

*Unofficial*

BENTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION  
405 South Grant Avenue  
Fowler, Indiana 47944

The Board of School Trustees of Benton Community School Corporation met in a BUDGET WORK SESSION Monday, August 17, 2020, at the Administration Building At 6:30 p.m. to discuss the 2021 Budget.

Board members present were:

	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Gabe Widmer	X	
Edward Schroeder	X	
Robert Sondgeroth	X	
Jennifer Barce	X	
Chad Tolen	X	

The budget work session adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brandie Burton, Recording Secretary

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President

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Member

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Vice-President

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Member

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Secretary

Regular Meeting  
Board of School Trustees  
August 17, 2020  
Administration Building

Board members present were:

	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Gabe Widmer	X	
Edward Schroeder	X	
Robert Sondgeroth	X	
Jennifer Barce	X	
Chad Tolen	X	

Also present were administrators, faculty, staff, and patrons.

Call to Order, Recognize Quorum

President Edward Schroeder called the regular meeting to order at 7:20 p.m., and recognized a quorum. The Board, Interim Superintendent, administrators, faculty, staff and patrons stood for the pledge of allegiance and took a moment of silence. Mr. Wittenauer indicated there was one emergency addition to the agenda. He stated it would be E.7 Consider approval of the month to month contract with Therapy Solutions to fill the vacant speech and hearing position(s). Mr. Wittenauer indicated to the board we were unable to find a person to fill the open speech position and that we also have a maternity leave for speech we will need to fill soon. He stated that speech positions are hard to fill and that most corporations find themselves in our position as well. He stated that the company has agreed to have a month to month contract so if we find a permanent replacement we won't be stuck in a yearlong contract. The board approved the amended agenda on a motion by Robert Sondgeroth and a second by Jennifer Barce. The motion carried.

Audience to Visitors

None

Routine Matters

The board approved the minutes of the executive session and the Regular meeting of July 20, 2020 on a motion by Chad Tolen and a second by Robert Sondgeroth. The motion carried.

Mrs. Albertson presented the vouchers to the board for approval. Mrs. Albertson pointed out the voucher to the Benton County Treasurer for \$10,000.00. She indicated this was to purchase as fully equipped vehicle for our SRO. Mrs. Albertson also pointed out that expenses coming from fund 7941 was CARES act money used for COVID 19 expenses. She indicated the nurse and extra custodian at Boswell were being paid out of those funds as well. Mrs. Albertson asked the board members if they had any questions. There being no questions from the board, Mrs. Albertson asked the board to approve the vouchers as presented. Gabe Widmer moved, seconded by Jennifer Barce, to approve accounts payable vouchers totaling \$801,838.52 and payroll and benefits vouchers of \$1,663,071.26 for a grand total of \$2,464,909.78. The motion carried with Robert Sondgeroth abstaining.

Mrs. Albertson indicated she had updated expenses and revenue on the financial reports sent to the board. She stated she did not have anything further to add from what was discussed at the work session.

Communications

Mr. Wittenauer acknowledged the following donations:

Benton Central

- \$485.15 from Charities Aid Foundation of America to FFA;
- \$250.00 from McAllister Foundation to Heather Screen classroom;
- \$50.00 from Daniel & Dawn Samet to FFA.

Mr. Wittenauer presented the board with the fundraiser report.

Mr. Wittenauer informed the board of the cancellation of the June 2021 concert band trip to Nashville, TN. Mr. Wittenauer also informed the board of the postponement of the 2020 Washington DC trip to Spring of 2021.

Mr. Wittenauer indicated he had sent the board a memorandum listing out his reasoning in wanting to revisit the purchasing of the school busses for this school year. He stated he was not going to go through each one individually but wanted to point out some reasons he felt were important. He stated the first was the safety issue and the second was that we had advertised the purchasing of the busses with our budget and told the tax payers we were spending those funds on the busses and he feels that is what we should do. He stated he does not want to be the superintendent who has a bus break down on the side of the road in a snow storm because we don't have enough working busses. Mr. Wittenauer stated he was recommending the purchase of the busses as was previously advertised and approved with the budget. He stated he would ask during action items for a vote of yes or no from the board. Mr. Wittenauer stated he was open for discussion of the matter and asked any board members for their comments or questions. Mr. Tolen stated that since the budget was approved in the fall of 2019 the world has completely went upside down in 2020 and a lot has changed. He stated that since we are facing possibly a \$5 million deficit we need to save that money for the education of our children. He stated he felt a bus with 140,000 miles on it was fine to transport our students. Mr. Tolen stated there are no flash blizzards and our students are not going to get stuck on the side of the road and we have plenty of resources to locate our busses and students. He made the comment that our corporation calls delays and schools more often and on the conservative side compared to other schools so we will most likely not be on the road in weather like that. Mr. Tolen stated that with COVID and the issues with that he feels that the money should be set aside and spent on education of students. Mr. Wittenauer suggested that maybe only buy 3 busses not the entire six. Mr. Wittenauer stated he is still concerned that the safety of our students has not changed due to COVID. Mr. Wittenauer again reiterated that he was recommending the purchase of the busses.

