

Green Mountain Unified School District Board

Regular Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 16, 2020

GMUHS Library

6:00 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL/CALL TO ORDER:

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

Staff: Lauren Fierman, Deb Beaupre (via Zoom), Meg Powden, Cheryl Hammond, Katherine Fogg, Lauren Baker, Amy Hamblett

Student Reps: Laurel King

Public: Patty Davenport

Mr. Fromberger called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. APPROVE AGENDA:

A. Mr. Studin **moved** to approve the agenda with the addition of an executive session for the discussion of V.S.A. Title 1 § 313 (3) Appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee. Mr. Marin seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

III. APPROVE MINUTES:

A. December 12, 2019

Mr. Marin **moved** to approve the minutes of the December 12, 2019 minutes. Mr. Studin seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

The January 14 minutes were in the packet but not warned so they will be warned at the next meeting.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None.

V. COMMUNICATIONS:

A. Student Representative

Ms. King reported that the boys' basketball team's record is 3-5, and the girls are 2-5. The rock-climbing team has been successfully competing in Rutland and have a few overall individual champions. It is growing in popularity. Semester 1 ended today. The spring musical, Annie, has begun production. Yesterday they had Bill McKibben, an author and activist speak to the whole school about climate change. He is a professor at Middlebury. She felt that it was great that someone such as this would come to GM and take questions from the kids in addition to speaking on the topic. She thanked Ms. Spurlock for organizing it.

There was discussion about how rock climbing is scored—difficulty and speed. They also have to pair up with students from other schools to belay. Mr. McBride questioned what the school can do to engage the students who aren't engaged. Ms. King suggested having upperclassmen interact with some of the younger kids. She gave an example of how she gets kids to join Interact. Mr. Studin questioned if there are sports or clubs that kids are interested in but don't exist at GM.

Ms. King felt that Nordic skiing might be, but she wasn't sure about the numbers. She advised that some kids are interested in STEM. There is another group who is interested in gaming and computer science. Ms. Fierman advised that there is a standing offer to students if they want to make a club, they will help them figure it out. For example, there was a debate club, but there wasn't enough interest this year. There is also a cross-fit club.

B. Board Member Comments

None.

C. RVTC Update

Ms. Perlah reported that this month there was a presentation from pre-tech studies. They are making skateboards. The board discussed some issues with sharing students with a sister district in NH. They had also discussed tech ed funding, including setting up a pilot program. Their budget is also suffering from the health insurance increases as well. The RVTC tuition is lower than many other VT tech centers. The students held a gaming competition and a student won a computer. Ms. Perlah discussed VTVLC and the ability to take online classes in real time. She invited this board to view their website at VTVLC.org. Ms. Fierman shared information on the opportunities at GM for students to do online classes through the flexible pathways program and through VTVLC. She described some of the courses that can be taken. She also discussed the GM teachers who also teach VTVLC classes. The school is doing more and more online learning. The school was also selected to receive additional technology to help support these efforts. She discussed the TRSU blog that talked about this topic.

Mr. McBride questioned if they can also offer more interactive real time. He supported this type of initiative bringing the student "there" and feel like they are in an actual classroom. Ms. Baker advised that USDA sponsors a distance education grant. She described the process of how this can help the school and the experiences that students can have. The 2020 grant should be released in February. There is usually a hefty match required, so it is helpful to have a collaborative partner to help them. She described the online and college courses that students are taking.

D. TRSU Update

Mr. Fromberger reported that the TRSU board met shortly before this meeting and approved an amended budget. The GM finance committee had reviewed it, as did the LMH board, and with the changes each discussed, have supported it. It will be considered in the local budgets which will be presented to the voters once approved. He felt that this budget is a good way to support the school. The increase was a 7.58%. The board discussed the various drafts of the TRSU budget. Mr. Fromberger reported on the LMH bussing changes, which impact the TRSU budget, but the assessment for which won't impact the GMUSD budget.

Mr. McBride questioned the LMH budget being 28 cents away from the penalty threshold, and felt that the only way for that district to avoid penalties next year would be to reduce their budget. Mr. Fromberger advised that the TRSU board has not yet discussed that. He also advised that that could be a different board at that point. Ms. Powden advised that this topic has been discussed at the LMH board. The LMH board asked the administration to cut \$468,000 and they will have to continue to address that going forward. Ms. Lamphere noted that this board improving its opportunities, while that board can't financially, causes issues with equity.

VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Mr. Alexander reported that Mike Davey from EEI and the representative from Control Tech came to the school and added monitors to begin collecting data for the energy audit. He described the process that they will follow to gather information and create a report to give to the board.

VII. ADMINISTRATOR REPORTS:

A. Superintendent Report

Ms. Powden advised that this will be Ms. Lamphere's last meeting. She thanked her for her service. She also thanked the Town of Ludlow for helping the LMHUUSD and TRSU with the transportation for the students in Ludlow. Ms. Powden advised that this has been a week of meetings, this being the 4th this week. She reported on the negotiations meetings, including the GM support staff negotiations. She and Mr. Eppolito are preparing for their Leadership Retreat. They will see how they are progressing on meeting their goals that they had set in the summer. They have retained a lawyer for the negotiations. She reported that the office has processed 82 volunteers from GMUSD and 66 volunteers from LMHUUSD. She thanked Ms. Boni and Ms. Hudkins for their work. Ms. Lamphere reported that her mother advised that the process was easy. Ms. Powden reported that the facilities directors feel that the buildings are sound and in good condition. Mr. Beamon asked that the board keep the back parking lot in mind for the future. Mr. McBride and Ms. Lamphere noted that the town felt that they own the property, not the school, but that paving may still be an option. They will just now need to go through some other processes first. CTES needs a new tractor and Mr. Parah felt that re-keying the school should be a priority. She advised that there are new bathrooms and nurses office and the dangerous trees have been cleaned up. The energy audit will move to CTES for the February break.

There is no new education legislation on the horizon right now. Ms. Powden advised that the regional superintendents are meetings. The chair of the House Education committee, Kate Webb, spoke with them. She advised that there will be no "tweaking" of Act 46. The legislators are looking at universal Pre-K under Act 166. They may recognize the schools like MHS and LES who provide full day preK, and perhaps allow them to count preK students as 1.0 equalized pupils instead of the .6 that they are counted currently. School construction aid has been on the agenda, but they are just forming an advisory committee this year. They are also looking at the role of the state board. They are also discussing a literacy bill to try to identify dyslexia earlier.

Ms. Powden reported that they have discussed the student:teacher ratio and the reality of living within that ratio. She advised that the superintendents are talking about the work with trauma developing a mental health system at the schools and that impacts the ratios. She advised that Secretary French spoke with the superintendents about leveraging aspects of the educational systems, such as educational support teams (EST), local assessment plans, coordination of curriculum and needs based professional development. She advised that the TRSU is on top of each of these initiatives already. They have a speaker coming on January 28 to discuss redesigning EST's.

Mr. Fromberger thanked the principals for submitting their reports to the board. Ms. Powden reported on the new TRSU and district employees—Erin Wallace (para-educator at CAES), Terry Harrington (maintenance at GMUHS), Emma Lombard (CTES), Elizabeth Houseman (para-educator at CAES), Alexis Palmer (para-educator at CTES), Sage DeMoula (personal care attendant for EEE), Bettina Davis (personal care attendant for EEE), Anne Tarmey (new mental health clinician at CAES), Isabelle White (ASP), Erin Wallace (personal care attendance at BRHS). She reported that Jerry Gillman (maintenance at GMUHS) has retired; and Carol Stratton (para-educator) and Robin Rounds (nurse) have resigned. Ms. Lamphere spoke highly of Ms. Tarmey. Ms. Fogg advised that the two para-educator positions are not permanent positions—one is a long-term sub and the other is only needed until the end of the year.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Approval of FY2020/2021 budget

