

**BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING**

Via Video Conference – Google Meet
September 3, 2020 - 5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Alice Farrell, Chair - (BT)
Sonya Spaulding, Vice-Chair - (BC)
Guy Isabelle – (At-Large)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

David Wells, Superintendent
Josh Allen, Communications Specialist
Brenda Waterhouse, SHS Principal

GUESTS PRESENT:

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Mrs. Farrell, called the Thursday, September 3, 2020 BUUSD Communications Committee meeting to order at 5:31 p.m., which was held via video conference – Google Meet.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

Add 5.6 Census

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Approval of Minutes –

4.1 August 6, 2020 BUUSD Communications Committee Meeting

The Committee agreed by consensus to approve the Minutes of the August 6, 2020 BUUSD Communications Committee meeting.

5. New Business

5.1 Logo/Branding

Mr. Allen believes this initiative could be blended with the Mission/Vision/Strategic Planning initiative. Mr. Allen has been working with Mrs. Van Orman to develop a color scheme and logo for the Barre Virtual Academy. Their work is currently being reviewed by the leadership team. Social media accounts will be set up for the Barre Virtual Academy. Mrs. Van Orman will be responsible for updating the social media pages. The link to the Barre Virtual Academy is located under ‘Schools’ on the BUUSD web site.

Mrs. Waterhouse confirmed that the gender neutral shark ‘Fin’ is the SHS mascot. Michael Pope forwarded to Mr. Allen, a logo he created for BTMES in 2017. Mr. Allen advised that the logo work is very impressive. Mr. Pope has great skills and would be a tremendous asset to the Mission/Vision/Strategic Design Team as well as for the logo and branding initiative.

5.2 Mission, Vision, Strategic Plan

Mr. Allen advised that Michael Pope has expressed interest in being on the Mission/Vision/Strategic Planning Team. It was reiterated that Mr. Pope has great skills and would be a tremendous asset to the Mission/Vision/Strategic Design Team. With regard to the Communication Committee’s responsibility for recruiting Design Team and Focus Group members, Mrs. Farrell believes the Committee needs to ‘spread a wider net’. It would be beneficial to distribute an informational piece in September. Mrs. Farrell also suggested that podcasts be created. These podcasts would be aired by local radio stations. Mrs. Farrell volunteered to work with Mr. Goodrich and Mr. Allen on the creation of podcasts, and it was agreed that all outgoing information should go through Mr. Allen’s office (Communications). Mrs. Spaulding volunteered to assist with distribution/posting of podcasts and other informational pieces and advised of her belief that the Board ‘owns’ this project and needs to be involved in the distribution of information and recruitment of participants. Active recruitment of Design Team Members and Focus Group Members should occur in December. Mr. Isabelle advised that he has a couple of names worthy of consideration; Steve Pappas and Sue Minter (Director at Capstone).

Mr. Wells suggested contacting local service clubs, such as the Rotary. Mr. Isabelle suggested that the Committee/Board may wish to consider the President of CVMC. Mrs. Spaulding cautioned that there is a limit of 12 members on the Design Team, and that the Committee/Board, should assure there is balance between Barre City and Barre Town residents. It was clarified that the Board agreed

to change the number of participants on the Design Team to 13. It might be beneficial to consider some of the named individuals for one of the Focus Groups. The goal for this evening's meeting is to determine the best way to inform the public about this initiative and to stress to community members, the importance of community involvement in this project. Mrs. Spaulding believes it would be better to have community members who volunteer, rather than those that have to be 'recruited' by the Board. In addition to social media, the Committee agreed that information should also be distributed via the Times Argus, The World, and area civic organizations.

