MEETING MINUTES
FY2015 School Budget Hearing and School Committee Meeting

NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT: Rowe NAME OF COMMITTEE: Rowe School Committee

DATE AND LOCATION OF MEETING: Thursday, March 20, 2014 – 5:30PM, Rowe Town Hall

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Lisa Miller (LM) and Lisa Danek-Burke (LDB)
PARTICIPATING REMOTELY (via Skype): Cindy Laffond (CL)

I. **MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY**: Chair Lisa Miller at 5:30pm. Chair Miller announced that because member Cindy Laffond is geographically distant she is attending the meeting remotely via Skype. All votes will be taken by roll call due to remote participation taking place.

AUDIO RECORDING: Cameron Graves announced he was audio recording the meeting. Chair Miller stated she was audio recording the meeting for Secretary Ellen Miller who was out of town, and Lisa Danek-Burke stated she was audio recording the meeting.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF PRESENT: Superintendent Michael Buoniconti (MB), Business Manager Joanne Blier (JB), Director of Pupil Personnel Services Leann Loomis (LL), and Rowe School Principal Bill Knittle (BK). **AUDIENCE MEMBERS:** Gail May, Susie Zavotka (SZ), Sharon Hudson, Susan Samoriski, Jodi Brown, Donna Flagg, Rosie Gordon, Jenn Morse, Cameron Graves

II. **AUDIENCE/STAFF COMMENTS (Combined):** Jenn Morse asked if negotiations with the North Berkshire School Union (NBSU) were going to be discussed this evening. Chair Miller responded that it is not on the agenda, and that the Rowe School Committee is waiting for a meeting with them. Jenn also mentioned how awesome Leann Loomis has been and that she is concerned that if we don't go with Mohawk, or we don't have the opportunity to negotiate with them what is going to happen to her special needs kids. She asked for an answer as to why the Rowe School Committee wouldn't negotiate? Chair Miller stated that at the last meeting the school committee voted to see if we could join the NBSU. Cindy Laffond (CL) stated that we should wait and see what NBSU says. Lisa Danek-Burke (LDB) stated that she thinks the question was why won't you not negotiate? Jenn then asked about professional teacher development...how is that going to work with the new district? She is also concerned about the social impact of isolating our kids and not going to things like sports and other activities with the kids at Mohawk, and what that might do to them as they go into 7th grade. She had two children that went into 7th grade at Mohawk. One went from Buckland-Shelburne and the other went from Rowe. The one who went from Buckland-Shelburne thanks her every day because she was more socially adapted because she went to school with 30 different kids. She wants the school committee to be thinking of these things as they move forward. Chair Miller stated that they have been addressing these items. Originally they responded verbally to questions raised by the school teachers, but she now has a more formal written response point-by-point, which covers some of these questions raised by Jenn. She doesn't have it ready for tonight, but it will be ready in the next few days. LDB asked if she was presenting the letter this evening. She stated that she didn't bring it to the meeting as it wasn't finished. CL asked if she would send it to her and LDB. Jenn was concerned about the ability of the Rowe school psychologist to network with the Mohawk school psychologist, and also concerned about being able to continue participation in the all-school musical and be interlinked with sports. Chair Miller said she hoped that could continue if everyone is agreeable. She can't see any reason why it couldn't continue as it currently is. Chair Miller: It is important - we should pay more attention to that and be doing more for that. I keep thinking the same thing, with Heath and with Hawlemont we often join in because we can't come up with a team alone. Jenn: Do you think those other schools are really going to continue to work with us if we don't become a part of the Three District Agreement? Chair Miller: I don't see why not. I think it would be pretty harsh if they wouldn't just because they didn't like the Central Office. Since our kids are all going to be together

at Mohawk that everyone would be on the same page and do the right thing for the kids. Jenn: Have you been to a Mohawk School Committee meeting to find out any of these things at all. Chair Miller: I have been to their meetings once or twice. I don't attend them regularly. Jenn: You really should go. Chair Miller: Thank you for that. LDB stated that Jenn had concerns about social impacts, and you said we're looking into that. LDB wants to make it clear that they have not discussed social impacts at this committee level at all, and she has been very concerned. She does not see an educational advantage to leaving the district, and she hasn't heard either of her committee members give educational reasons for leaving the district; and social impacts have not been discussed. Chair Miller: I beg to differ, it has come up in the 7th grade when we were talking about Spanish and we were even just changing the Spanish program because of that. LDB: That has to do with a program where you would still be staying with Mohawk. We are talking about something different. Chair Miller: All right, anything else?

