

Ludlow-Mount Holly Unified Union School District
Regular Meeting
July 11, 2018
MHS-Gym
6:30 p.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Board: Paul Orzechowski, Dan Buckley, Mary Alberty, Brigid Faenza, Katie Hollebeck, Mariel Meringolo, Chris Garvey, Kelly Tarbell

Staff: Meg Powden, Cheryl Hammond, Karen Trimboli, Melissa Ryan, Craig Hutt Vater, John Davis

Public: Lisa Kelley, Chris Devereux, Shawn Dunne, Amanda Martin, Vera Conroy, Shona Trimboli, Sue Crawford, Ted Crawford, Dave Venter, Joann Wilson, Beth Chase, Terry Thayne, Kristen Garvey, Marissa Selleck, Bruce Schmidt, Pam O'Neil, Lisa Schmidt, Fern Melvin, Marcia Dockum, Deb Harrison, Sherri Geimer, Shon Racicot, Alex Racicot, Sharon Bixby

Mr. Orzechowski called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. He invited the board members to introduce themselves.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Ms. Meringolo **moved** to approve the agenda with the addition of public comment and discussion of the food service contract and a board stipend. Ms. Alberty seconded. There was discussion about the agenda including discussion about the closing of BRHS. One member of the public felt that this discussion should have been made clearer in the agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. June 13, 2018

Ms. Alberty **moved** to approve the minutes of the June 13, 2018 meeting. Ms. Faenza seconded. Ms. Powden noted some additions after the executive session: The board returned from executive session at 9:33 p.m. and a motion was made by Ms. Alberty to increase non-bargaining staff salaries by 2.5% and to give Ms. Collins a salary of \$27,918 for the 2018-2019 school year. Ms. Hollebeck seconded that motion and it carried unanimously. She also noted the adjournment information. The motion to approve the minutes as amended carried unanimously.

B. June 20, 2018 Special Meeting

These minutes were not discussed at this meeting.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Black River Article 3 Merger Study Report-Discussion about BRHS closing

Ms. Meringolo noted that it is important to explain why this discussion has come up now. She noted the article pertaining to the closure of BRHS states that the new unified union district will operate BRHS until no later than June 30, 2020. However the board does have the ability to close the school earlier if circumstances are such that the board feels it necessary to close the school early. The discussion is meant to be able to clarify if the upcoming school year will be the second to last school year of BRHS or the last school year of BRHS. A number of parents requested that

the board have this discussion to give clarity to the situation. The board felt that it is important to give clear direction. She noted that at the last meeting the board had discussed collecting information and input from the various sources and stake holders and make a decision at the next meeting.

Ms. Meringolo noted that she felt that when the committee wrote the articles of agreement, they felt that two years from the end of this past school year would provide the necessary time to help the students' transition and to help the board and staff do the work of closing a school. She noted however that the committee was advised not to set that date in stone and instead leave an "escape hatch" as it were in the event of a worst case scenario, such as a mass exodus of staff and/or students such that operating the school for another year or two becomes untenable. She noted that the intention of the group that worked on the articles was to stay open until 2020 and she felt that that is what the community felt and heard as well.

Mr. Buckley noted that the enrollment has stayed steady for this coming school year. Ms. Trimboli reported on the enrollment by grade in the high school for next year. She reported that around the end of the last school year they gained a few other students, but cautioned that a lot can happen to enrollment over the summer. She noted that the world language teacher is no longer with the school, but not necessarily because of the school closing. The PE teacher has also moved on, but that is because of the reduction in the fee from .8 to .5. There is also an English teacher who has left the school. The world language teacher position is expected to be filled during the recommendations for hire later in the meeting. She discussed a couple of other potential positions that may need filling. Ms. Trimboli felt that this was the same or less turnover than in prior years and explained her conversations with Ms. Martin a few years ago as that principal was struggling to find a science teacher, math teacher and a few other teachers.

Mr. Venter questioned if there is still a 6 student cap on the ability for students to exercise their right to school choice. Ms. Meringolo explained that there are two different programs—the middle school limited school transfer program and that has a 6 student cap. The high school choice program is a state law and the school sets their maximum differential under certain state guidelines. Ms. Powden explained the difference between the programs. She noted that under the middle school limited transfer program, 6 students would be allowed out of the school and 6 students would be allowed in, but the maximum differential would be 2 students plus or minus. There was discussion about the lottery system to select students when there are more applicants than there is space in the program. Ms. Trimboli reported that 12 students applied for the school transfer but only 6 were chosen.

