

**Lamoille North Supervisory Union and
Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District Board
Minutes of Meeting
November 23, 2020**

Board Members Present: Belvidere: Stephanie Sweet; Cambridge: Laura Miller, Jan Sander, Bill Sander, Mark Stebbins, Eden: David Whitcomb, Jeff Hunsberger; Hyde Park: Chasity Fagnant, Tina Lowe, Patti Hayford; Johnson: Mark Nielsen, Angela Lamell, Katie Orost, Allen Audette, Jr.; Waterville: Bart Bezio
Board Members Absent: Cambridge: Bernard Barnes, Sue Prescott; Hyde Park: Lisa Barry; Johnson: Bobbie Moulton

Administrators Present: Catherine Gallagher, Deb Clark, Charleen McFarlane, Michele Aumand, Charleen McFarlane, Denise Maurice, Brian Schaffer, Flo Kelley, Tommy O'Connor, Wendy Savery, Erik Remmers, Janet Murray, Melinda Mascolino, David Manning, Jan Epstein, Mary Anderson, Diane Reilly, Jeremy Scannell, Jennifer Hulse, Bethann Pirie, Dylan Laflam

Others: Darcey Fletcher, Yvonne Jones, Betzi Goodman, Denise Webster, Ashlee Rubinstein, Heidi Kneeland, Christina Callahan, Erin Carr, Erin Paquette, , Greg Stokes, Sheri Boutin, Terri Ayers, Amy O'Toole, Chelsea Circe, Danielle Shoda, Donna Cullivan, Jacinta Raboin, Jon Brown, Matt Neckers, Olivia B, Robin Bryce, Eric Hutchins, Susan Ronci, Galen Reese, Devon DePaolo, Terry Bickings, Kelly Manosh, Stephanie Wilson, Jenna Sweet

Minute Taker: Sue Trainor

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Public Comment: Nielsen called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Nielsen noted the agenda was changed to reflect that an executive session was not needed under the Personnel agenda item. Clark stated that there was no Next Generation AntiVirus bid to approve and that item could be removed. J. Sander made a motion to approve the amended agenda, seconded by Whitcomb. The motion passed unanimously.

As part of the Public Comment:

- Erik Hutchins wanted to recognize the fact that at this point in the pandemic the school administration, Board, teachers, staff and students had done a fantastic job. There had been great leadership and great participation. He also wanted to note that the District was about to enter a different phase with winter coming on and the District needed to be prepared to act courageously and boldly in order to protect the communities.
- Darcey Fletcher echoed Hutchins' sentiments and stated the leadership had been doing their best by the community. However, Fletcher said that the membership was not feeling safe in the buildings. She noted cases were occurring in Waterville now, which she never would have expected. The administration and the task force had done everything right, but she felt they were at the cusp of things going wrong.
- Jenna Sweet agreed with the others, stating she appreciated the care being taken with COVID. This wasn't an easy situation for anyone. Educators were being asked to care for children in the community and to put the student's education and wellbeing ahead of their own families. Staff took all precautions to protect those around them. A positive COVID exposure could mean not seeing her children for the duration of their quarantine. She felt she was put in a position to take precautions at home and then come in and care for children of families who didn't take those same precautions. It was very challenging. She knew that the Governor's priority was to have students in school but she had to prioritize her own family. She was beginning to feel unsafe as she knew there were families in the community not taking precautions.

LNSU/LN MUUSD Routine Business: Consent Agenda Items

Minutes of the November 9, 2020, meeting and FCC Committee Meeting: Orost made a motion, seconded by Hunsberger, to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Board Orders: Miller made a motion to accept the Board Orders, seconded by J. Sander. The motion passed unanimously.

Central Office/Director Updates: Prior to the updates, Nielsen stated that the state and federal government were guiding the decisions being made by the Board and the administration. He encouraged people to continue to work together and support the administration as they were being asked to make choices. Nielsen reminded the public that it wasn't just Superintendent Gallagher making decisions.

