

**Green Mountain Unified School District Board  
Regular Meeting**

Monday, February 25, 2019

CAES Library

6:00 p.m.

**I. ROLL CALL/CALL TO ORDER:**

**Board:** Kathy Muther, Michael Studin, Marilyn Mahusky, Fred Marin Jeff Hance, Kate Lamphere, Deb Brown, Doug McBride (via phone), Rick Alexander (arrived 6:03)

**Staff:** Meg Powden, Cheryl Hammond, Lauren Fierman, Katherine Fogg, Deb Beaupre, Pam O'Neil, Jenn Harper, Jim Spaulding, Todd Parah

**Student Reps:** Laurel King, Rileigh Thomas

**Public:** Shawn Cunningham, Paige Karl, Annie Lamson, Caitlin McCoy, Gary King, Susan Holson, Deb Harrison, June Prola

Ms. Mahusky called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

**II. APPROVE AGENDA:**

Mr. Marin **moved** to approve the agenda with the addition of the senior class trip discussion. Ms. Brown seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

**III. MINUTES:**

**A. January 17, 2019 Regular meeting**

Mr. Marin **moved** to approve the minutes of the January 17, 2019 regular meeting. Ms. Muther seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

**B. February 6, 2019 Special Meeting**

Ms. Lamphere **moved** to approve the minutes of the February 6, 2019 meeting. Mr. Marin seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

**IV. COMMUNICATIONS:**

**A. Student Representatives**

Ms. Thomas reported that the GM winter track team had their state meet last weekend. GM sent 6 students and competes as a D2 school and all students made top 6. Kam Cummings is going to the New England competition. The board congratulated the team. The girls' varsity basketball team completed its regular season 15-5 and will head to playoffs on Friday. The boys team record 9-8 right now with some more games in their regular season.

The students participating in the musical, Beauty and the Beast have been practicing. The Iron Chef team will be headed to Essex in April and will be competing against teams from other schools. Mr. Carroll is currently advising the team, but it is unsure how the team will be led next year. There was discussion about how the meals are determined. They have to be meals that could be served in school, but couldn't contain meat, fish or nuts. There are 2 high school teams and 2 middle school teams.

**B. Senior Class Trip**

Ms. Karl, Ms. Lamson and Ms. McCoy introduced themselves. They shared the tentative itinerary with the board. The trip is an overnight trip and includes a Red Sox game, dinner cruise and other

activities. The trip is June 9-10. They are asking for \$50 deposit from each student and then the class will pick up the rest. The deposit is to ensure that students are committed. They have 3 chaperones including Ms. O'Neil. They anticipate having approximately 30 students participate. The class officers sent out a survey to the students. Ms. Brown **moved** to approve the senior class trip as presented. Mr. Studin seconded and the motion carried unanimously. There was discussion about overnight trips traditionally needing board approval. There was discussion about the need for more chaperones if more students attend.

**V. PRESENTATION BY SUSAN HOLSON, VSBA**

Ms. Mahusky introduced Ms. Holson and explained that the purpose of this training is to review the essential work of the boards. Ms. Holson reported that the VSBA purpose is to help the board members do their job. She noted that her presentation is intended to share best practices. She explained that the role of the school board is to act trustees on behalf of the community. She noted that the electorate was not electing the board members to represent their town, but rather they elected the board members to collaboratively work together as a board for all the kids and all the tax payers. The three jobs of the board are listed in statute—ensure a high-quality education for every student, ensure that the public gets a good return on its investment and to do so efficiently, effectively and ethically. Ms. Holson advised that in order to operate efficiently, effectively and ethically they have to develop trust in each other. She encouraged a team activity to do so.

Ms. Holson advised that the school board's job is the first and the last in the education—they need to set the direction and vision of the school district and monitor student outcomes to ensure that the vision is being met. Ms. Holson advised that the role of the supervisory board is similar to the school district board—they oversee the supervisory union and assure every student in the SU receives a high-quality education. They have to also assure effective and efficient delivery of regional services and sharing resources in the interest of students. She advised that the SD is part of the SU and noted that it isn't an "us" and "them" situation, they are both "us". She shared a video that explained that the board sets a goal for the district or the SU, but doesn't tell the superintendent how to get there. The board ensures that the school or the SU has the right money, staff and materials in place to meet that goal. She advised that the board is effectively the "grandparent" of the school. They want the best for the school, but they hire the administrators to "parent" the "children" (students).