Ms. Meringolo noted that the boards have created the limited school transfer at the elementary and middle school level, but the high school choice program is set by state statute. Ms. Powden noted that they can allow 5% out or 6 students, whichever is less. The board also determines how many students they will allow in and this board did not put a cap on the number of students they would allow in. There was some discussion about the number of school choice students that GMUHS would allow in. There was discussion about the grade composition of the students looking to transfer out. Ms. Trimboli noted that the majority of the students were 8th graders going into 9th, with a couple in other grades. Ms. Meringolo noted that this board has not had any discussion about changing any of the school choice numbers. Ms. Powden noted that the individual boards approved the limited school transfer programs and then the unified union district boards reviewed that decision.

Ms. Wilson requested that the board keep the school open until 2020. Mr. Venter questioned if the board was aware of what the parent preference was for whether they would like the school to stay open until then. He suggested that they could do a survey. Ms. Racicot explained some of the processes that their family has gone through to have both their children attend GMUHS for their 7-12 school years and maintain continuity. She noted that their family is facing a financial hardship in order to provide this continuity. She also noted that several of the students at BRHS will want it to stay open until 2020, but felt that those students who want to move on at this point should be allowed to do so. Mr. Devereux also noted that he preferred that the school close as soon as possible. Ms. Kelly noted that her daughter was able to be selected in the lottery to attend Mill River so that she can begin her high school education at the school where she will graduate and her son who is going to be a junior this year wants the school to stay open through his senior year. She felt that the board shouldn't hold back students if they want to move on to the school from which they will graduate.

Mr. Venter noted that the board can choose to increase their school choice numbers and can also work with the other TRSU middle school (GMUHS) to change the limited school transfer numbers. Mr. Venter also noted that this was part of the discussion with Donna Russo-Savage during the Act 46 meetings and gave the impression that the school could break the numbers in half, but acknowledged that they would have to adjust the staffing accordingly. They might have to give the staff a staying-on bonus. He also noted that Ms. Russo-Savage suggested contacting the school's attorney to determine that for sure. Mr. Buckley noted that he believed that if the board offers tuitioning and school choice for a grade, they cannot operate that grade. Meaning they can't offer school choice to all the 9th graders and still operate 9th grade for the students who choose not to participate in school choice. Mr. Venter suggested that all they need to do is increase the numbers allowed in the high school choice program and in the limited school transfer program. Ms. Powden will check with Mr. Leopold about the possibilities. Ms. Racicot questioned if it is viable to keep the school open for juniors and seniors and allow school choice/tuitioning for all the lower grades.

Ms. Harrison strongly encouraged the board to stick with the 2020 date because that was what was presented to the voters and that is the date that families have been planning for. She requested that if there is going to be discussion, the board set a bar or parameters by which to make that decision to close the school early. She explained that a letter went home with all the report cards informing students and their families about this meeting. She noted that she has been speaking with a lot of families who will continue to attend BRHS as long as the door is open—for a number of reasons: aversion to change, planning, transportation, and other details. She felt that if the board was going to consider early closure the board should have very clear parameters about what circumstances make that decision.

Ms. Kelly felt that keeping the school open for just juniors and seniors is not viable. Part of the school experience is extracurricular activities and those wouldn't be possible without all of the grades. Mr. Crawford noted that when the votes were happening on a \$7,000,000 budget, less than 75 people showed up in Ludlow and less than 25 showed up in Mt. Holly to cast their votes. He noted that people are exhausted by this process. He was aware of a number of parents who drove by a "vote today" sign and didn't vote. He encouraged the board to look into what the students want. He thought that the students were more concerned about graduating with their peers rather than what building they were graduating from.

Ms. Dockum also noted that she feels that the students believe that the school will be open for the two more years and the students do care about where they graduate from. Mr. Garvey felt that there was such a small number of people present at this meeting and even fewer who are directly impacted by the decision that they should seek input from the students effectively. Ms. Shona Trimboli questioned how they can encourage parents to fill out the surveys because they won't. There was discussion about the survey being an information gathering tool. Ms. Meringolo noted that this decision needs to be a board decision that is based on more than a few comments and a few surveys. Ms. Kelly noted that there were notices on Facebook, numerous emails and plenty of word of mouth about this meeting but not enough parents felt it necessary to attend.

