

TRSU BOARD

Regular Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 2, 2020

6:00 p.m.

Cavendish Town Elementary School, Art Room

I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Board: Wayne Wheelock, Fred Marin, Joe Fromberger, Paul Orzechowski, Mary Alberty, Dan Buckley

Staff: Meg Powden, Cheryl Hammond, Mary Barton, Katherine Fogg, Lauren Fierman, Deb Beaupre, Jared Harper, Jenn Harper, Amanda Tyrrell

Other Board Members: Jeff Hance

Public: Shawn Cunningham, Dave Venter, Sharon Huntley

Mr. Orzechowski called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He invited those present to introduce themselves.

II. APPROVE AGENDA:

Ms. Alberty **moved** to approve the agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

III. APPROVE MINUTES:

A. December 5, 2019 Regular Meeting

Ms. Alberty **moved** to approve the minutes from the December 5, 2019 meeting. Ms. Powden noted a correction. The motion carried unanimously.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Mr. Venter had budget comments

V. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Ms. Powden noted that this has been a challenging budget year. They have reduced the GMUSD budget has been worked down to \$17,000 per student, and the LMH budget has been worked down to spending under the penalty threshold. She advised that the transition committees continue to work at Black River. They have been talking about student records. They have records from 1939-2019. They will be allowing alumni who graduated between 1939 and 1999 to request their student records. This is for storage purposes. They will keep 20 years of student records.

Ms. Powden noted that at MHS, they recently discovered some PFAS well over the allowable percent. They have issued a no drinking order and are working with state agencies to remedy the situation. The students and staff are using bottled water. The issue also impacts the fire department.

Ms. Powden noted that discussion has happened around the location of the TRSU office. They recently paid off the renovation investment. From 2013-2018 they had to pay an extra \$300 per month for the renovations. They will discuss this further under the budget section.

VI. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Policies, Second Read/Approval (D7.v2 & H9)

Ms. Alberty **moved** to approve policy D7.V2 and H9 as presented. Jared Harper questioned the policy about volunteers needing to be fingerprinted. Mr. Orzechowski noted that the procedure is

up to the superintendent. Mr. Harper noted that the program starts next week and there is not enough time to get all the volunteers fingerprinted. He noted that the program is not run during school hours. He uses Vail's instructors and they are not fingerprinted. In the past the instructors and volunteers have not been fingerprinted. He worries about the viability of the program. He also acknowledged the concern for the safety of the students. Ms. Powden noted that there have been some issues with some of the checks and they are working to make sure that they are in full compliance. Mr. Harper noted that there will be times when non-fingerprinted adults are with children, such as on the chair lift. This is the only school that requires concussion training, instructor helmet wearing and 3:1 child:adult ratios so that no child is on the chair lift without an adult. He noted that the fingerprint check cost him \$25 and he wasn't reimbursed, and he is concerned that other volunteers wouldn't be able to afford the background checks. Mr. Buckley noted that the policy indicates that the district school boards will pay for the criminal records checks. There was discussion about the various ways that criminal records can be checked.

Ms. Fogg noted that the policy has already been passed at the GMUSD board, therefore CAES staff and volunteers have been operating under the assumption that this must be done before they can operate the program. There was discussion about Vail completing background checks, but not fingerprinting. Ms. Powden advised that she will work with Mr. Harper to resolve this issue. Mr. Harper noted that he wasn't ever made aware that this is a topic that has been up for discussion. Ms. Powden advised that the policy has been properly warned. Ms. Fogg noted that Chester PD has offered to do the finger printing for free, so she will ask if they will do that for CTES. Mr. Harper noted that there are only 3-4 teachers who ski or ride, therefore he doesn't have enough background checked staff to run the program that begins next week. Mr. Harper requested a reprieve from the policy for this season. Ms. Powden advised that they would want every volunteer to have gone for their fingerprinting by Tuesday and they can work on some alternatives, such as a cleared individual riding in the chair behind a non-cleared, pending individual. Mr. Harper noted that he is not putting himself in any position of liability and will pull the program if need be. Ms. Powden advised that she and Ms. Hammond will check with VSBIT. There was discussion about having a volunteer meeting. There was discussion about whether TRSU could hold off on the adoption, however the LMH and GM boards have already adopted it.

