

**HARWOOD UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2017 6:00-9:30 P.M.  
HARWOOD UNION HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY**

**Approved Minutes**

**Attending Members:** Christine Sullivan, Jill Ellis, Peter Langella, Maureen McCracken, Rosemarie White, Garrett MacCurtain, Alex Thomsen, Caitlin Hollister, Jim Casey, Alycia Biondo, Gabriel Gilman, Sam Jackson

**Administration:** Brigid Nease, Michelle Baker

**Attending Public:** Denise Goodnow, Tom Drake, Lisa Atwood, Ray Daigle, Chris Keating, Kim Laidlaw, Mary O'Leary, Dana Applebaum, Kaiya Korb, Howard Wynne, Tim Jones, John Dammon, Kyle Ellis, Rebecca Banzzi, Justina Boyden, Jenneth Fleckenstein, Mark Fleckenstein, Jean Berthiaume, Doug Mosle, Sheryl Kurland-Platt, Lili Platt, Beth Abbott-Koch, Jean Goldhammer, Liz Belknap, Matt Membrino, Teresa Membrino, Seth Henry, Amy Rex, Sheila Soule, Chicky Stoltz, Mike Jordan, Beth Peterson, Stephanie Hudak, Duane Pearson, Jeremy Gulley, Valerie Bigalow, Tammy Colby, Joe Robinson

1. Call to Order: Meeting called to order by Christine at 6:15.
2. Additions or Deletions to the Agenda: Heidi proposed providing time at the beginning of the meeting for community comment instead of at the end. Heidi also wanted to introduce her letter to the HUUB and have Christine explain her response letter. Both agreed to read their letters and then let everyone on the board have a chance to comment one time and one more time around, and then hear public comments.
3. Action Items:
  - A. Approve Meeting Minutes of 12/14/2016:  
*Rosemarie moved to approve minutes as corrected, seconded by Alex. Motion carried.*
  - B. **Discussion of Heidi and Christine Letters:**  
Heidi read her letter which was sent to the board and the school community of Fayston to advocate for her district in the areas of staffing, expenses, etc.  
Next Christine read her response on concerns around Heidi's letter, including a review of the original articles of the new HUUSB agreement. She also questioned the issue of conflict of interest that was agreed upon in the original articles.

Brigid's response addressed these issues: In a merger such as this, struggles and differences of opinions are expected. Brigid and Michelle's role is to bring the data for the board to discuss and then make decisions. Brigid also makes recommendations. At the last meeting, Brigid presented data and made recommendations on staffing and other items. She stands by her recommendations for not having an on-staff sub at Fayston, which now will be a benefit-eligible position, and her recommendation for having one teacher for the 1st and 2nd grades with 19 students. She provided further explanation of the Granville bus expense and the increased tuition amount. Discourse among the whole team needs to be respectful and thoughtful, and everyone needs to compromise.

#### **Board Response:**

**Heidi** believes every district does not have enough information about each other school. Thought it was appropriate to reach out to the Fayston community about the issue of cuts, etc. Board runs governance, not Brigid. Doesn't agree that class size is a primary concern for the budget.

**Jill** discussed the issue of having the Fayston Board meeting and sending information to the Fayston school community. Believes that small school standards are being overlooked. Thought the fact that there might be a conflict of interest was inappropriate. The suppression of dialog is what the local boards have been worried about.

**Alycia's** concern was about Christine's response and whether Gabe was involved or contacted. Thinks that there is not enough time at the end of the meetings to have reflective discussion with so many agenda items to work through. Does the board have to improve class sizes based on teacher to student ratio? What is equitable to us? Can we move slower and create real equities? Trust factor needs to be built.

**Garrett** saddened by tone of this conversation. This board needs to be concerned with the board as a whole and not rally for individual schools. Knows that Brigid is working hard for the board.

