

Green Mountain Unified School District Board

Regular Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 21, 2020

Zoom

6:00 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL/CALL TO ORDER:

Board: Joe Fromberger, Jeff Hance, Doug McBride, Kate Lamphere, Michael Studin, Wayne Wheelock, Lois Perlah, Deb Brown, Rick Alexander, Fred Marin

Staff: Lauren Fierman, Deb Beaupre, Katherine Fogg, Mike Ripley, Todd Parah, Cheryl Hammond, Mary Bauerband, Meg Powden, Pam O’Neil, Amber Wilson, Amy Hamblett, Patty Rumrill, Julie Parah, Donna Hamilton, Shanna McCarthy, Ann Thompson, Melissa Palmer, Erin Matulonis, Angela Hurd, Elizabeth Salisbury, Jim Spaulding, Venissa White, Frank Kelley, Laurie Birmingham, Holly Gauding, Ben Boyington, Jennifer Parks, Karla White, Christa Valente, Amanda Tyrrell, Abe Gross, Mindy Munroe, Tracy Churchill, Sarah Rose, Stephanie Alexander, Lindsey Turgeon, Kristi Flack, Pauline Wescott, Lisa Marks, Betsy Olson

Student Reps: Laurel King

Public: Shawn Cunningham, Sharon Huntley, Madison Wilson, Marlena King, Eric Chatterjee, Jared Gunnel, Julie Hance

Mr. Fromberger called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

II. APPROVE AGENDA:

Mr. Marin **moved** to approve the agenda. Ms. Powden requested to add action under New Business, options for fiscal year, and she requested to move the superintendent’s report before public comment. Mr. McBride questioned if there needs to be an action item added for the teacher and staff negotiation. Mr. Fromberger noted that there was a joint meeting with the LMH board on May 7. Both boards at the conclusion of that executive session chose not to take any action at that time, the item under section B is intended to be the action taken as a result of that meeting. The motion to approve the agenda as amended carried without opposition.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. April 28, 2020 Special Meeting

Ms. Brown **moved** to approve the minutes of the April 28, 2020 meeting. The motion carried without opposition.

B. May 7, 2020 Special Meeting

Mr. Alexander **moved** to approve the minutes of the May 7, 2020 meeting. The motion carried without opposition.

IV. ADMINISTRATOR’S REPORT:

A. Superintendent’s Report

Ms. Powden advised that the teachers and support staff continue to instruct the students remotely. Everyone is working very hard in this new environment. She continues to be grateful for all the work of the teachers, staff and administration. She shared information about the survey. There were 101 respondents through out the SU. This was intended to be a check-

in as the districts moved from maintenance to continuity of learning. The first question about the amount of work was answered in the majority that it was just right. The words used to describe these times were “challenging” and “stressful”. There was a question about screen time being appropriate, and the responses were primarily yes. The questions about the schedules working for the family were answered mostly yes. She advised that the families were overwhelmingly in support of the teachers in their instruction of the children and support of the families. They will check in with the families again in another week with another survey.

She shared information about the hearings at the legislature. The senate finance committee is projecting a \$4.6million deficit that will be carried to next year and the projected deficit is over \$155million projected for next year to be carried to the following year. She reported that she and Ms. Hammond are tracking COVID-19 related expenses. She discussed some of the ways that the legislature and AOE have been discussing dispersing the funding from the CARES Act to school districts. They may allocate some of the COVID-19 relief fund specifically for the AOE. The senate is also considering reducing the funding to the school districts. They are also considering other grants to help overcome various financial challenges. The administration is looking at ways to shift costs and reduce spending. The majority of costs are related to personnel. Given the projections, they have decided not to fill the K-2 position at CAES. This doesn't alleviate the concern for the education of the students, but it is meant to alleviate some of the spending issues. A 4th grade teacher has resigned and a 3rd grade teacher has requested to fill that spot, so that leaves a vacant 3rd grade spot at CAES. The administration has looked at various ways to fill that position, including voluntary and involuntary transfers. This is not tenable because this will change the class size from 19 to 26. Given the COVID-19 regulations that will likely be in place, they will need to fill that position.

Ms. Lamphere questioned the filling of the new position. Ms. Powden advised that this position is still necessary, but the spending is an important consideration this year.

