

# Akron Documenters

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## School Board Meeting

Documenter name: Jackie Jantzi

Agency: Akron Board of Education

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### Summary

- Members of the Akron Education Association (AEA) attended the Akron Board of Education (BOE) meeting Monday to protest the Jan. 8 vote for the contract between Akron Public Schools (APS) and [Varsity Tutors](#). The union is opposed to APS using the for-profit company to provide services to students. If the board does nothing before Feb. 1, the contract will begin. To cancel the contract, the board would have to hold a special meeting and vote.
- The redistricting proposal has been revised after several community meetings, and this was the first reading with the BOE. The board rules require the proposal to go through two more readings at board meetings before being voted on. There are many changes being discussed with little time to decide and little time to implement.
- Board members seemed to have some confusion on processes as they transition into new positions for 2024.

### Follow-Up Questions

- What is the history between the AEA and the BOE? Does the AEA have a cost-effective proposal outside of using Varsity Tutors to address the issue of students falling behind in reading?
- With all of the redistricting drafts proposed, are family concerns being addressed? Will there be more opportunity for public comment before a final decision is made? Will the proposed changes have time to be fully implemented before the school year begins in August? Did the previous board that discussed the school closures

have a plan in place to address these issues?

- What training do board members receive?

## Notes

- The livestream can be found [here](#).
- The [agenda](#) can be found on the Akron Public Schools website. Go to the “meetings” tab and select the meeting date. The agenda and minutes can be found there.
- Board members website:  
<https://www.akronschools.com/district/board-of-education/board-members>
  - Diana Autry, president
  - Carla Jackson, vice president
  - Bruce Alexander
  - Summer L. Hall
  - Rene Molenaur
  - Job Esau Perry
  - Barbara A. Sykes

By 5:15 p.m., the room was packed with at least 125 people. Some were standing around the edges while others lingered outside.

The meeting started at 5:35pm.

Most of the crowd was from the [Akron Education Association](#) (AEA). The teachers’ union was there to protest the Jan. 8 vote to enter into a contract with Varsity Tutors.

Many held signs with messages such as “Unfair Labor Practice, Don’t edit our educators,” “Keep Akron jobs in APS,” “Cleveland teachers support us,” “Wwe deserve transparency,” “Our children deserve better,” “Stop taking away our resources.”

The signs appeared to be in response to the contract and a [video glitch](#) that happened at the Jan. 8 board meeting during the discussion of Varsity Tutors.

This Signal Akron [article](#) cites the AEA grievances with Varsity Tutors, including how the board approached the contract and an AEA accusation that the board violated its own meeting laws. The article also mentions the video glitch.

About 2 hours and 10 minutes into the Jan. 8 [livestream](#), the motion for the Varsity Tutors was brought to the table. Molenaur talked about her concerns. That discussion is not part

of the recorded video. This glitch has caused some in the community to accuse the board of editing the video. APS Superintendent [Michael Robinson](#) and a lawyer representing the district have refuted claims that the video was edited, according to the Signal Arkon article.

After opening formalities on Monday, the board ate cake served by students from the culinary class at Buchtel High School as a thank you for OSBA School Board Recognition Month.

Jewan Surles, a student from [Bridges Community Learning Center](#) and a scholar board member, said students need more counselors for social/emotional needs.

About 30 minutes into the meeting, [Mayor Shammus Malik](#) spoke about the future success of Akron, saying it will depend on “whether young people growing up here can see a future for themselves.”

He spoke about how Akron and APS need to work together. He introduced two staff members who will continue to work closely with APS: [Nanette Pitt](#), chief of strategy, and Richelle Wardelle, education and health strategist.

Public comment was next on the agenda. Board rules allow 20 minutes for comments. Eleven people signed up to comment, and the board voted to extend comment time to allow all to speak for three minutes.

Topics included both the Varsity Tutors decision and plans to relocate STEM High. Two parents and a high school student argued against the STEM High relocation to East Community Learning Center due to the benefits of being on the University of Akron campus. Once the school moves off campus, they said, students could have a harder time accessing the classes they need for college credits.. Students can take [college credits](#) for free and earn an associate degree while still in high school at STEM..

Other members of the public argued in favor of the Varsity Tutors contract as it gave another safety net for students at no cost to parents.

