

**Lamoille North Supervisory Union and
Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District Board
Minutes of Special Board Meeting
August 7, 2020**

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

Board Members Absent: Hyde Park: Lisa Barry, Tina Lowe; Johnson: Bobbie Moulton

Administrators Present: Catherine Gallagher, Deb Clark, Charleen McFarlane, Michele Aumand, Denise Maurice, Brian Schaffer, Dylan Laflam, Flo Kelley, Tommy O'Connor, Mary Anderson, Janet Murray, Wendy Savery, Erik Remmers, Danielle Shoda, Darcy Fletcher

Minute Taker: Sue Trainor

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Public Comment: Chair Nielsen called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. An item was added to the agenda: Approve the Johnson Elementary Long-Term Substitute and Special Educator Hire. Bezio made a motion to approve the amended agenda, seconded by Sweet. The motion passed unanimously.

LNSU/LNMUUSD Routine Business: Consent Agenda Items:

Minutes of the July 20, 2020, Special Meeting, and July 28, 2020, Personnel Committee Meeting:

Orost made a motion, seconded by Prescott, to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Board Orders: Miller made a motion to approve the Board Orders. Stebbins seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

LNSU Support Staff Master Agreement: Prescott asked for a motion to ratify the one-year Support Staff Master Agreement for July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. Stebbins made a motion, seconded by Fagnant, to ratify the agreement. Prescott then reported that on behalf of the BNC they had been happy to be able to resume bargaining after the school closure. Under this agreement, each employee in the bargaining unit would receive a \$.50 increase. The new hire schedule would have a \$.30 increase so that current employees could grow ahead of the newly hired staff. They had changed an item in the agreement that now allowed the Superintendent to approve rates above the base rate for new hires. This item had already been approved by the Board. The current health insurance provision would sunset effective January 1, 2021 and would be replaced with the benefits as required by the arbitration award and the resolution of negotiations by the state-wide commission on public school employee health benefits. The life insurance had increased from \$50,000 to \$70,000. Prescott clarified that Cambridge would be voting on this item separately later in this meeting. The motion then passed unanimously.

Approve Pay Increase for Hourly Non-Represented Staff: Prescott stated that in the past the Board had approved the same pay increase for hourly non-represented staff as had been ratified under the Support Staff Master Agreement. Stebbins made a motion, seconded by Fagnant, to approve the same pay increase to hourly non-represented staff as that approved under the Support Staff Master Agreement. Prescott clarified that each employee would receive a \$.50 increase and the new hire schedule would have a \$.30 increase so that current employees could grow ahead of the newly hired staff. Lamell asked about salary freezes or what would happen in the event schools were closed down again. Prescott stated schools would not shut down, that they would be held remotely if necessary, and that despite the schools having moved to remote learning staff had continued to work throughout that time.

Lamell had been under the impression that the support staff had not been working full-time. Gallagher stated that was incorrect. That, in fact, staff had been working all summer. Miller asked what positions were in the hourly non-represented support staff category. McFarlane stated it was all hourly staff in Central Office, Human Resources, and Finance, as well as administrative assistants in the buildings. Miller

stated she believed staff was working harder than before. She thought the \$.50 increase was deserved. Barnes asked if they were being compensated for overtime. McFarlane stated there was no overtime. The motion then passed unanimously.

Approve the Hire of a Long-Term Substitute and Special Educator at Johnson Elementary School:

McFarlane informed the Board that the recommendation was to hire Carrie Jensen as the Johnson long-term teaching substitute who would then eventually transition to special education. She is a licensed elementary educator and would need a provisional license in special education. The recommendation was to hire her at \$51,520 based on her experience. Hunsberger made a motion, seconded by Bezio, to approve the hire. J. Sander informed the Board that Cambridge members could vote on this item, as special educators were paid through Central Office. The motion then passed unanimously.

Recess: The Board meeting was recessed at 6:17 p.m. so that Cambridge members could hold a meeting. The Board reconvened at 6:22 p.m.