Ms. Fogg advised that her board report was submitted before the change was made. Ms. Birmingham has made the transfer and the 3rd grade position has been advertised so they can move quickly. Mr. McBride read the home learning guidelines and questioned the limit of the teachers hours to 5 hours per day and questioned if that same limit applied to the para-educators. Ms. Powden advised that the teachers are doing a significant amount of planning and professional development to be successful remote educators. The thinking is that the teachers are living under the same conditions and governor's orders that the families are and they want to be mindful of the teachers' well being in this difficult time.

Mr. Fromberger commended the principals on their principal's reports. Ms. Fierman noted that there have been many questions and concerns about what high school graduation will look like. The administration has spent much time talking with the seniors about the possibilities given the restrictions of the governor. Graduation will still be held on June 19. At the moment, the primary options, is for everyone to be together and for families to be able to see them. Having all the families in the same space is not possible. The seniors also want to walk across the graduation platform. They have a couple options to meet this will meeting the requirements of the AOE with families being in cars. The family members can exit their cars to watch their child graduate. There are a number of concerns. The restrictions are not put in place to deprive the students, but they need to be followed.

Ms. Powden questioned if the senior awards night and class nights will be done. Ms. Fierman advised that those events will happen in a Zoom meeting so everyone can see and hear the awards. The links will be shared in the next week or so. Ms. Fogg advised that the 6th grade

graduation will follow a similar routine with a video for awards and speeches. They will likely have a drive-up graduation to keep everyone safe. Mr. Wheelock questions how many seniors were graduating. Ms. Fierman advised that there are 47 seniors.

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Ms. Madison Wilson read aloud a statement to the board. In the statement, she acknowledged that the administration is operating under the guidelines of the Governor and Secretary French. She also reminded the board that these are guidelines, not laws and this district could be the voice of change. She acknowledged that she was on the “bottom of the totem pole” and suggested that the administration could advocate for their students to those higher up the totem pole. She presented 2 scenarios that provide a socially distant space between each of the graduates, and between each family with assigned family spaces for their limited family in attendance. She also outlined a process by which each attendee could be temperature checked and health questioned per CDC guidelines before entry into the graduation space. Each attendee could also be required to wear a mask, including the graduates (except when their picture was being taken). Each attendee could also be required to sign a liability waiver in order to attend to protect the school.

Mr. Fromberger felt that her presentation sounded well thought out and suggested that the details would be better discussed with the administration. Ms. Powden questioned if she brought that information to the administration. Ms. Wilson advised that she presented the information to the administration and was shot down very quickly. Ms. Powden questioned if she would re-send the presentation to the administration and the board chair. Mr. McBride complimented Ms. Wilson on the presentation and congratulated the teachers on helping to mold a student to be this articulate.

Ms. White spoke about the summer program. She thanked the administrators for supporting the summer programming. The guidance coming from the AOE is very restrictive and many programs are shutting down this summer. The TRSU is very fortunate to have the administration be so supportive. She is hoping that it becomes news that the TRSU is providing such a great program to serve 70 students in a way that is safe and supports students and gives social and emotional support. Ms. Fierman advised that Ms. White has done a great job of putting together a comprehensive program that moves within the guidelines which are quite restrictive. Ms. Powden echoed Ms. Fierman’s thoughts and recognized Ms. White for her hard work on making this program successful.

Ms. Lamphere noted that as a parent receiving the communications from Ms. White, she appreciated the clarity and information. She questioned if there are any capacity issues. Ms. White advised that the registration is full. They are taking 75 students which is what their license is set for. She noted that they will never be able to serve all of the families that need care. She advised that the Springfield, BF, Leland and Gray and other summer camps are closing down. They are at the same capacity they were at last year. Mr. Hance questioned why the summer camp is allowed to have 75 students when they can’t graduate 50 students. Ms. White advised they are allowed to have 25 students in a single space and the West Hill location has acres and acres of space. They are breaking the groups up into 24 pods in separate areas. They have to have temperature checks and various procedures for health checks. There are transportation issues, required masks and other restrictions. With thunder, the program is closed down since they can’t transport 75 children safely. There are many other restrictions.

