

The Wellness Committee continues to concentrate on meeting requirements for the School Lunch Program.

The Special Education Advisory Committee and Gifted/Talented Leadership Team have not yet met.

**New co-chair appointed**

Rollins said that the leadership of the Parent and Community Advisory Committee is based on two co-chairs, each with a two-year term. Rollins' term ends next June.

Renee Butler, a representative of

Lewis-Palmer Elementary School, volunteered to serve and was confirmed by a vote of the membership.

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The Parent and Community Advisory Committee meets six times per year. Locations vary. The next meeting will

be on Oct. 10 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Palmer Lake Elementary School, 115 Upper Glenway in Palmer Lake. For further information, please contact [tmckee@lewispalmer.org](mailto:tmckee@lewispalmer.org).

Harriet Halbig can be reached at [harriethalbig@ocn.me](mailto:harriethalbig@ocn.me).

**Monument Academy School Board, Sept. 14 and 20**

**MA responds to ACLU, prepares for budget amendment**

By Jackie Burhans

At its Sept. 14 meeting, the Monument Academy (MA) board heard their lawyer's response to the ACLU and prepared to amend its budget, review carline safety concerns, and consider revisions to its employee handbook. At a special meeting on Sept. 20, the board continued the discussion of its emergency operations procedure (EOP) and employee handbook.

**Lawyer responds to ACLU demand letter**

Board President Ryan Graham noted that MA had received a demand letter from the ACLU with a deadline of Aug. 31 to respond. The demand letter addressed what the ACLU considered unlawful actions by MA and its board, undermining the safety of LGBTQ+ students and flouting state and federal laws. See <https://ocn.me/v23n9.htm#ma> for more information.

Graham read the letter from the ACLU and then read the response the board sent on Aug. 31 through its legal counsel, Brad Miller of Miller Farmer Carson Law LLC.

The response from Miller confirmed that he represented MA and its board and asserted that the ACLU's understanding was incorrect. He said that while MA had recently adopted a resolution, the ACLU's characterization was incorrect. The resolution was simply an expression of parents' rights and voice in education, he said. Finally, he finished by saying that he did not find any mention in the letter of who the ACLU purported to represent.

Graham indicated there was no current litigation and that the board would stand firm.

**Budget adjustments anticipated**

With the absence of MA's financial consultant Glenn Gustafson, Graham reported on his behalf that the audit was nearly complete, the 2023-24 budget was loaded into the financial system, and the payroll conversion had begun but had some errors that delayed the project to bring purchasing in-house.

The board adopted the FY23-24 budget in June 2023 and will need

budget adjustments in the fall and late January. Some expenditure items were under budget, Graham reported. This will mean reductions to an already tight budget and require MA to maintain budget discipline.

In the Finance Committee report, board member Joe Buczkowski emphasized that Gustafson's report had initially budgeted enrollment at 1,180. He said enrollment was below the budget at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The October count would also impact the budget, and some cost-cutting would have to occur at that point, he said. He noted there may also be additional revenue, including earnings from moving certificates of deposit (CDs) to achieve higher interest rates.

**Carline safety concerns**

Officer Maxwelle Ellis, MA's school resource officer (SRO), addressed concerns about the Highway 105 construction and safety. He noted that, while growing pains would happen, phase 4 would be better. Ellis, who works for the Monument Police Department (MPD), noted that MPD has no jurisdiction over Highway 105, which belongs to the county. The construction project is being done under the Pikes Peak Rural Transit Authority (PPRTA), with others trying to help as much as possible.

Ellis said he sees the frustrations and experiences the hostility but prefers that people bring their concerns to him rather than taking them out on MA staff. Parents coming early are adding to the frustration, he said, but the number of violations has dropped dramatically. He asked for patience and compassion and reiterated that people should come to him and contact him via email at [mellis@tomgov.org](mailto:mellis@tomgov.org).

Graham reported that the recirculation road was almost complete, with permanent fencing coming soon. MA would be moving into Phase 2 of carline procedures through December, with Phase 3 incorporating the new Knollwood roundabout. He asked that K-5 families not arrive before 3:15 p.m. for pickup and not block the Vision Center clients from exiting. He said MA would not tolerate families berating others and could and would revoke

carline privileges if necessary.

