

Green Mountain Unified School District
Board
Tuesday, April 17, 2018
CAES Library
6:00 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL/CALL TO ORDER:

Board: Joseph Fromberger, Jeff Hance, Kate Lamphere, Fred Marin, Mike Studin, Marilyn Mahusky, Doug McBride (via phone), Erin Lamson (via phone), Tonia Fleming (6:07pm)
Staff: Meg Powden, Cheryl Hammond, Katherine Fogg, Lauren Baker
Public: Shawn Cunningham, Sara Stowell, Trevor Barlow, Christine Balch, Alice Harwood, Sharon Huntley, Chris Marks, Bill Dakin, Lee Gustafson, Leigh Daki

Ms. Mahusky called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. The board introduced themselves.

II. APPROVE AGENDA:

Mr. Fromberger **moved** to approve the agenda. Mr. Marin seconded and the motion to approve the agenda carried with no opposition.

III. APPROVE MINUTES:

A. April 10, 2018 Regular Meeting

Ms. Fogg noted that she, Mr. Thomson, and Mr. Ferenc should be added to the list of staff in attendance at the April 10 meeting. Mr. Fromberger noted that the time out of executive session, no action taken and the adjournment information needs to be added to the minutes. Ms. Powden will provide the time and motion information for the minutes. Mr. Marin **moved** to approve the minutes of the April 10, 2018 meeting with the corrections noted. Ms. Lamphere seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

IV. COMMUNICATIONS:

A. Public Comments

Ms. Mahusky noted that there were a lot of members of the community in attendance and wanted them to know in terms of timing for the meeting, on the agenda tonight are discussion of the budget and a vote on it, the possible approval of a warning for the public vote, and at 6:30, they are scheduled to interview a principal candidate.

Mr. Marks questioned if there is only one candidate for the principal position now. Ms. Mahusky confirmed. Mr. Marks requested that the board consider reopening the position as a permanent principal position, not an interim principal position for a number of reasons. He felt that they would get a better and larger pool of candidates, and he didn't feel that it was in the students' best interest to settle on a candidate. He noted that he works at Vermont Academy and they recently had an interim head and felt that even the best and most well-meaning interim heads of a school aren't truly interested in the long term success of the school, and that can be felt by the parents, faculty and the students.

Ms. Stowell agreed with Mr. Marks' comments and noted that the community has asked repeatedly for this position to not be an interim position. She felt that it was an issue of transparency. She noted that at the last meeting, the board actually stated that this position is a place holder to give the administration and board time to make long term structure decisions. As such, the candidate pool wasn't very deep, and making a decision based on only having one candidate to choose from is an injustice to the Cavendish community and children.

Ms. Stowell also noted that the agenda changed several times, so she is not sure what the most recent agenda is. In the interest of transparency, she felt that multiple revisions of the agenda and multiple publications of the agenda were disconcerting and the community is unsure what the timing is for the interview and the rest of the meeting. She advised that she just looked at the TRSU, the GMUHS, and the CTES websites and there is no agenda posting now for tonight's meeting.

Ms. Stowell also noted that she was disappointed that this board did not represent its conversations at the last meeting when the members met as the TRSU board. Therefore the budget was passed with some reductions in it, but didn't address any of the issues that were brought up at the GMUSD meetings, such as the tables and chairs. There was no discussion about the superintendent increase in salary. She also noted that the

TRSU board which includes members from this board did not discuss the inequity of benefits between the TRSU special education staff and others who work in the same buildings but are employed by the local districts. She also noted that RIF notices were also given out to all the reading interventionists (grant-funded positions), yet the board has said that they were focused on doing more for the students. She reported that the Ludlow Mt. Holly board foresaw possible reductions in the federal funding and prepared by adding money in the local budget to keep the position a full-time position in each of their schools. She noted that they are talking about putting in a math interventionist and a 3rd grade teacher instead of preparing for possible losses in federal funding for the reading interventionists. She wondered if the board acted with the knowledge of the RIF's of the reading interventionists.