Ms. Fierman noted that the main part of the AOE guidelines that affects graduations is that students are not allowed to congregate or be in a line even when socially distant. Even if the number is increased to 25 between now and graduation, that still doesn’t accommodate the full graduation. She noted that even with the drive-up graduation plans, the cars have to be 6 feet apart. The AOE

restrictions advise that the graduates and families can not all be in the same space even in socially distant spaces.

Ms. Fogg thanked Ms. White for creating the outdoor summer program for the district and overcame many hurdles to make this happen 2 years ago. She advised that this program helps many families. Ms. White advised that if anyone wants to get out of their summer camp reservation can do so if there are health concerns or other concerns.

VI. COMMUNICATIONS:

A. Student Representative Comments

Ms. King noted that the AP tests have been completed. The tests were 45 minutes as opposed to the normal 3 hours. She also noted that teachers and staff have really stepped up to be there for students as educators, community members and trusted adults. She noted that small things like delivering a sign to her house was great. Ms. Powden thanked her and Rileigh for their years of service as student representatives. Ms. Fierman thanked her as well for her 3 ½ years of service. Ms. King introduced her freshman sister Marlena and advised that they are hoping to get a Cavendish student to also participate in the meetings. The board wished her the best for her next stage.

B. Board Member Comments

Mr. Fromberger noted that Mr. Eppolito has resigned as of the end of this year and the TRSU board will need to determine what they will do with that information. Mr. Marin thanked Ms. King and was impressed by the student representation at this meeting.

VII. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Sabbatical Request

Mr. Fromberger noted that the board is revisiting the sabbatical request that they approved on October 17, 2019. She noted that Mr. Kelley has a letter to read for the board. He read it aloud and noted what his plans were for his sabbatical. He noted that his goals are the same and they never would have been able to predict the current environment. He noted that his priority has always been the students. He noted that the students' resiliency reflects their families teaching. The economic outlook has prompted him to review his sabbatical request and he would like to withdraw his sabbatical request at this time and continue as the 5/6 teacher at CAES. He thanked the board for granting his initial request and for their support and encouragement.

Ms. Brown **moved** to approve Mr. Kelley's request to withdraw his sabbatical and to be reinstated as a teacher at CAES. Mr. Studin felt that the sabbatical request was mismanaged from the beginning. He felt that if the proposal was properly vetted from the beginning, they could have avoided many pitfalls along the way. He noted that there was a question about whether a contract was required for the sabbatical and was advised that there wasn't. He felt that this is an example of why a contract was needed. He apologized that he failed to follow his own rules of "trust, but verify". He felt that the board could have done better and vowed to do better in the future. Ms. Powden strongly disagreed with Mr. Studin's assertion that this proposal wasn't fully vetted. She recalled Mr. McBride asking about costs and recalled advising the board that they would be paying Mr. Kelley along with the long-term substitute for his position. The motion to approve Mr. Kelley's request to withdraw his sabbatical and be reinstated as a CAES teacher for the 2020-2021 school year carried without opposition.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Recommendation for Hire

Ms. Powden noted that Landon Elliot-Nags has applied for the guidance counselor position. She reminded the board of the anticipated increase of 50 students from LMH. Mr. Elliot-Nags, if hired, would serve as the 504 coordinator. He graduated from Brattleboro UHS and is excited to come back to Vermont after college and working away from Vermont. Ms. O'Neil felt that he was a good fit for the department and also for the students. The guidance team has a daunting task ahead of them in the fall. He has some leadership experience. Many of the candidates were very good, but he stood out. Mr. Wheelock **moved** to approve hiring Mr. Elliot-Nags as the guidance counselor. Mr. Hance advised that he is not willing to vote on this position until he hears more about the board bargaining and the result.

Ms. Powden advised that the board bargaining council met with the teachers bargaining counsel about what the board is willing to offer the teachers. There will not be another bargaining meeting until August. Ms. Powden advised that the meeting wasn't for negotiating, but was to advise the teachers what the boards are requesting throughout the SU. Ms. Lamphere advised that she is concerned about the budget and is reluctant to hire a guidance counselor that they identified needing before the pandemic now that they have a pandemic. She felt that this is a critical position that the students will need coming back to school. There was discussion about this position being part of the draw for the additional students coming to GM. Ms. Powden noted that the incoming guidance counselor was part of the consideration for Ms. Fierman's proposal for the administration structure at GM for the next year.

