

Monument Academy School Board, Sept. 9

Board offers alternative to hoodies

By Jackie Burhans

The Monument Academy (MA) School Board held a regular meeting on Sept. 9. It spotlighted a staff member, welcomed two new staff, addressed the uniform policy, and heard a public comment on its open records response.

Uniform hoodie policy

Board member Misty McCuen led the discussion on an alternative to hoodies in the elementary and middle school uniform policy. She moved to provide the option for a high quality crew-neck sweatshirt with a school crest patch. These sweatshirts, with no hood or pocket, can be ordered from an approved vendor in black, royal blue, or gray.

Board member Chris Dole said MA is a school of excellence and student dress is a big part of that, noting that when the uniform policy is relaxed it shows up in behavior. Dole and board member Megghan St. Aubyn voted no, while McCuen and board members Lindsay Clinton and Ryan Graham voted yes to carry the motion. Board policies 1501ES and 1501MS are at bit.ly/ma-bd-policies.

Board spotlight

The board spotlighted Amy Torrance, Communications and Marketing specialist, for her support of MA's enrollment growth goals. McCuen presented Torrance with a certificate of achievement.

Public comments on open records response
After a lengthy executive session, the board adjourned and then allowed public comments on items not on the agenda. A community member said she had made a Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) request that should have been filled in three days or up to 10 days under special circumstances. The board's lawyer replied that the documents would be ready after that deadline. She said she was given a box with 600 pages of wet and wrinkled papers, of which 500 were du-



Above: Amy Torrance, left, was recognized by the MA board at their meeting Sept. 9 and presented with a certificate of appreciation by Misty McCuen. Photo by Jackie Burhans.

plicates and charged \$134 per board policy 1512. She expressed shock at the unprofessional response.

Highlights

These items were highlighted at the regular board meeting:

- The board introduced two new staff members: Tamiko Thomas, East Campus assistant principal, and Chris Hale, athletic director.
- The board voted unanimously to increase the number of board members to seven and agreed to wait until the spring election to fill the seat.
- The board agreed to have lawyer Brad Miller review a statement clarifying MA's COVID-19 policies, stating the board is not man-



Above: At the Sept. 9 board meeting, Tamiko Thomas was introduced as the new assistant principal at MA's East Campus. Photo by Jackie Burhans.

dated to require vaccinations. See <https://bit.ly/ma-covid-stmt>.

- St. Aubyn reported that MA continues to work with the county on Highway 105 with a long-term solution of rerouting traffic around the school building. Staff is coming in early to help with the car line, and she is hopeful about working with the church next door that wants to cut off access to its driveway.

The next regular board meeting has been moved to Thursday, Oct. 7 at 6 p.m. at the East Campus band room due to fall break. The meeting will be in person only. The MA School Board usually meets at 6 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month. For more information, see <https://bit.ly/ma-boe>.

Jackie Burhans can be reached at jackieburhans@ocn.me.

Lewis-Palmer D 38 Board of Education, Sept. 20

Board cancels election, receives reports on priority 2 of strategic plan

By Harriet Halbig

The Lewis-Palmer D38 Board of Education held a special meeting on Sept. 2 and voted to cancel participation in November's election because only two incumbents filed paperwork to run. Board President Chris Taylor and board Secretary Tiffney Upchurch will each serve an additional four-year term.

Taylor commented that he was disappointed that he would not be able to reach out to the community during a campaign. Upchurch said she was honored to serve an additional term to maintain the momentum the current board has achieved.

The remainder of the board, including Theresa Phillips, Ron Schwarz, and Matthew Clawson, is serving four-year terms that will end in November 2023.

At the regular meeting on Sept. 20, there were several comments from the public. Three of these were from physicians in the area who said that El Paso County is again in the orange to red zone regarding COVID-19. They urged the board to take action by encouraging all staff to be vaccinated, including by offering incentives. Students should also be masked to avoid quarantine, they said.

Three local parents also urged stronger action by the board, one of them saying that his son was exposed at school and the schools had opted not to receive tests.

Four individuals thanked the board for allowing parents to make the decision regarding

masking.

One individual commented on the fact that the board is considering altering its policy regarding the teaching of controversial materials and that this is unnecessary. Others supported this opinion.

Superintendent's update

In his update, Superintendent K.C. Somers reported that the district's new executive team went to all schools in August to introduce themselves and encourage feedback.

Teachers and other staff said it was important to them to feel valued and that compensation should be improved.

Other subjects Somers mentioned were the first professional development day on Sept. 1, and the district will relaunch a Financial Advisory Committee soon. This group will consist of eight to 10 community and district staff members, chosen by formal application. The group will be tasked with creating fiscal credibility and stressing transparency.

Regarding the subject of the district reaction to the pandemic, Somers said the district continues to follow the guidelines of the Department of Public Health.

He recognized Anne Icke, Davis Saunders, and Allison Sobers for being named National Merit semi-finalists and Madison Wilson of Palmer Ridge High School for being named a KOAA Athlete of the Week.

Dr. Merlin Holmes, chief operating officer of Monument Academy, presented the school's

annual report and thanked the district for their partnership. He said the school did well through the pandemic, and its enrollment has grown by 100 to 125 pupils annually. The new campus serves grades six through 10. Plans are in place for an additional wing to serve students through 12th grade.

Strategic priority 2

Assistant Superintendent Amber Whetstine moderated a report on district activities in support of strategic priority 2, to ensure high-quality instruction and relevant educational experiences for all students. The focus is on early education and pathways to the future after graduation.

Due to staffing shortages, the Palmer Lake preschool had to be closed, but students were moved to Kilmer and other locations, including Monument Academy and a local private preschool.

There are currently 147 preschool students. Forty-five percent of these are funded through the Colorado Preschool Program or special edu-

Val Ross-Coy
Broker Associate

(719) 237-8787
val.erashields.com
vcoy@erashields.com