Ms. Stowell also noted that she was shocked that they have a superintendent who has no job description and she would hope that this board will ensure that proper job descriptions are created and given to various staff employed by this board and that the TRSU would do the same with their staff. She reported that the TRSU board can't even provide a proper evaluation of the superintendent because they had never given her a job descriptions or discussed goals with her.

Ms. Mahusky noted that she wanted to clarify some misconceptions. She reminded the public that this board came into existence in September, 2017. With respect to the TRSU, the TRSU board did decide to review the superintendent and during that process that is when they discovered that there was a job description prepared, but never presented to the board for approval nor was it subsequently presented to the superintendent. She noted that the TRSU board just became aware of it and is working to address it. She also reported on the budgetary items. She noted that the TRSU budget that was passed on Thursday is a reduction from the prior budget that had been approved. The desks and chairs were removed in the prior version so it wasn't necessary to discuss them during this latest discussion. She remarked on the dental benefits that some board members learned about last fall, and indicated that the bargaining council has been attempting to unify the benefits. They had anticipated that they would be one district under Act 46, but obviously that's not the case. During the last round of board bargaining, the TRSU staff was aligned with the GM side of the SU as far as benefits were concerned. She reported that the superintendent and the former director of finance negotiated dental benefits for the TRSU staff. This was news to many people, particularly since the goal had been to align the benefits. She reported that the board bargaining council will begin meeting tomorrow to discuss negotiations. Benefits will likely be discussed during this process and that is nothing that this body can do anything about at the present time. Ms. Mahusky noted that as far as the raises for SU staff are concerned, all potential raises are calculated in a contingency line item. This line item includes a proposed overall percentage increase in salary as well as potential changes in benefits, and any salary improvements. She noted that the superintendent's salary has not changed and no offer has yet been made to her for any changes in salary. It is her understanding that the TRSU board will not have that conversation until after the superintendent's review is completed.

Ms. Mahusky noted that the contingency line item does not include specific requests for salary increases. It is based on an "across-the-board" percentage increase. She was very clear to note that this contingency does not mean that the TRSU staff members will be given that percentage amount, it is a place holder they use as standard practice. Ms. Powden addressed the RIF notifications were sent out as a result of the late grant reduction notifications last year. She reminded the audience that last year, they had made plans for the reading interventionists whose positions are grant funded and were notified in July that the federal funding was being reduced more than anticipated. She reported that they are being proactive notifying the reading interventionists of possible unanticipated reductions. She noted that there were already reductions anticipated and the positions have been adjusted accordingly, but in the event there are further late reductions, they have already prepared for this. Ms. Powden noted that the LMH board did not fully fund the title I positions, but they did put some funds in their local budget. She explained the targeting and ranking process that Ms. Waite has followed to calculate the federal funding of these positions. There was discussion about the amount of the reduction in federal funding from last year. Ms. Powden noted that the anticipation is that the title I teachers will still be in the schools, but based on the timing of the master agreement and when they are notified of federal funding reductions, they had to send out RIF notices. She noted that the teaching contracts have gone out, but they haven't been able to offer the title I staff teaching contracts because the federal funding hasn't been finalized yet. Their contracts will go out when the federal funding is finalized, but because of that delay, RIF notices were required based on the master agreement. She noted that it is her intention to offer contracts when that notification comes. She suggested discussing GMUSD's response to possible reductions during the budget discussion later in the meeting.

Mr. Cunningham questioned if the teachers would still be in the building but if they would be at something less than a 1.0 fte. Ms. Powden confirmed that that depended on whether there were reductions in the federal

funding and then what the TRSU board and/or the GMUSD board decided to do with those reductions—if they decided to fund the remainder of the positions to ensure that they are made whole again.