Reopening Schools: Presentations by Superintendent, Union Leadership, Selected

Principals/Director, Facilities Director and Nurse Leader: Gallagher outlined the history of the past few months. In March, the schools went into an emergency situation and then quickly realized that schools would be closed for in-person instruction for the remainder of the year. Shelter in place then went into effect.

Gallagher talked about the guidance offered by the Agency of Education. The push was to return to in-person instruction, initially at the elementary level. There was a political agenda, an education agenda, and a health agenda. Because of the District's commitment to the family, students and staff they were most concerned about health. The AOE initially suggested that all districts make their own decisions. Guidance two weeks ago stated that the School Boards should weigh in on the decision. This week the AOE advised that it was a school district decision. The school districts had asked for a unified decision and asked for leadership from the state. Gallagher stated that would not be forthcoming. Gallagher noted that other countries had experienced better results in the rate of illness when they used a unified approach. On a microcosmic level, Vermont school districts were doing different things. Two districts had just decided to go fully remote. Other districts were back to the table for the third time considering options.

Gallagher stated that when it was a weather day Gallagher talked to a number of sources but ultimately it came down to what the Superintendent felt was safe for the District's families, students, and staff. Some families would complain, while others were supportive. Similarly, Gallagher now had heard a number of comments from families, ranging from threats of lawsuits to statements of appreciation for trying to accommodate everyone's opinions. Gallagher understood both sentiments, recognizing that people were anxious. She noted that as Governor Scott had slowly opened the spigot, the District decided to try a particular model for up to a maximum of 45 days and then revisit any decision that had been made. Ultimately the goal was to have children and teachers back at school safely.

The District was looking at a fully remote or hybrid schedule of two days in, three days out, or on a case by case basis, four days in, one day out. They were working to ensure that teachers were protected and that students felt comfortable learning in class. Gallagher noted that she believed there would be times that the school would have to return to a fully remote learning environment at some point.

An initial survey that was done showed that most parents did not want their students to return to school at all. That led to a second survey which provided an application for any parents who wanted their students to continue fully remote learning. Many parents stated yes, but only for two or three days a week. Each school's team had reviewed the results and looked at how to offer a hybrid or fully remote model. The Curriculum Director and the Virtual Academy Coordinator had looked at better remote learning options. Gallagher reminded the Board that the system of learning offered in the spring was not the best as it was offered quickly in an emergency situation.

Gallagher stated they would still be offering education to students. It was the location that was being reviewed at this time. They would look to open the spigot after 30 to 45 days because ultimately the District wanted students in the buildings. Gallagher outlined the amount of communication that had been offered, including surveys, district office hours, and community forums that would begin next week. The District was moving forward in ways that they believed were safe and accommodating the number of people in the classrooms safely. They had been told by the State that if there was not enough personnel to teach due to illness, the school would need to close. If there were no bus monitors, busses could not be used. If there was not enough PPE, schools would not be allowed to open. State regulations required that students wear masks all day. If children were at school, they were required to wear masks.

Gallagher expressed appreciation to all those who had worked to come up with solutions and she understand that some people were angry. However, the District needed to think about safety in a holistic way and they were doing the best they could with the ideas they had. What was being proposed was either a fully remote model or a hybrid model. They were looking into how to help with childcare. Gallagher offered contact information for the Deputy Commissioner for the Child Development Division, Steven Berbeco, who had promised to help everyone with childcare. It was the Commissioner's belief that the schools should not be concerned about childcare because schools should be offering education.

Ideally the AOE would make a unilateral decision and at any time they could. Gallagher didn't see that happening though. Therefore, LNMUUSD was working to unveil the best plan they could. Gallagher also wanted to thank everyone involved: union leaders, teachers, staff and task force members for their deep commitment to making this plan work.

Danielle Shoda spoke as the co-president of the Lamoille North Unified Education Association. In speaking with teachers and staff the overwhelming issue they heard was anxiety and concern for safety. Developing the plans had been hard work and implementing them would be harder. For some of the staff it would be the most challenging work of their career. It was unclear what challenges would arise in the first week of school. This created anxiety, but the teachers were trying their hardest to make this school year as successful as possible.

