

TRSU BOARD

Regular Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 5, 2019

6:00 p.m.

Black River High School, Library

I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Board: Mary Alberty, Wayne Wheelock, Jeff Hance, Joe Fromberger, Dan Buckley, Paul Orzechowski

Staff: Meg Powden, Cheryl Hammond, Mary Barton

Other Board Members:

Public: Shawn Cunningham, Sharon Huntley

Mr. Orzechowski called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. He invited those present to introduce themselves.

II. APPROVE AGENDA:

Mr. Fromberger **moved** to approve the agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

III. APPROVE MINUTES:

A. November 5, 2019 Regular Meeting

Ms. Alberty **moved** to approve the minutes from the November 5, 2019 meeting. The motion carried with Mr. Fromberger abstaining.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None.

V. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Ms. Powden reported that the TRSU hosted the legislative breakfast at RVTC in the café. It was well attended and there were good conversations about the upcoming education related legislative issues. She reported that the transportation committee held a meeting and had a discussion about a transportation director. Negotiations have begun for LMH support staff, and the teachers. The GMUSD support staff have not yet begun negotiations.

Ms. Powden asked the board to turn their agenda over. She reminded the board about when the TRSU was created a number of years ago. She noted that it was a lot of work to bring this SU together. When she was hired, one of the reasons she chose this position was to work with the boards that had worked together to voluntarily join together. She felt that there was real good momentum at that time, but felt that unfortunately with the Act 46 work, there are two very different boards. She read aloud the vision statement. She noted that the administrators and staff work very hard to achieve this vision. She asked the board (as this is the board that hired her) for suggestions about how to help the boards come together and work collaboratively. She felt that it is clear to her that the spirit of collaboration is no longer there.

Mr. Buckley questioned why she felt this way. Ms. Powden advised that when they bring suggestions that take into account the entire SU, such as the early literacy coordinator, it is not supported. She noted that the GM board has indicated that literacy is a priority to them, but they didn't support them.

Mr. Buckley noted that he also has a problem supporting that kind of increase to the budget. He noted that there are fewer HR tasks because they are closing a school, but felt that the SU still wants to increase the staff because there is more work with tracking the students. Ms. Powden disagreed and noted that it is the administrations job to support the teachers and help the students to achieve more and graduate college/career/tradeschool ready. She understands that budgets are tough, but there are reasons that they are asking for positions. They have prioritized the positions. Mr. Orzechowski felt that these positions were important for the students to achieve more.

VI. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Fiscal year 2020/2021 Budget 2nd Draft

The board reviewed the Central office budget. Ms. Hammond shared the information about what has changed since the last draft. She noted that the top three things were the HR assistant, the HR reserve and the summer curriculum work. She noted that the unemployment rates increased about \$31 per person to 1.08%. Ms. Alberty questioned what the changes are due to BRHS closing. Ms. Hammond noted that they are suggesting a .5 fte increase in the data specialist position to track the BRHS students. The person in this position will also be performing a number of other tasks as well, such as Power School data reconciliation. This data has to be tracked for students in TRSU schools and those who are in these towns but tuitioned out to other schools. Ms. Hammond gave detailed information regarding how a tuitioned student attending a non-TRSU school would be tracked. Part of this tracking is verification of residency annually. There are around 134 students who will be tuitioned next year.

Ms. Hammond distributed information on the 3 proposed positions along with their priority. Ms. Powden noted that the GM district currently employs a STEAM coordinator at .4 fte, and recently discussed increasing that position to 1.0 fte for their district. As such, if the LMH board would like to have a STEAM coordinator, they would need to discuss how much time they would need. There was discussion about the early literacy coordinator.

Mr. Buckley clarified if GMUSD has already declined the early literacy position, Ms. Powden confirmed they had. Ms. Hammond explained that this position was originally planned to be to cover all 4 elementary schools. Ms. Powden noted that she could speak with Mr. Eppolito about the fte needed for the STEAM coordinator for LMHUUSD. She will present this information at the LMH board meeting next week.

Ms. Hammond noted that the salary is \$84,202 for the early literacy and STEAM positions, if they were 1.0 fte. The health educator would be \$99,000. The STEAM position would now be prorated for the LMH district. There was discussion about the proposed increase of the STEAM coordinator discussed at the prior meeting. There was discussion about these positions not being in the budget currently.