Mr. Gustafson reported that he has been to a few meetings and each one has been a different committee—vision and finance and now the full board. He questioned if there is a list of committee members and how they interact with each other and who reports to whom. Ms. Mahusky noted that this is the GMUSD board and these are the members who were elected to represent the communities of the GMUSD. The committees—vision, finance, food service, facilities and PR—are subcommittees of this board and are made up of members of this board. The committees make recommendations to this board and if action is needed, the action is taken by this board—the elected individuals. Mr. Gustafson questioned how this board interacts with the SU board and their budget. Ms. Mahusky noted that the TRSU board is their own board and their members are drawn from the local boards. Right now since the districts are still operating as individual districts, there are 22 members on the TRSU board. For example, the CAES board has 3 of its board members on the TRSU board, the GMUHS board has 3 of its board members on the TRSU board, etc. like the GMUSD board. Because this board is so large, it conducts most of its business through an executive committee which is made up of one representative from each operating district and one representative from the non-operating districts of Andover, Chester and Baltimore and one representative from the non-operating district of Plymouth. Once the unified districts are operational, the SU board will be comprised of 3 representatives from the GMUSD board and 3 representatives of the LMHUUSD board. They are waiting for authorization from the AOE to change the composition on the TRSU board so that the new TRSU board will be representative of the two new unified school districts instead of representative of the several individual boards. She clarified that the voters elect members to the GMUSD board, but this board chooses which of its members will serve on the TRSU board.

Ms. Mahusky noted that she hoped that information would be reflected on the website. She also noted that the agendas and the meeting minutes should be posted on the website. She noted that they will double check that and make sure the information is accurate because the board is committed to transparency. Mr. Dakin questioned how the RVTC board fits into that flow. There was discussion about Ms. Lamson having been appointed at the last meeting as the GMUSD board representative at RVTC. There was discussion about both GMUSD and LMHUUSD each having a representative on the RVTC board.

Another community member voiced her concern with the interim CTES principal position and suggested that the board reopen the posting for a principal, not an interim principal. She noted that considering candidates who have vast experience, but not necessarily principal experience, could be beneficial.

B. Board Comments

Mr. Marin noted that he wrote an email and sent it to Ms. Powden and to the GMUSD board members and posted it on the Cavendish Facebook page and the Chester Telegraph Facebook page. He noted that there are a series of issues that the board members need to consider. He noted that people have voiced concerns with the promises of the Act 46 study committee work. He reminded the public that nowhere in the articles of agreement that the study committee agreed to, the state board of education agreed to and that the voters approved does it say anything about promises. The articles list things that the board hopes to accomplish. The only certainty (possibly) was that by voluntarily consolidating, they may have staved off an externally imposed consolidation. He noted that the board needs to be wary of micromanagement. He noted that the board's responsibility is to establish the what, the why and the when, but not the how. For example, one of the Act 46 passions is to implement foreign language in the elementary schools. The board needs to look carefully at what types of programming they would like to see, why it's important and when it might be implemented. They must also plan the finances of such a program. It is then the responsibility of the administrators to work out the details of how to implement it and develop a plan.

Mr. Marin also felt that although it is important to share ideas and information, it is also important to vet the information carefully before sharing it. He discussed the recent Wall Street Journal article comparing the success of a private academy's students compared to those in the public school housed in the same building. The article seems to attribute the success to the dedicated teachers at the academy, but a bit more research shows that there might be more than just random acceptance into the program. First a parent must apply to the program, then an academic achievement test is performed and while a student whose current achievement level is lower might be allowed into the program, they would be allowed in at a grade or two lower than their current transcript level grade. The rigorous high expectations that the academy sets sometimes leads to students dropping out of the program over time. The attrition within a starting group can be as high as 60%. He noted that the group test scores would be significantly impacted by this process of culling academically weak students out of the program.

He felt that they should minimize the number of simultaneous changes. Although the “passion” list continues to grow, including STEM, STEAM, foreign language, community service, coding and more, these items are marketed as important to 21 century education, as if they weren’t important in prior years. They are already waisted deep in the expense of personalized learning plans and proficiency based graduation requirements. He felt they should see if they can make those programs successful before introducing several other programs.

V. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Budget FY18-19

Ms. Mahusky noted that originally they had two principal candidates but one of them dropped out of consideration and therefore there is additional time built into the agenda for the two interviews. She suggested asking the remaining candidate if she would mind waiting until 7pm for her interview.

