

# TRSU BOARD

## Regular Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 5, 2019

6:00 p.m.

Green Mountain Union High School, Library

### I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

**Board:** Dan Buckley, Paul Orzechowski, Wayne Wheelock, Fred Marin, Jeff Hance

**Staff:** Meg Powden, Cheryl Hammond, Catherine Fogg, Lauren Fierman, Lauren Baker, Karen Trimboli

**Other Board Members:**

**Public:**

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

### II. APPROVE AGENDA:

Mr. Orzechowski requested to add Fiscal Year 2019-2020 budget update to the agenda. Mr. Marin **moved** to approve the agenda with the addition. The motion carried unanimously.

### III. APPROVE MINUTES:

#### A. October 3, 2019 Regular Meeting

Mr. Marin **moved** to approve the minutes from the October 3, 2019 meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

### IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None.

### V. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Ms. Powden reported that the GMUHS Boys' varsity soccer team are the Division III state champions. The game was won in overtime on a penalty kick. She also reported that the school choice and residency forms have been sent out in October and they only have about ¼ of them back. They are hoping that after the vote more will begin coming in. The deadline is November 15 and Ms. Moeykens has sent out an email reminder to families.

Ms. Powden noted that they have been trying to recruit BRHS students to GMUHS, but there seems to be some negative information coming from Chester that may be impacting students' decisions. Ms. Trimboli reported that some of the Chester Telegraph stories are concerning parents. She anticipated that there would be about 70-75 students going to GMUHS, but the negative press seems to have cut that in half. The board discussed this information hurting the towns. They also discussed the letter to the editor from Ms. Mahusky. Ms. Powden advised that the Telegraph has targeted her and the negativity is impacting the staff and students.

Ms. Powden reported that the VSA will be hosting a legislative breakfast next week (11/15). On Thursday and Friday she will be attending the VSA/VSBA annual conference which will be focused on equity.

**VI. NEW BUSINESS:**

**A. Policies First Read (C7.V2, H8.V2)**

The board reviewed the policies. Mr. Marin advised that the policies have been presented to the board in its prior version. Policy C7's approval was not recorded in the minutes previously. He also reported on the change in the wording of this policy "new members will participate..." is changed to "new members are encouraged to participate..." He also noted that in policy H8, the wording in item 7 seems to restrict board members from speaking their opinions, so the language is clarified that the board member can speak their opinion but must make it clear that this is not the board opinion. He noted that in these cases, there is usually a reason, such as a technical reason, that the official board position would need to be stated in a certain way.

**B. Fiscal Year 2019/2020 Budget Review**

Ms. Hammond reminded the board that they had reviewed the central office budget at the last meeting. She and Ms. Barton have been working on service plans and she has been working on the transportation budget. She reminded the board that currently the transportation expenses are assessed directly back to the district using the expenses and that may change in the future as they discuss SU-wide transportation. She noted that the current transportation budget looks good. She advised that they need to budget for the radio communication and the random drug testing for the drivers.

Ms. Hammond reported on the overs/unders in the special education budget. She reminded the board of the items she reported on last month—items that are required but that weren't budgeted for previously. She presented information on pending budget impacting issues that may potentially put them over budget in special education. She reported that there is a new student in the district who has an out of district placement. She also reported that there are some other students in the district who have been placed out of the district. She also reported that the occupational development program wasn't in this budget, but has been added to the new budget draft. She noted that it is still early in the year. Ms. Powden suggested that they now have some time because it is early in the year, to try to work on developing some savings for the current budget.

Mr. Hance questioned the repairs and maintenance line item for \$75,000 in the upcoming budget. Ms. Hammond explained that some of this expense is the inspections and regular upkeep of the buses that they are responsible. She reported that she would clarify that further when they begin discussing the next budget.

**C. Fiscal Year 2020/2021 Preliminary Budget**

Ms. Hammond reported on the central office budget which currently reflects a 1.61% increase. There has been a \$38,000 fund balance that has been being carried for a few years. There is no reason for the SU to carry a fund balance so she brought it in as a revenue. She reported that there are very few changes from last year. She reported that the health insurance is up about 12.9%. In technology, they need to replace a server from 2012, as well as some desktops/laptops on a rotation. She reported that the Microsoft office license expense is in the budget. There was discussion about this being the purchase (not the subscription price). Ms. Hammond reported that the first page of the budget presentation was a list of items that they would like to add to the budget (or at least have discussion about).

Mr. Buckley noted that when they combined into a single SU, and then combined again into only two districts, the combined costs were supposed to go down, and now that they are closing a school he would expect costs to continue to decline, but they are not. Ms. Hammond advised that the SU still needs to track all of the students regardless of what school they are attending. Mr.

