

Ludlow-Mount Holly Unified Union School District Regular Meeting Minutes

August 8, 2018

BRHS-Library

6:00 p.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Board: Dan Buckley, Mary Alberty, Brigid Faenza, Katie Hollebeek, Chris Garvey, Mariel Meringolo (6:07p.m.), Kelly Tarbell (6:08 p.m. via phone)

Staff: Meg Powden, Cheryl Hammond, Deb Harrison, Trish Rafter, Patty Rumrill, Craig Hutt Vater, Karen Trimboli, John Davis, Shona Trimboli, Anne Gardner, Melissa Ryan

Public: Pam O'Neil, Howard Paul, Bruce Schmidt

Ms. Faenza called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. She invited the board members to introduce themselves.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Ms. Hollebeek noted that the district still needs to adopt the second set of policies. Ms. Powden noted that they will be on the September agenda. Mr. Buckley **moved** to approve the agenda with the addition of discussion of People's Bank under new business. Ms. Alberty seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. July 11, 2018

Ms. Alberty **moved** to approve the minutes of the July 11, 2018 meeting. Ms. Hollebeek seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Ms. O'Neil noted that there was discussion at the last meeting that the board members that weren't able to be here would be reachable by phone and she questioned if they would be joining the meeting by phone.

V. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Timeframe for Closing Black River High School

Ms. Faenza reminded the board that at the last meeting the board discussed the date of the closing of the school. Mr. Buckley summarized the history. He noted that in May of 2017, there was a vote regarding closing BRHS, dissolving Union 39 and sending the 7-12th grade students to Mill River. That vote passed in Mt. Holly and didn't pass in Ludlow, therefore it was defeated. That summer the Looking Forward Committee investigated several different options about what could be done going forward. In September, the Ludlow and Mt. Holly school districts appointed members onto a committee to present something to the voters. What was presented was a timeframe of when to close the school. He explained that this was a compromise between Ludlow and Mt. Holly where Mt. Holly wanted to close the school earlier and Ludlow didn't want to close the school at all, based on what the vote seemed to say. He explained that the wording on the referendum was "not later than June 30, 2020" and the reason for the "not later than" was that if something beyond the board's control made it very difficult to keep the school open (such as a mass exodus of staff or students such that they couldn't provide educational opportunity), the board would have the authority to close the school sooner. He believed that this vote that the board will be having tonight is to determine if those things are happening. He felt that the vote is about whether there is something "earth shattering" that is happening that is requiring that the board move that date forward. He reminded those present that the 2020 date was a compromise and that if the intention was to not use the 2020 date, the outcome of the vote might have changed.

Ms. Meringolo noted that as a member of the committee that developed the articles of agreement she agreed with his interpretation. She noted that the 2020 date was a reasonable date to allow for the proper

closing of the school and transition process and for families to prepare for what is coming next. She agreed that the only reason that the date was written as anything other than “written in stone” was to allow for a worst case scenario situation that the board couldn’t predict or prevent. She felt that unless Ms. Trimboli were to present new information tonight regarding a substantial drop in enrollment or staffing, she would support continuing with June 30, 2020 as the correct date for closing the school. Ms. Alberty agreed with both of their interpretations, as did Ms. Hollebeek. Ms. Hollebeek suggested that the board should develop some parameters such that if the school moved into that area, the board could make a more objective decision.

Ms. Rafter noted that if the district plans to keep the school open until 2020 and something catastrophic happens this school year and the board decides to make 2019 the closing date without giving the students closure, that will not be good for the students’ mental health. She also noted that telling the staff in June that the school won’t be open the following year will be catastrophic for the staff as well because they will have missed the hiring window. Ms. Hollebeek suggested that they shouldn’t tie the parameters to a single parameter—it should be tied to several different parameters in order to qualify as catastrophic.