Ms. Mahusky noted that the budget was discussed at last week’s meeting but they were waiting for information about the TRSU budget vote. She noted that the TRSU executive committee reviewed the TRSU budget line by line and made a list of the areas that they wanted the business office and administration to review and see if more savings could be found in those areas. They researched each of the areas and made a recommendation to the executive committee about those areas. One of those places was the grant writer position. They reported that the former grant writer secured \$181,450 in grants in the past year so that position more than paid for itself. Therefore there was no reason to cut that position. Another location that they looked at is the travel reimbursement and professional development. Ms. Hammond had researched those line items in the past and determined that based on historical data, those lines are budgeted appropriately. There is a courier position that will be cut from the budget but the work will be handled by another position. There is a cut in the amount of \$12,271 in technology due to adjusted quotes and software no longer needed. The director of IT position will also be reduced to a .8 fte. There was also a recommendation to cut the assistant to the business manager position to .5 fte. This person will be responsible for the free and reduced lunch (FRL) applications and coordination of the food service. They will also act as the courier and assist with special funds including student activities and school level grants. That resulted in an overall reduction of \$88,052. The board considered the public comments about moving out of the current office space of the TRSU, and decided against it for now, given that BRHS is still operating and there isn’t enough space available in either of the high schools or other buildings in the SU to house the entire SU office. Additionally, there would be moving and set up fees associated with any move that would limit the savings of moving into a school district owned building—which incidentally would still charge rent to the SU. Once BRHS is vacated, that would be the time to look at whether it would make sense to move to that building.

Ms. Mahusky noted that the tables and chairs were removed from the SU budget prior to the first time it was approved by the TRSU board. She wanted to make sure that the public was aware that the TRSU board went through that budget line by line and ended up approving a budget that was \$88,000 less than the original TRSU budget, and the portion of this that GMUSD will end up saving in their assessment as a result is \$58,563.94.

Mr. Fromberger noted that the proposed budget does both things that the board was charged with doing—addressing STEM and math. He felt that the budget also represents the board having looked for all the savings possible. It also has the result of going to the voters with a number less than that which was originally proposed to the voters of the GMUSD. He felt that they have already gone over the budget details in great detail numerous times so it was unnecessary to do it again. Mr. Studin suggested going over the RIF’d Title I positions again. Ms. Hammond noted that there are 3 Title I positions in the GMUSD. The budget proposal currently includes the amount needed to bring the 3 Title I positions from their federally funding amount (determined by target and ranking) to a 1.0 fte position. Based on what the anticipated federal funding is and the 3 x 1.0 positions cost, the difference is about \$21,686 and that is currently in the budget before the board. The only question at this point is if the federal funding will be dropped again in an unanticipated manner as it was late last summer. Ms. Hammond noted that at this point, they anticipate getting the same funding as last year, but they still have to RIF the Title I teachers because they don’t know if they are going to get the federal funding.

Ms. Powden noted that if the feds give them the same amount of funding as last year (and as what is anticipated this year), that funding and what is in the budget will be enough to fully fund the three 1.0 fte positions. She noted that what LMH decided to do was to plan for additional federal cuts and increased their differential to not only cover the difference between the anticipated federal funding and the fully funded positions, but also add a little cushion in the event that the federal funding was reduced late in the summer again. There was discussion about how much the LMH funded that additional portion.

Mr. McBride questioned if the Title I teachers had been RIF'd in the prior years in anticipation of the final federal funding decision. Ms. Hammond noted that in the Title I contracts, the business office is required to denote that the positions are grant funded and the contract is dependent upon receiving that grant, therefore even without a RIF notice, if the grant funding was not adequate, the position could still be RIF'd. She noted that last year, they had issued the contracts before they were aware that the funding was going to get cut, so no RIF's were sent out. In prior years there were no issues with the grant funding after the initial approval, so they hadn't sent RIF's, but last year, the business office was notified in late June that there were reductions. Ms. Lamphere questioned if they were notified of that possibility again this year and if that is why the RIF notices were sent out. Ms. Powden explained that she was not notified of it as a possibility either this year or last, but sent out the RIF notices as a cautionary step as a result of what happened to them last year. There was discussion about whether the positions could be reorganized so that they are fully funded from the district and then the grant reimburses the district budget.