5.3 Communications Department

Mr. Allen advised that he does not have much new to report at this time, but he would like to move forward as was discussed at the previous meeting. There are many upcoming projects and it would be beneficial to have assistance with smaller projects. Mr. Allen provided an overview of the current structure which involves Mike Emmons and Dan Smith assisting with the BTMES and BCEMS web sites, but he would like to expand their responsibilities to include social media, and to assist administrators with newsletters and other regular reoccurring items. Mr. Allen would like to write some policies, but at present, does not have time to tackle those projects. It may be beneficial to check with the VSBA regarding Model Policies relating to Communications. It was noted that the Essex/Westford district does have a Code of Conduct policy that may be worth reviewing. Mr. Allen would like the proposed Communications restructure to start this year and believes it would involve increasing Mr. Emmons and Mr. Smith's stipends slightly. Mr. Allen believes the financial impact would be minimal. Mr. Allen will provide information to Mr. Wells. Mr. Wells will hold discussions with the Business Manager and the Director of HR. Mr. Allen would like to move forward with placing quality school merchandise (for sale) in local businesses to help promote the Barre schools. Brief discussion was held regarding Mr. Allen's COVID related work being charged to the COVID line item. Mrs. Spaulding would like to see small fund raisers for sports teams go away, and prefers to have students doing things in schools to support fund raising and selling merchandise, including promoting on-line sales of merchandise. In response to a suggestion that Mike Gilbert, who has a large website for alumni, might wish to be involved, Mrs. Waterhouse reported that Mr. Gilbert has advised that he wants to step back some.

5.4 Budget Promotion

Mr. Allen advised that planning for budget promotion is in its early stages, but with the rise in absentee voting, it will be important to send information out early. Mr. Allen plans to send out the Annual Report (same as was done last year), and he will be working on all of the non-budget pages, as soon as school starts. Mr. Allen would also like to include information on the SEA Project. The budget page will be created at a later date. Mrs. Spaulding will be in contact with Mrs. Perreault regarding the timeline for budget completion. The Annual Report will be sent to the printer as soon as possible. Mr. Allen also plans to produce a budget video series. Mr. Allen reiterated that everything will need to be completed earlier this year to insure that information reaches absentee voters early. Mr. Wells believes it is more important to promote what the community is voting for, rather than the budget amounts.

5.5 Promotion of SHS to Out of District Students

Mrs. Waterhouse advised that attracting out of district students to SHS, is a work in progress. SHS continues to work on its "dog and pony show", making the presentation more engaging and making SHS stand out differently from other local high schools. It has been pointed out that many individuals in outlying towns have a fixed mind-set when it comes to choosing a high school, and it will be difficult to break that cycle. In the past, SHS didn't provide transportation, but transportation is now being offered/provided. Promoting the transportation piece is important because many individuals still don't know that it is being provided. It will take time to promote the transportation piece. SHS currently has 15 students enrolled from out of district sending towns. Two years ago, when discussion was being held regarding the number of students required to fund a bus, the number of students was determined to be 6. At that point in time, there were 3 or 4 that wanted transportation, so it was felt that it was worth continuing to offer transportation. One of the graduating 8th grade classes last year, was very small, thus the pool of potential students was very small. SHS continues to try to 'brand' the school, working on documentation, hand-outs, and the web page. The web page has probably gotten the school the biggest footprint outside of the community. Mrs. Waterhouse receives requests for information from potential home buyers who are considering moving to the area. Mrs. Waterhouse and Mr. Allen have been working on improving the web site, to make it less passive. Another campaign is to work with realtors, and to improve the school's 'score'. Mrs. Waterhouse is working to determine how the score is realized and how the school can work with real estate agents to improve the score and promote all the school has to offer. Mrs. Waterhouse feels this is an area in which the school can grow and try to improve our student count numbers. Mrs. Farrell queried regarding what could be done to improve promotion of SHS to towns with school choice. Mrs. Waterhouse advised regarding those who represent SHS at the promo nights. Usually there is an administrator, the Director or Guidance, and JROTC representation. There is also usually some student representation. There is a video and handouts. Mrs. Waterhouse advised that chocolate chip cookies are also very popular in promoting interest in the SHS 'booth'. It's important to have good communication with the sending schools' guidance counselors prior to the event. Earlier Mrs. Poulin advised that it's very important to get information out early, because by the time school fairs are occurring, a lot of families have already decided the school their children will be tutioned to. It might be beneficial to target 7th graders and staff, and inform them of the many things we are doing. It is very important to change the perception regarding transportation and other benefits of choosing SHS. Other schools have had 'swag' to hand out, and that might be something we want to consider adding. Mrs. Waterhouse and Mr. Hoffman have been discussing having some quality merchandise to hand out (tee shirts, coffee mugs). The timeline for promoting the schools usually starts in October or early November. SHS doesn't have access to student addresses, but can provide information to the guidance counselors at sending schools. Mrs. Waterhouse and Mr. Hoffman have been trying to identify ways to promote SHS other than on the high school fair night.