Mr. Buckley suggested that they should set a specific date so families can plan accordingly. He suggested that if they set these parameters in a certain way, someone might try to manipulate the numbers to achieve a certain outcome. Ms. Meringolo suggested that they should proceed positively and felt that if the board’s outlook is positive and they set an intended closing date and do everything they can to ensure the wellbeing of the students, faculty and staff throughout the remaining time that the school is open, they can work together toward a positive outcome to help keep the student and staff numbers relatively level. She noted that hiring is something that needs to be addressed at a year to year basis even when there isn’t the threat of closure. Ms. Hollebeek noted that she would like the school to stay open until 2020, but wants to remain open minded to the escape hatch if they have to. She understood that having that escape hatch can have a negative connotation.

Ms. Alberty noted that she is on the bargaining committee and they are looking at a two year contract with the teachers to help provide the stability they need. Ms. Buckley noted that the support staff contract was a two year contract as well. Ms. Powden noted that they are very fortunate that they have had a number of staff and faculty that have committed to staying on for the next two years. She also noted that if some of the faculty have to leave for personal reasons, she felt that they could adjust and adapt.

Mr. Garvey noted that he has feels that the escape hatch may still be needed based—not because of the staff leaving because he feels that they are very dedicated to our students—but because if there are a number of students that leave the school, it will change the per-pupil costs and then ultimately there will be tax penalties that the tax payers in town will have to absorb. He questioned what the level of student drop will be that they can tolerate without tax penalties. Ms. Powden advised that they would have to develop those numbers. She also confirmed that by entering this side-by-side, they only preserved the merger support grant, not the hold-harmless qualification that could have prevented a tax penalty for a significant drop in enrollment. Mr. Garvey felt that the board needed to do its due diligence regarding the taxes. He noted that he also didn’t see how they could possibly close the school earlier than 2020 because of the transition needs.

Ms. Faenza noted that while the tax penalty is a concern, the educational quality for the students and their well-being is the most important concern. Ms. Rafter questioned the fund balance that was carried over into LMH from the prior districts that could be used in the event of a catastrophe to help prevent a major tax penalty. Ms. Hammond noted that the gym floor and the paving project have used some of those funds. She noted that she is working on finalizing those numbers.

Ms. Meringolo noted that as a board, they are always dealing with the health of the school and the feelings of the community. She noted that if the board were to set a date now, they still have the authority to adjust it if something *really* went wrong. She noted that the board shouldn’t proceed with that in the back of their mind—they should proceed positively with an eye on celebrating these last two years at BRHS.

Ms. Shona Trimboli noted that she has lived here for more than half her life and doesn't recall a time that the town didn't pass a school budget. She noted that this town's support for the schools is so strong that if something catastrophic happened, the town would likely help support the school to continue to operate.

Ms. Alberty **moved** to keep Black River High School open until June 30, 2020. Mr. Buckley seconded. The motion carried with no opposition.

B. Paving Project and Gym Floor Update

Mr. Hutt Vater reported that the paving project is almost all complete and already looks beautiful. There is one spot (10'x10') where the septic collar needed to be raised but Master Plumber couldn't do that work before the Springfield Paving needed to get in to pave the parking lot. They will finish the collar on Tuesday and the paving will be complete on Wednesday. The lining will be completed after that point.

Ms. Trimboli noted that the gym floor will look great when it's done. The work has been delayed and will likely be about 3 weeks behind the start of school. She explained that the demolition process was very time consuming—there was a lot of tar underneath the floor and the dust from its removal required a lot of cleanup. She noted that the process is now moving forward. She explained that there was a small problem with drilling through a water pipe during this process that delayed them a couple more days. She explained that most of the subfloor is down and some of the finishing boards are now down. She is making arrangements to use the community center for PE as necessary and will hope for PE classes outside through September. She noted that the tracking under the sub-floor is meant to adjust.

Ms. Hammond noted that one of the costs for this project came in way over the \$19,000 that was quoted, but they honored the quote. There was discussion about the flooring company being Danaher. Ms. Powden noted that this is the same company that did the GMUHS gym floor. The board discussed the seal in the center of the floor "BR" and then "Presidents" on either end of the gym floor and then a memorial line on one part of the floor. There was discussion about the wax not drying quickly with the humidity.