Ms. Baker noted that it is complicated because the grant can't be used to subsidize a position they are already paying for so the budget can't fund the positions fully—they have to demonstrate the need for the funding. The district has to be careful about supplanting. Ms. Hammond noted that they anticipate the cost of the 3 positions is about \$214,000. Ms. Powden noted that Ms. Waite works very diligently to predict the federal funding as close as she can. Based on the \$21,000 in the budget, it appears that the federal funding is expected to come in around \$193,000. There was discussion about whether the budgeted amount is enough. Ms. Powden noted that the differential is based on the best estimate.

Mr. Studin questioned if there is no question that the positions will be 1.0 fte positions. Ms. Powden explained that if they get the federal funding they anticipate getting, the positions can stay at 1.0 fte, but if the federal funding comes in lower than anticipated, then they will have to come back to the board and see if the board wants to make up the difference in the budget between the actual and the anticipated amount to keep those positions at 1.0 fte (essentially reducing the line items for something else in the budget) or if the board will choose to reduce the positions to something less than 1.0 fte. There was discussion about the LMH board choosing to add a buffer. Ms. Mahusky noted that the budget proposal is reduced by about \$58,000 based on the reduction in the TRSU budget. Ms. Hammond reminded the board that the net reduction is \$15,000 because of the changes that were discussed at the last meeting.

Ms. Fleming **moved** to approve a budget for the 2018-2019 school year in the amount of **\$12,532,143**. Mr. Fromberger seconded the motion. Mr. McBride noted that he had asked openly for more disclosures about the special education budget and he wanted the board to know that Ms. Powden and her team have met with him and walked him through the elements of the special education budget that he didn't understand. He felt that was very helpful. He indicated that he hoped that some of the sensitive information that he was given will be shared with other members of the board in an effort to help them gain some clarity on the special education budget. He noted that if and when a budget is approved, he suggested that the letter that accompanies the budget when it is presented to the voters be approved by the board. He also suggested that they disclose the cost per pupil increase/decrease for each of the different schools, or based on a consolidated budget. He noted that the cost per pupil drives the taxes so it is an important factor that the tax payers should be made aware of. He also reminded the board of Mr. Ripley's comments about CTES at the Cavendish Town Meeting where he encouraged everyone to value the differences of opinion in this process. He felt that Mr. Marin sharing his opinion was very welcome and while they have a difference of opinion, it was shared in such a way as to still foster a great working relationship. He noted that he had shared the Wall Street Journal article that Mr. Marin referenced and he would like to continue to share articles that he finds helpful to him and enlightening. To him the article represented a school aspiring to great things and he used the article only as a way to highlight that this board could aspire to greatness as well.

Mr. McBride questioned if the assessments could be broken down by category to aid in the transparency to the voters. He also felt that they should try to level fund the budget based on the per pupil costs. He understood that this budget proposal doesn't do that, but he still felt that it was important. He also noted that, as Mr. Marin had stated, the discussions during the Act 46 process weren't promises, but hopes/aspirations/desires and he wished that this budget addressed those hopes/aspirations/desires more. Ms. Mahusky noted that she wrote a letter to the newspaper on her own behalf, not the board's behalf. Mr. McBride clarified that he wasn't talking about that letter, rather the letter that accompanies the budget in the booklet. Ms. Mahusky noted that she writes that letter near the deadline for the booklet so that it can have the most up to date information in it. Mr. Fromberger noted that the warning that accompanies the budget is very specific and is board approved. Ms. Mahusky noted that each year, the chair writes a letter to the voters discussing some of the accomplishments of the school during the prior year and some of the highlights of the budget being proposed to the voters.

Mr. Studin questioned what the cost per pupil in the last budget proposal was. There was also discussion about having the prior budget proposal for comparison purposes. The budget proposal of \$12,532,143 reflects a reduction of \$15,370 from the last budget presented to the voters. The cost per pupil is \$15,637.41 which is an increase in the cost per pupil at GM and slight increase in the cost per pupil at CAES, but reflects a reduction for CTES as compared to last year's budget. Mr. Studin noted that the cost per pupil in the prior proposed budget is \$15,571.87. Ms. Mahusky acknowledged that the budget doesn't include all of the changes that they would like to make in programming, but it does include some of the programming changes they have discussed and the vision committee will continue to work on the long range planning.