Mr. Hance questioned if Ms. Powden's comment about the lack of collaboration included GMUSD's decision about making the STEAM coordinator 1.0 fte all in GMUSD. Ms. Powden noted that making this position a 1.0 fte position is fine, but there is value to this position in the other schools, so that is why she is recommending a coordinator position for the LMH schools. Ms. Hammond noted that adding just one of these 1.0 fte positions would increase the budget to 13%.

Mr. Buckley suggested that the health educator duties should be done by the director of curriculum. Ms. Powden noted that Mr. Eppolito's area of education is Social Studies. While it is his job to be sure that the curriculum is in alignment, he is not a health educator. Ms. Alberty noted that she saw value in each of these positions but the taxes are too high.

Mr. Buckley suggested that the LMH board could support .4 fte early literacy position since GMUSD didn't support this position. Mr. Fromberger noted that this board's role is to determine what positions the TRSU will hire. Ms. Powden advised that this position is an SU position and it is this board's decision, not GMUSD's. If this board approved the position, both districts would be assessed for the position.

Mr. Buckley suggested that based on the way the health educator description was written, these roles should fall to Mr. Eppolito. He suggested that if GM has decided to not support the literacy position, the LMH board can decide to support a .4 fte literacy position. There was discussion about the GMUSD finance committee having made some recommendations about the budget, but it is ultimately up to the board. Mr. Buckley noted that since their finance committee has already talked about not supporting this position, if this board approves it, they are effectively forcing the position on the GM district. He felt that if LMH expressed a strong desire not to support something, he wouldn't want this board to force it on them either.

Mr. Fromberger discussed the GMUSD retreat and the strong priority to address early literacy. He was surprised that they didn't support this position. He felt that they should do something about early literacy. Mr. Orzechowski felt that neither district board should force the hand of the TRSU. He also felt that it is the role of this board to look out for the best for all the students. There was discussion about how this board can pass something if the two member boards disagree on it. The one position would increase the central office budget to 13.98%.

There was discussion about the board not having much leeway on the special education budget. Ms. Powden noted that if a district board instructs their representatives to vote a certain way on the TRSU board, they are to do that because the members on this board are delegates from their respective boards. There was discussion about the board having passed a budget and then they should support it.

Ms. Hammond reported that she and Ms. Barton have gone over the special education budget to try to save money. She explained the proposed Social Emotional Program and the proposed savings of \$100,000 that this would save. There was discussion about this savings coming from tuition and transportation. Ms. Hammond noted that there are more students who have moved into the district so the net won't be clear in this draft. There was discussion about the autism program having been brought in house and that was proposed to save \$100,000, but the budget increased. But that is because there were more students added to the SU than originally budgeted. Ms. Hammond noted that if they didn't have the program, the budget would have been substantially more than what it is currently because they would have had to pay for transportation and tuition. Ms. Barton noted that if they tuitioned the autism students out, it would cost about \$500,000, and the program costs about \$200,000 thus a \$300,000 savings. There was discussion about using the words "we expect to save". There are 3 students in the autism program currently and it can take up to 5 students. Ms. Barton noted that there have been 15 new special education students who have moved in this year, including one with significant needs which will result in extraordinary costs. Ms. Barton advised that the autism students have been getting a much better education than they were previously.

Ms. Hammond noted that the unemployment also needs to be adjusted. She also noted that she will be making some corrections to the excess costs. There was discussion about the 12.9% health insurance premium. They should hear by 12/15 about how this will impact TRSU. The projected increase for special education and EEE is 16.9% increase.

There was discussion about Act 153 and the requirement that transportation revenue and expenses flow through the SU. Ms. Hammond will bring back the definition at the next meeting. There was discussion about each school district not having to provide transportation at their choice, but this may or may not be an SU function. Mr. Orzechowski reported that the transportation committee met recently. They discussed centralizing the transportation. He recommended if they were going to purchase buses to purchase the newest and 2nd newest bus from Ludlow. He recommended not necessarily purchasing the smaller bus. He advised that the 32-seat bus would only be able to be used on this side of the SU. However, part of the centralization would be to be able to share the buses. He reported that there would be 9 routes total (3 new routes more than the GM district has currently), with a recommended 3 new buses. He discussed being sure that there would be sufficient buses for extracurriculars. He reported that Mr. Parah would be talking with the shop to get the value. Mr. Buckley noted that the select board approved selling all 4 buses for \$50,000, or one for 50% of the blue book value. There was discussion about the transportation being split based on enrollment. There was also discussion about the transportation reimbursement 2-year delay, and this being a big increase to Ludlow because they haven't paid for transportation before. There was discussion about how this board would take on the buses of GM—including the loan for \$684,000.