Gallagher then invited administrators to talk about work being done to move social justice forward in the District. Jennifer Hulse stated she, Co-Director Bethann Pirie, and Superintendent Gallagher would be meeting with Miles Smith from NVA, the Assistant Director of Athletics and Diversity and Inclusion Designee, to ask for guidance on facilitating a school-wide read, to possibly attend faculty meetings to offer guidance on conversations about racism and bias, and to help identify speakers on topics of racial justice. They were considering providing a presentation to the Board on racism and system structures that perpetuate racism. They also met with Building Fearless Futures and looking for guidance for Grades 7-12. The staff was also planning on reading *How to Be An Antiracist*.

Wendy Savery stated she was trying to stay up on meetings with Hulse and Pirie, as well as the Racial Justice team. She was in the process of looking at the federal grant and in some cases amending it and in other cases requesting new funds to support many of the initiatives that Hulse had spoken of. Savery was also looking into the 100% Respect! Campaign. The campaign trained faculty on implementing a program which held everyone accountable, helped to build strong equity, worked through bias and reviewed the school's culture around what respectful behavior looked like when built on equity for all, as well as the necessity for constant communication. Building Fearless Futures would assist with issues of tolerance and with mitigating racial stress in the school community, as well as helping with racial literacy and justice. The District was committed to the concept of safe and healthy students in schools. That started with wellness. Therefore, she was also trying to build money into the grant for stress mitigation and building resiliency. She would amend the grant by the end of the week and hoped to have funds available by early January.

Nielsen reported that he was on Johnson's Racial Justice Committee with Eric Hutchins. Nielsen stated he was working on a project on refugee resettlement. He hoped to be a conduit between the Town of Johnson Racial Justice Committee and the School Board. Nielsen stated change didn't happen overnight but changing a generation would be a great way to start.

Gallagher reported on information and guidance she had received today. The VPA would likely postpone winter sports. This would be more in alignment with restrictions already in place. The first piece of guidance was that schools were told that during the daily health screens they could ask whether the student had interacted with a household other than their own during Thanksgiving. If the answer was yes, the student wouldn't attend school. She thought it was unfortunate that it fell on the schools to do this.

The second piece of guidance was that school boards and other bodies subject to Vermont's open meeting requirements would now meet virtually until the health emergency ended. The third item of guidance and the one that Gallagher was concerned about was the process change for contact tracing. When an infectious case was identified at a school, school administrators would be asked to communicate directly with all teachers, staff and families who were identified as close contacts. The Department of Health would be the ones to identify the close contacts. Gallagher thought this process change was due to the fact that the Department of Health had so much more to do.

Gallagher stated the administration and staff had received scathing messages from some parents who were quite venomous and threatening. This behavior from the communities was not what she was used to. Gallagher noted that a parent wrote to Dan French at the advice of a Board member to say that French

needed to keep students in school and that Superintendent Gallagher was going to shut the high school down through June. Further, that the teachers didn't care about the children. Gallagher reminded this particular parent that the Board was unified in their decision. Gallagher stated that Dan French received every communication sent to families in the District. French asked that Gallagher respond to the parent by saying that French applauded every one of Lamoille North's efforts.

It was clear that there were factions who believed in five days a week instruction and those who believed in fully remote learning. However, the District started with metrics this year: the number of cases, the ability to staff, and the hospital capacity. Of the four metrics that the Department of Financial Regulations posits, one was getting close: the 5% positivity rate of cases on a seven day average. Gallagher stated that everyone knew that in-person instruction was better for most students. The District cases were less than one-quarter of a percent. She noted that the cases that the District had experienced came back to two events. The District was doing their part. She had never wanted to defend the District's teachers and staff more than she did right now because they were the ones thinking about what was best for the students. Gallagher noted that the Board meeting was the place for Board members to speak about their concerns, not giving recommendations to a community member. The Board needed to be together on this.

Gallagher then spoke about the time involved in contact tracing. It was a 24-hour job. Gallagher stated they never heard about a case from the Department of Health. The family was the one to first report it. Then the case was confirmed. A meeting was then requested and someone from the Department of Health interviewed the family. The school administrators had become experts at contact tracing and the work done by the teachers and nurses in being able to report close contacts at school was seamless. To do one contact tracing could take anywhere from seven to thirty-six hours.

