

**UNION 28 JOINT SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday, February 11, 2015**  
**FINAL Minutes**

**Present:** Alan Mully, Jen Chylack, John DeWitt, Mike Yohan, Carla Halpern, Johanna Bartlett, Dick Baldwin, Scott Bastarache, members; Dan Hayes, chair; Matthew Galman, Accountant; Bob Mahler, Superintendent

**1. Meeting Called to Order at 7:05 P.M.**

**2. Public Hearings**

Dan was contacted by a reporter who said that SES was not listed as being closed on the U28 website. Could cancellations be listed on the U28 site? Bob responded that most parents go to their respective school's site or to the various TV/radio stations that report closings; he said that they could look into adding the info to the site.

**3. Approval of the Minutes from November 19, 2014**

**JEN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES. JOHANNA SECONDED. UNANIMOUS. THREE ABSTENTIONS (KIP, CARLA, JOHN).**

**4. Budget and Personnel Committee Update**

- a. No update.
- b. FY16 Union #28 Budget – Final Vote

**SCOTT MOVED TO APPROVE THE CENTRAL OFFICE BUDGET FOR FY '15-'16 IN THE AMOUNT OF \$552,019. JOHANNA SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.**

Johanna and Scott both noted that the B&P committee representatives felt that their respective communities were aware of the budget and approved of it.

**5. Regionalization Update**

Bob reported that the final document has not been received by the Amherst-Pelham School Committee. Kip said it has, though belatedly. The document has been delayed while it was reviewed by legal counsel. Yesterday, it was submitted to the superintendent of the regional school district. The document is the translation of the RAWG proposals into legalese. The regional committee will meet again on 2/24, then 3/10, which is when they were supposed to vote on whether to pass the document on to the towns in time to get on the warrant for Town Meetings. However, there doesn't seem to be enough time now to fully review the document, and they might not vote at the 3/10 meeting; if they do not, the timeline might be too constrained for getting the document on the warrant for spring Town Meetings. LES is having a forum on the proposal on 2/26; Amherst and Pelham are having a forum on 3/3.

Mike asked about the composition of the proposed regional school district (7 from

Amherst, 2 from Pelham, 1 each from Shutesbury and Leverett). Jen asked about the status of the document in relation to public accessibility; Kip responded that the document should be getting up on the LES site soon.

## **6. News/Updates from Each School**

Leverett: Jen reported that the Winter Murals have been put up in the school.

Erving: Scott reported that Erving has brought back an after-school academy as well as a late bus; the all-school play is being pushed as well, and the late bus will serve all the students involved in these after-school activities. The new director of the after-school program has integrated more structure into the program to support student learning and emotional/social development rather than leaving students to their own devices (for example, reading and homework time as well as making care packages). The after-school academy has a waiting list already; the first session will focus on robotics. Erving received a Fuel Up grant for \$2400 to improve food freshness, quality, and access in the cafeteria. Erving will also be starting to run a 100-Mile Club. A monitor in the lobby connected to Weather Bug displays local meteorological data and has been incorporated into the curriculum as well.

Dan commented that at the Collaborative, there was a presentation on how to involve parents in school projects and programs; there are many ways the Collaborative can help Erving and other schools connect with resources that can be used to increase involvement in the community.

Wendell/New Salem: Carla reported that there have been several personnel changes that are going well; the long-time secretary has retired and been replaced with an alumna. The director of the after-school program has changed as well. Swift River is starting its second year with the 100-Mile Club, which has been very successful. Participants can now run outside on an asphalt track installed last year. The Rabbit Run in New Salem to be held soon will benefit the 100-Mile Club. Also, the Science Fair is coming up; the theme this year is Air. A parent volunteer brought a Destination Imagination program to the school that challenges students to create science-related projects. A kindergarten team and a 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade team will be competing this year. Swift River now has a Student Council, and its officers have begun work on various projects. The school may be dealing with School Choice issues since there is a large population bubble in the preschool right now; this might constrain the school's ability to offer seats.

Shutesbury: Dan reported that Shutesbury also has a School Council, which has selected a moose as the school's mascot through a very open, democratic process. SES also participates in the 100-Mile Club, and students are thinking about various ways to make the social environment here comfortable and nice.

## **7. Foundation Budget Hearing – Update**

Dan reported that the state is looking at the Foundation Budget formula for the first time since 1993. This represents an opportunity for school districts and their constituents to make their voices heard in the deliberative process. A forum held in Northampton about

a month ago was filled with people doing just that; the issues facing small rural districts were well represented there. Dan felt encouraged to see the state soliciting this input, and advocated that we all keep pressure on the state in order to make progress on solving these problems.