Ms. Holson advised that the characteristics of successful boards include sharing the vision, purpose and responsibilities. They communicate with each other and hold well structured meetings. They are open minded and respectful of the other board members. They come prepared for the meeting and they respect the decision of the board. She shared characteristics of challenging boards as well—they lack clarity, some have an attachment to specific outcomes and interests, some have problematic motives or behavior and there is often a lack of trust. She encouraged the board members to thoroughly review the code of ethics when they sign them. Ms. Mahusky reported that the current practice is to review and sign the code of ethics each year. She invited the board members to participate in an activity designed to show the board members how the board members go about making decisions. This activity is designed to show the board that they need to try to avoid "getting in the weeds". Each group has its own strengths. For example, the "acting" group is motivated to "get it done". She noted that sometimes the "acting" group are too quick to make a decision, while the "detail" group wants every layer of detail before making a decision.

Ms. Holson suggested Ms. Mahusky review this from time to time. Ms. Holson advised the board that there are 6 items in the tool kit of training for board members. Ms. Mahusky had advised that the board is having difficulty establishing a vision, partnering with the superintendent and administration, and developing a budget and assuring financial oversight. She noted that the budget is a reflection of the vision of the district. The vision is intended to give clarification and ownership of the school's

overall purpose. Ms. Holson suggested some key questions to answer to develop a vision: what do we want students to know, what do we want them to be able to do, what kind of experiences do we want them to have, what long-term outcomes do we want for our students, and given limited resources, what are our priorities? She suggested developing a very broad vision, then a mission statement and strategic plan to help meet that vision. She shared the definition of policy and advised that procedure is the administration's job. She advised that boards assure that the schools are well-run, but don't run them. They need to monitor the outcomes and change the direction if they aren't meeting the goals. She advised that the superintendent being the CEO of the organization. She reported that the principal is the instructional leader of the school. The principal reports to the superintendent, not to the board. She reported that the superintendent is the contact for the board, not the principals. She noted that the logistics are not the board's responsibility. For example, during the senior class trip discussion, the majority of the board's questions were not board level concerns. Ms. Beaupre questioned if it was Ms. Holson's recommendation that the principals don't report to the board. Ms. Holson advised that their job is to report to the superintendent and the superintendent reports to the board.

Mr. Hance noted that the majority of the principal's reports are of celebrations. Ms. Holson still recommended that the principals channel their reports through the superintendent. Ms. Lamphere questioned if the intention is to ensure that the superintendent is sharing the information with the board. Ms. Holson advised that this practice will also keep the board out of the weeds. Ms. Lamphere felt that it was helpful to hear from the principals in order to hear their excitement about their schools. Ms. Fierman noted that she reports nothing to the board that she hasn't already shared with the superintendent. Ms. Mahusky advised that the things that she as a board member wants to hear about is the work on the continuous plan and other strategic items.

Ms. Holson reported that the chain of command is the board (with its vision, policies, resources and accountability to the public), then the superintendent (who is the systems leader and CEO of the district, and is accountable to the SU and district boards); then the principal (who is the educational leader for the school and is accountable to the superintendent). She discussed governance, noting that the board provides direction with the vision, goals and policies and they judge the accomplishment of the goals by evaluating the superintendent performance and monitoring and assessing the district results. She noted that the board is not expected to know about curriculum, but rather to hear a report from the superintendent about various data points that show how the student and the school is doing. Mr. Studin noted that a goal of the board is to determine what they want the students to know, but questioned how they do that without knowing the curriculum. Ms. Holson noted that for example the board wants the students to learn math, but which way they teach math is not necessary for the board to determine.