Gallagher stated she was concerned about the seven days following Thanksgiving. The protocol would be that if the Department of Health said there was a confirmed case, the schools would quarantine the pod and would ask that the households quarantine as well. While the Department of Health would say everyone else could return to school, the District needed time to deep clean and to ensure nothing was missed in the contact tracing. Gallagher asked if the public could fault the District for being so careful. If the majority of schools had cases simultaneously that would be an easy decision. Gallagher stated the cases they had were community driven and there wasn't a single case of school transmission.

Bezio stated he had been personally impacted by this situation twice, as his wife worked at Waterville Elementary. They had had to go to remote learning to do contract tracing and he felt that was the prudent approach. He appreciated the data-driven, thoughtful, approach that was being applied to this school year. He would be supportive of a policy that stated if the majority of District schools were impacted by COVID, that the District would go fully remote. The difficulty with the virus was that people could be asymptomatic and there could be a number of positive cases that went undetected.

Darcey Fletcher reported the Association had distributed a survey on the 13th shortly after the Tech Center, Middle School, and Waterville went remote. 70% of the 200 people that responded thought going fully remote was the best option right now. Teachers were scared and anxious because they could be bringing this into their families. Fletcher provided a personal story on how the positive cases had impacted her family. Fletcher said she would be the first to stand with Gallagher due to the support she had given the educators and support staff. Fletcher believed that children should be in school but she didn't think that was the best thing right now. The faculty and support staffs were struggling and it was hard every day. People were not being as kind to each other as they had been in the past. Betzi Goodman added that teachers cared deeply about the families and students they worked with and it was a tough struggle to put your students first while compromising your family.

Gallagher reported that Lamoille South had opened for four days and then back to two days. OSSU was going remote from the end of Thanksgiving until December 15th. Calais just went remote for two weeks after Thanksgiving. Barre had the highest number of cases and was remote right now. Again, if cases

were increasing, if staff numbers were low, or if hospitalizations were increasing, either the state or the District would have to make a decision. Gallagher reiterated that the community was struggling as well and stated that this was the worst time not to be unified.

Nielsen speaking to the Board, administration, teachers and staff, said he had hoped to make it through to Thanksgiving. After that he thought some decisions would be made for the District. Nielsen said that everyone was very much appreciated. He knew from personal experience that individuals were working beyond the hours that the contract said they should. He stated the Board was very supportive of Gallagher and the decisions she would have to make.

Principal/Director Updates:

Belvidere/Waterville: Epstein reported it had been a tricky month. Waterville had been experiencing cases and it had taken its toll on the staff's energy. Epstein acknowledged the incredible work that her nurse had done and how supportive and helpful Gallagher and Kelley had been. Despite pivoting back and forth between remote and in-person, the team had been amazing. In the past few years the school had done a food drive for families in Belvidere and Waterville at Thanksgiving. The first year they had provided five food baskets and last year they provided seven food baskets. This year there would be twelve food baskets. In years past the community had been asked for donations. This year teachers and staff donated everything. Epstein thanked all those who participated in that. The art teacher at the school participated in a racial equity class and received a grant for some books that would help to support some of the education in the school.

Cambridge: Anderson stated her staff continued to amaze her and make her proud. They had survived having their first case of COVID-19 in the school. She was pleased to say that all went very smoothly and it helped to have Gallagher by her side. Anderson and the school nurse performed the contact tracing and it took twenty hours between the two of them to do the work. She wanted people to know the amount of time it would take if they had more than one case. Anderson thought it was an unreasonable expectation that schools would be able to handle all of the contact tracing. However, it was clear that they could contact people faster than the Department of Health could. From that standpoint, the school was doing the community a great service by shutting things down and getting people in quarantine as fast as possible. The school would be holding their first virtual assembly tomorrow and an ice cream party to celebrate the fact that the children and staff had done a fabulous job following safety protocol. Anderson said the Lamoille North faculty was proving themselves to be extraordinary, especially faced with the challenges they were facing right now. There was a great deal of trepidation and fear and she wanted people to recognize that. Anderson then said that all students who wished to return to school for four day instruction would be returning on November 30th.

