

**HARWOOD UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2017
6:00 - 9:00 P.M.
HARWOOD UNION HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY**

Amended & Approved Minutes

Present from the Board: Christine Sullivan (Chair), Gabe Gilman, Jim Casey, Garrett MacCurtain, Tom Cahalan, Jill Ellis, Maureen McCracken, Alexandra Thomsen, Rosemarie White, Caitlin Hollister, Alycia Biondo, Rob Williams and Peter Langella.

Present from HUUSD: Brigid Nease, Superintendent and Michelle Baker, Director of Finance & Operations; Sheila Soule, Director of Curriculum & Assessment

Public present: Chris Keating, Maddie Hughes, Kyle Ellis, Kim Canrecci, Seth Henry, Pete and Sally Kulis, Rick Rayfield, Rick Battistoni

1. Call to Order

Christine Sullivan called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

2. Additions/Deletions to Agenda

Complaint from the Valley Report and Waterbury Record; will be discussed as part of the discussion of Gabe Gilman's 9/26/17 letter.

3. Public Comment

Chair reviewed public comment procedure.

Jill Ellis made a motion to move public comment later in meeting. Gabe Gilman seconded. Jill Ellis and Gabe Gilman voted to approve. Christine Sullivan, Caitlin Hollister, Jim Casey, Garrett MacCurtain, Maureen McCracken, Alexandra Thomsen, Peter Langella, and Rob Williams voted against the motion. Motion did not pass on a weighted vote of 80.6 against to 10.2 in favor. Tom Cahalan abstained. Alycia Biondo not present for the vote.

Rick Rayfield, Fayston. Introduced himself as a JP in Fayston. Commented on open meeting law, the ways it serves democracy at the local level, and where citizens can find resources about the Open Meeting law. Expressed concern that the Board appears to be avoiding admitting they may have been wrong and would like Board to resolve issue and move forward.

Rick Battistoni, Fayston. Asked about number of applicants for open Fayston seat. Indicated he is new to area and school board meetings. Said he was baffled why the Board wouldn't accept statements from the public during the meeting; feels it limits public input.

4. Action Items

A. Approval of Minutes from September 6, 2017 and September 27, 2017

No offered edits. Minutes are approved.

5. Discussion Items

A. Board Reflections

B. Unfinished Business (Carryover from September 27):

1. Review self-assessment tools and schedule for use

Caitlin Hollister reported that Val Gardner is available to come to the December 13th meeting (agenda will be restricted to budget and Board development). Part of the cost may be covered with unused balance from earlier contract with her. February dates might not work as initially hoped. She can't do 27th but could do 21st if Board is willing to do back to back meetings. A show of hands indicated support for Val attending the February 21st meeting. Board will provide Val with assessment data on Board functioning and proposed areas for where the Board would like support.

2. Superintendent Report on OML/attorney finding

Brigid Nease read a rebuttal to Gabe Gilman's 9/26/17 letter and asked that it be included in the minutes along with Gabe's letter.

3. GG Letter of 9/26 - (20 minutes)

Rosemarie White read a prepared statement. Rosemarie made a motion that the Board receives formal training on executive session. Alexandra Thomsen seconded motion. Motion passes with no votes against. Maureen McCracken abstained.

Gabe Gilman apologized for not being able to be present at the 9/27/17 meeting. He discussed his understanding of Open Meeting law, intent, and the provision in the law that allows a group to apologize for a violation of the Open Meeting law and indicate what they will do in future to prevent violations. He then read a prepared statement. He suggested that the Board admit it made a mistake and make a motion to address the mistake.

Christine Sullivan indicated that she wanted to address issue of intent and legality of the May 24, 2017 executive session. She read a prepared statement.

Alexandra Thomsen read a prepared statement. Alexandra Thomsen made a motion that there was no violation and as a result no cure is needed. Garrett MacCurtain seconded the motion. Christine Sullivan, Jim Casey, Garrett MacCurtain, Maureen McCracken, Alexandra Thomsen, Rosemarie White, Caitlin Hollister, Alycia Biondo, and Peter Langella voted in favor. Gabe Gilman and Jill Ellis voted against. Tom Cahalan and Rob Williams abstained. Motion passes on a weighted vote of 69.2 in favor, 15.2 against, and 11.0 abstaining.

Discussion: The executive session involved discussion of employee concerns that also involved a discussion of Board dynamics. It would have disadvantaged the employees if the discussion had been public. The Board is not in agreement about whether the discussion resulted in an unintentional violation of Open Meeting law. With the exception of one Board member, Board members are not hearing from their town members that there are concerns about the May

executive session. Several Board members expressed frustration that this issue keeps coming up and taking Board time. Jill Ellis discussed her belief that an unintentional violation of Open Meeting law took place. She expressed understanding for how it happened, given the nature of the executive session discussion. She asked the Board to take a moment to step back and think carefully about what happened. Board expressed shared desire to resolve the issue and move forward productively with a focus on supporting students.

Caitlin Hollister made a motion that as Board members, when we have an issue to raise with fellow Board members we do so in person and in an open Board meeting. Maureen McCracken seconded. Motion passed unanimously. No abstentions.

Michelle Baker reported a request from the Valley Reporter for a copy of Brigid Nease's contract with regard to her ability to consult with attorneys. Board affirmed their understanding that Brigid Nease and Michelle Baker may need to consult with attorneys in the course of fulfilling their job responsibilities and do not need the express permission of the Board to do so.

Board discussed timing of training on executive session and function and decided it should wait till after the open Fayston seat is filled, so all Board members can participate in the training. Training will go on agenda after November. Agreed to invite VSBA again to do the training.

C. New Business:

1. Budget Communication Plan (Communications?)

Group has not yet met; 1st meeting likely to be next Friday. Asked if Board wanted to provide input into how they should address budget communication plan. Committee will bring something to the Board on 10/25.