C. Elect Alternate TRSU board member with voting rights

Mr. Buckley explained that with only 3 members from each district on the TRSU board, it changes the dynamics drastically if one of the TRSU board members is not at the meeting. This option, which could be used by either the GMUSD board or the LMHUUSD board would allow them to each have an alternate who could substitute for any one of that board's members and still have voting rights. It was noted at the TRSU board that if two of a board's representatives were unable to attend a meeting, they would still only be allowed one alternate with voting rights. There was discussion about Ms. Alberty, Mr. Buckley and Mr. Orzechowski serving on the TRSU board currently. The meetings are usually the first Thursday of the month at 6:00 p.m. at the Roost, but this month the meeting will be August 23.

Ms. Powden noted that she was not sure about this possibility being allowed by statute, so she checked in with the district attorney. Mr. Leopold noted that the statute is silent about this topic, but felt that the same group should be consistent for a year. She reported that he found some old letters from the AOE several years ago regarding the need to keep a consistent board. He felt that if the boards did want to go this route, they should draft a letter to the state board of education asking for a waiver. There was discussion about the GM board getting the same information. There was discussion about the absent member filling in the alternate and the alternate keeping up to date with the minutes. The board consensus was to ask Ms. Powden to draft a letter to the state board of education asking for a waiver to allow an alternate with voting rights on the TRSU board for each district in the TRSU.

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Recommendations for Hire

Ms. Powden noted that they have 3 teachers that they are recommending for hire: Christopher Deck for HS/MS PE, Hillary Wolfson for HS English, and Lauren Seber for grade 1 at LES. Ms. Trimboli reported that they have had a lot of very good candidates to interview for all of these positions. She reported on Ms. Wolfson's history and background. She reported that there were English teachers on that committee along with Ms. Russ and herself. She explained that there are some program changes. She noted that Mr. Deck is a new teacher who has done a lot of coaching and AD work. She also reported that all of the HS

teachers that they interviewed were aware that this is a 2 year position. She also noted that Ms. Seber is coming to them from Georgia, but grew up in the Vermont area. During the interview process, they mentioned the Forest Fridays and Ms. Seber is very excited about that opportunity. She noted that the school is looking for people who are skilled at their content, but also passionate about it and compassionate for the history of this district and its students.

Ms. Meringolo moved to approve hiring Mr. Deck for the HS/MS PE teacher position, Ms. Wolfson for the HS English teacher position and Ms. Seber for the Grade 1 LES position as recommended and per the master agreement. Mr. Buckley seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

B. Ratify Support Staff Master Agreement

Ms. Powden noted that the support staff negotiations began a number of months ago. The agreement was resolved with the negotiations council and recommended to the board to approve. She noted some of the changes in this contract, including the language regarding the Vehi dual option, the change in the association name. Mr. Buckley noted that he reviewed the topics that were discussed in negotiations and felt that they were finalized as he remembered. He also noted that the clothing allowance is in the contract for the custodians. The increase is 1.25% and it is a two year contract. She also noted that 50cents will be added to those support staff who are on step 18. Ms. Hammond noted that with the step increase and the changes in contribution for health insurance, they came in within a few hundred dollars of what was budgeted for the contingency for this group.

Mr. Buckley **moved** to approve the support staff two year contract. Ms. Albery seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

C. Assumption of Debt

Ms. Hammond noted that the bond bank that holds the bonds for Ludlow and Mt. Holly would like a letter from the board indicating that the LMHUUSD is assuming the debt for the prior districts, even though it is in the articles of agreement that they will do so. They would also like it reflected in the minutes and each board member to sign the letter. She passed the letter around for their review. She noted that the Ludlow bond is \$160,000 currently and the Mt. Holly bond currently has \$80,000 remaining. She clarified that the letter indicates that the new entity assumes the debts of the prior entities. Ms. Meringolo **moved** to approve the letter acknowledging the assumption of debt by the LMHUUSD for the prior U39, MHS and LES districts as penned by Ms. Hammond. Mr. Buckley seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

D. Insurance Coverage

Ms. Hammond noted that at the TRSU meeting, Mr. McBride, a GMUSD board member, had been reading the statutes and the board members are to ensure that they have appropriate liability, errors & omissions, and worker's compensation insurance coverage. As a result she gathered that information and summarized it. She distributed that summary to the board members for their review. She has many more pages of details if the board members would like more detail sent to them. On the back of the summary is the listing of the buildings, and the values that the insurance company has on record. There was discussion about the board members being covered by the E&O insurance, as school leaders. There was discussion about the financial staff being bonded. There was discussion about the vehicles covered by the insurance. There was discussion about the number of busses being used by the district and most of which are in use every day. There was discussion about the coverages being split by the insurance companies' split—valuation of the buildings, the vehicles, employees, etc.