Buckley noted that the SU doesn't have to budget for Black River. Ms. Hammond advised that they still have to do the LMH audit. Mr. Buckley felt that the complexity of the LMH budget has been reduced because of less schools. Ms. Hammond advised that they are trading that complexity for a different complexity—they will now have 120+ students that they will have to track residency, tuition and services for at various schools around the area. Ms. Trimboli also noted that if the building doesn't go to the town, they will still need to budget for the maintenance of the building. Mr. Buckley discussed the reduction in services from the combination of SU's. Ms. Powden reminded him of the reduction in staffing: 2 business managers, 2 superintendents; 2 student services directors, etc. have all been reduced to one in each of those positions.

Mr. Buckley noted that promises were made that there would be reductions but they are still seeing additions. Ms. Hammond noted that reducing by one building with BRHS's closure does not reduce workload—there are still schools to budget for and students to track. She noted that the student tracking will be far more involved than developing this budget. Ms. Powden noted that tracking student residency is very involved. Mr. Wheelock advised that even in Baltimore with very limited students, they have a difficult time with residency confirmation. Ms. Powden advised that in Plymouth, she and Ms. Boni tracked those students.

Mr. Buckley noted that it is difficult to accept an extra \$200,000 of expenses. Mr. Orzechowski advised that they haven't yet had the opportunity to hear the rationale for the additional requests, and requested information about what they are for. Ms. Hammond advised that Mr. Eppolito has more information on some of the items. She reported that the auditor is recommending an HRA reserve to set aside some funds in the event that they need more than budgeted. She reported that the state guideline is to budget 65% of the total maximum exposure, which they have followed, but in the event that they actually need all of their maximum exposure, there are no backup funds to cover it. She noted that the health insurance plan is a calendar year, but the budget works off fiscal year. She explained that if someone had a surgery in December and again in January, the district would be responsible for 2 full deductibles during the same fiscal year. She is recommending \$8400.

Ms. Hammond reported that they are looking for the finance data assistant position to become a 1.0 fte school year position. This position will assist in tracking grades 7-12 LMH students. The person in that position currently tracks the FRL applications, and the claims reimbursement for the hot lunch meals. The position will help Ms. Baker with the PowerSchool data collection, along with the manipulation of the data to be able to upload it into the state system. Ms. Baker reported on the data collection process. It was previously cleaned and collected at the state level, but now it will come directly from PowerSchool. The census and discipline and other information will be collected as a single data point, rather than "silo-ed" as in the past. She noted that previously they had to report attendance in the spring, but now have to report every single student's attendance every single day. This information is used for ADM for state reimbursement. Ms. Baker reported on the data management and census changes at the state level.

Ms. Powden reported on the summer curriculum development and Mr. Eppolito's plan to work with the teacher leaders on curriculum development over the summer, rather than during the school year while they are trying to teach. Mr. Buckley questioned if this is the work that the teachers are supposed to be doing on the Tuesday afternoon early release days. Ms. Powden advised that that is for work on PBE, while this work would be specifically curriculum development.

Ms. Powden reported on the recommendation for a health educator. The whole child/whole school/whole community committee is recommending this position because the elementary

teachers have limited time in their day to teach health education to their students. This position would cover all 4 elementary schools' health education. The team is made up of guidance counselors, nurses as well as outside people such as Paul Faenza from BROC and the regional nurse Colleen Barlow. This person would also work on developing a health curriculum for the SU.

Ms. Powden reported that the Director of Early Literacy position was due to the need to focus more on early literacy. There has been some turnover in teachers in the younger grades and this can impact the learning for these students. This position will coach the teachers in literacy, oversee the literacy program and also serve on the EST teams. They will also plan the professional learning.

Ms. Powden reported that the GMUSD board has discussed expanding the STEAM Director position. This position, if expanded, would then be an SU-wide position, impacting all student and providing coaching for all the teachers in the SU.

Ms. Hammond noted that the first couple positions are at the SU level, while the others would be at the school level, but housed in the SU budget since it is an SU-wide position. Ms. Powden suggested bringing the administration's top priorities back to the board next month (after she discusses them with Mr. Eppolito).

Ms. Hammond will present the budget draft next month with the first 3 positions added into it, and a recommendation from the administration on the remaining positions.

Ms. Hammond reported on the EEE and its funding. She noted that they will receive about \$73,000 from the block grant and the rest of it will be local funded. She discussed the Medicaid reimbursement. She advised that the budget is up 9.3%, but that represents about \$22,000. The biggest reason is that para-educators will be needed to support students coming in with their IEP. She noted that this position will be primarily an LMH position. Ms. Powden reported that Ms. Barton, Ms. Trimboli and Ms. Hammond have been working on developing a social-emotional program that will help bring more students home, like the Autism program has. Ms. Barton and Ms. Trimboli discussed the benefits of this program, including the children being part of the community and the children learning from their peers. The plan is to begin the program next September if approved. This will also help reduce the amount of time the students spend on the road. The plan is that this program will help save approximately \$96,000. Ms. Hammond advised that since the program is being housed in LES but is a district program, the plan is that the GMUSD budget will fund a portion of the program for the use of the building. She discussed developing a formula for square footage usage.