**Rosemarie** thought Christine and the process was open. Suggest we slow down a bit, but not so slow that it stops. Thought the first budget recommendation was only a suggestion with nothing set in stone. Need to understand each of the school systems better. Need to be collaborative.

**Jim** caught off guard because last time board gave information to Michelle to come up with a budget that we could discuss, not a final budget. No decisions were made and everything would be discussed at the subsequent meetings.

**Maureen** thought the budget work by the board was asking Michelle only to find a starting place and board has not even seen the revenue numbers. Open to having class size discussion. Unfortunate about the emotion contained in the letters. Nothing set on stone at this time.

**Alex** not sure what board is discussing - the process? Equity piece? teacher cuts? class size? The communication of these letters felt hard. Thought the board was doing a great job of presenting opinions and listening in previous meeting. When communicating, it should be to all towns, not just one town. Have dual responsibilities now. Teacher cuts not just one of equity but what makes sense for kids and the value of the education.

**Caitlin** learning about board, need to balance role of serving both our towns and the board as a whole. Hear the sentiment about moving slower, but haven't made any decisions yet. Good work of Communication Committee of getting information out. Would like to get back to best intentions and hope individuals can resolve things to move forward together. Have made no decisions yet around cuts. By putting potential teacher reductions on the table, could be positive and something that we have been predicting, not because of a budget emergency.

**Gabe** is for institutional help of supervisory union. Having parallel boards is difficult and the board needs to be careful because of the environment that we are in. This cannot be a model of how we function as we go forward. This was a useful learning experience of how to speak to community members and discuss hard issues. Hope board will behave rationally to reach decisions. See nothing unethical or illegal about wanting to protect one's local school but there's something to be said about not doing this again. Need a more constructive way to raise concerns. Do less talking through email and more discussion in the board meetings. Have to act as diplomats for unified board.

**Christine** hopes can move forward and provide higher educational standard for everyone. Wish letter had come to board first. Have to remember that board acts on behalf of all the members.

**Brigid** has no idea how this happened and is regretting it. Concerned as leaders that we don't feel that after everything that has transpired, board can move forward to discuss this. Brigid makes recommendations for consideration, board makes final decision. Thought this was being responsible. Should be talking early so have plenty of time to make decisions in the future.

**Sam** communication issue - have the conversation at the board meeting, not by letter or email. Worried that some people are protecting their building and not thinking about the union as a whole. Reality is that there is a concern about tax

rates and there will be painful choices. Equity is going to be a difficult issue. Have to find methods that are measurable and that we can define.

**Peter** - since the letter was addressed to the board, wish the letter was brought to the unified board first before sent to the community.

**Heidi** didn't know it would be construed so negatively.

#### **Public Comment:**

**Seth Henry**, Fayston. Believes that district was sold a bill of goods by Act 46 committee. Angry about the budget, feel betrayed. Angry at administration.

**Theresa Membrino**, Fayston. Think board has to talk about ethics, and feel like chair tied question of ethics to the two members. Think it's reckless. Would like to ask for apology from Christine to Heidi and Jill. Agree that this board is not going to accuse, but be open-minded.

**Doug Mosle**, Fayston. Have been extremely supportive of Brigid and the people on the board. The thing important to understand is that the Articles of Agreement were meant to be vague but did not give overreaching authority. Discussion was to maintain the unique individuality of each school. This budget looks like a deliberate action to put an end to the Fayston school. Feel budget betrays what was entrusted.

**Rebecca Bruzzi**, Fayston. Really impressed with thoughtfulness and dedication to be on this board. Moved here for the quality of the school and trust board to do the best for the school

**Chicky Stoliz**, Moretown. Not sure if promised that the budget would not change, but was under the impression that it wouldn't. Budget comes as a shock. Level service remains the same for the first year. Board is not necessarily the rule of the small boards. Setting vision and class size-- save for another year. Give it a rest, table it.