Shoda stated that throughout the spring and summer employees at every school had pivoted at every turn and taken setbacks in stride. They had been pillars of support for their students. Safety, flexibility and support were necessary in order to continue their efforts. Shoda outlined what teachers and support staff saw as silver linings in all of this. They were excited to offer more opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. They were excited to expand their own learning and work collaboratively with colleagues across the district. She noted that the employees wanted to be with their students but each employee had their own families that they worried about as well. She asked for the community to be patient.

Darcy Fletcher, co-president of the Lamoille North Unified Education Association which represented 250 teachers and support staff, then addressed the Board. Employees were excited about seeing their students on September 8th as well as experiencing crippling anxiety about their health and safety, as well as their own families and their student's families. Fletcher stated Vermont had been fortunate not to see the devastation that the rest of the country had experienced, but with the opening of schools it was not a matter of if an outbreak occurred, but when. At that time schools would have to close.

Comments from her peers included the fact that staff was being asked to provide flexibility, safety and security when they needed the same reciprocity; a flexible schedule was being created for students and the same should be afforded to teachers and staff. The employee's mental and physical health were being forced to take a back seat in a profession that was already undervalued. Employees were frustrated and scared to come into a building knowing that many community members were not following safety protocols and not modeling safety protocols to their children. These same children would be coming to school on September 8th.

Fletcher stated she had been in her building most days since March, wearing a mask and following the safety guidelines. She had been helping the cafeteria staff who were making less than \$14 an hour, by delivering meals to homes all summer long while wearing a mask. While she missed her students, she didn't miss them enough to put their lives in jeopardy or the lives of her co-workers.

Flo Kelley then addressed the Board, stating that she had been embedded in the health and safety issues relative to COVID-19 since March. She had been selected to be on the Vermont State School Nurse Association as part of their district representatives and they had worked diligently as a group to come up with health and safety recommendations. She was also involved in the National Association of School Nurses. The District followed the standards of practice that were put forth by the Vermont Department of Health and the AOE. Those guidelines were the primary guidelines and best practices used in the District. The school nurses in the District had been meeting continually and had a strong health plan that followed best practices. Guidance was updated frequently and was subject to rapid change.

Kelley explained that there would be daily health checks. Each morning students, staff and anyone entering school buildings or busses would be required to complete a daily health screen. The health screen required a temperature check and responding to mandated questions provided to the District. It was critical for everyone's safety that state guidelines for travel and return be followed. These guidelines could be found on the Vermont Department of Health website. Each school would determine how the health screens would be conducted. The elementary schools would be likely to have a drive-up situation where the student was screened while in the car. The high school would be doing their screening on-site in the buildings. Parents, visitors and vendors would not be allowed in the buildings unless pre-arranged.

Face coverings would be required. These needed to be cloth coverings. However, there were supplies of surgical masks for families and staff if needed. These were to be worn at all times unless they were eating or drinking or outside where social distancing could be maintained. Families could provide their own cloth face coverings for children. Diligent handwashing was going to be required of both staff and students.

Students would be required to maintain social distancing as much as possible. Classrooms would be reconfigured with physical distancing in mind to the best degree possible. Holding classes outside when feasible was recommended. Student transitions from class to class was to be limited but on occasion would be required. The key to those transitions was going to be taking attendance for contact control.

Students could continue to bring their own meals from home or they could order from the cafeteria. All snacks and meals were going to be served in classrooms. When possible, classrooms could go outside for lunch.

The sharing of materials among students needed to be limited. Student belongings were to be kept in designated areas reserved for them individually. Unnecessary items from home should not be brought to school. Children's books, art supplies, paper-based materials, envelopes were not considered items of high-risk infection and did not need to be cleaned or disinfected. The Health Department was doing all contact tracing. The Health Department would notify administration if there was a positive COVID case. The Health Department would then determine the next steps because they were responsible.