Mr. Wells identifies with the difficulty of attracting students from sending communities and agrees that early promotion is very important. Mr. Wells also advised that learning what the students and parents want is very important (e.g. sports, JROTC, attend the technical center). Mrs. Waterhouse advised that AP offerings are a draw, but other schools also offer AP classes. JROTC is also important, and SHS is only 1 of 3 schools in the state that offers it. Sports are also important. Many students from outlying towns are in sports 'feeder' programs and already have established friendships with Barre students because of their interactions playing sports together. Students from sending districts are entering high school from small schools and it's a benefit to know they are entering a school where they already have friends. Mr. Wells suggested SHS promotion at sporting events. Mrs. Farrell suggested promotion in The World. Mrs. Spaulding believes promoting graduation requirements is important (community service, financial literacy, civics). Mr. Allen advised that he's been reviewing a few web sites for private schools, and noticed they have an 'About Us' page. SHS does not have an 'About Us' page, or something equivalent. The About Us pages include; a welcome message, mission, vision, school community, athletics...etc.. Mrs. Spaulding advised that many private schools also do much promotion via social media. Mr. Allen advised that although our social media following has grown greatly, there is much more growth potential. Mr. Isabelle feels for outreach, it is always good to have the school promoted by those who have had great experiences, and perhaps some alumni could assist with promotion. Mr. Isabelle advised that it may be beneficial to have Board Members assist with promotion. Mr. Wells noted that the high school's central location is an asset. Mrs. Poulin advised that in some of the smaller towns, it has become the norm to send students to a particular school. SHS has lost millions of tuition dollars to another area school. It will be important to push transportation. There is at least one known freshman student who has enrolled elsewhere because it was not known by the family that SHS provided transportation. Mrs. Poulin believes that promotion needs to start early, and promotion should include some of the very positive aspects of SHS; the excellent band program (which is held prior to the school day, allowing students to gain an extra credit each year), the Scholarship Trust, continued sports with friends, a school closer to home (very beneficial for after school events and allows less daily travel time to and from school), block scheduling(allowing students to focus on 4 courses at a time), the JROTC Program and CVCC being located on campus. Mrs. Poulin stressed the importance of promoting transportation, and reaching families that don't already have students at another high school.

5.6 Census

Mrs. Farrell advised that census data has been submitted by 70% of the Barre Town population and by 58% of the Barre City population. Census work is moving very slowly. Completion of the census needs to be promoted; including the importance the census plays in the community. The City and Town will lose \$4,000 for each individual that is not counted. It was noted that the census link can be shared, and it should be shared widely and constantly. Mr. Allen has some promotional materials from the census. Mrs. Spaulding requested that Mr. Allen send an e-mail to all parents, stressing the loss of \$4,000 per person, and advising that there is a significant financial impact if the census isn't completed. Mr. Allen will utilize the promotional material as much as possible and will send out an e-mail.

6. Old Business

6.1 Re-Opening Communications Update

Mr. Allen advised that since the last meeting, he has distributed lots of information, including 'day in the life' videos for each school, and many other documents. It is agreed that communication needs to be frequent and timely. There will be much communication over the next month, as schools are re-opening. Mr. Allen would like to make an effort to be in the various buildings and capture what is going on. Freshman Orientation will occur on Friday, September 4, 2020 and Mr. Allen plans to be in attendance to take pictures which he will post over the weekend. Mr. Allen has not received the bus or meal delivery schedules yet, but he will publish that information as soon as it's available. Mrs. Waterhouse suggested that Mr. Allen also interview some students as they are leaving the school, and ask them about their experience.

Mr. Allen advised that the BUUSD will again be featured in the full page ad/promotion in the Times Argus. The first ad will be in the 10/23/2020 edition. Additional pages will be posted in January, March, and May of 2021.

7. Other Business

Mr. Isabelle queried regarding the number of homeschoolers in the Barre area, when we will know the final count, and what the financial impact is. Mr. Wells advised that the State provided the first report. Spaulding High School has 9 homeschoolers, but 8 of those were homeschooled last year. Mr. Wells also advised that VSBA wants to hold districts harmless for any drop in ADM during COVID.

Mr. Isabelle believes it is very beneficial to share as many positive stories as possible.

8. Items to be Placed on Future Agendas

- Mission/Vision/Strategic Planning
- Budget Promotion
- SHS Promotion to Out of District Students
- Logo/Branding
- Communications Department

9. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, October 1, 2020 at 5:30 p.m.

10. Adjournment

The Committee agreed by consensus to adjourn at 7:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Poulin