**Valerie Bigalow** Warren. Talk about teacher cuts did not discuss with administrators. Should give the administrators the opportunity to talk about their schools

**Mary O'Leary** Fayston. Thank you to Heidi and Jill. Trust to make good decisions now. Wish to slow down the process and think about it. Want to be advocate for small schools. Ethical issue is challenging and lots for board to work through. Bring more information to the public. Would board have paid that much attention to the concerns of the small schools if everyone had not shown up?

**Tim Jones**, Fayston. My only concern is the science of class size - please consider the thinking about this. My personal experience is that smaller is better but heard

that somehow a small class is somehow not advantageous to students. Would like to see how to render a judgment on how to decide on class size.

**Tammy Colby**, Warren. Heidi's letter caught her attention. Seems that there is a moment when everyone needs to step back and ask questions. Equity, class size not clearly defined. Time to slow down - discussing cuts at the first go around not a good idea, even though may have to discuss this later. Think cutting teachers is a last resort. As this board grows and matures need to find the hot topics and have discussions around them - equity, class size, etc. Need to slow things down.

**Joe Robinson**, Waitsfield. Custodian at Waitsfield School. Wishes to discuss cuts at their school. Read the email he sent: feel like the Waitsfield admin & their board have demonstrated a good feeling about maintenance needs. Some years a reduction has been needed and was done. New proposed reduction will be 4 hours instead of 5. Travel time for sharing with 3 other schools will be an issue. Concerned about health, safety of the school with this change. Sees real challenges for schools sharing this. Suggest keeping part time work for each school with livable wage and benefits. Would be interested in maintenance cost per pupil for all schools. Please do not reduce custodial hours at Waitsfield School. Joe read an article that he had found about the problems of reductions to save money.

Jim Casey wanted to go on record as offering his opinion that he thinks Brigid has been dumped on in this discussion. It's up to the board to discuss these issues and decide, Brigid's job is to bring the information and make suggestions, which she does. Re-discussion followed by Seth Henry and Gabe regarding the budget.

Christine asked to close public comment and move on to budget issues.

C. Set Tuition Rate for All Schools for FY 2018: \$14,000 - P-K to 12.  
(Could be different because of True-up at end of year based on real numbers.)  
*Rosemarie moved to set tuition rate at \$14,000, Jim Casey seconded. Motion carried.*

#### 4. Discussion Items

A. FY18 Budget Discussion Continued (presentation includes revenues and cost per equalized pupil): Full budget can be seen on WWSU website under the HUUSB tab).

Michelle Baker: tonight's discussion is of expenditures only. On Dec 7 was the last time board looked at expenditures. Now: Do need to purchase computers discussed last time.

Look at three budgets (A. Level Service with Granville bus, B. With Additions, & C. Less Two FTE)

Tax rate is total revenues (local revenues, state revenues, reimbursements, Federal Revenue) less expenditures. Yields education spending, divided by Equalized Pupils. E.P. homestead tax rate of \$1.53, \$1.56 or \$1.55 (for the three budgets).

Prior year fund balance: each school got audited financial statements with fund balances; need to discuss how to manage this fund balance - very complicated, per Title 16. Could be put in budget to offset the tax payers.

(Frozen Equalized Pupil Rate is not available yet.)

Now have things to look at with these figures. Could have discussion on each of these budgets.

Common level of appraisal discussion.

Need to collect questions about expenditures and revenues via email to Michelle to be discussed next time.

B. Workgroup Reports - Gabe recommended moving Caitlin to policy group.

Table Workgroup reports until next time.

5. Public Comments - see above.

6. Other Business - next meeting discussion.

Caitlin suggested that as we allocate more time for decisions around equity and student ratio, which might be a topic for a work group, or visioning piece.

Give equity and student ratios 30 min. for discussion next time. Make a list of things that have been talked about and discuss them.

7. Adjourn - Meeting adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Next meeting: January 11, January 18 and January 25, if needed.

Submitted by Freya Chaffee