Dylan Laflam, Facilities Manager, stated they had hired thirteen temporary employees to deal with the added duties. These duties included disinfecting all bathrooms every hour on the hour. All year-round staff would be certified in disinfecting and control of infectious disease. Custodial procedures had now been revised to deal with COVID. All schools would now have a mild disinfectant that would be used when school was in session and then a stronger disinfectant would be used at night.

Laflam then stated the HVAC system was 100% operational. All dampers, filters and units were working. The last three weeks all filters had been changed. Direct outside air would be brought in 24 hours a day.

This was a big change from the way the HVAC used to run and was far more than the recommended amount. Temporary isolation rooms had been built in every building and were situated in the gym. The room was a plastic room with a chair in it. Each room had dedicated air purifiers.

As far as classrooms, the Facilities team was following AOE and DHS guidance. All classrooms would be facing the same direction and would maintain a 3-foot distance. Where that was not possible they had purchased plexiglass dividers and other equipment to maintain barriers between students. The District now had about a three-month supply of PPE supply.

Wendy Savery, Curriculum Director, then spoke about the future of remote learning and the need for ongoing social and emotional support for students. Savery stated she was determined to focus on a strong continuity of learning regardless of location and having plentiful resources, content and training for any possibility they were to face. In June, it was clear school would look very different. Health, safety and instruction were on the forefront of the efforts to create new learning environments. It was clear that there may be a quick pivot at some point in the year to remote learning with little to no warning. What was clear from feedback was the need for consistency across classrooms and schools, to keep things manageable for parents and to provide training on tools and resources to assist with online learning.

The District had decided to partner with the Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative (VTVLC) for all K-6 schools and a number of teachers at the secondary level would also participate. VTVLC had been in existence for many years and had a strong online presence. Their online system provided access to a standards-based curriculum, instruction and delivery system. Hundreds of courses and materials would be available. Savery outlined the benefits and structure of VTVLC and explained what a typical day of full remote learning would look like. The hybrid model would see the teachers using the same content and materials to maximize their in-person time with students and then to set them up for success with their continued work completion when they were off-site. At the secondary level they would continue to use Schoology or the VLC Canvas system. This system would provide the consistency across schools that the District and parents desired. Progress would be monitored to ensure goals were met in having solid strategies for transitioning between remote and in-person instruction no matter what each day brought.

Mary Anderson, Principal of Cambridge Elementary School, provided an overview of the first 45 days of elementary school. All K-6 schools were planning for a hybrid model of two days of in-person instruction and three days of remote instruction. All students enrolled in the hybrid model would work remotely on Wednesdays, attend school on Mondays and Tuesdays or Thursday and Friday. The goal of this type of instruction was to lessen the number of students in a classroom.

The remote model would involve teachers and students interacting regularly through email, phone, conversations and various web tools and students would work at their own pace and on their own time. Under certain circumstances a student may receive in-person instruction for four days. This would be a school-based team decision specific to student needs and the capacity of the individual elementary schools and would be considered on a case by case basis.

Janet Murray spoke of early education/pre-school plans. Murray stated they were waiting for official written guidance from the Agency of Education Early Education team as well as the Agency of Human Services Child Development Division (CDD). All early education programs at Lamoille had always been run under the CDD. The programs were licensed through the CDD so she was well versed in trying to manage health and safety guidelines. The official guidance was expected to come out next week.

Murray stated there were two goals for the youngest students. The first was to meet the educational needs of the youngest learners in a safe and healthy environment. The second goal was to do the best they could to align their model with the K-12 system in a hybrid situation, with classes being held on Monday and Tuesday or Thursday and Friday, in an effort to meet the needs of families as well.