Mr. Wittenauer stated he wanted to talk with the board about maintenance responsibilities. He stated that when he was here before there was a facilities director and that he is aware that the position was not filled when Sherm Bice passed away. He stated that he feels it would be helpful to have 1 person to go to. He stated he was not suggesting we hire another person but look at the possibility of putting one of our current maintenance employees as that person and give them extra compensation. He stated he felt maintenance things were falling through the cracks and systems were not being maintained the way they are supposed to. He stated

that he was not sure who would be the go to person and that he would get together a job description for the board to review.

Mr. Wittenauer suggested to the board that they postpone starting the Long Range Planning Committee until January. He stated that way the new superintendent can be involved in the picking of the committee and any new board members there may be can be involved as well. Mr. Schroeder stated he felt that it was wise to wait also. Mrs. Albertson stated that we would contact the community members who had expressed interest and let them know that we plan on starting the committee in January.

Mr. Parker, Technology Director, made a presentation to the board on the progress of our virtual students and their access to reliable internet. Mr. Parker stated that they were focused on getting internet access first for the virtual students who indicated they had no internet access at all. He stated they are providing hotspots to students. He stated they had delivered 4 hotspots and had a couple more to go out in the next day or so. Mr. Parker indicated that he was working with a company to have an agreement for them to install equipment on our towers and then give our students discounted internet rates. Mr. Wittenauer asked if there was a cost to us for the equipment installation. Mr. Parker stated the company would pay for and install the equipment and then if a student chose to use the internet access they would have an \$8.00 equipment fee and a \$15.00 per month fee for internet access. He stated he was still in talks with the company and would bring a proposal to the board for approval when needed. Mr. Wittenauer asked where the company was out of. Mrs. Albertson stated the information said they were from LaPorte. Mr. Parker stated they have a lot of presence in the area. Mr. Wittenauer inquired of Mr. Sondgeroth if this answered his questions he had. Mr. Sondgeroth asked if every student has access to the internet at his or home. Mr. Parker stated that anyone that was in range that needed it did. Mr. Parker indicated the company would offer discounted rates to any families on free and reduced. Mr. Wittenauer stated to Mr. Sondgeroth that if he knew of someone that was having trouble getting connected to let him know so that they can work on the problem and get the student access. Mr. Wittenauer stated that if the students/families do not tell us then we cannot help them. Mr. Sondgeroth inquired if the principal or teacher would know if a student was having trouble. Mrs. Alberston explained that during the registration process a parent was asked to indicate if they had internet and if it was reliable and if they were going to be a virtual student. She stated this is how Richard was able to get the hotspots to the families that needed them. Mr. Sondgeroth was asking for a follow up on students. Mr. Wittenauer stated that if we are made aware they are in need then we will make sure they get what they need to have access. Mr. Sondgeroth inquired about the category that was labeled unknown and asked if these students were falling in a crack? Mr. Parker stated that those people just didn't fill the information out. Mr. Sondgeroth asked if these students had been contacted to make sure they had internet access. Mr. Wittenauer stated that if they did not take the time to fill out the information than that is on them. Mr. Sondgeroth stated he did not agree with that. Mr. Parker said he could send out an email notification to all parents but we were not providing internet to students who already have it. Mr. Wittenauer stated that the bottom line is we will try to get all virtual students that need internet access what they need to be able to connect and do their school work. Mr. Wittenauer was going to move along to old business and Mr. Sondgeroth indicated he had other concerns he would like to address about the issue. Mr. Sondgeroth stated he was worried it was the parents' responsibility to contact the corporation. He stated that as a teacher many parents did not return parent teacher conference letters that were sent home and that they would track those

parents down even if they had to go to their house. Mr. Sondgeroth stated he felt we needed to do the same in this situation if need be. Mr. Wittenauer stated that he would work with the principals and teachers and to make sure all students had access. Mr. Schroeder thanked Mr. Parker for his hard work and stated he was doing a good job getting all this taken care of. Mr. Wittenauer asked Mr. Parker to come to the September board meeting for any updates and further questions.