Alan asked about the Foundation Budget, and Bob and committee members responded that it is designed to provide a foundational budget for all public schools in the state. The formula is very complicated, and many feel that it is inequitable regarding smaller or rural communities. Bob added that the Foundation Budget determines how much money the state determines each town must provide in order to make up the whole Chapter 70 amount; some schools are funded by their communities beyond this amount, while communities that fail to meet this number face consequences. Unfunded mandates are not provided for in the Foundation money.

Kip asked where we can go to get all the elements that go into the formula; Bob responded that mass.gov might be the place, but he would think about other places to go. Kip also asked whether the formula takes into account the amount of taxable property in a community; Bob said he thought yes, but he's not sure. He added that Leverett receives the fewest Chapter 70 dollars of all four schools, since it is considered to be a wealthy community.

Kip wondered whether laws passed since 1993 that have instituted unfunded mandates have been considered in the Foundation formula; Scott responded that this was a rhetorical question. Johanna added that some wealthier communities have gotten more money than they need under the formula, while struggling communities are ill served by it.

Johanna noted for the benefit of new school committee members that it takes about a year to get clued in as to how everything works; there's a lot of complicated information in play.

## **8. Superintendent Report**

Bob reported that U28 teachers are taking advantage of a grant to increase teacher evaluation capacity at all four schools; at SES, teachers are doing peer evaluations. Bob met with the principals to figure out how to carry the recommendations that come out of this process into the next school year, to make it an ongoing process of improvement rather than a one-and-done review. The recommendations will be entered into an electronic system.

Through Professional Learning Communities, U28 is trying to increase the teachers' abilities to instruct as well as their confidence; this form of professional development is working well so far, and will have a more lasting impact on their professional capacities. Planning for PLC activities next year is underway now. Bob stressed that this is one more way the union gets stitched together.

About 9c cuts, Bob reported that the first round only affected regionalized transportation (so, within U28, only Swift River), but the second round will affect all four schools because it targets early childhood education programs. Preschool play groups, some

library programs, STEAM grants, and so on will be directly impacted. So far, there are no indications of school-impacting cuts in next year's state budget.

Carla expressed her appreciation for Bob's leadership and care during the extra year he has spent as Superintendent; the other committee members all seconded the sentiment and punctuated it with a round of applause.

## **9. Director of Finance and Operations Position – Update**

Dan wants the committee to start thinking about this position. When should the position be posted? Scott reviewed the recent history of the position, reiterating that it has always been the intent to open the position to the public. He stressed that opening the position publicly was not a slight against Matthew, whose work has been highly valued over the past year. Johanna noted that we should make sure that Jen will be comfortable working with whoever is hired.

Bob asserted that the job doesn't stop; the pieces are always moving, and Matthew has taken all that on. Johanna responded that nevertheless, she agrees with Scott's point that the position needs to be opened to the public, and that if at all possible, Jen should be involved in the search.

Mike asked how much it will cost the union to conduct the search, especially given we already have a person who can do the work well and who is liked by all the committees? Dan said it would be in the hundreds. Dan acknowledged Mike's feeling about the issue, but that having an open process is healthy even if Matthew turns out to be hired.

Kip stated that he is not in favor of opening the position until after the new superintendent can come in and have a conversation with Matthew about the skills and demands of the position, so that the posting can be more informed. Scott noted that Jen's contract starts a day after Matthew's ends.

Bob said that having a person in the office who knows the budgets inside and out (having built them all) will provide some stability for the new superintendent as she settles into her role; it would also give her time to come to understand the thinking that went into the budgets. Scott cautioned that details of any contract extension need to be discussed in executive session.

**JOHN MOVED THAT THE COMMITTEE ENTER INTO DISCUSSIONS TO EXTEND THE CONTRACT FOR THE UNION 28 ACCOUNTANT POSITION NEXT JANUARY, AFTER WHICH THE DIRECTOR POSITION BE DETERMINED AND POSTED. SCOTT SECONDED. JOHN WITHDREW THE MOTION; SCOTT WITHDREW HIS SECOND.**

Dick noted that our thinking about the position has been shifted because of this motion. Carla said that she agrees with the first part of the motion, but that the second part (whether or not to open up the position) needs to be discussed before it be determined as the course of action. (John and Scott withdrew the motion in response.)

Kip asserted that matters of personnel need to be discussed in executive session, and that the committee is coming dangerously close to the edge of the law. Any such discussion must necessarily include an evaluation of the job Matthew has done.

