

UNION #28 JOINT SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE
Monday, January 14, 2019
Final Minutes

Present: Anna Wetherby, Carl Seppala, Tara Acker, Bethany Seeger, Johanna Bartlett, Erik Semb, Beth Erviti, Carla Halpern, Dan Hayes, Members; Lauren Thomas-Paquin, Chair; Annie Foley-Ruiz, Director of Learning Design; Prudence Marsh, Director of Student Support Services; Bruce Turner, Director of Finance and Operations; Jennifer Haggerty, Superintendent; Public Guests

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

Lauren moved the Approval of the Minutes before Public Hearings and added Warwick Community School to New Business.

2. Approval of the Minutes from December 10, 2018:

Erik and Lauren offered emendations.

BETHANY MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 10, 2018 AS EMENDED. CARLA SECONDED. UNANIMOUS. (TWO ABSTENTIONS.)

3. Public Hearings:

James Trill, Principal at Erving Elementary School, asked for clarification of an emendation of the previous minutes, then shared a document with JSC given to him by the Erving Teachers Association, which he read: it further clarified that ETA did not in fact support the letter read by Tracy Supple at the previous meeting. A member of the ETA Executive Board was also present to confirm this. He shared his concern that the staff at EES has been implicated in this prior to a crucial vote on the budget. He thanked JSC for their service, then requested that JSC consider requiring equal representation for each school (a full complement of three members) when such votes are undertaken. He also requested that JSC consider some form of validation or verification of the information being presented to them. How would the vote have gone had equal representation and verification been in place?

Beth asked for clarification of his points, and Carla thanked him for coming tonight and assured him that he has been heard. She pointed out that only one member from each school attend for quorum purposes, and the composition of school committee representatives to JSC is up to each individual school committee, so it's not something JSC can address. She also noted that the emendation of the minutes has reflected his concern about how EES staff is represented at JSC. Johanna added that generally, JSC has been in agreement on many issues up until this last budget, so perhaps school committees have grown relaxed about representation at JSC. We can certainly encourage more members to attend.

Tara speculated that the vote might have gone toward a higher budget, per Erving's concerns, had each school had three members present. Dan affirmed that there was a robust discussion that revolved around each town's concerns. Lauren also thanked James for bringing this to JSC's attention. She said that in the future, we can check the signed names to see who's really being represented. Dan suggested that Leverett teachers can bring items of concern to LSC first, who can bring them to the full JSC in the future. James thanked JSC for their time and concern.

Dan spoke about how people across the state are beginning to mobilize in support of a resolution supporting Public Education, which he's provided for JSC's consideration. This resolution addresses how public funds are allocated according to the Foundation Formula from 1993. We should be aware that this is coming down the pike and get in contact with our representatives. He's looking into whether some committee can be created through CES to help mobilize folks behind the resolution. This is really where the funding fight lies, not among towns in the Union. Carla requested that Dan read the resolution so it can be entered into the minutes. Dan declined to read it since this is Public Hearing time, but it is included in these minutes as an attachment. He went on to urge JSC members to think about how we can get the public involved in this movement beyond writing letters. If these resolution items were adopted, they'd have a tremendous impact on our budgets.

Beth asked Dan to clarify the history of these items; some have been around for years, but never adopted at the state level. Erik suggested that state representatives attend a local school committee meeting to see the tiny budgets we struggle with.

4. New Business:

Warwick Community School: Lauren said we've been contacted by Warwick Community School, which has been struggling financially. The school has been looking at ways to avoid closing, one of which is to approach U#28 about joining. She had a conversation with a liaison from the group trying to save the school. She and Jennifer aren't sure what the Union could do to help at this point, but they wanted JSC to be informed about the discussion. Jennifer went on to explain that WCS joining another school district would be a long, multi-step process involving acceptance votes from all the towns involved; unfortunately, our legal counsel can't advise us on this because they also advise Warwick. Anna wondered how joining U#28 would help them financially: it's not clear, since it seems it would cost a lot to leave.

Johanna asked Jennifer's perspective on this: to Jennifer, the guiding principle should be what the fiscal benefit would be to U#28. Johanna said we should consider it based on the bottom line for us, as well as consider the cost to Jennifer in terms of the added duties. Lauren said it would be an enormous amount of work to determine the pros and cons, and personally, she's reluctant to devote much of JSC's energies to the task until we knew that they could even leave their district. Johanna said six towns in the Union might be better for flexibility and fiscal stability over the long term. Dan noted that a similar transition transpired in Worthington, but he's reluctant to change our governance structure, which is the strength of our schools.