Ms. Brown questioned if the board isn't involved in these details why do hiring decisions and budgets come to the board. Ms. Holson advised that the hiring decisions rest with the superintendent. The superintendent will bring a recommended person to the board. There was discussion about the statute that requires that licensed staff is hired by the board. Ms. Holson noted that the superintendent brings the recommendation to the board and unless there is a glaring issue, the board should accept the recommendation. There was discussion about this being the expenditure of funds. Ms. Lamphere noted that as an elected official who is expected to make a decision, she wants to know the details to make an educated decision. There was discussion about this also being the traditional practice. There was discussion about the process currently used to develop the budget. The finance committee reviews the budget draft presented by the administration. The committee reviews the priorities of the administration. Then the board eventually approved the budget after several iterations.

Ms. Holson noted that the board should have communicated its priorities to the administration. They should then give the administration a budget number. Then the administration develops a budget that tries to meet those goals. At that point then the group works together to set a number and advise whether they are able to sacrifice some goals for money. She advised that in many cases the finance committee just monitors the budget, but the board is ultimately who makes decisions on the budget. She also noted that all committees need a charge either in policy or in the minutes. There was also discussion about how the public factors in about these decisions. She noted that it isn't appropriate to engage the community with regard to hiring an assistant principal. The board questioned why not giving that it is a fundamental change to how the school operates. Ms. Holson advised that this begins with the administration making a case for the need and then continues with the board making a decision about whether or not they buy into the idea presented. There was discussion about the proper way to deal with the chain of command. Ms. Powden suggested that if there is a concern with an individual, they should go to that person first and if they don't feel comfortable, then they should go to the next person up in the chain of command. Ms. Holson noted that this is not the point at which the board should be involved. They shouldn't be involved until it has made its way through the chain of command so they can make an impartial decision. She also suggested that if there is a possible perceived conflict, the board should recuse themselves. Mr. Hance questioned if the teacher is afraid to go to the principal or superintendent for fear of retribution. She suggested that the board member direct the teacher to their union rep in this case.

Ms. Holson noted that governance is an oversight of management. It is not the board's job to manage, but rather to oversee the management. She likened the board's role to the person in a fire tower watching over the land. That person notifies the fire department when there is a fire, they don't fight the fire themselves. She asked the board members to participate in another activity designed to determine oversight versus overstep. There was discussion about the composition of the hiring committee. Ms. Holson advised that the hiring committee composition is up to the superintendent since it isn't a board committee. There was discussion about the board setting a vision to have an inclusive process that is transparent and then the superintendent is judged based on adherence to that vision. There was discussion about the board chair having the authority to put things on the agenda. Ms. Holson also reminded the board that the board has one voice. Ms. Holson suggested that the board take 10 minutes on a future agenda to discuss overstep versus oversight. Ms. Holson also suggested that the board members ask the oversight questions in her presentation to determine if they are properly maintaining their oversight role.

Ms. Holson also discussed the public involvement in the meetings. She noted that if there is a contentious item, the board can set ground rules for the discussion. She noted that the board does not need to engage in discussions with the public in the meeting. Ms. Holson presented information about the rules surrounding executive session. There was discussion about budget discussions that might include potential changes in staffing but decisions haven't been made yet and whether they could have this discussion in executive session.

Ms. Mahusky encouraged board members to attend the various VSBA trainings offered. Ms. Holson reported that rather than the regional meetings that have been held in the past, they will hold a day-long board training on June 1 and they hope to have veteran board members speak as well.

## **VI. COMMUNICATION:**

### **A. Public Comments**

Dan Tyrrell questioned who brought in Ms. Holson. Ms. Mahusky advised that this presentation was due to a discussion between Ms. Powden and herself. There was discussion about the composition of the VSBA and that this presentation is based on best practices. He questioned the truancy policy at GM. Ms. Powden noted that the truancy protocol is set by the Windsor county

truancy office. Ms. Fierman reported on the steps taken after 5, 10, 15, and 20 absences. At a certain point DCF is notified. She also explained that a certain number of tardies count as an absence. Mr. Tyrrell noted that it is a concern for the board and suggested that they see a report on how many students are truant and also to review the policy and its enforcement. He felt that the school has worked well with him, but feels that it might be a growing problem. He also questioned if tax payers are continuing to pay for a student who has quit. Ms. Mahusky suggested that they hold this for an agenda item for the next meeting.