Denise Maurice, Middle School Principal, expressed appreciation for the fact that there were over 160 people attending this online Board meeting. She outlined the planning that took place, beginning in March, to deal with instruction, student participation, and developing relationships even though remote. It was clear from the survey data that most parents wanted students in the building as much as possible but there was a large number that wanted to make sure that the number of students in attendance were kept in small groups. To that end, the hybrid model was developed to allow students to attend school two days a week. Parents were also concerned about having a uniform platform that they would be able to access to help their students. The school would continue to invest in Schoology and to offer office hours to help parents and students who had questions about Schoology. There would also be a fully remote option where students would be able to engage with the school. The teachers might not be from the middle school but would have all the proper endorsements.

The model at this time was that 7th graders would be in the school on Monday and Tuesday, everyone would be remote on Wednesday, and the 8th grade would be in the building on Thursday and Friday. They hoped to have family members attend school on the same day as much as possible so Maurice would be working with the elementary and high school principals to create that continuity. They would also be looking at social and emotional growth and continuing the focus on restorative practices and having circle meetings in the morning and afternoon to support their student growth throughout the day.

Brian Schaffer, High School Principal, stated his school was full of innovators who were agile and responsive in a fluid situation. Schaffer noted the fact that flexible learning options had been available to students for years, through online courses that were linked to instructors, independent studies, and dual enrollment and early college options.

Schaffer stated feedback from parents and students had some universal themes. One was that the workload that could be delivered to a student in a classroom wasn't one that could be expected in a remote setting. Communication was often too much or not enough. Emails were overloading students and families. Training on how to learn in a remote environment was needed. There was also a need for some type of connectivity between all students.

The result of all of this was to develop a quarterly a.m. and p.m. schedule. Students would spend their mornings with one instructor, with supportive structures such as restorative dialogues put in place, then switch to a p.m. schedule with a different instructor. They would be following the pod model and change pods at the quarter. More detail would be provided at the upcoming community forum.

Erik Remmers, Tech Center Director, spoke about the GMTCC's proposed schedule which was based on their unique capacities and structures and instructional focus. Students would remain in cohort groups throughout the day. Class sizes were already below what the State recommended. The schedule would be a hybrid model with all students in-person on Monday and Tuesday. Wednesday would be remote. This would allow for a deep cleaning in the facilities. This would also allow instructors to work with students remotely and get a routine in place over time. All students would then return on Thursday and Friday. The Tech Center would not be offering a fully remote option for their students at the beginning of the year.

Gallagher outlined the community forum schedule for the following week. She then noted that a final survey would be sent out over the weekend to parents. This survey would ask for the family's choice of full remote learning or the hybrid model, for family member information which would allow, to the extent possible, to place families on the same schedule, and would ask if transportation was needed. The application would be due back by the end of the day on Thursday.

Tommy O'Connor, Virtual Remote Learning Coordinator, stated his role was to support not only the student and teachers but also the parents. The K-6 afterschool enrichment program set out their guidelines and the afterschool program would follow the model set up by the elementary schools. That would involve the hybrid model with the pod and would allow students to attend the afterschool program on the days they

attended school. O'Connor noted they had held a very successful remote program this summer with almost fifty students taking part. Therefore, they would also be offering remote afterschool enrichment activities to all families who wished to participate.

Gallagher then stated that it seemed some people might not be prepared to decide if they would participate in the hybrid model until after hearing what was discussed at the forum. Gallagher stated they could respond following their school's forum.

Mark Nielsen, Chair of the Board, stated there were 160 people participating in the meeting. This meant a great deal to the Board and the staff. Speaking on behalf of the Board and staff, Nielsen stated they would do everything they could to ensure everyone involved was safe. He stated that due to his job he had a good view of what was being done on a worldwide scale. As a result, he thought the District was doing a good job. He thanked everyone associated with the school for their hard work during a summer when they might not have normally had to do as much work.

Orost and Fagnant asked if the School Board needed to approve the plans outlined at the meeting. Gallagher reported that the head of the Vermont AOE stated that by statute the decision was delegated to the Superintendent. It did not need approval at this point.

Other Business: There was no other business.

Adjourn: Orost made a motion, seconded by Hayford, to adjourn the meeting at 7:33 p.m.