**Employee handbook discussed**

At the Sept. 14 meeting, Krista Pelley, director of people operations, led the discussion of changes to the 2023-24 Employee Handbook. She directed the board to focus on the portion of the handbook that impacts pay and time off requests, noting that in previous years it had not differentiated between sick and personal leave. The proposed policy would adjust the cap of leave accrual, differentiate between leave types, use half-hour increments, and implement new work calendars. This area was important to solidify so it could be entered into the financial system so employees could know how much leave they have and begin to request it.

Another area of change in the handbook covers purchase orders and financial information, which was significantly out of date. To update this section, she is looking at D38, D20, and other charter school policies. She will consult with Gustafson and the financial team about changes to purchasing.

In addition, Pelley said she was removing everything that is procedural from the handbook as principals have created procedural guides for staff. She also noted that she was reviewing board policies to see how that would impact the handbook. Board member Karen Hoida noted a section in the handbook regarding conflict resolution that conflicted with policy 1518A. Hoida suggested the handbook should simply refer to the policy. Pelley agreed and asked for clarification of the teacher representative policy. Graham noted that wasn't mandated in the handbook. Finally, Pelley asked for board input on the teacher-student communication section for language around social media.

Pelley said she would love for the board to further review sections but wanted to segment out staff leave and approve that. Graham said he felt comfortable knowing that legal was involved and had seen it. Buczkowski said he would rather not pass it today. Graham tabled this item to discuss at the upcoming special meeting.

At the Sept. 20 special meeting, the board took up the discussion of the handbook again, starting with a comment from Graham that he had heard that a couple of administrators needed time to review the document and suggested postponing approvals until October. Pelley emphasized that staff was waiting to hear on leave policies and that she and Gustafson had removed much of the finance policy and purchase order information out of the handbook.

Lindsay Clinton, board vice president, suggested that in the future, discussions of the handbook should be penciled in for the June agenda so that it would be available for new hires. Graham said he would oppose any approval of the handbook until all administrators had a chance to review it. Buczkowski said he had reviewed other sections and felt they were fine but that the document could be better organized. The meeting adjourned to executive session without taking a vote on the employee handbook.

**Highlights**

Board meeting highlights include:

- Board member Craig Carle spotlighted the work of Kristi Hayes, preschool director, for doing a phenomenal job managing the carline at MA West. She is a guiding light for parents, he said. He appreciated her leadership and said she and her team were "the epitome of resilience."
- High School Principal David Kennington presented the EOP plan intended to standardize MA's initial response to expected crises, including coordination and communication through a safe school plan as required by state law CRS 22-32-109.1(2). Although the plan was not reviewed by legal counsel, the board unanimously adopted it with the intent to continue updating the plan.
- At the Sept. 20 special meeting, Buczkowski said he had reviewed the statute regarding the safe school plan and identified some missing items such as a written evaluation after exercises or incidents, annual inventory and testing of safety equipment, having school personnel complete training courses, and including SROs. He also noted that the school is supposed to have a policy on annual inspection of buildings to address the removal of barriers to safety and supervision. Buczkowski offered to share this information with Kennington and to work with the Governance Committee to develop the needed policy.
- Curriculum policies IIAC-MA, IIAC-E1-MA, IIAE-E2-MA, IJ-MA and IJ-E1-MA were passed unanimously with minor changes from what was discussed at the previous meeting. Approved MA board policies can be found at <https://bit.ly/ma-bd-policies>.
- The board approved a contract for the 2023-24 fiscal year, as recommended by Gustafson, to engage CLOCworks Inc. to install equipment to monitor and optimize energy costs for a \$4,800 installation fee and \$500 per month management fee. Gustafson felt these fees could be recouped in three or four months, and MA would realize savings in the long term.
- The board unanimously approved changes to the preschool policies and procedures as Hayes and Elementary Principal Kurt Walker requested. Changes included removing language about "Love and Logic" principles, changing the word "rules" to "social contract," and removing language in the behavior and discipline section referring to mental health personnel since none is available at MA West.

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The MA School Board meets at 6:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month. The next regular board meeting will be on Thursday, Oct. 12, at 6:30 p.m. at the East Campus. See more information at <https://bit.ly/ma-boe>. Jackie Burhans can be reached at [jackieburhans@ocn.me](mailto:jackieburhans@ocn.me).



Above: At its Sept. 14 meeting, board Director Craig Carle, right, spotlighted Preschool Director Kristi Hayes, left, for doing a phenomenal job with her team in managing the carline at Monument Academy's West campus. Photo by Jackie Burhans.