

Springs Fire Department Recruit Academy, for about 30 firefighters.

- District Training Officer Capt. Chris Piepenburg made improvements to the live fire training building and repaired the broken overhead door on the barn.

Fleet update

Langmaid said district mechanic Gavin Smith has made multiple repairs to several vehicles. A Type 6 requires new brakes, a tender requires a new primer pump, and both are out of service. The meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

Meetings are usually held on the third Wednesday of every month at Station 1, 11445 Teachout Road, Colorado Springs. Meetings are open to the public via Zoom until further notice. The next regular meeting is scheduled on

Jan. 19 at 7 p.m. For joining instructions, updates, agendas, and minutes, visit www.bffire.org or contact the Administrative Officer Rachel Dunn at admin@bffire.org or call 719-495-4300. *Natalie Barszcz can be reached at nataliebarszcz@ocn.me.*

MA (Cont. from 1)

an hour and a half, finally leaving after depositing signs with messages to the board including "Listen to Our Teachers," "Something's Not Right," "Leaders Don't Just Leave," and "Talk to the Teachers Not the COO."

The board reconvened after nearly six hours to adjourn, taking no action.

Large audience attends meeting to address leadership concerns

On Dec. 9, nearly 100 people attended the regular MA board meeting, which was moved to the East Campus gym to accommodate the crowd. The board voted to post the meeting recording on a one-time basis on the MA YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/I9J92-YNgsU> to remain available for 30 days.

Miller said many in the community have discussed online a staff issue from last summer. He said that a serious Title 9 investigation concerning the assistant

principal/athletic director position was initiated by the prior chief operating officer (COO), which compelled the school to act. The resulting recommendations were acted on but not initiated by the new COO, Merlin Holmes. He added that Holmes has been in multiple employment scenarios, which can be an issue of interest and concern. He said that to his knowledge Holmes never left a position due to interpersonal behavior involving other employees in any sort of direct matter. Lastly, he admonished parents to speak from the heart but speak from truth they were personally aware of rather than what they saw online.

A teacher spoke next, saying that a recent faculty meeting had disturbed a lot of people, but she had some positive suggestions. She advised leadership to focus on improving the climate and culture at both campuses. She said little things would help, like social gatherings offsite, more jeans

days, having administration step in and give teachers a 20-minute break, and celebrating birthdays again. She also suggested mental health days, perhaps using leftover snow days. She asked for an anonymous grievance process such as a locked mailbox for the board that the administration cannot access, saying she would never participate in a survey with her email attached. Finally, she asked that teachers be treated more professionally and that they be evaluated not only in the classroom but for all that they do outside of teaching.

Several parents spoke, thanking the board for all they do but saying that staff is hurting and have no public voice because their careers are on the line. A parent said the board has heard that the new COO is increasing work hours, bullying behind closed doors, cutting budgets, and more. They encouraged the board to reach out privately to teachers and staff, bypassing the COO. A parent read the names of nine staff

members who had recently left Monument Academy: Julie Seymour, Carol Skinner, Marty Venticinque, Eric Rocciola, Chandy Buckingham, Sharla Davis, Janyse Skalla, Rachel Maring, and Debra Kappel.

Other MA parents spoke of their long time at the school and previous challenges MA has faced. They expressed concern that new staff and long-term substitutes do not measure up to MA's high standards. A parent suggested they might consider leaving the school, which would pose a problem for MA's bond refinancing effort. They felt that MA's mission was not being fulfilled and that their children were bored and not learning. They felt teachers could not teach well if they were not supported and that emphasis on character fell off at the middle school level when kids need it the most.

Parents said that MA needs more kids to get more money so they can expand but has traded quality for quantity. One parent said they appreciated Miller's statement about online gossip, but at the same time gossip and rumors are sometimes born in truth or reality. They urged the board to consider their policies and investigate teacher treatment. A final speaker said that last year was difficult but nothing like this year. She said, "There is an enemy attacking this school and he can't have this school, this is our school." She said that the climate has changed and that she has heard directly that teachers are not being heard and are scared to speak up, and that is why they are leaving. She urged the board to listen to teachers.

Board member Chris Dole read a statement on behalf of the board. He thanked the six people who spoke, saying it took courage, honesty, and strength. The board, he said, came into the meeting focused on three things: the COO as the leader of MA, the departure of nine staff members, and the stability and viability of the institution. People are angry, tired, concerned, frustrated, and fearful, he said, but this has been building over several years. MA has dealt with a facility expansion, the pandemic, firings, loss of life, and three top leadership changes. He agreed that MA has drifted off course. He said that the board shared every concern they heard, and that they too are parents who want success, academic challenge, accountability, and discipline. But, he said, the board would be wrong to point to Holmes as the only reason.

Dole reviewed the three leaders over the last 2 1/2 years: an executive director who created an atmosphere of distrust, a COO with health issues leading her to resign, and finally Holmes. The MA board, over this time, has been tasked with establishing trust and transparency, acting with deliberation in soliciting input on the secondary school and hiring two COOs and principals to round out the organization chart at both campuses.

However, they sadly lost their principal at the West Campus and decided not to replace him which, in hindsight, was a mistake, Dole said. The board was still trying to understand Seymour's resignation as East Campus principal. He said MA had been a well-oiled machine with one campus, but opening the new campus created a distance that exposed weaknesses in leadership. The leadership at each campus comes from



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