There was discussion about various compromises that can be made. The policy states that the superintendent will carry out criminal records checks, but that doesn't say fingerprinting. Ms. Powden discussed the intent of the language and she will check with VSBIT about the liability.

The motion carried with no opposition.

B. Fiscal year 2020/2021 Budget 2nd Draft

Ms. Hammond noted that the detailed budget is available online and she printed one for Mr. Buckley. She advised that they have removed the summer professional development, the early literacy position and the additional time for the data specialist. There is currently a 2.31% increase on the central office budget and most of that is due to the increases in insurance.

There was discussion about the general reserve fund. There was also discussion about the dues and fees under the director of curriculum. Ms. Hammond noted that the director of technology increase was due to actual spending, and she thought that the director of curriculum's dues were for a new program that he needed.

Ms. Hammond noted that there is a 12.9% increase to health insurance. In addition, there is an increase due to the HRA. Mr. Venter questioned the partial fte increases in many places in the

budget. Ms. Hammond explained that those are two different items—fte versus people in the position(s). There was discussion about the grant writer position.

Mr. Venter questioned if the legal fees are enough considering the pending lawsuits. There was discussion about the current lawsuits being covered by the insurance (with a \$5000 deductible per suit). There was discussion about the legal fees being primarily for negotiations which they are in currently so next year should be less due to the plan for a multi-year contract. Ms. Hammond noted that the liability insurance has increased due to an overall increase, as well as the SU's experience rating due to the CAES claim. There was discussion about the server replacement cost, as well as the software licensing fees that are coming due.

There was discussion about the contingency fund being to cover a potential increase due to negotiations. It is estimated at 2.5%. There was discussion about the HRA reserve. Mr. Venter suggested getting a separate insurance policy or self-insure to cover the potential HRA risk. Ms. Hammond noted that they might have to hire a third-party administrator if they self-insured. Mr. Venter questioned the rubbish and records increase at the central office. Mr. Cunningham questioned why the entire CTES building is 2800 and the SU office is about the same. There was discussion about the School Spring expense, versus the advertising expense. Mr. Venter questioned the increases in utilities, lawn care and plowing. Ms. Hammond noted that this is cost of living increases.

Ms. Hammond noted that the majority of the special education changes are due to health care increases. They have reduced the budget by a special educator at GM that had been proposed. Ms. Powden advised that the budget proposal they are reviewing is the last budget that reaps the Act 46 tax benefits at 2%. There was discussion about the special education assessment being up 22% while the reimbursement is only up 4%. Ms. Hammond advised that the excess cost level has been raised. It used to be anything over \$50,000 would be reimbursed at 90%. This year, it is anything over \$60,000 is reimbursed at 95%. The additional \$10,000 is being raised through assessment. There has been an increase of about 16 special education students who have moved into the district.

Mr. Venter questioned the mentor salaries. Ms. Hammond explained that for every new teacher hired, they hire a mentor to guide them through their first two years. This has been practice for a number of years, but hasn't been in the special education budget in the past. There was discussion about the professional development budget for the director of student services. Ms. Hammond advised that this has been underfunded in the past.

There was discussion about the need for legal services under special education. Ms. Barton advised that they have needed legal counsel for mediation and due process. There was discussion about the special education transportation expense. There was discussion about how to illustrate the savings that the van has provided. Ms. Powden advised that they could create a document to show how much that expense would be if the students were being transported by the taxi or private transportation. There was discussion about the savings under the special education elementary transportation and the same for the middle and high school program.