**B. Board Comments**

Ms. Mahusky reported that Ms. Fogg received a communication from someone who is going to be shooting a movie and want to take some shots of the school and include some students. She felt that the board needed to know about it. The select board also is aware of this for the town. She has reached out to the PTG for the paperwork for the student extras. The filming will be held on a Saturday. She felt that it is a parent decision, but ultimately since the school will be in the film, she felt the board needed to know.

**VII. NEW BUSINESS:**

**A. Marketing Incentives to BRHS Students**

Ms. Mahusky reminded the board that BRHS will be closing in 2020 and this district should be interested in seeking out as many of those students as possible. She noted that the more students they have, the more opportunities they can provide. Ms. Powden advised that there are neighboring schools aggressively recruiting BRHS students. Mr. Studin noted that it is good to recruit the BRHS students but they also need to look at keeping current GM students at GM. He suggested starting with the high school staff and having them help promote the schools. Ms. Lamphere noted that the board has already set recruitment as the vision. She suggested that the administration do that work. There is a BRHS fair that includes schools from the area. There was discussion about possible ways that the board can help. There was discussion about possibly hiring a professional recruiter. There was discussion about joining the kids together with the rec departments to get the kids together at the elementary level. There was a suggestion about compiling all the benefits of the school district. Ms. Prola suggested sending a group of students to BRHS to discuss the programs available at GM. Mr. Cunningham also suggested that the administration try to determine the reasons why students are considering other districts.

**B. CAES Water Project update**

Ms. Hammond reported that she has reached out to VSBIT regarding the insurance adjustment, but they haven't completed the review yet. She hopes that it will be complete in the next few weeks. She hopes to have an update for the next meeting.

**C. Current Year Financials**

Ms. Hammond noted that the TRSU and LMH boards have opted to go with quarterly financial reports with the full detail. The monthly summaries don't show the detail that would be necessary. She advised that she would bring any major changes to the board as they happen. The consensus was that a quarterly report is sufficient, but any time there is a significant issue she will share with the board. She discussed the current bus lease that the board has opted out of. DATCO has an agreement with the board that they will purchase the buses back at the end of 60 months. She noted that the board has to make the final balloon payment of \$387,000 to Sun Trust to sell the bus to DATCO. She noted that between the balloon payment and the buy back, GMUSD will owe \$68,230.72. There was discussion about this having been a decision of a prior board. She advised that it is still less expensive to do this this way than to hold the buses. There was discussion about whether the buses could be sold to another company besides DATCO. The

board will have to absorb this extra \$68,230.72. Mr. Alexander questioned if the administration can seek other vendors for the bus buy-back that might be less of a cost to the board. The board consensus was that the administration seek alternatives and other options that might be less expensive to the district to bring to the board for the next meeting as a recommendation.

The CTES tables and hot water heater projects are complete. Ms. Hammond will give an update to the board on transition funds for the next meeting.

**VIII. NEXT MEETING AND AGENDA ITEMS:**

The next meeting will be the public informational hearing on February 26, 2019 at GMUHS in the library. The next regular meeting will be on March 21 after the annual meeting. The next agenda will include the truancy policy and protocol, and a financial update. The next agenda will also include the reorganization which will include a review of the code of ethics. There was discussion about the board holding a board retreat. There was also discussion about the miscommunication about the informational meeting date that was corrected the next day. Mr. Parah reported that the administration attended a safety training regarding the incident a couple weeks ago. The only door that will be open for board meetings is the door by the flagpole. They also discussed having the Chester PD at the school during board meetings. Ms. Mahusky requested a recommendation from the superintendent to be discussed at the next meeting regarding the presence of law enforcement at the meeting given a legal action at a meeting at another district.

Ms. Brown thanked the GM staff for their handling of the incident at GM. The board echoed those thoughts.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT:**

Mr. Marin **moved** to adjourn at 8:25 p.m. Ms. Muther seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amber Wilson  
Board Recording Secretary