Ms. Hammond reported on the special education budget. It currently has a large increase, but less than when the draft originally began. She reported that Ms. Barton is working on different ways to provide services to students. She discussed the Medicaid clerk position. She also reported that there are a certain number of out of district placement students currently and next year with BRHS closing, there will be another 30-35 students in out-of-district placements. Therefore they are recommending a part-time out-of-district placement coordinator to help track these students' special education services. She reported on the extended year services being added in the budget draft, and reminded the board of her report on those for the current budget. She reported that the 12.9% increase in health insurance will mean a \$43,000 impact on this budget. There are new students added to this budget which is about \$150,000 impact.

Ms. Hammond reported that the ED (Emotional Disturbance—Social & Emotional Learning) program is anticipated to cost about \$220 to run the program. They also anticipate needing another special educator at GMUHS for the additional LMH students that will be attending that school. She explained how the expenses will be coded out and assessed to each of the districts.

Ms. Hammond will present a summary form for the budget next month, but felt that the board needed the detail for this first review of the budget. Ms. Hammond reported that previously there had been a concern that a portion of out of district special education students' education is general education and therefore not reimbursable under the special education funding formula; however the decision has been made "to not interpret the law that way", therefore they will still get reimbursed for the extraordinary expenses for out of district placements. However, there will still be the special education funding change. She described the formula, noting that it takes into account the long term average and the three year special education costs to get the per-pupil costs. She noted that she is unsure if there will be special weighted measures for poverty. She is also unsure of how the distribution will be determined—will the funds go to the SU to be spent at their discretion, or to the districts based on their students. This will be determined in the future.

Ms. Hammond will bring revisions to the draft back at the next meeting. She noted that there are some numbers that they won't know for certain until December 15.

#### **D. Supervisory Union Transportation Director**

Mr. Orzechowski reported that he was curious about what the expenses would be if the SU shared a transportation director. Ms. Hammond presented information on the director proposal. She divided the assessment by enrollment. She explained the rationale for breaking it apart by enrollment rather than by equalized pupils, noting that transportation will be provided by the receiving schools in some cases, so it should be billed to the schools based on where the students are attending. She discussed the tech center transportation. She also discussed the transportation reimbursement.

There was discussion about the \$15,000 anticipated for converting the municipal buses. The cost is \$7500 per bus to convert, but the purchase piece is not yet in this proposal because that is an unknown. There was discussion about the need to purchase another bus for an additional bus run. Ms. Hammond also reminded the board that transportation is a function of the SU, but there isn't an SU transportation committee, only a GMUSD transportation committee. She suggested that they should have an SU committee. Ms. Powden also suggested inviting Mr. Parah to the committee meeting to hear input on the transportation. There was discussion about using one of the newer Ludlow buses to cover the Mt. Holly route. There was also discussion about each district paying for their own buses (as a pass through with the SU). The board discussed still sharing the director position and assessing by enrollment.

Ms. Hammond noted that one of the benefits to sharing the entire service and assessing all expenses by enrollment would be to share buses—and be able to use smaller buses when appropriate and larger buses when that is appropriate. The transportation committee will meet soon.

#### **E. Supervisory Union Food Services Director**

Ms. Hammond noted that currently LMH has a food service provider, however next year with the closure of BRHS, the current provider is unwilling to provide services to the district (or if they do, it will be at a significant increase). She reported that LMH is looking to bring their food service in-house, similar to GMUSD's food service. The proposal is that Mr. Kennedy, the GMUSD director, could transition into an SU-wide director and then hire a part-time person to

fill in at GMUSD in the various non-director work that he is currently doing. She advised that she has not yet spoken to Mr. Kennedy about this. She noted that the distribution based on enrollment would be similar to what each district is currently paying. There was discussion about each district working to bridge the gap between revenue and expense. The food service employees at LMH would then be LMH employees, rather than employees of Café Services. There was discussion about moving the Ludlow cafeteria back to LES, rather than at the armory, but that expense would be an LMH expense, not an SU expense. The Mt. Holly meals would then be made at LES and transported up. This would also allow the students to not go outdoors to get to the cafeteria. The consensus was to continue with this planning. There was discussion about the Café Services maximum exposure in the past being about \$6000, however with the change to per-plate pricing, that stopped.

**VII. PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Ms. Trimboli reported that Ms. Hammond and the central office staff do a great job preparing the budget and addressing questions and concerns of all the board members. She noted that the staff is working very hard and gave an example of employees who are .8 fte actually working 1.5 fte without the extra pay to get the jobs done. She also noted that Ms. Powden has done a great job for the students in the district under very adverse conditions during her tenure at TRSU, and she wanted to recognize her for that work.

Mr. Buckley noted that the reason that the board decided to move the meetings around was to encourage more public participation, however there are no additional members of the public present so it seems that the experiment is not changing the public attendance. There was discussion about the board visiting all 6 schools (giving the trial 6 months).

**VIII. NEXT MEETING:**

The next regular meeting will be Thursday, December 5, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. at BRHS.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT:**

Mr. Buckley **moved** to adjourn at 7:11 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Amber Wilson  
Board Recording Secretary