Mr. Schmidt felt that the board wouldn't get the results of the survey by the time of the next meeting. He also noted that the public is expecting 2020 and the reason that was decided was to appease Mt. Holly. The voice of Mt. Holly was that they didn't want BRHS to stay open longer. He felt that if they had a shorter window, the Ludlow voters likely wouldn't have passed the vote and much longer than that and the Mt. Holly voters likely wouldn't have passed the vote. He also noted that if a family is that concerned about the continuity of their child's education they can send their child to whatever school they are willing to pay tuition to. There is a community that will be impacted—business, staff, students, families, etc. He felt that this board should be more concerned with making the school a school that the families WANT to send their students to for the next 2 years. His comments were met with a round of applause. Ms. Wilson noted that in her child's report card there was a green slip of paper that advised of two meetings—this one and one on August 8. She interpreted it as having 2 opportunities to voice her concerns and felt that other parents might also. She also felt that a lot of this discussion is spurred by parents whose children “lost” in the lottery and encouraged the board to follow a very thoughtful process to close the school. She felt that they have already missed their opportunity to close the school next year. Ms. Dockum noted that she had spoken with a young family who wondered why they had bought property in this town when the school was closing. She noted that the board needs to think of the staff with regard to this decision.

Mr. Buckley noted that one of the decisions the board has had is around subdividing the property and he didn't think that could be done within one year. This is just one example of the complexity surrounding closing the school. Mr. Venter suggested that the board could just satisfy more people by increasing the number of people who could take advantage of school choice while still keeping the school open. Mr. Crawford felt that the language was clear “on or before June 30, 2020” so that definitely allows for an early close. He also felt that once these towns offer school choice, more families will move in so they can take advantage of the choice.

Ms. O'Neil cautioned the board from thinking that because parents aren't here means they don't care. First the agenda item isn't very clear and many already trust that they voted the board members in as experts to make the tough decisions, and many just assume that the board will keep the school open until 2020 since they voted that way. She highlighted many of the good things about the school—2 teams going to the state championships and flexible pathways among them. Ms. Wilson reported that she interpreted the board's ability to close the school earlier than 2020 would be based on the quality of education falling below a certain level due to a mass exodus. Some board members agreed with that assessment, noting that this timeline gives them the time to do the work of closing the school. Ms. Meringolo noted that the “escape hatch” wasn't meant to

be a way to hold another vote, but rather to allow the board to not be bound by that specific date if there were a mass exodus of students or staff.

Ms. Powden noted that the enrollment has stayed stable and they have only lost 4 teachers this year (not an unusual amount). Mr. Schmidt noted that kids are resilient and they will adapt. But he felt that this board should make a decision to stick with 2020 and make the students and parents a pledge to do better for the next 2 years. He suggested that the students could participate in some virtual learning with GMUHS or Mill River to begin to acclimate to those schools and their classes. The AD can also speak with the AD's at those schools and begin to open up member-to-member opportunities. There was discussion about the home to school liaison helping students with the transition. There was also discussion about student absenteeism when they miss the bus because parents have no other way to get the students to school once BRHS closes.

Ms. Meringolo reminded the board that no matter what date they end up closing the school there will be a group of students who will spend only their senior year at a different school or who will spend all their high school career at a different school. Ms. Harrison noted that most of the families who are living in poverty, or who have less education or who are living with trauma generally don't participate in this type of forum or in surveys and those people are the most vulnerable and need a voice. She also noted that the students need to know ASAP if this is their last first day of school. She explained that the staff and students have been planning on what they will do with the next 2 years.

There was discussion about the time of the meetings and making sure that it was posted properly because errors in time make it seem that the topic isn't important. Ms. Trimboli reported on the high quality education at BRHS and the student achievement. She also reported that some of the changes planned for the next year will help to continue that quality and pledge commitment to the students academically, socially and emotionally. She commended the staff for remaining committed to the students even in light of losing their jobs in 2 years. Mr. Racicot encouraged the board to consider the circumstance that the state has put them in and look creatively to meet the goals of keeping the school open until 2020 while also meeting the needs of those students who want to begin their high school career at their new school without financially burdening the families to do so. Ms. Schmidt noted that her perception about the school closing prior to 2020 wasn't whether or not the board wanted to close the school early, but whether it HAD to close the school early because it couldn't operate the school because of a mass exodus of the staff.

Ms. Albery suggested that she would like to please everyone and see if they can increase the school choice numbers, or let freshmen go to another school or other creative ideas, but they also have to think about the building. She noted that if they lose the financial benefit of having these students in the school, they then have to worry about how to afford the building for the next two years. She didn't feel that the August 8 date wasn't realistic. Mr. Buckley felt that this board needs to have a firm date before the school year starts. Ms. Harrison noted that a month ago, this topic was discussed and the research needed was discussed at that time. She questioned what, if any, research has been done up to this point on this topic to prepare for tonight's meeting. Ms. Meringolo noted that enrollment and staffing has been researched. Mr. Venter noted that part of the decision about closing the school was whether the school could maintain the educational quality standards. Ms. Wilson noted that sticking with the 2020 date allows for a thoughtful transition. Ms. Faenza noted that the support staff negotiations and food service contracts are

being created with an eye to a 2 year projection. There was discussion about whether the contract has a clause that nullifies its second year if the school is closed.

