

**MONTGOMERY TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Minutes of the Friday, June 12, 2015 7:30 A.M. Special Public Meeting**

These minutes have not been formally approved and are subject to change or modification.

The Montgomery Township Board of Education held a Special Public Meeting on Friday, June 12, 2015 at 7:30 a.m.

**OPENING OF THE MEETING**

A. The Montgomery Township Board of Education held a workshop and special public meeting on Friday, June 12, 2015 in the Board of Education office large conference room.

B. Roll Call - The following Board members were present: Humberto Goldoni, Nicholas Hladick, Dale Huff, Adelle Kirk-Csontos, Amy Miller and Christine Witt

The following Board members were absent: Dharmesh Doshi, Sandra Donnay and Judy Humza

Also Present: Nancy Gartenberg, Superintendent  
Deborah Sarmir, Assistant Superintendent  
Thomas M. Venanzi, Business Administrator/  
Board Secretary  
Kelly Mattis, Director of Human Resources  
Mary McLoughlin, Director of Pupil Services

C. President Kirk-Csontos then read the following Statement of Open Meeting and Public Participation – In accordance with the State’s Sunshine Law, adequate notice of this meeting was provided by mailing notice of meeting on June 2, 2015. Notice was provided to Board of Education Members, Montgomery Township Clerk, Rocky Hill Borough Clerk, Public Library, Township Posting, School Postings, PTSA Officers, Courier News, Princeton Packet, Trenton Times, and The Star Ledger.

D. President Kirk-Csontos then led everyone in the Salute to the Flag.

E. President Kirk-Csontos welcomed all to the special public meeting.

**BOARD OPERATIONS**

Ms. Gwen Thornton, Field Service Representative with the New Jersey School Boards Association, was present to facilitate discussions with the board and central administrative team on the development of district goals and board goals. Ms. Thornton was also present to review the board self-assessment.

Ms. Thornton initiated the discussion on the board self-assessment by providing the evaluation results which reflect the perceptions of each individual board member as he/she ranks the

effectiveness of the board and themselves as a board member in various areas of board operations. Ms. Thornton also distributed a four-year history of results noting that the biggest drop in rankings was in the area of board operations and board performance, and she suggested that these two areas could be a focus for a board goal to improve.

Ms. Thornton made the following power point presentation which assisted her in facilitating discussion regarding the board self-assessment.

**SCHOOL BOARD WISDOM FROM A DOZEN TRUTHS**

Facilitated by:  
Field Services Representatives

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**You have said...**

- Lack of preparation on a fairly consistent basis- not reading materials in advance; not reaching out with questions in advance
- All members do not come prepared to ask questions or seek clarity in advance of our meetings which often makes discussion frustration and unproductive
- Respecting our Committee structure; asking questions for understanding vs. to challenge our administrators' authority and professionalism

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**Truth # 1**

**"No surprises."**

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**Truth # 2**

***Trust is the foundation of good governance.***

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**No Surprises – the Cardinal Rule**

No one (superintendent, board member) should get surprised at any time — in the meeting or between meetings. Some people resist because they don't want the whole thing to appear scripted. Others love to play "gotcha." The truth of "no surprises" is **respect**. Going outside of respect for either people or processes, and someone will get surprised — and end up looking or feeling bad — and the **work will suffer**.

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**Trust**

Good governance is about roles and relationships. All members need to live within their role to build trust and foster good relationships. Both require effort and trust — trust that others will perform their own role appropriately and trust that others are not out to get you or the system. Trust is earned (by a system and individually by participants) when integrity and quality outcomes are ensured.

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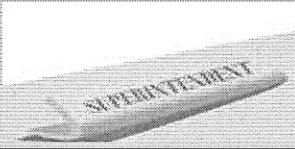
**You have said....**


- Experienced confidentiality breach
- Some members put their personal/political needs above the needs of the district/board as a whole.
- Our board lacks trust and respect among all members.
- The public perception of the Board's collegiality is quite low


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**Truth # 4**


***The most important thing a school board does is hire a superintendent.***





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**Truth # 3**


***It's a meeting in public, not a meeting of the public.***




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**Hire a Superintendent**

A school board cannot make a wise hiring decision without a shared vision on the direction, purpose and needs of their district. With clarity in these areas, the board and the person they hire as superintendent can forge a partnership that benefits all students and the district as a whole.