#### Old Business

None

#### New Business

Mr. Wittenauer presented the staff report to the board. Gabe Widmer moved, seconded by Robert Sondgeroth to approve the following staff report as presented:

#### Leaves

- Leave of absence for Crystal Pandy as special education aide at Prairie Crossing Elementary effective July 31, 2020;

#### Resignations

- Madison Klender as Speech and Language Pathologist (offer not accepted);
- Tristen McKinney as a part time special education aide at Benton Central Jr./Sr. High School effective July 29, 2020;
- Brayden McKinney as 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher at Otterbein Elementary effective July 22, 2020;
- Tracy Tatge as full time aide at Prairie Crossing Elementary effective July 30, 2020;
- Ben Schutter as the Head Wrestling coach at Benton Central Jr./Sr. High School effective August 10, 2020;
- Jim Gerlach as the Head Softball coach at Benton Central Jr./Sr. High School effective August 5, 2020;
- Nelson Pelton as a Science Teacher at Benton Central Jr./Sr. High School effective August 11, 2020;
- Marcy Swanson as a bus driver effective July 31, 2020.

#### Employment

##### Benton Central

- Jennifer Hasser as Special Education Teacher effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year;
- Transfer of Zack Rea from Special Education Teacher to 7<sup>th</sup> grade Math teacher effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year;
- Transfer of Kelly Yadon from Otterbein Cafeteria to part time aide effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year;
- ECA positions per attachment.

##### Otterbein Elementary

- Eva Cassiday as 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher effective the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year;
- Vicki Fehland as a 3.5 hour cafeteria employee effective completion of an extended background check.

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Prairie Crossing Elementary

- Jamie Briles as a Music Teacher effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year;
- Sandra Ashworth as 29 hour aide beginning the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year;
- Jessica Laughner as a 20 hour 1 one 1 aide effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.

Boswell Elementary

- Jennifer Call as Kindergarten teacher effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year;
- Megan Hawk as a full time aide effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year;
- Renee Bunch as school nurse effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year;
- Kasey Honsowetz as part time ESL aide effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year;
- Esmeralda Luna as a part time ESL aide effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year;
- Aaron Hasser as custodian effective upon board approval;
- Mayrani Cortes as part time -29 hour- ESL Aide effective the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.

Motion carried. Mr. Jeffrey Toll introduced Jennifer Call, the new kindergarten teacher at Boswell. Mr. Toll also introduced Renee Bunch the new school nurse at Boswell. The board welcomed the new staff members and wished them luck.

Mr. Wittenauer asked the board to appoint Kelly Talbot to the Otterbein Public Library Board of Trustees. Jennifer Barce moved, seconded by Chad Tolen to appoint Kelly Talbot to the Otterbein Public Library Board of Trustees. Motion carried.

Mr. Wittenauer asked the board to appoint Jamie Baker to the Earl Park Public Library Board of Trustees. Chad Tolen moved, seconded by Robert Sondgeroth to appoint Jamie Baker to the Earl Park Public Library Board of Trustees. Motion carried.

Mrs. Albertson presented the board with the revised 2020-2021 Textbook Rental, Curricular Materials (Devices), Consumable and Fees and asked the board to approve same. She indicated that we were unable to procure the handwriting books for the elementary from our normal vendor and that Ms. Burton was able to find the books for a cheaper rate from another vendor so we were able to charge the parents a cheaper fee. She indicated they had changed the fee for the parents already and they were charged the lesser amount but that we needed it approved by the board also. Jennifer Barce moved, seconded by Gabe Widmer to approve the revised 2020-2021 Textbook Rental, Curricular Materials (Devices), Consumable and Fees as presented. Motion carried.

Mrs. Albertson asked the board for approval of permission to advertise the 2021 Budgets that was discussed in the work session before the board meeting. She stated she recommended advertising the form 3, Capital Projects and Bus Replacements plan as presented in the budget work session. She stated they would be advertised next week, the hearings would be held in September and the Budgets adopted in October and again in December that is when the final budget rates and amounts are set. Mr.

Schroeder wanted to reiterate that this was for advertising purposes only and nothing on the referendum levy had been decided yet. Robert Sondgeroth moved, seconded by Jennifer Barce to give permission to advertise the 2021 Budget. Motion carried.