Ms. Hammond noted that at the last proposal, they had budgeted for a .4 fte transition coach which is based on a guidance salary, but the board opted to change this position to a math interventionist which is based on a teacher's salary and that allows for that position to actually be a .5 fte. The motion carried with one vote against. Ms. Mahusky thanked the administration and the business office and the board for their work on the budget.

B. Approval of the Warning

Ms. Mahusky noted that the board originally had wanted to hold the vote on May 29, but the town clerks indicated that that would be a difficult day to hold a vote on because it is the day after Memorial Day. Based on statute the town offices have to be opened on the day before the voting day. The board discussed whether to move the vote back to May 22. There was discussion about the polling times at the various locations. Ms. Mahusky read aloud the warning for the GMUSD with the approved budget amount and the new voting date. The public informational hearing needs to be within 10 days of the vote. The informational meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 16 at the GMUHS auditorium. Ms. Fleming also noted a typo in Article 1. There was discussion about the district already having the authority to borrow funds in anticipation of tax collection. There was discussion about the warning timeframes.

Ms. Fleming **moved** to approve the warning as Ms. Mahusky read aloud with the corrections noted. Mr. Fromberger seconded. Ms. Powden noted that if it needs to be corrected (based on the timing of the informational hearing) the board can call a special meeting to correct it.

VI. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

A. Interview CTES Interim Principal Candidate

Ms. Mahusky noted that executive session was needed to interview the candidate for the interim principal position. She noted that if they determine to hire a candidate, the action the board will have to take will be in open session and therefore will be reflected in the meeting minutes. There was a question about whether the people who were on the principal search committee could be invited into the executive session to be present, but not necessarily participate. Ms. Mahusky felt that that would be inappropriate at this stage of the interview process, and this is a decision of the board. She noted that the board has heard the public comments regarding the interim position. Ms. Lamphere noted that she was on the search committee and she didn't believe that the committee has made a recommendation to the board about a candidate. They have presented the board with a candidate, but haven't made a recommendation. There was discussion about the process of putting up the best candidates for interview by the board. Ms. Powden noted that the committee put forth two finalists to the board. Ms. Lamphere felt that it was a stretch to say that the committee presented two finalists. Ms. Powden noted that the candidates shouldn't have been called finalists in that case.

Ms. Mahusky felt that it is the board's responsibility to interview the candidate and then deliberate. Ms. Stowell questioned the hiring committee's feeling about this candidate. Ms. Lamphere noted that with one candidate, to say that the person is the top candidate is a stretch. She noted that as part of the committee, her job will be to share the concerns of the search committee with the board regarding the candidate. Ms. Mahusky noted that due to the timing of this meeting, there may be a discussion about student services at the next meeting. There was a question about Mr. McBride having received the information about the special education services. Ms. Powden noted that due to federal special education laws that govern confidentiality, the information can only be shared with board members in executive session, not with community members.

Ms. Fleming **moved** to enter executive session at 7:27 p.m. for the purpose of interviewing the CTES Interim Principal Candidate and doing so in open session would put the board at a significant disadvantage. She invited Ms. Powden and Madeline Carlock, the candidate. Ms. Lamphere seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

The board returned from executive session at 9:57 p.m. Ms. Mahusky reported that the board has interviewed the candidate and the board has deliberated about hiring the candidate. Mr. Fromberger **moved** to hire

Madeline Carlock as the interim principal for CTES for the 2018-2019 school year at a salary of \$80,000 beginning July 1, 2018. Mr. Hance seconded. The motion carried with a vote of 5-3. Ms. Mahusky asked Ms. Powden to notify Ms. Carlock of the board's decision. Mr. Cunningham clarified that the 3 no votes were from Mr. Studin, Ms. Lamphere and Mr. McBride.

VII. NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be Tuesday May 8, 2018 at 6:00 at GMUHS. There was discussion about every meeting in May being held at GMUHS. The June meeting will be back at CTES.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Lamphere **moved** to adjourn at 10:00 p.m. Mr. Marin seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amber Wilson
Board Recording Secretary