## **10. Superintendent Evaluation**

Bob will start to work on this; it's important to carry out because of the process itself, as it will prime committee members for the same thing next year. Even though Bob won't be here next year, it will be worth the time to become comfortable with the process.

## **11. Grant Writer Position / 12. 3-D Printer Grant Proposal (combined by Dan)**

Bob wants to build MAKER labs in all four schools. Dan would like to get a detailed proposal: What is it exactly? How much will it cost? He's more comfortable having the proposal percolate from the other direction, from the teachers. If we build these labs and teachers aren't comfortable using them, what have we used our money for? Also, there might be other resources teachers would like instead. Finally, the expenditure of \$5,000 to get the grants in the first place would have made committee members think twice about moving the proposal forward.

Bob responded that he did talk to technology staff and principals about the labs, and they are all excited about them. These labs would provide entree to a world of engineering and technology that is largely closed to students right now, particularly girls. He acknowledged that the process for the grants was not the best it could have been, but this is a rare opportunity to get in on the ground floor of an engineering revolution.

Scott said that there is a lot of excitement about the possibility, but he objects to the lack of process moving it forward. Transparency is vital for the committee to function, even if it's just a sharing of information rather than a discussion. Dick noted that 3-D printing will require students and staff become familiar with 3-D software modeling – it's fantastic if we can get the labs into the schools, but we should have a more transparent process as well.

Kip commented that one of the things that impressed him about Jen was her assertion that technology is a tool, and he wants to be sure that these labs will remain a tool rather than an end in themselves. He would like something written that explains how this technology would be used to enhance their instruction in the curricula they're already teaching.

John asked how the grant writing was funded; Bob said the funds were taken from several different salary lines. John then asked whether the superintendent normally has the discretion to redirect funds in this way; Bob said he let Dan know he was going to do so. John concluded that process is important, but it needs to be balanced with respect for outcomes and intent as well, and that in this case, he has a lot of trust that the principals and teachers are able to make the right decision.

Dan asserted that process is indeed important, especially with a new superintendent coming in; would the MAKER labs be replaced next year by something else? As a committee, we need to know what's coming down the pike, what's happening. He added that a recent change in the executive director position of the Collaborative offered a similar conundrum regarding process. Bob said he will provide a written proposal with all the details. Kip said that even if we don't override the prerogative of the

Superintendent, we need to know about what we're voting on for our constituents' sake.

Scott affirmed John's point: at the very least, we need a heads-up for such changes. Also, is this sustainable? Once the labs become school property, how will we be able to maintain them? Dick asked whether information like this would come through each of the school committees? Dan responded that the initiative was coming from the central office, so even if at the local level, principals are talking about this, we need the information ahead of time; in terms of grant writing, a discussion about whether or not to fund specific proposals might broaden to discussions about grant writer positions for the whole union.

Bob apologized for the process, which he admitted was poor, but that he will provide a draft proposal to the committee. Scott concluded by wondering whether there might be process language added into the union procedures that doesn't infringe on the discretion of the Superintendent; he will bring the issue to the Budget & Personnel Committee.

### **13. Policies – Bob/Sean which policies to be brought forward**

Bob has not had the opportunity yet to meet with Sean and discuss the relevant policies. Scott took the policies from Bob to take to Budget and Personnel; none of them are pressing. Johanna noted that that committee is usually so swamped with more urgent issues that these policies have gone on the back burner. John said that the new Superintendent ought to be involved with this discussion; he's happy to kick the can six months down the road. Scott will sort through the policies to see which should be addressed earlier.

Kip said that we do a long-term disservice to this body, and to future Superintendents, by shunting policy discussion to the bottom of the list. John feels that the new Superintendent needs to be involved, but that they shouldn't be pushed off by a year. Bob also noted that all four school committees have ongoing policy review processes.

### **14. Financial Plan for Union #28**

Bob requested that this be moved to executive session because it involves a discussion of salaries.

### **15. Future Items to Discuss:**

#### **a. Standardized Testing – MASC Glenn Koocher**

Kip urged any and all members to stop by their schools and ask to be shown just one grade of PARCC; it is shocking. Add to unreasonably complex standardized testing, we are cutting funding for early childhood education, and put together, these things are cause for concern.

Johanna said we should invite Glenn Koocher to speak with us at some point. We don't necessarily need to do something drastic, but neither should we only sign a petition, which is not enough. When should we invite him to speak – after the new Superintendent is here?

b. Next meeting date: Deferred to executive session.

**JOHANNA MOVED TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR THE PURPOSES OF DISCUSSING PERSONNEL AND FINANCIAL PLANNING. MIKE SECONDED. ON VOICE VOTE, ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.**