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**Public Comments**


School boards provide leadership for what are typically multi-million dollar businesses. The board has important work to accomplish. To do that work, the board needs to be fully engaged around the table. The Open Public Meetings Act requires that public business be done in public, and that citizens have opportunity to observe, and comment, at every meeting. Wise school boards understand the difference between public comment and the rest of the meeting. They also create appropriate venues (coffee, forums, surveys) to engage the public.


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**Truth # 5**


***The board has one employee.***




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### One Employee – the CSA


The board does two things: 1) clarify expectations for the system, and for all staff, and 2) hire a good superintendent that everyone else in the system works for. This keeps the lines of accountability clear. The superintendent is responsible for administering all aspects of the district, and the board empowers the superintendent so that it can be managed well.



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### You have said...


- Show up at schools unannounced
- Writing letters to the local paper and speaking with reports and never clarifying that the comments did not reflect the opinion of the board as a whole



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### You have said..


- Our board should receive more input from various levels of the administration; likewise the BOE should have more relationships with other staff members
- Some members who routinely reach out to administrators, arrive at the schools without following the proper protocol or chain of command
- Avoid micromanaging and recognize that the paid administrators are the experts in their respective fields and hold the supt. accountable for her recommendations which are developed through the work with her administrative team.



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### No Power as an Individual



The school board is empowered by the state to perform a number of critical functions. Individual school board members have official power *only* at the board table. Wise and effective board members make sure they, and their colleagues, only exercise legitimate power and refrain from assuming authority in areas where none has been given.



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### Truth # 6



**Individual board members have no power away from board meetings.**

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### Truth # 7

**The essential board skill: being able to count to five**  
(or whatever number is your board majority - and - optimally reaching consensus whenever possible).

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### Act with a Majority

Board members only have power when they act with a majority of the board. It takes a majority to accomplish anything. But the real power of the board is finding common ground on behalf of the whole community. Common ground can only emerge when all the voices are heard. A board that runs rough shod over the minority (board member or citizens) is headed for trouble.



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### Teamwork

Some board members are ill prepared to work cooperatively with their board colleagues. Teamwork is a skill that must be nurtured. Board candidates make promises in the election and then come to understand their only power is the ability of the board to act as a whole. Part of the task of each board member and superintendent is to help build a team that is equal to the work.



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### You have said...

- Important work can not be achieved in a timely manner because our board is being hijacked by unnecessary politics and self serving board members
- The board needs to eliminate the obvious split within the board and work toward building consensus toward what is best for the district rather than supporting personal agendas or interests.
- As a group we should look at what is best for the future of the district, not individual preferences.



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### You have said we need to work on:

- Collaborative decision making
- Respectful communication between board members and with our administrators
- Understanding the role of a BOE member
- Focus on the needs of the students of the MTSD

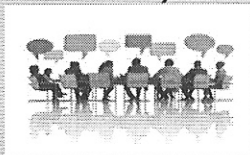


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### Truth # 8

***School board members run for election as individuals, but must govern as part of a group (the board).***



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### Truth # 9

***The board speaks with one voice (or it doesn't speak at all).***

**one voice**



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**Speaks with One Voice**

Essentially, in their actions, the board speaks to the superintendent, setting direction for the district: "Here's what the community expects us to achieve." Until the board reaches an agreement, no individual board member has a right to expect a particular action from the district. Multiple voices create a "no-win" situation.



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**Balancing of Rights**

Roberts Rules is about balancing the "rights of the individual" and "will of the majority." On some boards, it's expected everyone will quickly join ranks with the majority; a dissenting voice is rarely encouraged. Other boards have a culture where dissent is so prevalent there is no effort to find common ground. Good governance is a balance that values the individual voice *and* the ability of the board to act (speak).



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**This requires board members to:**

- Accept and support the decisions of the majority and move forward
- Follow board policy on who speaks for the board
- Refer questions/concerns up the chain of command

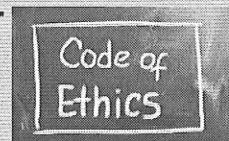


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**Truth # 11**

***A wise superintendent knows he/she cannot get involved with board behaviors and issues.***

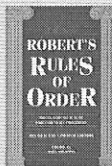


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**Truth #10**

***Roberts Rules guarantees you get your "say" but not necessarily your "way."***



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**Board Behaviors and Issues**

Board members often look to the superintendent to fix a board member who is out of line. The superintendent works for the board, and the board cannot expect the superintendent to intervene in board disputes, or to take responsibility for keeping the board on the "straight and narrow." A local board of education must take responsibility for itself.