Susie Zavotka stated that she had a concern with the timing of the decision. The School Building Committee is currently trying to make decisions. For example, she and Bill Knittle had a meeting with Dustin Bernier of Mohawk this week concerning technology. Is he going to be available for installation of tech equipment at the new school? We have $200K to spend on furniture, equipment and furnishings, which includes technology, data switches, etc. The assumption was that if we were with Mohawk, Dustin would be doing the installation. Now Dustin is trying to prepare quotes for the work both with us being with Mohawk and not with Mohawk. We have an April 1st deadline for knowing how much we can spend on furniture, which is reliant on what we need to spend on other things, like technology. Clearly by the beginning of May we have to know everything. Is there some way you could help? Does NBSU have a tech person available? How do they handle technical issues? Bill Knittle added that if we stay with Mohawk there is a piece of hardware that we need to purchase for *BudgetSense*. If we're not with Mohawk we won't need this. LM stated that she believes the NBSU is meeting on March 31st to discuss Rowe joining their union, and hopefully we'll have an answer from that meeting. SZ: After that will we get a more definitive line item budget? LM: Yes. SZ: Is there a plan to meet more often to speed things up so we can have something done in a timely manner? LM: Yes, tentatively my thought is to probably meet right away, and then perhaps a couple of times per month, because there are a lot of plans to make.

Donna Flagg: Is it not possible to postpone the change to Berkshire at this point? LM: It would be not possible. If we were going to change it would have to be now or never. LDB: Why? LM: I can't expect them to make the change next year. It probably won't be open to us next year. LDB: It should be clear why. If this is an executive session item than you clearly say so. This is a committee of three people. We serve the public and we serve the best interest of the children. This is a huge decision. We just had a parent/voter ask why this can't be postponed. Why isn't it even being considered? Why won't we even consider talking to the District we are now affiliated with? Why won't we talk to the people in the room with us? LM: We've worked with this system for a long time, and I personally don't think it's been working very well. LDB: This is not just your decision. LM: Yes, I know. That is why we took a vote. LDB: We took a vote without really any discussion. Now it's a month later. The School Building Committee is here with questions. We don't know anything. Jenn Morse: What about transportation, because you signed a transportation agreement with the other two districts? CL: No, we have a separate contract. Mohawk bid it for us, but Mohawk, Hawlemont and Rowe each have their own contracts. JB confirmed this. LM: I don't think it would work with us waiting until next year. There are other people looking at that same option.

Gail May: At the last meeting when Jon Lev of NBSU was here, it seems to me that this was hashed out before a decision was made. It seems like we're doing it all over again now. If we've already asked them to accept us and we're waiting for an answer, why are we doing this all over again? The committee voted to go that way—it wasn't just Lisa (Miller) that voted. Why is it all being hashed out again? LM: Alright, we'll take that as a point that we don't need to hash it out. I was just trying to give persons the opportunity to speak. LDB: The reason why this is being rehashed—if that's what you want to call it—or actually discussed—is because this is a really important decision that affects our children. And there is no reason why we can't discuss it. There are a lot of unanswered questions. Gail May: I thought that was all done before we asked them to accept us. It's like

you're going backwards. LDB: Look through the minutes. There hasn't been a whole lot of discussion. I don't understand why we won't have discussions with Mohawk. People in the community tell me they don't understand it, but unfortunately they don't come to meetings. This is an important decision and it shouldn't be taken lightly.