There was discussion about this being a savings on both sides because GM would share the costs of the director and the extra LMH, while LMH would share the costs of the GM buses. There was discussion about the lender perhaps not necessarily agreeing to transfer the loan to the TRSU. There was discussion about this decision being far more complicated than just taking this on. Mr. Fromberger noted that they have 40 years' experience in providing transportation. As such he suggested LMH contracting with GM for transportation. There was discussion about comparing the actual costs to each district with transportation as an SU service assessed back to the districts, versus combining it to one system and sharing the assessment based on enrollment.

Ms. Powden noted that the SU had a waiver from the state because Ludlow had a different transportation system. That waiver was only good until they had to provide the transportation to all the schools in LMH. Mr. Buckley questioned how the SU can take out a loan if they don't have taxing power. There was discussion about where the authority is for purchasing, managing and billing. There was discussion about the bill back from the SU to each district. Mr. Orzechowski requested to see the numbers at the next transportation committee meeting with the same costs, but broken out based on the different scenarios. There was discussion about being able to share resources if there is one single unit.

Mr. Cunningham questioned the additional bus expense in the proposed draft. There was discussion about whether the draft includes a bus that has already been in circulation. There was discussion about alternatives such as leasing. There was discussion about the recommendation to purchase larger buses because they are not much more expensive to operate, but they provide the capacity that would be needed for certain events. The transportation committee meets next on 12/16 and they will discuss this further. There was discussion about the GMUSD having researched lease versus purchase options. Mr. Fromberger reported on what happened with GMUSD's recent lease issues. Ms. Hammond noted that the shortage of bus drivers also impacts the decision about whether to contract bus services.

Ms. Hammond noted that the budgets are kept separate for review purposes, but then joined together at the end on a summary sheet. She also noted that the proposed hours in the transportation budget last year didn't include the extracurricular activities. There was discussion about perhaps getting a spare bus by purchasing all the Ludlow buses. The board discussed the additional cost for retrofitting the Ludlow buses.

Ms. Hammond discussed the food service proposal. She advised that LMH currently has a food service program that will not be returning next year. This proposal is a way to share Mr. Kennedy as an SU food service director and assess the costs back to the SD's. Having food in house is generally better quality. The kitchen renovations would be an LMH expense since it is building related. There was discussion about why LMH has had a food service program. Typically, when schools operate food service, they run a deficit, and when they considered a food service contractor, there was a hold harmless level, so the deficit was minimized. A couple years ago, the state changed the way food service is billed to per-plate which caused the food service company to lose money—about \$20,000. As such, they significantly increased their costs this year. There was discussion about the director overseeing all the schools, but each site having a site coordinator. The hope would be that there would be complementary menus at each school, but some difference between schools. Ms. Hammond reported that Mr. Kennedy has been consulted about this.

Ms. Alberty suggested that Ms. Hammond create a budget draft with the literacy position, the food service director and the transportation director to get an overall picture. In this way they can compare the total budget from last year to this, and also the assessment to each district from last year to this. Ms. Hammond noted that even if the TRSU doesn't support the food service director, the LMH board will need to hire a food service coordinator with certain credentials. They still want to see all the pieces of the assessment with any new changes highlighted. The board discussed the concerns regarding the proposed Act 46 savings and that they are not evident. The town of Ludlow is 95% non-resident which includes businesses and 2nd home owners.

The board discussed preparing for a decision on January 2, or holding a special meeting.

VII. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Approval of Financial Management Questionnaire

Ms. Hammond advised that this is something that is required annually. It is a self-assessment of how processes work in the central office and a way to be sure that the board is aware of those processes. Mr. Buckley questioned who is responsible for the items that are not populated. Ms. Hammond is ultimately responsible for all of the activities. There was discussion about the board chair signing the document confirming that the board reviewed the document.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None.

IX. NEXT MEETING:

The next regular meeting will be Thursday, January 2, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. at CTES.

X. ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Alberty **moved** to adjourn at 7:34 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Amber Wilson
Board Recording Secretary