Mr. Fromberger questioned the number of LMH students coming to GM. Ms. Powden advised that the BRIS will only accept 14 students and they are anticipating that some of the 23 students that were going to attend BRIS will be coming to GM, therefore the numbers are anticipated at about 45 students coming to GM from LMH.

Mr. Wheelock's motion carried without opposition.

B. Options for Fiscal Year 20-21 Budget

Mr. Fromberger noted that the board needs to deal with the unresolved issues discussed at an executive session with the LMH board. He noted that at the end of those meetings neither board took any action.

There was discussion about the health insurance increases. Mr. Fromberger reminded the board that the bargaining counsel has not scheduled a meeting until August. Mr. Cunningham questioned the boards each making a decision to make their decision public at their next meetings. He maintained that making a decision in executive session is a violation of open meeting law, but the board had said that they would make a decision at the next meeting. Mr. Fromberger advised that they took no vote and exercised the option to make a vote at the next meeting, however the board has chosen not to do so. Ms. Powden advised that the LMH board has decided to postpone any decision until the June meeting. She noted that the LMH board was not able to ratify the support staff agreement due to some changes needing to be made. She has since met with Ms. Hammond and the association and the attorney. They will be bringing the agreement back to the LMH board at their next meeting.

Mr. McBride felt that there would be some questions presented at this meeting tonight and votes taken. Ms. Powden advised that there are no votes that need to be taken at this meeting. Mr. Fromberger noted that if the board doesn't have any action they want to take, they don't have to vote.

Mr. McBride questioned if this board feels that there should be a salary freeze that is recommended to the bargaining committee. Mr. McBride **moved** to instruct the negotiations counsels, both teachers and support staff, to take a position to negotiate for no salary increases for any of the negotiated positions. Mr. Studin advised that this was the discussion that they had had at the negotiations meeting on Monday. Mr. Cunningham noted that at the bargaining committee meeting on Monday, Ms. Mahusky and Mr. Studin made this statement at the request of the board. He felt that this indicates that a decision was made, but it should have come at the end of the executive session as required by law, particularly if the negotiators were under the impression that this was the board's feeling.

Ms. Lamphere noted that while this may be a starting point, it is still a negotiation that they should do in good faith. She asked of the intent was that this position would be a hard line for the negotiators or just a starting point. Mr. Fromberger stressed that no votes were taken in executive session and no polls were taken. They asked the members to express their opinions about the viable options. At the end of the meeting both boards decided not to take any action. On Monday, the negotiators may have taken a position to not offer salary increases in light of absorbing the insurance increases, but they would have taken that from the conversations that were had, not from a vote. Ms. Lamphere questioned if this decision will tie the hands of the negotiators—will salary negotiation be frozen. Mr. Fromberger noted that the counsel has the authority to negotiate, but the final decision will be up to the board to approve.

Ms. Powden noted that the motion seems to have changed a little to include non-bargaining and administration. Mr. McBride noted that his intent was to have the motion apply to all employees. He amended his motion accordingly. There was also discussion about keeping the contract to a one-year contract, rather than a 2-year contract. Ms. Fierman noted that the bargaining portion of the motion is a recommendation for the bargaining counsels, however bargaining takes place in good faith so the motion shouldn't be made as a firm decision. However, the board can make a decision about the non-bargaining employees. Mr. McBride amended his motion. He **moved** to request that the bargaining counsel for both teachers and support staff strive to achieve a wage freeze for all bargaining employees.