Ms. Tarbell acknowledged that no matter what they decide, there will be people who are happy and people who aren't. She respects the feelings expressed tonight but felt that nothing that was said has swayed her opinion to be in support of keeping the school open until 2020, but also cautioned against saying that it is a hard and fast absolute. She felt they can't do that because next summer the teacher exodus could be more than the 4 it is this year. She felt they should go into it planning the 2 years, but allowing for a closure if something drastic happens. Ms. Meringolo agreed with her and noted that that is how she felt during the creation of the articles of agreement. Ms. Tarbell suggested using "viable" as the measure. If the school becomes non-viable then they need to re-assess, but until then they should plan on 2020. This also gives the independent school time to create their school.

Ms. Powden noted that Article 3 also states that this board will develop a timeline for the transition. They either need to continue with the plan to close in 2020 or make a motion to close in 2019 because of X, Y, Z factors. There was discussion about not allowing teachers who have signed their contracts out of their contracts. There was also discussion about not wanting one's child to be in a classroom where the teacher doesn't want to be there. Ms. Meringolo also noted that having the opportunity for a job for one year or two years is still a good opportunity so she doesn't have a huge fear about not being able to staff the school for the next 2 years. Ms. O'Neil also noted that this gives new teachers the ability to gain some experience. Ms. Kelly suggested increasing the school choice numbers a little next year.

There was discussion about opening up negotiations with the GMUSD about the limited school transfer program, but there is also a financial impact (50% of the student's ADM). There was also discussion that high school choice students don't have money follow them, so the receiving school is doing that without any financial benefit. Ms. Powden explained that the high school choice statute indicates that the number of students has minimums set by the state, but the board can allow more students to participate. That is set to prevent a mass exodus from a school forcing its closure. Ms. O'Neil explained how the GMUHS board in the past set their school choice numbers. There was also discussion about the number of students who applied for school choice and the limited school transfer program this year compared to past years. There was discussion about whether increasing the lottery will encourage a mass exodus.

Ms. Tarbell also noted that similar to when they can't report test scores because the sample size is too small, even a small number of students is a large percentage. Ms. Meringolo felt that there wouldn't likely be a change in educational quality standards because she doesn't anticipate major changes in staffing or enrollment. Ms. Powden noted that the flexible pathways allows students to accessed personalized learning, whether it be online or in non-traditional ways. She feels that the students are being offered rich educational programming including dual enrollment and early college. There was discussion about the number of students coming into BRHS through the school choice program and the limited school transfer program. There was discussion about the opportunities available to the students with GMUHS and Mill River even now before BRHS closes.

- B. Public Comment
None.

C. Recommendation for Hire

Ms. Powden reported that the recommendation for the Spanish teacher is Eric Snay for the .5 fte Spanish teacher. There was discussion about the 3 students who are French IV who will be doing their learning virtually. Ms. Trimboli noted that most of the rest of the foreign language interest is in Spanish, but there are other virtual opportunities. She reported on his educational and teaching history. Ms. Tarbell questioned if his references were checked and they were. There was discussion about using the other .5 fte of his time with other activities that the school might need. Ms. Meringolo reported that she and Ms. Trimboli have discussed sharing staff between BRHS and OMS in order to make viable teaching positions.

Mr. Buckley **moved** to approve hiring Eric Snay as a .5 fte Spanish teacher for the 2018-2019 school year. Ms. Alberty seconded and the motion carried without opposition.

D. Food Service Contract

Ms. Faenza reported that the Food Service committee met last night to discuss the two bids they received for the food service program—one from Café Services and one from the Abbey Group. Ms. Hammond distributed the basic cost information about the bids to the board members. She noted that the process is different this year because the bid is on a per-plate basis. She reported that the Abbey Group bid is to charge them \$4.07 per lunch and \$2.51 for breakfast plus a management fee of 19 cents per meal. The Café Services proposal was for \$3.85 per lunch and \$2.20 per breakfast and a 9 cent per meal management fee. She noted that the federal reimbursement for the free meal is approximately \$3.41 per meal. She explained that the difference on the meals that the school would have to pick up is about \$15,000. She explained that they have USDA commodities that work out to approximately 23 cents per meal which would leave the district responsible for about \$6,000. She compared it to the prior year's contribution by the districts. She also noted that this expense could be mitigated if they could increase participation in the program. She explained that the food service committee recommended the Café Service bid. She also reported on some of the learning components of the Café Services bid.

