

UNION 28 JOINT SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE
Wednesday, May 20, 2015
FINAL Minutes

Present: Renee Tela, Jessalyn Zaykoski, Jen Chylack, Son Hui May, Audra Goscenski, Sarah Dolven, Alan Mully, Kate Fiander, Johanna Bartlett, Michael Yohan, Fred Steinberg, Carla Halpern; Jennifer Haggerty, Superintendent-to-be; Bob Mahler, Superintendent

1. Meeting Called to Order by Johanna at 7:00 P.M.

2. Public Hearings

3. Approval of the Minutes from February 3, 2015 and February 11, 2015

SARAH MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 3, 2015. RENEE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

SARAH MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 11, 2015. SON HUI SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

4. Budget and Personnel Committee Update: See below.

5. Regionalization Update

Bob reported that the committee studying Amherst primary school regionalization was meeting tonight to discuss the educational benefits of regionalization; a few weeks ago, they met to discuss the financial benefits. Sarah added that the financial situation is fluid, but there might be up to \$660,000 in savings were all four towns (Leverett, Shutesbury, Amherst, and Pelham) to join the region, and that a substantial portion of this would come from transportation. Part of this number also reflects state money that encourages regionalization. At the end of the day, the financial savings don't appear to be so substantial as to make them the sole deciding factor in the decision. She indicated that a PowerPoint presentation about the situation is available on the Amherst-Pelham school site.

Bob added that the state support funds are determined through the budgeting process and might fluctuate from year to year, depending on revenues and what the legislature decides to do. The numbers used for the presentation were from 2013; they're outdated and inaccurate at this point.

6. News/Updates from Each School

Wendell / New Salem: Mike reported that at the last meeting, there was some discussion about adding boulders between the play area and the parking lot in order to better protect students. The Community Service Award was given to Cathy Chamberlain in recognition

of her eight years of organizing the Science Fair. After a lengthy discussion, SRSC voted to participate in School Choice again, as there are around 35 children choosing in. Town Meetings are coming up (June 7 for New Salem, June 8 for Wendell), and they are in the process of salary negotiations. Johanna added that a resident said Bobby Curly at North Quabbin Trails would be willing to redo the trails in the school woods. Also, about \$8,000 has been presented to the school from logging on a plot of land deeded to the town in order to support the school; this is the first time the land has been logged for this purpose in decades. Finally, the Rabbit Run happened and made a small profit, which will go to support the 100 Mile Club.

Leverett: Sarah reported that the committee just reorganized, and that after a lengthy discussion, LSC voted to participate in School Choice again, although they also recognize the problematic nature of the program. LSC plans to have a more in-depth discussion over the coming meetings in order to come up with an alternate plan, as the School Choice monies are regularly used to close budgetary gaps. Bob added that School Choice is only an issue in Western Massachusetts and Cape Cod due to the difficulties in transporting students in these areas; elsewhere in the state, School Choice does not present the same problems. The MCBA celebration party happened in March and was a great success. In April, visiting poet Verandah Porsche worked with LES students, funded through a MCC grant. Students in various grades have been making field trips to local museums.

Erving: Renee reported that ESC voted against participating in School Choice, which is usual for EES. The committee also reorganized last meeting. The Grinspoon Excellence in Teaching Award was given to Ben Rubin, the single nomination from the school district will pass from school to school each year from now on. 100 Mile Club is starting at EES, and there was a Mad Science event there this spring.

Shutesbury: Kate reported that SSC has also reorganized, and also voted against School Choice (also usual for SES). The school has been busy with many field trips and performances lately. Fred reported that SES is hiring a part-time office assistant to help with state-mandated reporting.

Bob remarked that none of the school mentioned PARCC; Johanna pointed out that is an agenda item for later, and that she's got both barrels loaded.

7. Foundation Budget Hearing – Update

Dan reminded the JSC that there was a hearing scheduled on the Foundation Budget, the formula adopted in 1993 that is used to determine base school support statewide. He contends that many of the problems schools face could be solved at the state level through mechanisms such as this budget. The CES is an example of other ways schools can work collaboratively to solve problems, but other problems need to be addressed at the state level. Many public voices at the hearing spoke to the fact that the Foundation Budget is woefully out of date and needs to be reformed in order to better serve towns, schools, and families.