Ms. Hammond advised that the only difference from the last draft are the reduction of the 8 students from tuition, the removal of the world language position and the change in the TRSU budget due to adding back in the positions discussed at the last meeting. Mr. Fromberger advised that the exercise of cutting the budget and then adding back in what the board felt were priorities was helpful and advised that they need to educate the public on the importance of these pieces. Mr. McBride advised that VT ranks #4 in educational spending and hoped that GM is an outlier in what they do spend. He advised that school supplies cost money and the statute requires that they provide them. He advised that he has collected letters sent home from parents. The letters clearly advise that the supplies aren't necessary, but it still feels necessary. He read aloud from some of the letter. He felt that some of these supplies being asked for (pencils, erasers, tissues, etc.) should be provided by the district. He noted that the teachers need these supplies. He felt that the teachers shouldn't ask for these items if there is enough money in the budget for supplies. Ms. Beaupre advised that she has spoken with the teachers about this. She noted that the teachers send out a list because some parents feel the need to help the classrooms, and the lists help direct those parents to useful items. She advised that there are things that the teachers want to ensure that parents didn't give. She suggested that if the board doesn't want teachers to ever send a letter, they can. She felt that back to school shopping is such a prevalent event and felt that many parents want to donate to the class. Mr. McBride felt that the classrooms need to have everything they need and preferred if parents don't feel pressure. Ms. Powden suggested the schools can make a list for parents that parents can seek out, but not feel pressured that they have to buy. Ms. Beaupre advised that the art teacher asked for \$500 in her budget but she could only give her \$250, so the teacher bought the rest, including construction paper. They have an Amazon Wish List.

Mr. McBride suggested that the board consider adding the World Language Teacher back to the budget. He felt that this is a "catch-up" year in order to make good on the "commitment" to the community since it came up at many Act 46 discussions. He noted that the relatively speaking this is a small amount compared to the budget and asked the board to consider it. Mr. Wheelock advised that it was already on the budget but the administration felt that they would struggle with it this year. Ms. Perlah agreed with that assessment since the principals are working on literacy and numeracy as a priority for this year. She felt that the principals know what their teachers can handle this year. She felt that this is a priority but this may not be the year. Ms. Lamphere noted that layering on too many good programs at one time has a negative impact on existing programming. She felt that if the principals could support the implementation, she wouldn't have a problem adding it back to the budget financially. Mr. Studin also advised that World Language helps students with literacy and worried that next year there might be some pushback like this year.

Ms. Beaupre felt that the model that they had been looking at before was to have teachers teach the foreign language themselves. She also wouldn't support that, but she would be interested in integrating World Languages into 4th-6th to begin. She would have to talk to people who want that job to see how it would look within the school day. She also advised that some language courses could be available to the ASP even for the younger grades. Mr. McBride suggested that this teacher could give their input on how to implement the program, even if it is a staggered rollout. This program could be adjusted as necessary if it becomes overwhelming. Ms. Fogg advised that she discussed this with her teachers today. They will figure it out if the board says it has to happen. Her staff is working on implementing FUNDations to help literacy and developing Literacy blocks. She wondered where the foreign language would fit in. Mr. McBride felt that this argument will be the same next year and years later, and so felt that they need to figure out a way

to implement it. Ms. Fogg advised that she doesn't know how other schools make this work. This is an exciting program and they would make it work if they needed to. Mr. Marin suggested that they need to be careful about "gaveling in top down programming initiation" and they should be sure that there is real research about the benefits of this type of programming. He felt the same thing about STEM. He felt that they don't need more scientists.

Ms. Lamphere suggested setting a directive for developing a plan for world languages in the schools in 6 months which they can then build into the next budget. This will give the administrators the time they need as well as hold them accountable to a deliverable. They could then thoughtfully build this into the next budget and commit to it. Mr. Studin and Mr. McBride were the only two in favor of this addition for this budget.

This budget reflects a 9.06% increase. There have been no updates on the Black River Independent School this week. There was discussion about the tuition line accounting for 54 students. There was discussion about them knowing of 44 students, guessing on 10 students. There was also discussion about there being 3 Grafton students paying tuition in this budget as well.

Mr. Wheelock **moved** to approve a budget of \$14,108,968 for the 2020-2021 school year for GMUSD. Mr. Hance seconded. Ms. Hammond advised 4 students from Grafton, 45 from LMH and 10 anticipated students, for a total of 59 students. There are 31 uncommitted students. Mr. Alexander suggested that the administration provide a narrative about the major unavoidable increases. The increase is \$1.1million but \$550,000 of that, the board had no control over, while maintaining economic opportunities for the students—including STEAM coordinator and social studies teacher. This bulleted list would help the board give a consistent message and help them demonstrate the value of the budget. The board has to put the word out in multiple places since few people come to the board meeting. Ms. Fogg advised that this information needs to come out now, not the week before the budget. She suggested providing a handout to the community now.

