

HARWOOD UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD MEETING

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2017

3:00 - 8:45 P.M.

MAD RIVER BARN, FAYSTON

APPROVED MINUTES

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

Present from WWSU: Brigid Nease, Superintendent and Michelle Baker, Director of Finance & Operations

Guest: Val Gardner, Retreat Facilitator

1. Call to Order
2. Additions and Deletions: Discussion of Budget Planning Approach
3. Facilitated Discussion

Retreat focused on Board's role and responsibilities, as well as those of the superintendent and the building administrators; the delegation of authority and accountability among the different groups; and the legal (federal and state) and other compliance requirements that provide the broader operating context.

The Board holds responsibility for the strategic vision and outcomes for the district. It delegates authority to the superintendent to enact the vision and manage the outcomes across the district. The superintendent, in turn delegates authority to the building administrators to implement the strategic priorities in their individual schools. The building administrators are responsible for the day-to-day operations of their school. The superintendent, and by extension Central Office, conducts the business of the district; provides information on best practices; monitors legislative changes; ensures the district is legally compliant; and reports regularly to the Board on the state of the district.

The HUUSD Board is transitioning into a shared governance model, in which it is a Board of the Whole. Board members' role is shifting from individual town representatives to district trustees. Board's role is oversight, stakeholder engagement; strategic communications; supervision and evaluation of the superintendent; budget approval, policy setting, and long-term strategic planning.

In its oversight role, Board needs to consider how it knows that the district is providing what it says it does efficiently, effectively, and ethically? Ask the superintendent to provide both qualitative and quantitative data/evidence. Gather data from broad range of constituents, including students. Monitoring is more than just accepting reports. It involves reviewing, interrogating, and approving reports. Reporting needs to link back to the district's Action Plan

and the monitoring needs to be built into the Board's annual work plan in regular and consistent ways. The work plan then becomes the basis for the Board's meeting agendas. Work is predictable and consistent across the year and from year to year.

If Board is going to use a committee structure, it needs to develop broad guidelines and context for all Board Committees to ensure shared understanding of function and responsibilities.

Agenda item for next meeting: Review the standing committees, meeting times, and membership.

Board discussed need to think through a strategic communications plan that addresses the cultural shift from individual boards to a unified board and the related shift in perspective regarding priorities, funding, and planning. How does Board make visible shift from individual school focus to collaborative, shared focus? Language matters; we need to shift the language to more collaborative messages and develop a public record of transparency through board minutes, TV, news reports, and other communications. Its vital to ensure that Building Administrators and the public feel communicated with.

To be effective, the Board needs to conduct its business ethically and legally. Reviewed Guidelines for Lawful and Ethic Board Operations. Discussed them in small groups and completed a self-assessment identifying areas where more policy work needs to be done. Next step is to build that work into the Board's Work Plan. An immediate priority is to review the preamble of all current policies to shift language from individual schools to the Unified District.

Policy work should be down within the context of the following parameters:

- Consider forming a policy committee. Superintendent must be involved with committee to provide state and federal requirements and statutes.
- Board policies should be minimal and distinct from administrative and procedural processes. Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) website has tools that helps policy committees distinguish between the required, recommended, and optional policies.
- Be clear about why there is a need for policy.
- When discussing management policies, Board needs to interrogate the data informing the policy.

Board discussed various potential conflict of interest scenarios, accountability by Board members, and how the Board should respond if and when a conflict arises.

It was recommended that the Board develop a feedback form for evaluating Board meetings, individual members' participation, and a process for how to work with the feedback. Focus both on meetings and a more in-depth assessment at several designated times throughout the year.

Discussed Building Administrators participation in HUUSD Board meetings. It is not necessarily a good use of their time to come to all the Board meetings. While always welcome, it

is fine if they only come when there is a specific need for their presence to provide info about issues in their buildings and/or to provide feedback on agenda items.

Budget Planning Approach:

Reviewed roles and responsibilities and addressed questions for impact on the budget process proposed by Central Office at 8/20/17 Board Meeting. Is there already an established budget policy? Brigid Nease confirmed yes, [policy E2](#). In budget development process, Central Office provides foundational pieces, e.g. State mandated components and changing federal legislation with an impact on benefits such as health care.

Board needs to decide the budget process; roles (who presents budget to community and responds to questions; the Superintendent? the full Board? a finance committee?); and budget parameters (level funded, tax rate, equity, efficiency, etc.), and what level of budget detail the Superintendent presents to the Board. Parameters should be tied to Board's vision and priorities. These, in turn, are informed by community engagement and where the community stands vis-à-vis affordability and perception of school's performance. Have to find ways to reach out to community members who are not engaged with the schools on a regular basis.

The more the Board can think about multi-year budget planning, 3 to 5 years forward, the more proactive the Board can be aligning the Board vision and priorities with available resources. It also allows for anticipating and addressing challenges such as declining enrollment or legislative mandates. Multi-year planning supports the Board in articulating a clear rationale for annual and long-term priorities. In reporting on the budget, the Board can discuss with the community the constraints the Board is facing long-term, while also showing progress on strategic priorities.

The Superintendent summarized the administrative team's discussion on how they're approaching developing the preliminary unified district budget. Work is data driven and focused on categories of expenses, i.e., technology costs or staffing levels, across the district. Enrollment trends have been consistent over the last several years. Budgeting for Central Office will continue to be built into the overall budget. Board asked that the preliminary budget rationale be explicit about the challenges addressed, as well as priorities. Brigid confirmed that the budget presentation to the Board would include a rationale for additions and eliminations in the budget. Question: will Central Office be able to articulate how much money has been saved as a result of the merger? Brigid says yes. Cost savings won't necessarily translate to a tax rate reduction due to potential increases in large expenses such as health care or staff costs. If Board establishes and funds a reserve would it be strictly for emergencies or could it be used to fund priorities further down the road? More discussion is needed. Individual Board members have to remember their role is trustees of the district rather than representatives of individual towns. Board's role is to interrogate the budget vis-à-vis the stated strategic outcomes for the district and ask questions about the data used and how it supports the proposed outcomes. Not, "Why are you cutting to 2 FTE?" instead, "How does the proposed staffing plan support the outcomes?"

Agenda item for next meeting: Vote on the budget development process for fiscal year 2019.

Facilitator asked Board members to complete a feedback survey about the retreat. The compiled results will be shared with the Board.

4. Other Business

5. Adjourn

Christine Sullivan moved to adjourn at 8:51; Alycia Biondo seconded. Motion carries.

Respectfully submitted.

Jennifer Tripp Mead