

UNION 28 JOINT SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE
Monday, February 29, 2016
Final Minutes

Present: Scott Bastarache, Bethany Seeger, Johanna Bartlett, Son Hui May, Dick Baldwin, Carla Halpern, Jessalyn Zaykoski; Dan Hayes, Chair; Prudence Marsh, Director of Student Support Services; Aaron Osborne, Director of Finance and Operations; Jennifer Haggerty, Superintendent.

1. Meeting Called to Order by Dan at 7:03 P.M.

2. Public Hearings

Dan thanked Wendy Trill for providing the delicious soup for the evening.

3. Approval of the Minutes from January 13, 2016

Committee members offered one emendation for the minutes.

**JOHANNA MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2016 AS EMENDED.
DICK SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.**

4. Budget & Personnel Committee Update

a. FY17 Union #28 Budget: Bethany and Dan reported that the committee review of the budget was very productive, particularly around technology purchases. The committee unanimously approved the budget. One item to be mindful of in the future are the fringe benefits offered to the Superintendent and the Director of Finance and Operations.

**JOHANNA MOVED TO ACCEPT THE FY17 BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$564,840.
JESSALYN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.**

Dan thanked Aaron for all his excellent work on this budget.

5. U28 Central Office Renovations – Update

Scott reported that there is no update at this time; the Erving Selectboard is looking at these renovations as part of a holistic plan for the town, and there are some differing opinions about this set of issues. Jennifer noted that the Selectboard Chair inquired about what it would cost to install a buzz-in security system. There are simply too many unknowns at this point to start earmarking monies for any of these proposed renovations, however.

6. Regionalization Update

Dan reported that the vote to approve the regionalization proposal will be postponed until 2017. He thinks this might be because there's no interest in Shutesbury, and that the town might vote no on both questions, preventing the other towns from voting to join the new region. Also, there are so many things going on in Amherst right now that this might be just too much to pursue at

the moment. The committee discussed the prospects of the proposal; no members expressed concern about its chances. The committee also reviewed similar regionalization proposals that had failed prior to this. Dan noted that the next focus of the state seems to be on charter schools rather than regionalization. Scott added that EES is a small, dynamic learning environment of the kind charter schools like to advertise themselves as; we just don't have the title.

Son Hui reported on a meeting she attended recently that focused on the issues surrounding charter schools; they cost more to send our kids to, they don't offer transportation, they're semi-private in that they can be selective about the students they take, and their budgets are not subject to town approval, but they operate with public money. They play by a different set of rules, in other words.

Dan said that there are two paths facing the state on charter schools at present: a referendum on whether to lift the cap (thus provoking a free-for-all), and the legislators working with the Governor to craft a more reasonable solution. The CES has done a thorough study of the impact of charter schools on small and rural districts; they are sharing this information with Sen. Rosenberg so that he has leverage to negotiate with. Johanna said that the charter school side has a very strong lobby as well as a lot of money, so if it came to a referendum, they could show up in force.

Son Hui continued by saying that she's been investigating charter schools for her daughter, but that when she starts to think about the larger impact on other families and schools, it gives her pause. Dan said that he doesn't oppose having choices for families, but he's concerned about how the public funding works.

The committee discussed how we might talk with neighbors to educate them about these impacts. Carla pointed out that there's a parallel issue in the School Choice program; each school is happy to take School Choice money from neighboring towns. If we want to oppose charter schools, we should think about the potential hypocrisy of participating in School Choice. Jessalyn said that a friend of hers went from teaching in a public school to a charter school, where her pay almost doubled for the same amount of work.

Dan said that the state is capable of thinking about competition among technical schools in a region, but not all schools. Jennifer said that public education is supposed to be the great equalizer in our society, so when charter schools don't provide transportation or are selective about enrollment, that works against the main purpose of public education. Dick went on to say that the charter movement is simply another stage in the creeping privatization of public education. Bethany said that the arts usually get cut at public schools when there are budget pressures, but charter schools don't face these same constraints. Son Hui noted that charter schools are actually missing important pieces that public schools have; for example, Four Rivers lacks a gym.

Jennifer responded that the U#28 staff has been talking about what we can do to rebrand or re-vision or re-market the strengths of our public schools in order to promote them; there are a lot more options in this supervisory union than we've explored so far. Scott added that working together across districts, it's quite possible to make our strengths and resources better known to our communities. Pru agreed. Scott wondered about cross-school field trips; could one class join

their peers in another school for a day, like the staff do through their PLCs?

Johanna wondered about the scope of the enrollment challenge Leverett in particular faces. Bethany said that there are some things the town needs to do to bring more families in; in addition, the town has faced this tax abatement problem for a while now. After that's settled, the town will have to sit down and figure out where it stands on the school. Several committee members chimed in that their towns ultimately need to figure out how to make more low-income housing available in order to grow enrollment. Dan added that we need to think creatively about how to meet town-wide needs that incorporate school resources.

7. News/Updates from Each School and Union #28

Wendell / New Salem: Johanna said that after the Standardized Testing Forum, the teachers became more galvanized about taking action. SRSC decided to write a collective statement supporting a moratorium on standardized testing; perhaps other towns would like to make their own statements, but in any case, we could also make a statement as a Union. Teachers are thinking of meeting with parents to explain and advocate for the opt-out strategy, since there are no repercussions for opt-out families. SRSC supports the teachers in this, but it's not an entirely risk-free strategy. Jennifer said that she has sent SRSC's support statement on official U#28 letterhead to Secretary Peysner. In other news, the Kindergarten grant came through, and the committee will be discussing charter schools and School Choice in upcoming meetings. Carla reported that there were two emergencies recently, both of which were dealt with perfectly. Jennifer said that the Preschool invited her to make stone soup with them; the cafeteria was decorated with their work and they all sat down to a root vegetable lunch.