Mrs. Albertson asked the board to approve the authorization of Patty Kem, Director of Cooperative School Services, to sign agreements for Alternative Services and Private Residential School Placements. Mrs. Albertson indicated that since Mr. Hoover has retired Mr. Schroeder is actually suppose to get online and approve these agreements. She stated by approving this it gives Patty Kem the authority to do that for us. Mrs. Albertson stated Mrs. Kem is asking this of all the schools in the CO-OP. Mr. Schroeder stated he could see that is a good idea so she isn't waiting on everybody and she is basically doing it anyway. Jennifer Barce moved, seconded by Edward Schroeder to approve the authorization of Patty Kem, Director of Cooperative School services, to sign agreements for Alternative Services and Private Residential School Placements. Motion carried.

Mr. Schroeder asked for a motion to approve the contract with Therapy Solutions for a speech therapist for 7.5 hours per day at \$69.50 per day. Mr. Wittenauer stated they only get paid for days they work so if there is a snow day or cancellation they would not get paid for that day. Mrs. Albertson inquired if we should approve the contract for the maternity leave position now as well since the next board meeting was not until September 21<sup>st</sup> and that was when the maternity leave was supposed to start. The board agreed to approve both contracts now. Mrs. Albertson stated one contract is for the position vacated by Jennifer Young when she transferred to another position and the second contract is for Erin Budreau and her maternity leave. Mr. Wittenauer stated he had an editorial comment that he was not sure why a teacher was let to transfer to another position when we didn't know if we had a speech and hearing person. He stated it is costing us more money than it would have to keep her where she was. Edward Schroeder moved, seconded by Jennifer Barce to approve the contracts with Therapy Solutions for speech therapists for 7.5 hours a day at \$69.50 per day. Motion carried.

Mr. Wittenauer asked for the board to vote again on the replacing of the busses. He stated his recommendation is that we still buy the busses. Mrs. Barce stated that she voted to replace the busses last time and will still vote to replace them. She stated it is not only for safety reason but also that the life span of a bus is basically 12 years and if we keep kicking this down the road we are going to have to replace a fleet of busses and not have the funds available to do so. She stated that is why we have a bus replacement plan so that we can replace them gradually as they need to be. She stated we know they are worn and expensive to repair and non-efficient and she feels that we need to stay on our scheduled bus replacement plan and replace the ones that we had originally said we would replace. Mrs. Barce stated she would vote yes for replacing the total 6 but would compromise and go for half if that is what was wanted as well. Mr. Sondgeroth stated the buses are not getting used full season and that is mileage that we can consider the bus did not incur. Mr. Sondgeroth stated that we cannot say for certain that an 8 year old bus is going to break down and a newer 2 to 3 year old bus is not. He said statistically yes more likely but no guarantee. Mr. Sondgeroth stated that if we do not stop spending money we are going to be in a bad place. He stated we needed to stop the bleeding and that he is still a no on replacing the busses. Mr. Widmer asked what we tell the parents when a bus breaks down that had 140,000 miles on it and their kids are sitting out in the cold and they voted for that 31 cent referendum and we decided not to replace

them, they voted for the 31 cent to keep the status quo which would include replacing the busses like scheduled. Mr. Widmer stated that is what they voted for. Mr. Schroeder stated do not go there with the referendum. He stated it was 46% no also but just not to go there. He stated the busses can last longer. Mr. Schroeder stated he made a decision and he is still going to vote no. Mr. Schroeder asked if Mr. Wittenauer wanted him to go around the room and see if it is a yes or no from each board member. Mr. Wittenauer stated yes he would like that and that he was recommending to the board to replace the busses per the advertised bus replacement schedule. Mr. Wittenauer stated that we had the money in 2020 to replace 6 busses we will not have the money in 2021 to replace 12 busses. Mrs. Barce stated that she feels we need to replace the busses to maintain our fleet. She stated we are not like other corporations that have other options such as city bus, etc. Mr. Wittenauer stated to Mr. Tolen that he was the last vote, that it was 2 to 2 and he would respect whatever his vote was. Mr. Tolen stated he was still against it and he didn't know when the last month of the year we could buy them was, but that there are millions and millions of dollars in uncertainty out there. He stated that congress threw \$230,000 out the first time and they are wanting to throw out 10 times that amount the second time. He stated if we could wait a few months and the government gave us \$500,000-\$700,000 that could change his opinion. Mr. Tolen said right now we are looking at a \$5 million deficit. Mr. Wittenauer stated that is why the 31 cents is going to be important. Mr. Wittenauer stated that is a good point though that if we do receive more money than we can revisit the issue down the road. Mr. Tolen stated that in way of budget cuts down the road, he stated that it was probably hard to figure out but would like to see how much we spend a year in transportation and see about outsourcing our transportation. He stated we could have companies come in and give presentations but we would need to know how much we spend to make sure it is worth our while. Mrs. Albertson stated it is not hard information to get. She stated it is in their financial packets each month. She stated if you look at the operations fund and student transportation you will see that we are expected to spend \$1.7 million in student transportation this year. She indicated that includes all salary and benefits. She stated that if you look under that section and at bus replacement that is zero since the board had voted not to replace the busses this year. She stated that figure could vary some depending on if any raises are decided to be given or if fuel prices skyrocketed, but as of right now that is what we are expected to spend on student transportation this year. Mr. Schroeder asked if that was for the entire year. Mrs. Albertson stated yes for the entire 2020 calendar year. Mr. Wittenauer stated he would reach out to other companies and get some figures for the board on outsourcing transportation.