Ms. Chase expressed her concern with sugars, food dyes, nitrates and processed food have no place in the students' lunch. She hoped that the food service company will take feedback and input from the committee and find alternatives that are healthy and cost effective. Ms. Hammond explained that the bid is 92 pages and includes information about the nutrition of the program. She also noted that the ASP and the snack have separate quotes within the bid so that they have pricing but aren't necessarily tied into the same provider. There was discussion about the escalator built into the contract that is roughly equal to inflation. This bid allows for up to 5 years of renewal, but is a year to year contract that this district can get out of. The bidders were also aware that BRHS is closing within 2 years.

There was discussion about the bid process, and whether the commodities will apply for both companies. Mr. Schmidt noted his concern with having the conversation with one of the bidders regarding the commodities. Ms. Trimboli reported that the committee had already recommended Café Services before Ms. Hammond had the conversation with Café Services about the commodities. Ms. Hammond explained that she wasn't aware that the commodities came off the total cost, she had thought that it was included in the bid cost. There was discussion about the projected units being vastly different between each of the bids. Ms. Hammond explained that the numbers of meals they used were based on the numbers that she provided them about the meals

provided last year. Café Services also has a staff member that will be more available to respond to district concerns and will participate in the food service committee.

Ms. Alberty **moved** to approve the bid for the food service program provided by Café Services as discussed. Ms. Faenza seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

E. Board Stipend

Mr. Orzechowski noted that during the annual meetings for LES, U39 and MHS they did not approve stipends for the board members for the period of March 2018 until December 2018 when all the individual board business and paperwork is complete. He noted that he had spoken with the attorney and the only way that this board can do anything about that is to present it to the voters and have them approve the stipend. Mr. Buckley noted that he thought that they had intentionally left it off because the board members were paid their stipend in December. Ms. Powden noted that while the board members are typically paid in December, they are paid for the term of March to March (or April to April for LES), so the individual board members are currently not receiving payment for any of this current term. Mr. Schmidt noted that the board member who contacted him felt that they should have received their stipend from March through June at least. Ms. Powden noted that there would need to be a vote in each town similar to the annual meeting. Mr. Schmidt felt that the question should be considered even if it is only half a payment since the boards didn't have to do much work during most of the term.

There was discussion about this being an assumption to leave the stipend off the annual meeting warning. There was discussion about when the warning was approved. Ms. Meringolo questioned when the stipend is paid for and Ms. Powden explained that the stipend is for annual meeting through annual meeting and the December payment is effectively paying the board members slightly ahead of the end of that term. Each individual board can decide on their own if they want to hold their own annual meeting provided it is warned properly. There was discussion about warning the annual meetings for shortly before the next LMH meeting. Ms. Powden will research with Mr. Leopold whether this vote can be a "hand vote" or if it must be by Australian ballot. Ms. Hammond noted that if the individual boards do hold a vote and vote to pay this stipend, it will come out of the LMH budget since each individual district has already pooled their money to the LMH district.

F. Public Comments

Ms. Schmidt questioned the transition funds and whether they would be decided upon by the district boards or the SU board. She noted that the LMH board should consider using some of the transition funds on the students' transitioning and on closing the building. There was also discussion about whether the funds are appropriated properly. Ms. Powden explained that the SU has a side by side with the two districts. She will be presenting the TRSU board with a transition fund budget and pending their recommendation she plans to bring that budget to each of the individual boards. She noted that currently there isn't funds in the budget for the closure of BRHS, but she will address that before presenting that budget to the TRSU board.

V. **NEXT MEETING DATE AND AGENDA:**

The next meeting will be on August 8 at 6:00 at BRHS. Ms. Tarbell noted her concern with the date and times and place of each of these meetings and felt that it should be easier to find the information about the meetings. She noted that she didn't know what the solution is, but asked that the business office look into the best practice. Ms. Powden noted that in the past, board members have asked to receive notices for all

the meetings. There was discussion about the subject of the email being pertinent to the content, such as LMHUUSD Regular meeting 8/8/18 6:00 p.m. BRHS. Ms. Powden noted that Ms. Baker is working on revising the district websites. On each of the websites, she is building a place where the agenda and minutes will be posted. There are also attachments on the notifications on the shared calendar.

VI. ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Alberty **moved** to adjourn at 8:46 p.m. Ms. Tarbell seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amber Wilson
Board Recording Secretary