Five people spoke very strongly against the Varsity Tutors contract, saying it was not crafted in collaboration with the AEA. Many argued the quality would be poor and it would take jobs away from APS employees. They said it was a for-profit organization and there was a lack of transparency in the decision making.

One hour and 15 minutes into the meeting, the discussion turned to the superintendent’s

report. While some students were to be recognized for their reading over the holiday break, all of the students had left or did not show up.

Robinson said he would be presenting his report differently based on the AEA response to the Varsity Tutors decision. Robinson said that he thought the tutoring was an incredible opportunity for students who were falling behind in reading, but he asked the board to consider rescinding their vote due to the negative response from the AEA.

There was a lot of discussion urging continued talks with the board and the AEA before the Feb. 1 deadline. The board may hold a special meeting to vote again, but no meeting was scheduled.

Stephen Thompson, the board CFO and treasurer, recommended the board have more discussions with the AEA..

Several board members had questions that went unanswered during the meeting. Robinson said there are 70 openings for tutors to work during the school day on-site at schools. The Varsity Tutors program would be after school and an entirely separate program. Robinson requested that teachers be considered first to tutor their own students through the Varsity Tutors program if they wanted to.

APS teachers did not appear excited about applying to tutor their students through a program outside of APS. The board had a long discussion about the motion to rescind the vote. The board voted 5-2 not to rescind its vote to approve the contract. Molenaur and Perry voted to rescind. Autry asked Robinson to have some more discussions and report to the board to see if this was a relationship issue or a Varsity Tutors issue.

About two hours into the meeting, Robinson shared other updates, including school closures and the success of the students and teachers at Akron Early College High School, where 87% of students passed the American Government Ohio state test.

Robinson also honored five principals who have pulled their schools out of comprehensive support improvement based on grades and graduation rates. They are:

- David Kurzen at Innes CLC
- LaMonica Davis at Helen Arnold CLC
- LaCresia Beecher at Buchtel CLC
- Walter Noland at East CLC
- Frank Kalain, Kathryn Rodocker and Kim Sabetta at North High School. (Editor's

note: Rodocker and Sabetta are past principals

Robinson also honored the cheerleaders at Firestone CLC as they earned a bid to the national high school cheer championship.

Some frustration was voiced at this point about how long the meeting was taking.

At 7:55 p.m Robinson went into the Redistricting Report. At about 2 hours 23 minutes into the [livestream](#), the new redistricting proposal PowerPoint can be viewed.

School officials have updated the presentation several times; past versions can be found [here](#).

Many of these changes were put into motion by decisions made before Robinson started in August. The board had already voted to close many of the buildings and the contract with APS to continue to hold classes through STEM High School at the University of Akron is ending this year.

After several community meetings, Robinson has made several changes and updates to the redistricting plan. The plan submitted to the board is a draft and may change..

This was the first board reading, and there are two more readings to come.

Robinson asked the board to consider suspending the rules to allow only two readings or hold a special meeting so that the board may make a decision sooner.

He said that there are many decisions to make with all of the building and transportation changes, and this would allow more time for the process to be put into place.

Once the board approves the plans, Robinson will send families affected by school closings a letter and establish a special open enrollment period for families to choose the best school for their children.

While there was public comment on the negative effects of moving [STEM High School](#) off the University of Akron campus, there was no plan to renew the lease so a change would have to be made.

Hall asked about the effect on teachers at schools that may close. Robinson said they

don't know where teachers will be assigned until a final plan is approved by the board.. There is also a concern that families will not know about the transportation opportunities and changes before they have to make a decision during the special enrollment period.

At 8:58 p.m. the board moved on to the approval of the previous meeting minutes. Molenaar requested changes.

There was confusion about the vote. Members were not sure whether they were voting on a change or voting on the minutes as written. The board did not pass the minutes. An amendment was suggested and, with the amendment, the minutes passed 7-0.

Autry, who was elected board president this month, said she was new in this role and had made a mistake not addressing the point of order called during the meeting. She said she realized she had made a mistake.

The rest of the agenda went fairly quickly. Autry thanked everyone for allowing the discussion and for taking the time to do professional development.

The board moved to executive session but did not plan to hold a vote afterwards, so the public could leave, according to Autry.

Recess at 9:20 p.m.

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**Notes to reader:** Unless quotation marks are used, all text is paraphrased. If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email us at [documenters@signalakron.org](mailto:documenters@signalakron.org) with "Correction Request" in the subject line.