2. Assessment Presentation - Sheila Soule

Up until 2015, the District had been using NECaps as the standardized test. Adoption of the Common Core standards prompted a change to the Smarter Balance Assessment, as it better aligns with the Common Core curriculum. The SBAC test is given in May and taken online and adapts to the answers students provide, increasing or decreasing the difficulty of questions to find student's range of learning. District has administered the test for three years. The first year, 2015, was considered a pilot year, so only have two years of data to review. The test and resulting data is new and we're still learning how to interpret the data and act effectively on it.

Sheila walked the Board through the results and how to interpret that data. The scores have dropped, particularly those of last year's junior class. Unsurprising, given what they had to cope with last year. As an academically strong cohort, the drop is not consistent with their SATs and other assessments. With only two years of data, it is difficult to deeply analyze the results. As students get older, test scores typically go down. Older students are not necessarily invested in doing well on the tests. Class size can also have significant impact on cohort scores from individual schools, causing fluctuations in the scores. Central Office uses the SBAC results to look for trends across the district. The scores will be used to identify areas of strength, areas of growth, and areas for focused investigation. The data will be looked at globally, as well as by specific groups such as gender, socio-economic class, IEP, etc. Test scores are only one data source and must be evaluated along with other data sources such as local assessments, what is

happening in classrooms, staff professional development, PSATs and SATs, etc. Tests are not great measure of students as independent learners. They are better measures of what is happening at the building level and district level.

The local scores are compared against a group of area schools and the State. The area schools is not a true peer cohort, as Vermont's small size makes it difficult to build a local cohort consisting of schools with a similar enrollment and characteristics (unified district or not; % of free and reduced lunches, etc.). The State data tends not to fluctuate much because it draws on such a large pool of results. The local data draws on a limited pool of results and small changes can have statistically significant impact.

Questions:

- SAT scores represent a pre-selected group of students, who choose to take the test. How many students on free & reduced lunches take the PSATs and SATs? Sheila Soule reported she will have to talk to Guidance office for demographic data for SAT's, to parse out the F&RL%.
- Now that we are a unified district, will there be an impact on the elementary school scores? Response: While the curriculum across the district will be more consistent, the instruction still varies by building and will be reflected in variation in results by building.
- What is Central Office focusing on in response to the data? Will the results be compared with local assessments to judge seriousness of data? Response: Yes. We focus on local assessments and their alignment with Common Core standards. Local assessments provide more consistent and time sensitive data, allowing us to respond quickly to changes in that data. Improvement in local assessments should ultimately result in improvements in SBAC scores.

3. Administrative Procedures for Vacant Seats/Update on Fayston Vacancy Process

Deferred to next meeting. Brigid reported that two letters of interest have been received. Closing date for applications is October 13. Interview of applicants will take place at the October 25th meeting.

4. Reports: Communications (?), Negotiations, Policy, Community Engagement, Superintendent(?), Director of Finance

- Communications: See above.
- Negotiations: Will meet tomorrow.
- Policy: Set policy priorities and made progress on the next policy packet that committee will be recommending to the Board.
- Community Engagement: Sheila Soule joined the meeting to discuss what the District already does and to avoid unnecessary overlap. Group brainstormed how to reach community members not already associated with the school in some way. What resources is the Board not already accessing? What kind of community engagement is the Board

interested in? Community engagement increases the input from the community and clarifies their expectations of the Board and what the Board is doing. One outcome of improved community engagement is to increase the Board's understanding of what is happening in our communities. As a Board, we need to be clear that the information being taken in won't necessarily translate into direct Board action. For example, Board meetings are for conducting Board business and not for engaging with the community around the issues under discussion. Group looked at VSBA information about community engagement. Work group would like permission to do outreach with other Boards who have successful community engagement efforts in place. Board supported the idea.

Reminder: Unofficial minutes from committees need to be posted on the SU website no later than 5 calendar days after the meeting. They are approved at the committee's next meeting.

5. Board Orders

Rosemarie White made a motion to confirm Board Warrants #1078 - #1092, dated 9/20/17 – 10/11/17, and totaling \$1,823,099.72. Jim Casey seconded. Motion passes unanimously. No abstentions.

6. December retreat/check-in update (date, topics?) and possible Feb. date (Motion to confirm either or both)

Not addressed.

6. Other Business - update work plan/agenda planner

Not addressed.

Act 166

Jim Casey suggested the Board invite someone from AOE to discuss Universal Pre-K, boundaries, and staffing data. Caitlin Hollister reported that she attended an AOE hearing this morning and changes are coming. Brigid Nease reported that there is a proposed change to allow unified districts to establish boundaries for where the State provided vouchers to District families can be used. Brigid has applied to establish a boundary that includes public and private providers within the District's towns. The application has been turned down twice. If the proposed change goes through, the SU could reapply. Universal Pre-K is running up against implementation issues. It is a statewide model with multiple statewide problems and needs a statewide solution. School boards and supervisory unions can only address impact on programs offered through the public schools; they can't address issues private providers are dealing with. Board suggested that Brigid think through possible proactive community outreach efforts around the issue.

Caitlin Hollister asked for an update on students attending the meetings, noting their thoughts on the SBAC, while anecdotal, would have been helpful. Brigid will follow up with Lisa Atwood.

Jim Casey noted tension between the Board chair and vice chair and asked for assurance that they are able to work together moving forward. The Board affirmed the need for them to work

together effectively and suggest they take time outside of Board meetings to talk through/resolve any differences they may have.

7. Executive Session (if needed)

None needed.

8. Adjournment

Rosemarie White made a motion to adjourn. Alycia Biondo seconded. Motion passes unanimously.