Leverett: Bethany reported that there's an all-day Read-A-Thon this Friday in conjunction with the MCBA Book Awards. A storyteller will be doing a two-week residency with the K-6 students as well. LSC decided that all members are automatically alternates for B&P so that quorums can be established more regularly. Pru reported that the new SPED room is a beautiful, comfortable space to meet with parents. The general LSC feeling about School Choice is that it's uncomfortable taking money from other towns, but it's important to the LES budget.

Erving: Scott reported that EES was trying out a Before-School Program, but it didn't really catch on and will be cancelled next week or so. Talk, Read, and Play, which is an early intervention program offered to children up to three years old, will be expanded by inviting other U#28 students. A poet visited and worked with lots of different kinds of poetry, which was posted throughout the building. There's an ongoing concern about math, and ESC will be strategizing about how to reach out to parents to help them feel comfortable helping their children with their math homework. A recent Author Tea had older students read their writing to younger students over refreshments. Dr. Seuss Day is coming up this Wednesday, and the older students will be doing a lot of work at the Community Center in order to fundraise for their field trip. Rehearsals are underway for the School Play, which is being kept under wraps by the children. Jennifer added that she and Pru and Pru's assistant were invited to EES to sing a Dionne Warwick love song with the students. Pru praised the EES music teacher's talent and charm; the kids were riveted. Scott echoed this praise; it's amazing to see how all the kids are enjoying being part of the performance now.

Shutesbury: Dan reported that SSC discussed opening up to School Choice. The MCBA Book Awards will be at SES this Friday (5:30-8:30). It's nice to look at the Principal's report to see what the children are up to. He hears lots of positive comments about SES from families involved with it.

Union #28: Jennifer reported a legislative update: we have level funding from last year in Chapter 70 and Circuit Breaker aid while the Governor has authorized \$5.6 million for a new MCAS. She has been working hard in the New Superintendent Induction Program, looking recently at how to address root causes of problems. She's finished her mid-cycle review process, and it's nice to have some time now to stop and appreciate her colleagues. DESE is now looking for public comment on their new technology and science standards.

8. Shared Employee Agreement – Discussion

Jennifer said that although we think that having a shared U#28 employee is a viable option looking forward, this year it is not the best option, and we'll look for another solution.

9. Director of Finance and Operations Report

a. Chapter 70 and Circuit Breaker Funding: Aaron presented on Foundation Budget, Chapter 70 Aid, and Circuit Breaker Funds. There's a lot of value in understanding the dynamics of these components of the school budget. He summarized the three types of aid as follows: Chapter 70 ensures that every district has sufficient resources to meet its foundation budget level; Net School Spending ensures that all towns provide an adequate level of financial support to their schools; Circuit Breaker provides additional state funding to districts for high-cost services to support students with special education needs.

The Foundation Budget is determined first, then the Local Contribution (how much of the Foundation Budget should be paid for by each town based on the relative wealth of the community) is subtracted, and the remainder is funded through Chapter 70. There are huge differences in town ability to pay across the state. The Local Contribution cap is 82.5% of Foundation for all towns, meaning that all towns get at least 17.5% of Foundation as Chapter 70. This means that something like \$362 million is given to towns that don't need a dime for their schools because of their ability to pay.

Aaron provided the breakdown for all these numbers for each U#28 school; none reach the Local Contribution cap. He also discussed Net School Spending shortfalls and funding, showing that school categorization by Level is closely tied to funding. All four U#28 towns exceed Net School Spending, and all are Level 1 or Level 2; while our towns face funding challenges, we are in fairly good shape compared to some towns out there in the state. Part of the challenge we face comes from the fact that most baseline fiscal considerations are on a per-student basis, while education is step-variable in nature (meaning that costs do not work on a per-student basis).

Pru went on to explain Circuit Breaker funding, which is a state reimbursement system for high-cost special education students. Once a student costs more than about \$42,000 (excluding transportation, which is not covered, but including monies paid to a district specifically for

SPED instruction), Circuit Breaker funding applies: the state reimburses in FY16 at a rate of 73%. There is also a Move-In Provision that protects against some unbudgeted expenses after the 4/1 deadline. Extraordinary Relief is also available in specific cases. She compared three different examples of students who would be eligible for Circuit Breaker; by far, residential students pose the greatest potential cost to a district. Pru noted that it can be very difficult to balance the needs of the child with the cost to the town.

Aaron closed by sharing a Zillow commercial featuring a couple who instantly stop considering a house because of poor ratings for the local school; when the school quality declines, housing prices follow.

Johanna asked what we could do to change the cap, because nearly half of Massachusetts towns are wealthy enough not to need any Chapter 70 aid, but get 17.5% because of the cap. This is inequitable, to say the least.

The committee applauded Aaron and Pru's presentation.

10. Future Items

- a. Next Meeting Date – TBD

11. Adjournment

Dan thanked all school committee representatives for attending tonight, and for doing what they do to support their schools.

JOHANNA MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 8:55. DICK SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.