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**Truth # 12**


***What gets measured gets done.***

**DATA !!**

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**Good Governance**

Thank you for the interest in good governance practices to support student achievement.



Adapted from the Illinois Association of School Boards

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**What gets Measured**

Effective boards know "what the board cares about will soon be what the district cares about." There is incredible power in providing a shared vision, focus and direction for the district. One way the board exercises leadership is in deciding what to monitor (measure). As it measures, wise boards assure the data gets used to inform, improve and increase student learning.

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The next part of the meeting was devoted toward the development of board goals for 2015-16. Input from the board members included the following:

1. To engender support for the referendum in collaboration with our administration through effective communication with our community and our stakeholders.
2. To continue to build collaboration by actively participating in ongoing professional development, workshops and trainings. Explore utilizing our reorganization meeting as a vehicle for training to foster team work and an understanding of board members' roles and responsibilities.
3. To implement the following operational protocols for board members
  - Respond in a timely way to emails regarding meetings and information requests
  - Review minutes and inquire about your questions before both workshop and action meetings
  - Provide questions to chair of committee 24 hours prior to public meeting
  - Conclude all closed sessions with a reminder of the need for confidentiality

- Confine closed sessions to agenda items only
- Police ourselves in being accountable; once the board arrives at a decision the board will move forward and not continue to revisit issues already resolved

The final portion of discussion was to focus on the development of district goals for 2015-16. The district goals will continue to be on three areas with specific focus identified as follows:

1. To identify and effectively utilize specific communication protocols with parents, staff and community members that are consistent in message.
  - Convene district-wide committee to study K-4 report card for implementation in 2017
  - Streamlining teacher communication to parents
  - Communication of referendum
  - Establish regular communication opportunities for instructional vertical articulation
  - Utilize various communication vehicles such as town halls, coffees, or “breakfast with” to provide additional communication channels for the superintendent and the board with the community at large
2. To review, evaluate and assess current programs and staffing structures to determine gaps/needs.
  - Research, design and implement a master schedule at LMS/VES
  - To establish a set of skills and a technology proficiency criteria for students in grades 4, 8 and 12
  - Develop Enrichment identification protocols/curriculum implementation of programming for K-8
  - Columbia Teachers College training reading
  - Understanding by Design training/differentiated instruction
  - Curriculum writing/revision plan for 2015-16
3. To identify and implement social emotional learning programming to be addressed district wide through the counseling program
  - Examine SEL target areas, HIB Data, Discipline reports, bus incident reports, assessment data, nurse, parent reporting, student reporting, teacher referral, CST referral, current counseling groups, Student Engagement survey 7-12, attendance data, guide office visits, intervention and referral services strategies for teachers, college tracking reports including experience-acceptance and continuing attendance
  - Explore expansion of service learning for students
  - Explore internship opportunities for high school students

The next steps were for the Superintendent to develop action plans for the district goals and share them with the board. The district goals should be communicated to the community via the website, newsletters, back to school nights, etc.



### PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Phyllis Bursh commended the board for the dialog at this meeting. She also offered that the presentation on physics first was phenomenal and suggested that a link to the presentation would be helpful in sharing information with parents. She also suggested that students could be provided with a positive interaction with the community by thinking about community projects/issues for students to solve. She also stated that the board should still consider the implementation of full-day kindergarten since there have been positive results from those districts that do have the program.

Mr. Alan Wirsul stated that he felt that board members have difficulty communicating with the public. He wondered what happened with the issue that was raised by a parent at the last board meeting and felt that this was an opportunity for the board to address a time-sensitive issue in favor of the student. He stated that the board did not do its due diligence by approving a purchase several months ago for apple computers for \$36,000 and felt that an investment in Samsung equipment would be more practical for the students. He voiced his disagreement with the NJSBA representative stating the board meetings are held in public and not a meeting of the public. He suggested that the board should review their goals on a monthly basis rather than waiting until the end of the year. He questioned the leadership of the board when no one reported on a committee report when the chair was absent. He felt that other board members should cover in their absence. He stated that he became aware of a board matter through the open press, and it's not a question of a board member releasing confidential information to the public.

### ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mr. Hladick and seconded by Ms. Witt to adjourn the meeting at 11:27 a.m. Upon call of the question, the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Thomas M. Venanzi  
School Business Administrator/  
Board Secretary