Ms. Davenport felt that if the superintendent produced a YouTube video on the topic that could be emailed to community members, posted on social media and on the websites. Ms. Powden advised that she has had conversations with Okemo Valley TV about holding a video dialog. Mr. Fromberger suggested that there be a short, pointed list of the increases, with the uncontrollable increases highlighted. Mr. McBride felt that there will be a number of people who will stop at the increase, and this will be a tough sell. Ms. Hammond advised that the state average is 5%. While the communities may want 3-4%, that would come at a major cut to the budget. Mr. Fromberger felt that if the board is comfortable with this budget, they should enthusiastically support the budget to their communities, and remind people that this will help attract tuition students. Ms. Fierman echoed Mr. Fromberger's thoughts. She felt that it is a large number, but if every member of the board talks about how hard they worked to make this a financially sound budget while still offering the programming that they need to. She felt that the community would support it, but if even one member says they agreed to it, but didn't support it, it will falter. Ms. Baker thanked the board for sticking to their goals. She felt that this distinguished this process from other budgeting and suggested they use that to "sell" their budget. Ms. Fogg advised that many districts are dealing with this same type of increase.

The motion carried unanimously.

B. Limited School Choice

Ms. Powden reminded the board about the limited school choice program that has been in place for several years. In this program families can choose to have their child attend any elementary

school in the TRSU. The district would pay half the tuition for any student taking advantage of the program. There are 6 students allowed in and allowed out from each school. The purpose was to give students options. There was an idea that each elementary school could be specialized. There are students in the program, but none of the programs are maxed out. Ms. Powden can report on the numbers at the next meeting. The special education services are run through the SU so the expense would be in the SU district and assessed to each school based on child count. Mr. McBride discussed some of the reasons that a family would choose school choice. Ms. Hammond thought that there might be 6 Cavendish students attending LES. There is no financial impact to the parent.

Mr. Marin **moved** to approve the limited school choice program as presented and authorize the chair to sign the contract. Mr. Alexander seconded. Ms. Powden reported that there are 3 students going from CAES to CTES, 6 students attending LES, 1 LES student attending CTES and 1 student from MHS attending LES. There are 4 MH students from BRHS attending GM. There was discussion about the financial impact. If this program wasn't in place, the parent would still have an ability to appeal to the board to allow their child to choose.

Ms. Powden requested to table the motion because she would like to discuss the program further with Ms. Hammond. Mr. Marin and Mr. Alexander withdrew their motion and second. The discussion was tabled.

C. Australian Ballot & Annual Warning

Mr. Fromberger advised that the warning has been discussed with the Assistant Town Clerk and researched fully. The board also needs to set the annual meeting for this district. The warning will include a question to establish a new date for the annual meeting. The LMH annual meeting and the GM annual meeting are set for the same day, therefore they need to establish a different day. The board needs to set an informational hearing as well. It will be set for February 27 at 7:00 p.m. at GMUHS in the Auditorium. Mr. Studin **moved** to approve the informational meeting warning as discussed. Mr. Alexander seconded. This is the same night as the annual meeting. Mr. McBride questioned why it is at Green Mountain again and not at another town. The board discussed holding the meeting in different locations in the future. Mr. Fromberger suggested that Mr. McBride ask the select boards in the towns if they would be open to moving this meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Studin **moved** to approve the annual school district warning for February 27, 2020 at GMUHS Auditorium at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Marin seconded. There was discussion about the board holding this meeting immediately following the informational meeting. Ms. Fierman suggested that last year the meeting was held in the library and asked the board to consider holding it there again. The board discussed the comfort of the auditorium. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Studin **moved** to approve the Australian ballot vote warning for March 3, 2020 at the Andover Town Hall, Chester Town office, Baltimore Town Hall, and Proctorsville Fire Department. Ms. Lamphere seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None.

X. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

A. V.S.A. Title 1 § 313 (3) Appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee.

Mr. Studin **moved** to enter executive session at 8:04 p.m. for the purpose of discussing an employee evaluation under the provisions of V.S.A. Title 1 § 313 (3) Appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee. There was discussion about there not needing to be a specific finding to enter executive session. Mr. McBride seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

The board returned from executive session at 9:00 p.m. No action taken.

XI. NEXT MEETING AND AGENDA ITEMS:

The next meeting will be Thursday, February 20, 2020 at CAES at 6:00 p.m.

XII. ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Studin **moved** to adjourn at 9:02 p.m. Ms. Wheelock seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amber Wilson
Board Recording Secretary