E. Transition Funds

Ms. Powden noted that the TRSU has received transition funds in support of the districts within the SU transitioning. She noted that in section 15 under Act 156, there is guidance on how the funds are to be used and apportioned. The districts are eligible jointly for the benefits of these funds. She noted that the business office has developed a budget about how to use those funds. They presented it to the TRSU board last month and now are presenting it to the LMH and GMUSD boards for their review and approval.

Mr. Buckley noted that during the TRSU meeting, the board members felt that the funds are not the TRSU's funds to spend, they are the individual districts' funds to spend. Ms. Meringolo questioned if there

was discussion about how the funds would be distributed between the districts to determine how much each has to work with. Mr. Buckley noted that what hasn't already been spent with various transition processes already is approximately \$90,000. He noted that he felt that both entities had to be there in order for the SU to qualify for this funding, therefore the funds should be split evenly between the two districts. He noted that he has a very strong comment about the professional development classroom furniture that was rejected from the TRSU budget was suddenly back in these funds. Ms. Powden felt that it wasn't sudden and even though it was rejected from the budget there is still a need for the furniture.

Ms. Alberty noted that there are costs associated with closing BRHS that they may need funds for. Ms. Powden noted that they put \$10,000 in this proposed budget, but they don't know the actual costs. Ms. Trimboli felt that some of those funds should be used for transitioning students and faculty transition to their new future, including celebrations and assemblies, as well as professional support for resumes.

Ms. Powden explained some of the already expended funds as part of the actual transition—legal fees, VSBA consultant, and others. Some of the planned expenditures would be for a TRSU retreat to include board members and administration from each district. They will be having a VSBA consultant describe what would happen at the retreat. The \$5000 planned would be for the consultant, the room and lunch. She explained that the website software would be able to be tied into the website and the messenger notification system. She explained that the district websites have been revamped with the new districts by Ms. Baker already.

Ms. Powden explained the board stipends for the current U39, LES, MHS board members for their work in closing out those districts, and there had been conversation about them receiving a partial stipend. There was also a leadership retreat recently with the administrators and teacher leaders that would be covered by these funds. In the meantime, the expense is being covered by professional development funds. She is also suggesting a district read and outlined some of the book studies they have done in the past. Mr. Hutt Vater has recommended a district read with the book *Leaders of their own Learning* by Ron Berger. This book focuses on integrating with proficiency based education.

Ms. Powden also noted that there have been a number of teacher leaders who have participated in several conferences and meetings to help with proficiency based education and several other initiatives without additional compensation. She and Mr. Eppolito feel that this group of people could form a committee that could continue to work on these things going forward with a stipend that could be paid from this fund. This would compensate 18 teachers to participate on that committee. She noted that the professional development classroom furniture is also in this plan. She noted that currently in the roost, there is a large conference table which is suitable for board meetings, but isn't suitable for professional development trainings or courses. They would like to have moveable tables that could be flexible for large group work as well as small group work and classroom work. Mr. Buckley questioned if there is similar furniture being available at the schools. Ms. Powden noted that the Roost is centrally located and the teachers like to do this type of work out of their schools. Ms. Trimboli also noted that sometimes this work is done during the school day and the spaces in the school to which Mr. Buckley is referring aren't available at the schools.

Ms. Powden noted that the TRSU board was introduced to the Ogment curriculum management system. She noted that in the integrated field reviews, it was clear that they SU schools need to update their curriculum. One of the ways to do that efficiently is with a curriculum management systems which will be more effective than developing a curriculum and then having it sit on a shelf only occasionally accessed. The Ogment system would be a pilot program for the first year. She noted that the LiFT program is currently in place for personalized learning. She described some of the benefits of LiFT.