There was discussion about the building rental for the special education specialized programs being housed at LES. Mr. Venter suggested that they need to illustrate what these services to the students would have cost if they weren't being housed in the SU. There was discussion about the charge being put in the TRSU budget, and both LMH and GM will pay some of that back. There was discussion about Act 173 and the goal to bring back students back to the district and educate them in the community. There was discussion about the savings that the programs will provide.

There are three children in the autism program, which would have cost \$600,000, while the program costs significantly less than that. Mr. Fromberger noted that the lack of savings from the autism program concerns him with starting up another program. There was discussion about the lack of information about the social emotional program. Ms. Hammond noted that this program has been discussed during every special education budget conversation this year.

There are children in the autism program from both districts. Ms. Barton noted that the social emotional program students costs about \$40,000-\$50,000 per year in tuition plus transportation which cost approximately the same amount. This expense would no longer be in place with this program. Some of the confusion is due to increased students in the programs which “eats” up some of the anticipated savings. This is why “editorializing” the savings by illustrating what these exact students would have costs. Mr. Buckley noted that there are reductions in purchased services and tuitions. He suggested breaking out the savings that are due to these programs and showing the extra costs due to the additional unanticipated students. There was discussion about providing a “cheat sheet” for the public. There was discussion about the 5 ftes to run the autism program and the capacity of the program being up to 7 students. Ms. Barton explained what the positions in the program are. Mr. Cunningham questioned what would the increases be if the program increased capacity by one or two students over that limit. Ms. Barton advised that it would be approximately 1 more fte for the additional students, likely a para-educator.

There was discussion about the additional EEE para-educator needs. There was discussion about the extended year services for students who qualify. There was discussion about the ODP tuition missing from last year’s budget.

Ms. Hammond noted that the transportation budget only includes GMUSD, since it will be discussed at the upcoming LMH board meeting about whether to provide transportation. Ms. Hammond noted that the transportation budget proposal in the fall did not include field trips or co-curricular events. There was discussion about whether LMH will provide transportation for field trips. Ms. Hammond advised that they will need to discuss this at the LMH board meeting. There was discussion about whether there are special needs students that they are required to transport and whether this would be included in the special education budget. Ms. Barton will work with Ms. Hammond on this. There was discussion about the maintenance budget increasing so much when there is a fleet of brand-new buses. The buses have to be inspected 4 times per year, but this is not a new expense. There was discussion about the increased supplies. The maintenance and repairs section includes the radios and the drug testing for the bus drivers. The supplies line was a recommendation from Mr. Parah so they can check with him about that recommendation. There was discussion about the increase in the transportation budget. Mr. Fromberger suggested that the reserve fund be reduced to \$35,000. There was discussion about the new loan payment being higher in the 2nd year than the first, but then reducing year by year. There was discussion about the transportation aid being two years behind so LMH will still receive aid for 2 years. The GM transportation includes the pickup in Mt. Holly and Ludlow for LMH students to go to GMUHS.

There was discussion about the revenues on the summary page. Ms. Hammond noted that this is a \$601,829 increase, or 9.54%. There was discussion about this not being a reasonable increase. The CPI is 2.1%, and pensioners received 1.6% increase. Mr. Venter noted that the mean average income is \$40,000 in the area. Mr. Fromberger noted that he is in favor of doing what is necessary for educating the students, but they have to do it in a reasonable way. There was discussion about needing to be in compliance with state and federal statutes. However, unless the voters approve the district budgets, the central office has no money. Mr. Venter suggested that they could breakdown the mandatory expenses (by statute or contracts) to illustrate how much of

the \$609,000 increase they can actually impact. There was discussion about anticipating the savings from the autism and social emotional program and explaining this to the community in a way that they can support.

Mr. Cunningham suggested looking at other special education programs to see if delivery in another way could offer additional savings while still meeting the students' needs. Ms. Powden advised that the Southeast Superintendents' Association is looking into that and hope to soon visit some MA school systems. There was discussion about the cost per special education student being higher than the general rule of 20% over general education. There was discussion about the expense for Ms. Waite's position and the other Title teachers being housed within the grants. Ms. Hammond advised that they don't know how much grant money they will be getting so that isn't planned out.