Susie Zavotka: The Mary Lyon Foundation (MLF) voted to sponsor a capital campaign for the new Rowe Elementary School, and has already begun work. Sue Samoriski and Sharon Hudson of the Mary Lyon Foundation are here with us this evening. We are very excited that they're sponsoring this and wanted to acknowledge them this evening. Also, a Rowe School capital campaign committee has been formed that is working with the MLF. This is not part of the School Building Committee (SBC). LM: How was this group formed? SZ: The SBC asked for community volunteers. Some members of the SBC also volunteered to be part of this group. LM: Thank you. Can you explain a little more about the campaign: SZ: There are three parts: 1) a letter writing campaign, of which Bill K has been working on a letter, 2) a brochure being put together by Bruce Cowie, and 3) we're working on gathering the names of townspeople, taxpayers, alumni along with their family and friends, etc., to send appeal letters to. If anyone has names they would like added to this list please get in touch with either me or Margie Morse. Bill Loomis is working on commercial donations and working on a list of businesses to get in touch with. Bill K: The reason for the campaign is that there are four areas of need that the insurance settlement isn't going to cover: library (books & fixtures), playground and equipment, technology, and arts. SZ: Fund raising events are also being planned, and some grant writing is taking place. It's great to have some other townspeople involved now, and great to be working with Mary Lyon Foundation. They will be the recipient of all funds, and will turn them over to the town for expenditure by the SBC. Sue Samoriski: MLF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Any donations are tax deductible. We have had six very successful capital campaigns for all of the other schools, and are happy to support Rowe school and make it happen by providing for all of the extras not covered by insurance funds—from paving the driveway, to library books, to playground equipment. Sharon Hudson is our corresponding secretary. She will actually be writing all of the thank you letters. LM thanked them all.

Rosie Gordon: As a point of clarification for myself, you're using the insurance money for to build the school. SZ: And to furnish it. Rosie G: And we have a $1 million plus budget for the school in the annual budget, and now this is going to be added on top of that? SZ: These are donations that people can choose to give or not; it is not a requirement. Rosie: So this will be additional money? SZ: Yes, this will be for things like books for the library. We have some money for library books, but this will provide for additional books; it will be for playground equipment [the old structures are not compliant, so new structures are needed]; a curtain for the rear of the stage, stage lighting, etc.

Sharon Hudson: I think it's important to remember that this is not only a school, it's our community center as well.

III. HRSD/RSD Joint School Committee Meeting: Not needed

IV. MINUTES:

a) **February 20, 2014 meeting:** LDB asked that the following changes be made to the minutes:
   1) **V. ACTION ITEMS - SCHOOL CHOICE SEATS:** Detail on the number of seats per grade should be listed in the minutes—not just the total number approved for Grades K-4 (12).
   2) **Attachments to minutes:** The list of all attachments/packet items should be listed at the end of the minutes—not just "various newspaper/magazine articles"

   It was agreed that LDB's recommended changes be incorporated into the minutes for approval at the next meeting.

b) **Record Keeping**: CL asked Bill K if Laurie Laffond is keeping a book at the school of all School Committee minutes, with all attachments (items from each packet; items discussed at the meeting). BK said yes, Laurie is keeping these records at the school.

V. **ACTION ITEMS:**

- **Overnight Field Trip:** CL made a motion to approve the overnight field trip for 5th and 6th grade students to Nature's Classroom in Yarmouth Port, Cape Cod MA, from May 19-23, 2014. LDB seconded the motion. Roll call vote to approve the overnight field trip to Nature's Classroom from May 19-23, 2014: LDB: yes, CL: yes, LM: yes. Motion unanimously passed (3/0/0).
- **Remote Participation Policy:** LDB stated there should be a standard code reference at the top of the document. LM will have Judy Willis place the appropriate code on the document. Action on the policy was tabled to the next meeting.