Ms. Hammond noted that the divisions and timeclock changes have already been transitioned and this budget includes those costs. She noted that they had originally given her a quote of \$25,000 for just GMUSD, but they came in at around \$14,000 for both new entities because the business office did a lot of the work for that transition.

Ms. Hollebeek questioned if the furniture could be held off until the long term plan for the TRSU offices are determined or until they see if some of the BRHS furniture could be used for this need. Ms. Powden

noted that they will be looking into those options. Mr. Garvey noted that when they looked at the LES budget and saw \$250 for each teacher for supplies and a lot of times the teachers are funding those supplies out of their own pockets, he feels that using this amount of money on furniture for convenience is inappropriate. Ms. Meringolo wondered if the classroom furniture is an appropriate use of transition funds. She also felt that compensating the teacher leaders for their work is a good idea, but perhaps they should find a different way to do that elsewhere in the budget because it also isn't transition related. Ms. Trimboli noted that this work brings teachers and professionals together between all the districts to align the curricula between buildings, therefore it is transition related. Mr. Buckley questioned if this would be happening if TRSU had to have its budget voted on by the voters. He feels that TRSU seems to spend any money it can get its hands on. He felt that what has not been spent already should be divided between the two districts to be used how each sees fit regarding transitioning.

Ms. Powden noted that the TRSU focus has always been to move a good system to a great system and that means working together and develop initiatives. She talked about the benefits of the leadership retreat. Ms. Alberty questioned the leadership retreat funding. Ms. Powden noted that the retreat was currently funded out of the professional development funds, but the hope is that this plan would be approved so that they can keep their professional development funds for other courses.

Mr. Garvey questioned the \$10,000 that was earmarked for the closure of BRHS and how that dollar amount was determine. He felt that this figure is too low for what is needed. Ms. Trimboli noted that there are a number of legal and logistical changes that need to be done, but there is also the need to address the needs of the students and the faculty. There was discussion about the costs of closing a school, but several of the schools that have closed are still being used by their districts for other purposes. Ms. Meringolo suggested that they firm up those numbers before setting an amount. There was discussion about the Ogment curriculum management software and the principals and teachers not having reviewed the system yet.

There was discussion about the website software and making the websites more user friendly. Ms. Harrison suggested that the board consider using some of the transition funds to help the students and staff with their transition, including managing stress and decision making. There was discussion about the attorney costs for subdividing the property.

Ms. Alberty **moved** to split the remaining funds between the two districts so that LMH can make its own decisions about how to spend their portion of the money. Mr. Buckley seconded. Ms. Meringolo questioned if that meant that if the LMH board decided that one or more of these expenditures was a good idea, they could then support it with their portion of the funds. The motion carried unanimously.

F. People's Bank

Ms. Hammond noted that with the new entities came new EIN numbers, so they had to bring that information to the banks and have them update the accounts. The documents need to be signed in front of a notary by the treasurer (Ulla Cook) and the chair (Paul Orzechowski). She requested that the record reflect the board approval of the resolution that People's is requiring to update the EIN numbers on the various accounts held at that bank. She also explained that the district uses Community Bank primarily, but the hot lunch and the Black River student activities are the only accounts being held by People's Bank.

Mr. Buckley **moved** to approve the resolution necessary for changing the EIN numbers at People's Bank as presented by Ms. Hammond. Ms. Meringolo seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

VII. ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT:

Mr. Hutt Vater noted that in addition to the paving project there are a number of other B&G related projects this year. The incoming Kindergarten class is around 20 and the class that is moving up to 1st grade is about the same size. There has been discussion about swapping some classrooms around in order to allow a larger preschool class size. While they don't have that number planned for next year, they are planning for the future. They had to install a bathroom in part of the space and though the project is a bit more expensive than planned originally, it should pay for itself over time. They are also painting the building this summer.