Mr. Wheelock questioned the difference between all employees and all bargaining employees. Mr. Fromberger advised that the difference is that one group is under a contract and represented by a union. The other group deals directly with the board on salary increases. He clarified that the motion before the board currently deals only with the bargaining units. Ms. Lamphere noted that being a board member right now is incredibly stressful and the staff is doing a great job navigating this pandemic, but the board has to deal with making decisions looking at a \$150 million shortfall in education funding. She felt that any decisions will be difficult. Mr. McBride's motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Fromberger noted that there is a second issue regarding the non-bargaining unit employees. Ms. Powden suggested that the board could address this issue tonight so the business office could issue contracts. She also reminded the board that they had approved 2-year contracts for the principals at a previous meeting and would like to not see that disturbed at this time. Mr. McBride suggested that the salary freeze should be consistent across all employees. He **moved** to have a salary freeze for the non-bargaining employees consistent with the bargaining employees. Ms. Brown felt that the intent was to freeze salaries, stipends, hourly rates across the board, not just salaries, and not because of the job the employee does, but because of the financial situation the district is in currently. A board member suggested freezing all compensation. Mr. Studin noted that they can't say "compensation" because that includes other benefits which are changing. There was discussion about the appropriate term being a "wage

freeze”. Mr. McBride amended his motion to impose a wage freeze on non-bargaining employees consistent with bargaining employees. Mr. Fromberger felt that the phrase about the bargaining employees shouldn’t be included. Mr. McBride further amended his motion to remove the portion: “consistent with bargaining employees”. The motion read as Mr. McBride **moved** to impose a wage-freeze for non-bargaining employees. The motion carried without opposition.

C. Schedule Next Finance Committee Meeting

Ms. Brown noted that she is waiting for a poll of the board members before scheduling the next meeting for the finance committee. She and Mr. Fromberger will work together to schedule the next meeting. Ms. Powden will follow up with Ms. Moeykens tomorrow on this topic.

There was discussion about locking in on various costs, such as fuel and other costs and futures. Ms. Hammond felt that no company is going to lock them in for a year at this point given the volatility of the market. There was discussion about the current cost \$2.28 per gallon for 78,000 gallons, but they only used about 67,000 gallons. The board discussed there being no risk to go out to bid. Ms. Lamphere felt that they might as well try.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Wheelock questioned if the schools used less than they needed or more.

Ms. Wilson advised that the purpose of younger Ms. Wilson’s comments was to advocate for herself and her classmates, as she has been taught to do and to ask the administration to advocate for them to their superiors on the students’ behalf. She noted that younger Ms. Wilson is a realist and understands that the likelihood of changing minds at this late date is slim, but still felt the need to express herself and advocate for what she wanted.

Mr. Cunningham noted that he was impressed with Ms. Wilson’s presentation and credited her parents for her articulation and advocacy. Ms. Lamphere echoed the comments.

Ms. Lamphere also noted that there are rumors about budget cuts, including cuts in ASP spending. She advised that her understanding is that they have only done proforma presentations, but have made no cuts and have advised the administration to be “lean and mean” in their spending. Ms. Hammond advised that the decision to make cuts from ASP was done in December/January before the budget was approved, and the board decided to cut the funding in half. The only decision that has been made since the approval of the budget was to be mindful of spending.

Mr. Marin suggested that the graduation proposal be circulated to the board members. Ms. Powden will circulate it when it is received. Mr. Alexander noted that they would like to read it and understand it and get information about why that wouldn’t be viable if presented to Secretary French. Ms. Powden noted that she would want to review it closely. There are factors within the proposal that would deem it out of compliance. Ms. Fierman noted that at the moment the graduation is 6/19 and the specific guidelines from the AOE prohibit gatherings of more than 10, but that may change to gatherings of 25, but there are no provisions that will allow that to be more in a single space. Between now and June 19, if the guidelines allow a larger gathering, they will make those changes.

Ms. Beaupre thanked Mr. Eppolito for advocating for student voice and choice and for supporting teachers in their work. Mr. Wheelock questioned how many students they still haven’t gotten ahold of for school. Ms. Powden noted that they have contacted all the families, but there are still several families who haven’t responded. Mr. Wheelock advised that his question was about how many students don’t have internet. Ms. Powden advised that there are about 5 or 6 families who have

advised that they don't have reliable internet at home. Many families are traveling to WiFi hot spots through the area. They are also providing learning packets for the students who need them. Most students are engaged, but they are trying to reach out to the disengaged students regularly.

Ms. Fogg advised that the Andover town hall just installed a WiFi hot spot for people to access the internet.

X. NEXT MEETING AND AGENDA ITEMS:

The next regular meeting will be Thursday, June 18 at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom.

XI. ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Brown **moved** to adjourn at 7:54 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amber Wilson
Board Recording Secretary