VI. **Principal's Report:**

- **Library Grant:** Great news! We received a $20,000 grant check this week from American Library Association for the library at the new elementary school as part of a Dollar General Corporation grant for library restitution. We've applied for an additional grant for "replacement of a library necessary due to a catastrophic event." We should know on that in June. Sue Kranz was instrumental in getting this grant done, with assistance from Sue Samoriski of the Mary Lyon Foundation.
- **MCAS:** This week and next week. Going well.
- **Classrooms:** The preschool has their doctor's office operational for the "tools of the mind" program. They are performing exams. Grade 3/4 is doing the regions of the U.S. Grade 5/6 is working on states that matter. Primary class: black bears and their life cycle and habitat. AmeriCorps volunteers have left. One volunteer left us after 1st month. Cecilia stayed to the end. She was great. BK spoke with someone at the AmeriCorps volunteer appreciation dinner about perhaps doing a summer project with us.
- **5th/6th Grade Fundraiser:** Annual spaghetti supper was last Thursday at Rowe Camp & Conference Center. Raised about the same amount as last year. Sending RC&CC a big thank you letter.
- **StarLab:** Working with Hawlemont to bring StarLab to the school June 2nd and 3rd. They will take over the gym for two days with inflatable planetarium. Each class will get lessons in the planetarium.
- **Field Trip:** Nature's Classroom will be May 19-23. Permission slips have gone out and chaperones will be chosen early part of next week.
- **Safety:** Fire drill on March 7th was postponed due to frigid weather. Will probably hold it later next week. Tentative date for evacuation drill is April 9th.
- **Professional Learning Days:** Next week, and two in April to talk about "What is Rowe School? What can it be?" Leann has been attending a staff meeting monthly, which has been very helpful.
- **LEC:** Met early this month. Working on a parent survey and a student survey to get a sense about how everyone is feeling. Worked on the survey with the Rowe Teachers' Association.
- **Capital Improvement Plan:** Two years ago at town meeting we had capital article for iPads. Can we possibly pursue this again? How does this come about? BK has a proposal. Response: This should have been submitted at budget time. LDB: I support this, but I think it makes sense at this point to get into the new building. We should then take a good look at the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for the school and work on prioritizing capital items. LM offered to get in touch with FinCom Chair Dennis May to go over the current CIP list. JB will put the latest school CIP list she has in the packet for the next meeting.

VII: Superintendent's Report: MB reported on the following:

- **Technology:** Technology is becoming more and more important. Mohawk district is in the process of forming a Technology Council. MB presented an initial draft of a Mohawk Technology Improvement Plan (TIP). He is sharing this information because he is inviting Rowe and Hawlemont educators to participate in this process as well. One possible outcome might be the creation of a Rowe TIP. Also provided a copy of the state's standards: "*MA Technology Literacy Standards and Expectations*" from DESE. As we've been working on our infrastructure we've learned that we need to do more in our curriculum before we take on all of the new technology being provided. We will probably go in the direction of Google applications for education fairly soon. With the new fiber lines coming on there will be a lot of throughput happening. He suggested that BK take a look at the Google Chrome Book and compatibility as far as what platform we end

up on. A lot of exciting stuff. Needs to be done in a thoughtful way. They've started at Mohawk and are migrating it to Hawlemont. He recommended Rowe School District think about this for the coming fiscal year.