Mr. Hutt Vater noted that there are great new staff members in PE, Music and the School to Home Liaison. He is still working on a school based clinician. Last year, they partnered with Maple Leaf Clinic and the clinician that helped them last year has moved on to other full time work. They have had conversations with the director of the graduate level clinical psychology department at Castleton University and there are some graduate students in need of professional internships and one of them is very interested in being placed at MHS. They will be interviewing him next week. The way it will work will be similar to how it worked with Maple Leaf. It is a full time internship partially paid through Medicaid and other insurances. One potential downside is with possible lack of continuity. He reported that the candidate for internship is a long time resident of this area, so there might be the potential for longevity. There was discussion about the interview and vetting process. There was discussion about being able to partner with Maple Leaf in order to bill through Maple Leaf. Ms. Powden noted that she and Mr. Hutt Vater have discussed adding a school counselor in the budget next year.

Ms. Trimboli noted that there have been 14 hires between both Ludlow buildings, between the 3 approved earlier today, the TRSU employees that work in these buildings and some support staff. She explained that Ludlow is also beginning an autism program that will help out several Ludlow students. She explained that this opportunity will not only help Ludlow students remain in the community but might also help area students stay closer to home by attending a program in Ludlow rather than a farther distance away.

Ms. Trimboli noted that Ms. Rumrill has taken a position at GMUHS and therefore BRHS will need an admin assistant. They have hired Cindy Tuomisto as the admin assistant at BRHS. They have also hired a para-educator to work with one of the students. They have also had to replace part of the educational support solutions technician. The new Spanish teacher can help out with part of that role which will make the position half time Spanish and half time technical supports.

Ms. Trimboli reported that the leadership retreat was one of the best ones she has been to in the past. They had uninterrupted time to flush out several misconceptions regarding proficiency based education and to help consistently align the PBE. Then when the teachers participated it was even better. The teachers at each school have committed to working with the admin council to continue to develop this initiative. It was also a great way to meet and welcome the new CTES and GMUHS principals. She is excited to start the new year, but is feeling a bit behind due to the work and time needed for the hiring process.

Ms. Powden wanted to recognize Ms. Trimboli for setting up all of the searches and the hiring committees. She noted that she conducts the final interview before the candidates are recommended to the board, so having Ms. Trimboli take the lead on in of the preparation work ahead of that is very helpful. She reported that she hired a new assistant—Mary Moyekins. Ms. Moyekins will also be the PR coordinator for the schools and the SU. Ms. Powden reported that the administrative council agreed to leadership guidelines and she will be bringing them to the boards at an upcoming board meeting. She also reported that she was contacted by Howard Wise-Tissman who is the southern reporter for VPR. He is seeking to highlight an SU and its districts and report on how they develop their budgets with their own local flavor. He wants to be there from day one of school, attend board meetings, and budget development sessions and continue through town meeting to the budget's approval. There was discussion about his understanding what the TRSU is going through with the transition. There was general support of his reporting on this process.

Ms. Trimboli noted that Mr. Thomson was recognized at the VPA appreciation dinner for his years of service to CTES. Ms. Powden noted that if there is something in particular that the board is looking for regarding administrators' reports, to let her know. Ms. Ryan noted that there is a lot of work ahead of them regarding PBE and personalized learning. She explained that they might not all agree on all points, but there will be a tremendous amount of collaboration and work to achieve this goal. There was a lot conversation around the students. She said it was evident that it wasn't the admin against the teachers. It was very clear that it is a team effort. She invited the board members to attend some of these meetings to enhance their understanding. Ms. Hollebeek also suggested that they have some parent presentations. Mr. Buckley referenced some of the early presentations to the board and suggested some updated presentations about where they are now. Ms. Trimboli described some of this collaborative work and suggested Mr. Eppolito as a resource. Ms. Ryan noted that multiple times during the retreat parents were brought up, so the group is aware that they need to relay that information. Ms. Harrison suggested sharing information during a parents' night like they did last year and updating them about where they are at this point and every year because it changes so quickly. Mr. Hutt Vater

noted that during the student-led conferences with parents, that will help share the information with the parents as well.

VIII. NEXT MEETING DATE AND AGENDA:

The next meeting will be on September 12 at MHS at 6:00.

IX. ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Alberty **moved** to adjourn at 7:54 p.m. Ms. Meringolo seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amber Wilson
Board Recording Secretary