Mr. Wittenauer gave a brief update on our COVID cases and stated we are following all protocol and have a good handle on our situation.

Mr. Wittenauer also wanted to publicly thank Mr. Bowman, our transportation director, for getting our students to and from school with 4 less bus drivers to start the school year.

Mr. Wittenauer also let the board know that as of this time we had gotten 12 applications for the superintendent position and there are some really good candidates that will make narrowing down difficult, but he stated that is a good problem to have. After some discussion the board decided to schedule the executive session to review the applications for August 21, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.

Mr. Wittenauer stated he has been looking at and working on ways to



increase enrollment and reduce expenses. He stated he is working with Mrs. Barce and Purdue on a program for our students that gives us something other surrounding schools do not and makes us more appealing. He stated he is looking into windmill money from the Boswell phase.

Mr. Wittenauer stated he is meeting with elementary teachers to discuss what is working and what is not working with our virtual students. He is hoping to come up with a plan that helps our teachers teach and our students learn the best way possible. Mr. Wittenauer stated that students/parents have until August 19<sup>th</sup> to make the decision to be an in person student or a virtual student. He stated overall the school year has started out well.

Mr. Schroeder stated we all need to communicate to make the best situation for all.

Mr. Sondgeroth informed the board that the Fall ISBA conference was going to be held virtually this year. He stated it was September 28 & 29<sup>th</sup>. He said if you registered, the sessions would be available online for 30 days in case there was one you wanted to attend but could not. Mr. Sondgeroth asked if any other board members were going to attend because they could get a group discount if they registered together. Mr. Tolen stated he would let Mr. Sondgeroth fill him in on the sessions. Mrs. Barce stated she may be able to watch some of the sessions but would depend on her schedule.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m. The next regular board meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m. Monday, September 21, 2020, at the Administration Office.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Brandie Burton, Recording Secretary

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President

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Member

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Vice-President

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Member

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Secretary

The Board of School Trustees of Benton Community School Corporation met in an EXECUTIVE SESSION Friday, August 21, 2020, at the Administration Building At 4:00 p.m. to receive information about and interview prospective employees.

Board members present were:

	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Gabe Widmer	X	
Edward Schroeder	X	
Robert Sondgeroth	X	
Jennifer Barce	X	
Chad Tolen	X	

The executive session adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brandie Burton, Recording Secretary

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President

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Member

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Vice-President

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Member

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Secretary

The Board of School Trustees of Benton Community School Corporation met in an EXECUTIVE SESSION Friday, August 28, 2020, at the Administration Building At 4:00 p.m. to receive information about and interview prospective employees.

Board members present were:

	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Gabe Widmer	X	
Edward Schroeder	X	
Robert Sondgeroth	X	
Jennifer Barce	X	
Chad Tolen	X	

The executive session adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brandie Burton, Recording Secretary

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President

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Member

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Vice-President

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Member

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Secretary

The Board of School Trustees of Benton Community School Corporation met in an EXECUTIVE SESSION Friday, September 8, 2020, at the Administration Building At 6:00 p.m. to receive information about and interview prospective employees.

Board members present were:

	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Gabe Widmer	X	
Edward Schroeder	X	
Robert Sondgeroth	X	
Jennifer Barce	X	
Chad Tolen	X	

The executive session adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brandie Burton, Recording Secretary

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President

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Member

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Vice-President

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Member

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Secretary

The Board of School Trustees of Benton Community School Corporation met in an EXECUTIVE SESSION Friday, September 9, 2020, at the Administration Building At 6:00 p.m. to receive information about and interview prospective employees.

Board members present were:

	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Gabe Widmer	X	
Edward Schroeder	X	
Robert Sondgeroth	X	
Jennifer Barce	X	
Chad Tolen	X	

The executive session adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brandie Burton, Recording Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_  
President

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Member

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Vice-President

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Member

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Secretary