- **New Student:** There is a new 9th grade student moving into Rowe who will be starting at Mohawk on March 31st. This will be a budgetary impact.
- **Letter from School Committee Chair:** MB reported that he received a complaint by registered mail from School Committee Chair Lisa Miller. Letter directed to MB and Principal BK. He stated that as with any complaint, the person whom the complaint is against can elect to respond either in open session or executive session. MB is choosing to respond in open session. Principal Knittle has authorized him to do the same. LM stated that the complaint was not against the principal, but it does involve the principal. MB stated that he will read the complaint, and will then read his response. Supt. Buoniconti then read Chair Miller's February 23, 2014 letter aloud. He then read aloud his letter dated March 18, 2014, responding to her letter. MB provided copies for the School Committee members. LM stated that her memory of that meeting is different than his. LDB: I am concerned that it was in October you wrote this letter and did not speak to the Committee at all. LM stated that this was her own personal experience and her own personal letter. She sent the letter because she wanted to know why she was led to believe one thing, and then something different happened. LDB stated that MB came to the December meeting and explained that he was going to meet with the stakeholders and evaluate the principal. LDB: I am surprised that this the first time anyone on the Committee is hearing about it at all. LM stated she thought she would get a personal response and would at least have a reason why. She never heard anything. MB then stated that in 10 years as a superintendent and working with roughly 75 school committee members he has never received a registered mail of this kind. Generally speaking when people have an issue and want to talk they call him. LM stated she just wanted to keep it confidential between her and him, but that it is fine if he wants to make it public. MB stated that people visit him every day, he closes the door, and they have private conversations. LM stated that she understands that, and that is what they did; but she left that meeting with one understanding, and doesn't feel like she got any feedback from him. He could have called her stating that they had had that discussion, but that this is now what he is doing. LM stated that she recalls the meeting differently. LDB: The Superintendent did report to the Committee what he was going to be doing. You have said nothing to the Committee. You met with the Superintendent privately to complain about the Principal's job performance. It is just a glaring example of what I have been saying all along that these are personal issues. CL: Lisa (LDB) it is personal so let it go. It is between Lisa (LM) and Michael. LDB: You supervise the Superintendent who did not renew your husband's contract, and then you went to him to complain about the Principal's job performance. Chair Miller: Let me clarify for you, I did not make this appointment with him to complain about Bill. I wanted to talk to him about how things were going at Rowe, there were many subjects we discussed, and actually I don't recall initiating that subject. I recall Michael initiating talking about how the Principal was doing. There is a glaring gap in what he remembers and what I remember. It was a while ago. I asked him a question. He responded. He chose a public response so now it is public. MB said that he was not doing this all from memory. He checked all his notes after the visit. His response is based on notes that he took after the meeting, and notes that he captured and put into the records. Chair Miller: Back to you and your continual allegations. A lot has happened here in the last few years and one of them is the school burned down. I'm afraid that you can't let things go. LDB: We are moving forward with the school, that's great, but this Committee is stymied when it comes to Superintendent services and this is a huge issue right now. It's not that I won't let it go. It's that we refuse to really talk about what the issue is. Chair Miller OK I guess I'm done with that subject, Cindy you said you were done with that subject. CL I am done with that subject.

VIII. FINANCIAL INFORMATION/REPORT OF THE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR: None.

IX: DIRECTOR OF PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES: See March 2014 report attached.

X: DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM & ASSESSMENTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: See March 2014 report attached.

XI: NEW BUSINESS: None

XII: ADJOURNMENT: At 6:49pm LDB made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by CL. Roll call vote to adjourn at 6:49pm: LM: yes, LDB: yes, CL: yes. Motion passed unanimously (3/0/0).

Respectfully submitted by Ellen Miller,

Signature: _____

Lisa A. Miller, Chair

Date Approved: 5-12-14

Meeting Packet/Handouts:

- Agenda
- Minutes (2/20/2014)
- Field Trip Request Form (Nature's Classroom May 2014)
- Remote Participation Policy (Second Read and Adoption)
- Principal's Report 3-20-14
- Superintendent's Report 3-20-14
- MTRSD District Technology Literacy Action Plan 2013-14 to 2014-15
- MA Technology Literacy Standards and Expectations
- L Miller 2-23-2014 letter to M Buoniconti
- M Buoniconti 3-18-2014 letter to L Miller
- Report of Director of Pupil Personnel Services – March 2014
- Report of Director of Curriculum and Assessment – March 2014
- Recorder articles: *Rowe moves up time of supt. vote* (2-18-2014); *Rowe to pursue new superintendent* (2-20-2014); *Rowe may know by March if it can join school union* (2-21-2014); *Rowe seeks school broadband, treasurer change, legal money* (2-28-2014)