5. Budget and Personnel: No report.

6. Superintendent's Report:

Jennifer reported that the Rural School Coalition Superintendents have written a letter advocating for more support for rural school districts, which face unique challenges, and sent it to state representatives and education administrators. A planned Rural Day on the Hill is an opportunity to draw attention to our challenges and the urgent need for increased support. Jennifer is also sharing information with U#28 schools on alternatively structured learning days, which could be used in lieu of Snow Days, and is asking schools to pilot two such days to see how well they serve their students, given the varying Internet access our towns enjoy. In relation to advocacy, Dan related a story from a state representative that handwritten letters (in the case of the story, from children on paper plates) are most effective.

7. Budget Report:

Bruce reported he's attending the Mass Municipal conference on Friday. It's not clear how education priorities will fare in this legislative session, although state revenue has been so robust that the income tax rate is being slightly lowered. Bruce detailed upcoming infrastructure repairs and improvements at several schools. One major challenge in several budgets has been an unexpected need for ELL positions. Lastly, Franklin County administrators have been working on joint bus bids in the hopes of saving some money in transportation; part of the new bid would be exemptions for the alternatively structured learning days.

8. U#28 Policy Subcommittee:

Lauren noted this Subcommittee consists of her and Jennifer. They've forwarded some policies for JSC to look over before voting at our next meeting. Jennifer said there are many kinds of policies we don't need at the Union level that are mandatory for schools, so our policy binder will be much slimmer than is usual. Dan added that this is a great opportunity to collect some history about JSC's decisions for future members. Tara suggested the binder be made virtual to increase access to it. Bethany asked whether the Superintendent evaluation process would be included: yes, since the state process is always changing. One problem with the policy binder is determining who will be in charge of updating it. Johanna said timelines and lists could be added as well. Dan said this won't necessarily change how JSC functions in the future; it's just a resource.

9. School Updates:

Wendell/New Salem: Carla and Anna reported on an amazing Winter Concert the last day before break, including soloists. Some students also performed at the Full Moon Coffee House in Wendell. We've approved two days of the e-learning pilot, and we just got our chickens and will have therapy goats soon. Beth concluded with a pitch for a fundraiser via Hillside Pizza. Carla also pitched the Rabbit Run in May, which will count towards 100-Mile Club totals.

Leverett: Tara reported that LES is facing at least a \$60K budget gap on the low side, so there will be some cuts. We're still working on a revised budget to present to the Town. LES teachers told LSC that the uncertainty around the budget was difficult to deal with; they just need clarity about what the increase will actually be, then they can plan around the gap. We're trying to mobilize the community to provide support, but we can't use fundraising for the basic budget. Also, our Principal is retiring effective June. On the upside, we have a Talent Show coming up in a couple of weeks. Bethany invited advice for fundraising. James Trill offered some: he related a meeting with an administrator at Pioneer, who told him about the community and business connections he's developed that might benefit EES somehow through efficiencies and funding for innovation. Employees and managers at charitable companies often live in our hilltowns, so they might be happy to get involved. Tara concluded by saying LSC is considering how a grant writer might be of help. JSC members offered sympathy for LES's difficulties.

Shutesbury: Lauren said things are going well: there was a fun Country Fair last week at which students created their own countries, complete with flags and songs. There was also a Games Night and a Folk Dance.

Erving: Erik invited James to speak. They're looking for a Principal to replace him, as he's retiring. James said we're looking at ways to grow our own food and buy locally and sustainably. Hawlemont has been a great inspiration to us in this regard. Pru pointed out that this kind of learning (the field trip to Hawlemont) is just the kind of integrative experience we're trying to promote in curriculum and which will stay with kids. Erik added a story about an EES student who won tickets to a Bruins game, which Erik attended along with the Librarian. They got pictures taken with some major players, and it was a wonderful experience.

10. Future Items to Discuss:

- Next Meeting Date: Monday, March 18, 2019, 7:00 p.m. at Swift River Elementary School
- Joint Supervisory Policy Sub-Committee: Monday, March 18, 2019, 6:45 p.m. at Swift River Elementary School
- Budget & Personnel Committee: TBD

11. Adjournment at 8:16:

BETHANY MOVED TO ADJOURN. ANNA SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.