Eden: Mascolino stated that people were feeling anxious and on edge. They were planning ahead for remote learning should that occur. They were planning parent conferences and some professional development. It was hard to keep focused and the teachers were tremendous preparing for both possibilities. The District had made good headway in getting devices to all students and getting them situated on educational platforms.

Hyde Park: Reilly had been out for a week and she complimented her staff for the amazing work they had done in her absence. Three classrooms were added and between fifty and sixty additional students would be coming in four days a week. She thanked the teachers and staff for everything they had done. Reilly said her staff had shown such kindness and supportiveness and she was grateful every day that she was there.

Johnson: Manning stated they had distributed a survey asking parents if they were interested in changing the model of education and there was a hefty response. Meetings were held to determine if they could make room for more students, desks were ordered, and parents were contacted to discuss what they wanted for their children. As of November 30th they would have 32 students increasing from two

days to four days, one student would be going from fully remote to two days a week, six students would be going fully remote. The change would result in a net of 27 more students in the building on Monday. Manning stated that every school classroom, except for one, had an additional student and each teacher had to rethink the floor plan of their room. He commended the teachers and custodial staff for their work in eventually being able to accommodate every request. The playground was now open and students had been great following the rules as far as staying in their assigned area.

Middle School: Maurice expressed her appreciation to Darcey Fletcher for her work in contact tracing for the middle school. The support staff was crucial in making this all work. Additionally, the maintenance and custodial department had been top notch in working with the teachers, making sure that desks were set up as they needed to be. All guidelines were being met. Maurice noted they had had some calls from parents who had wanted to move back from four days to two days. There was still a great deal of trepidation in the community. She commended her staff for their ingenuity and creativity. Students were currently participating in the King Arthur Flour Bake for Good campaign, which had students baking two loaves of bread. One loaf was for their family and one was to share with another family. iPads were now up to date. Some of the teams were working on student-led conferences in a new way. The science department and STEM class were looking at the scientific method of flight. Bottle rockets and paper airplane experiments were being done.

High School: Schaffer noted the Association's survey and applied it to him personally, stating that he was the one who scanned each person coming into the building. He did so at his own personal risk because he loved the school and the people. When he looked at the leadership across Vermont and across the country, there was none finer than Superintendent Gallagher. Schaffer encouraged people to continue in the same vein as they had been. People had risen to the occasion and he thanked members of the Association, his peers and Gallagher for leading the way.

GMTCC: Remmers stated that GMTCC had been the first to have COVID cases in their school. They had three cases all contained to the same pod. He appreciated working with Gallagher and Kelley. The professionalism of the staff had been amazing. That professionalism came with all the anxiety, concerns, and mixed opinions about what should or should not be done at this time. It was a difficult time in education right now. Remmers noted he had hoped to update the Board on funds from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER). They were currently going back and forth with the Agency of Education and he hoped to have information at the next Board meeting. Remmers then talked about Elias Gillen, a student in the Creative Media program, taught by Matt Neckers, who was informed that Senator Leahy had seen a video that Gillen had made for Jenna's House. Leahy contacted Greg Tatro of Jenna's House to offer his financial support to the program. In the midst of a virus, a student took skills that he had learned in this program, applied it on his own, which then supported an important organization.

Other Business: Gallagher stated she didn't know any other district where she could call anyone in the District and they would ask immediately what could be done together to find a solution. That was because the District members had relationships with each other. This was a group that shared a lot and did a lot for each other. This needed to be a tight group, especially now. She thanked everyone for supporting the administration, teachers and support staff.

Laflam asked if the Board was interested in doing some kind of walkthrough of the completed gym, cafeteria and stage on December 28th. Nielsen stated that would be a good idea.

Adjourn: Miller made a motion, seconded by Hayford, to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 p.m.