPS.

In response to a question from Boardmember Sears, Mr. Cutright commented this is the first step in expanding the technology. He remarked looking into the future, if the COM deploys its own private cellular across the city, the City could eliminate those data costs.

Mr. Brady pointed out the project being in a qualified census tract is what allows the City to use ARPA funding. He added the City has a Request For Information (RFI) out soliciting input from proposed vendors about the possibility of running fiber in front of every home in Mesa to provide that connectivity.

Mayor Giles indicated the long-term goal is to have fiber to each home in Mesa. He commented that Mesa is in a position to be a national leader addressing the digital divide.

Discussion ensued relative to future expansion, router connection issues that may arise, as well as antivirus and internet filters that are used.

5. Challenges We Are Trying to Solve.

President Richardson encouraged the Mesa City Councilmembers and MPS Governing Boardmembers to brainstorm other challenges that were not yet discussed. (See Pages 29 and 30 of Attachment 1)

In response to a question posed by Councilmember Luna regarding what MPS is doing to promote workforce development, President Richardson explained the Graduation Plus program encourages certifications. She mentioned education workforce to prepare teachers will be discussed at the next school board study session.

Councilmember Freeman reported meeting with East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT) to discuss workforce development and creating pipelines for Mesa students and awareness to inform students that diverse skillsets are needed for different careers that may not require a degree.

President Richardson invited Council to visit high schools to see what is being done to promote career paths. She said the earlier students are involved in learning about career paths and technical education the better.

Discussion ensued regarding EVIT, Career Technical Education (CTE), and Graduation Plus offered by MPS to ensure students are ready for college, career, and community when they graduate to provide more opportunities within the workforce.

Councilmember Spilsbury mentioned Katie Lohec Sondej, National Senior Manager for Government and Community Affairs at Apple and a member of the Education and Workforce Development Roundtable, emphasized that everyone assumes what type of employees Apple is seeking; however, there really is a much broader spectrum of workers that are needed, and large companies need to communicate what their workforce needs are.

President Richardson stated MPS has a grant-funded position at one of the high schools to focus on creating more partnerships with companies and provide students with more internship opportunities. She noted the goal is that every student who wants an internship will receive one.

Vice Mayor Duff remarked beyond education, another area leaders need to address is the housing crisis. She asked where MPS falls on the conversation of providing housing on school grounds.

Dr. Fourlis replied MPS is in discussions with Vitalyst to explore attainable workforce housing for educators. She continued by saying her next pitch to Mayor Giles is expanding the conversation to include first responders to provide additional support for those low wage entry positions and partnering to solve this challenge. She added the City of Chandler and Chandler Public Schools will begin to unveil their conversations as well.

Boardmember Ellingson stated 8th grade reading proficiency is only 38%. She indicated the focus should be on phonics and helping children in K-3. She expressed her desire to see a partnership with the City to establish a program of community helpers that can work with students on reading to take some of the pressure off teachers who are desperately trying to give the classroom support.

Councilmember Spilsbury believes if the community knew what the needs were and there was a way to coordinate a program of community helpers, then that could solve the issue and help support teachers.

Boardmember Hutchinson advised a literacy taskforce was started with the goal of promoting the importance and love of reading through accessible material and programs that ensure there is multigenerational readiness for college, career, and community. She said the taskforce will create partnership opportunities to fill the gaps.

Councilmember Spilsbury indicated interest in the literacy taskforce collaborating with the Education and Workforce Development Roundtable.

Boardmember Sears stressed the importance of infusing in the culture new norms because most people do not know the timelines, such as when to fill out the Free Application for Federal

Student Aid (FAFSA). She encouraged having a citywide campaign to inform the community regarding FAFSA deadlines and that there are funding options for trades. She said summer opportunities open in January and there needs to be a shift in the norms to make the community aware of the opportunities available.

Boardmember O'Reilly added leaders need to look at things from the child's point of view and work together to deliver a great experience.

President Richardson stated the Mesa Promise and Mesa Counts on College pathways are appreciated, and she would like to see expansion of the programs to help pay for dual enrollment classes.

Councilmember Spilsbury suggested reaching out to Deputy City Manager Natalie Lewis as a contact at the COM.

6. Close.

President Richardson thanked everyone for coming and their participation. She looks forward to the next meeting.

Without objection, the Joint Meeting between the Mesa City Council and the Mesa Public Schools Governing Board adjourned at 9:24 a.m.

JOHN GILES, MAYOR

ATTEST:

HOLLY MOSELEY, CITY CLERK

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Joint Meeting between the Mesa City Council and Mesa Public Schools Governing Board held on the 10th day of February 2022. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held.

HOLLY MOSELEY, CITY CLERK

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(Attachments – 1)