There was discussion about the renovation and moving costs to move the SU location. The landlord has not raised the rent in the 7 years they have been there. Mr. Fromberger advised that the WSWSU considered moving the SU office to the high school and all the staff and administration was opposed to it. There was discussion about the various potential locations for the SU offices, and the board in charge of that location making an offer. There was also discussion about the rent only being \$24,000 so this wouldn't have a sizeable effect on the budget, and in fact cost more with the move and renovations. Further discussion of the move was tabled at this time.

Mr. Fromberger advised that he has received several urgent emails from GMUSD board members that request that the GMUSD representatives on this board do not approve a TRSU budget until the GMUSD board has been presented with a budget in detail. As such he would not approve a budget at this time. Mr. Wheelock felt that the budget needs to be cut in places to 5-6%. Ms. Powden advised that they need direction from the board about what budget level they could approve. There was discussion about there needing to be a sizable cut in the special education budget in order to achieve this. There was discussion about the cuts to LMH—with the closing of a school and the cuts to the transportation being proposed.

The board consensus was to cut the budget to about 4-5%. Ms. Hammond advised that this would mean cutting about \$286,269 from the budget. Ms. Fogg noted that CAES adopted PBIS (which provides free training for the staff) which helps to reduce special education spending in the social emotional area. She suggested they could use this as a way to provide savings. She noted that this program has helped them to not send students out of the district. Ms. Beaupre noted that teaching has changed since she began teaching years ago. She noted that school is fluid and the students are impacted by economics, trauma, opioid crisis and other things. She advised that the special educators are successful because they have worked hard to gain experience and education. She implored the board members to come to the schools to see how the students, particularly those in special education are being taught. She felt that some of the best teachers in the state are teaching in this school. She felt bothered by the statement that "they can't control special education costs" and felt it is a slight on special education. She noted that there is a specific level they have to meet and standards that they have to determine to decide whether the costs are justified. Mr. Buckley noted that the reason they don't have much control over the special education costs is because of that process that the students must go through to qualify for special education. Ms. Fierman noted that when there are fixed costs at 12-15%, but the cut is recommended for 4%, that will mean cutting staff and programming which will reap negative results. There was discussion about the dichotomy between the needs of the schools and the tolerance of the voters. Ms. Fierman noted that part of the job of the board is to make statements to the community that this is the number that is necessary to support the schools. She felt that if the board goes forth and says

that the 6% is necessary, they can persuade the voters. They hear every month the amazing things that are going on in the district. Ms. Beaupre felt that education is an investment.

Mr. Cunningham advised that when the first GMUSD budget failed, the telegraph did a poll and it was largely due to the voters not getting the things they were promised. There was discussion about the board being the interface with the community. Mr. Venter noted that if the board or the administration can justify an expense, he will accept it and so will many voters. He felt that board's job is to educate the voters.

Ms. Tyrrell has invited boards into her classroom many times so that they can see what the kids need for their education. She has never been asked what kids need—even though the board began their budget discussions early with the intent to get stakeholder feedback. Mr. Venter questioned if the mandatory requirements add up to more than 5%. There was discussion about the cuts being made at the LMH board and about selling the budget to the voters.

There was discussion about the LMH budget being over the penalty threshold, yet closing the school saves \$255,000 per year, but there is a lot of unknown information with the tuition. Mr. Buckley suggested that the administration go through the budget and remove anything that they can, particularly those places that are increased. Mr. Venter suggested breaking down the budget based on what is mandatory. Ms. Alberty noted her concern with truancy with LMH potentially cutting transportation.

VII. NEW BUSINESS:

None.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None.

IX. NEXT MEETING:

The next special meeting will be Monday, January 13, 2019 at CTES at 6:00 p.m. The next regular meeting will be Thursday, February 6, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. location TBD.

X. ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Alberty **moved** to adjourn at 7:58 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Amber Wilson
Board Recording Secretary