8. Superintendent Report

Bob thanked the incoming Superintendent for taking the time to meet with him and with each individual school committee in order to get to know the region; Johanna reassured her, and other new committee members, that everything may seem daunting at first, but that the pieces would all fall into place.

Bob also reported that he's been visiting all the schools and seeing the wonderful things that are happening all around.

9. Director of Finance and Operations Position – Update

Dan reported that the search for a new Director has been advertised and opened now, since it is important that both Bob and Jennifer have input into the process. Bob asked for three or four members to serve on the screening committee; he will also be contacting town Fin Com members to see if any could serve. Johanna, Alan, and Son Hui volunteered. The salary range is \$85-90K.

10. Superintendent Evaluation

Bob presented the JSC with “an annotated view of his world” in the form of a packet of artifacts he is submitting as part of his evaluation process. Looking at these, and indeed going through this evaluation, is important because it will accustom the JSC to the process for future Superintendents. He walked the JSC through the packet. Notable components include information on the Professional Learning Communities (a kind of ongoing professional development) established at each school and across the union as well as program recommendations from a state review of each school, the majority of which are trivial; the schools all came out shining in these reviews. He provided an overview of the electronic form used to evaluate teachers and discussed the timing of submitting these evaluations to the state.

Dan noted that the reasons for evaluating Bob even though he is retiring include establishing a clear and productive process for the future as well as providing Bob with feedback on his work. New committee members who haven't had the opportunity to work with Bob are not expected to fill out their evaluations. Bob added that evaluating the Superintendent in April is a better idea for the future since the evaluation would be complete before elections change committee membership. Dan would also like to review an additional “360” feedback process that he thinks would contribute to the substance and effectiveness of future evaluations. Jennifer echoed that the educator evaluations help to create a very useful process.

Bob asked about confidentiality in the 360 process as it was used at the Collaborative for Educational Services; Dan replied that all feedback from employees was confidential, while Superintendent feedback was public, and that all comments were available to the reviewing committee. The process is dynamic and rich. Bob wondered whether it might

not be worth implementing this year as a practice run; Dan replied that it's a comprehensive system that needs to be well orchestrated over a greater span of time than we have at this point. Sarah concluded by saying that this 360 process at CES was the first time the evaluation process made sense to her, in no small part because the DESE-generated rubric is near incomprehensible. Bob responded that the form can be edited to serve the committee's needs; indeed, the whole process should be set up this way.

11. Standardized Testing

Johanna reported that there is widespread distress and even dismay among students, parents, teachers, and administrators in response to the ever-increasing burdens and pressures of standardized testing. It is important that the union respond in a unified way to the state on this issue; Johanna passed out several points that could be included in a draft letter. She asked for one person from each town to liaison with her and pass on thoughts and responses from their fellow citizens. Out of these conversations, a grassroots response can take shape. She also passed out a number of articles criticizing standardized tests in general as well as PARCC in particular.

Alan wondered if anyone had feedback from educators in the state on PARCC. Johanna said she wanted to hear from our educators first, and Alan asked whether the MTA has an official position on testing; the MTA opposes it. Educators at SRS have related that they would like the school committee to take an official position.

Audra pointed out that these tests are an attempt to conduct a performance review of entire schools, and that we might learn something from that perspective. Johanna acknowledged that legislators are under a great deal of pressure to improve our schools, and that their response has been to test everyone on everything and punish people for not doing well enough. Sarah asked why this has to be balanced on the back of students.

Bob pointed out that it's not a performance test; it's a poverty test. Give him the zip code, and he could predict test performance. Jennifer added that this is precisely the case in Orange, where a school has gone from Level 2 to Level 3 in one year, but the teachers haven't gotten worse. Johanna commented that the standards will invariably get dumbed down because not enough students will pass. We need to ask the state to pull back on the unfunded mandates that are burdening our schools.

Wendell and New Salem will have a public hearing in June on this issue. Dan asked Johanna to send an email to everyone in U28 in order to cast the widest possible net.

12. Future Items to Discuss:

- a. Superintendent Evaluation Process
- b. Next meeting date: July 7, 2015, 6:30 P.M., Shutesbury Elementary School

Before adjourning, Dan recognized Bob Mahler for his hard work, dedication, and inspiration during his stint as Intern Superintendent. He has helped the district coalesce, and helped us all feel good about our schools and about the union as a whole. He also thanked Jennifer for taking the position and attending the meetings with school committees and with Bob; we look forward to working with her to keep our schools thriving.