

**Lamoille North Supervisory Union and
Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District Board
Minutes of Meeting
April 12, 2021**

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

Board Members Absent: Bobbie Moulton

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

Others Present: Denise Sargent, Greg Stokes, Betzi Goodman, Kevin Leavitt, Kathy Marchant, Elizabeth Lamphere

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. Whitcomb made a motion, seconded by Bezio, to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously. McFarlane then asked to add the hire of a Lamoille Union High School physical education teacher. Stebbins made a motion to approve the amended agenda. Whitcomb seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. A letter was forwarded to the Board as part of the Public Comment section of the meeting. That letter is attached at the end of the minutes.

LNSU/LNMUUSD Routine Business: Consent Agenda Items

Minutes of the March 22, 2021, meeting; April 6, 2021, Special Meeting: Whitcomb made a motion, seconded by Stebbins, to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Board Orders: Miller made a motion to approve all Board Orders listed on the agenda, seconded by Bezio. Miller noted there was a large amount taken out from the CARE Relief Package of between \$700,000 and \$800,000. The motion passed unanimously.

Approve Acceptance of Federal Funds & Subgrant Agreements and Assign Agent(s) for

Financial Matters: Clark explained that this was the annual subgrant agreement. LNSU acted as the recipient and pass-through of federal and state grants. This document would approve Clark and the Board Chair as the official signers for the District. Clark asked the Modified Unified Union School District to approve the subgrant agreement with Lamoille North Supervisory Union for the fiscal year July 1, 2021 ending June 30, 2022. Whitcomb made a motion, seconded by Lamell, to approve the request. The motion passed unanimously.

Belvidere PreK Recommendation: Hulse, as Acting Director of Early Education, stated she had been tasked to follow up with the Board regarding questions from the public about whether PreK would be offered at the Belvidere school for the 2021-2022 school year.

Regarding the public comment letter presented to the Board, Hulse clarified that it was made clear on two separate occasions there would be no written report. Administration was not unwilling to share information with the public but felt to do so would be inappropriate prior to sharing its recommendation to the Board. Finally, Administration did not allude to closure during a phone conversation with a member of the public.

As far as Universal PreK, it was important to note that per Act 166 the District was not required to offer a school-run program as long as Act 166 was supported through other options, which the LNSU did. The decision to close Belvidere PreK this current school year was due to low enrollment. With only two

students enrolling it was not feasible to run the program. Looking forward to next year they would take a common sense approach to address the situation. Belvidere PreK was still in the budget and it had never been removed. According to LaFlam, the cost to get the Belvidere building up and running would be nominal, if any. If current COVID protocols remained in place next year, LaFlam estimated the cost would be \$19,000 above the current budget.

Currently the projected numbers of interested students was six. However, registration was not yet complete and those numbers could increase or decrease. Discussion was taking place as to what model would work best. Because the teaching staff shared time with Johnson, it was a logistical challenge. Prior to COVID, Belvidere ran a two-day, 6 ½ hour, program that included nap and snack time. Transportation would not be offered for PreK at this time. In speaking with Denise Sargent and Jan Epstein, there were some items of concern: there was no nurse on that campus and if the power went out it would be hard for the folks to communicate with Waterville due to cell service.

Given the recognized importance of a town-based PreK, the Superintendent and Hulse recommended reopening Belvidere PreK for the 2021-2022 school year with the caveat that if they could not staff the program the public PreK option would return to Johnson Elementary School. Parents could also apply to other public PreK programs in the district as well. Additionally there were sixteen PreK partners for families to choose from.

Gallagher stated the report that the person who wrote the letter to the Board seemed to be referencing was likely the space/use analysis that LaFlam presented several years ago. Further, at the time the decision was made to move to Johnson there were only two students that had applied. This year the District hoped to have even more students apply and therefore it made sense to try to open the next school year.

Sweet asked if there was a cutoff time frame as far as staffing. Sweet wanted parents to have enough notice so they could apply to another school/program in the district. Hulse stated there should be time to find options if they were not able to open Belvidere. Parents would have the option again to utilize Johnson Elementary School. Parents would also be able to apply to the in-district public PreK programs or to apply to the District's partner programs. Stebbins asked if there was a student number they were looking at when determining whether to hold a program at Belvidere. Hulse replied that she and Gallagher would have to consult about that. Orost stated she assumed the Budget Committee would return to reviewing the space/use analysis. LaFlam stated they were still looking at it. Sweet made a motion, seconded by Bezio, to accept the recommendation. The motion passed unanimously.

High School Physical Education Teacher: McFarlane informed the Board that the recommendation was to hire Gregory Davis of Johnson Elementary School to be the High School Physical Education teacher. This would be a lateral move as far as salary. Stebbins made a motion, seconded by Orost, to approve the recommendation. The motion passed unanimously.

Approve Middle School Special Educator Hire: McFarlane informed the Board that the recommendation was to hire Brian Irwin as the Middle School Special Educator. The Master Agreement stated that no one should be hired above a step 12. Irwin came with eighteen years of experience. In the past the Board had considered a two for one ratio beyond twelve years. Therefore, the recommendation was to hire Irwin at the Masters Step 15 level at a salary of \$62,510. Stebbins made a motion, seconded by Miller, to approve the recommendation. Prescott wanted it included in the recommendation and approval that this was not precedent setting and was a one-time option. McFarlane stated that section 6.4.3 gave the Board the opportunity to do this. Prescott agreed, but stated if they continued to do this it would be precedent setting. The motion then passed unanimously.

Approve Director of Early Education Hire: McFarlane stated the recommendation was to hire Melinda Mascolino to be the Director of Early Education, beginning July 1. This would be a lateral move. Gallagher

stated this was a unique opportunity. Gallagher explained that Mascolino had been tasked with developing a pre-K program during her prior employment, dealing with licensing and compliance and creating schedules with the early educators, and that she also had experience teaching kindergarten. None of the other applicants had the well-rounded experience that Mascolino had. Now they would need to start a rigorous round of hiring for Eden Central School. Whitcomb made a motion, seconded by Stebbins, to approve the recommendation. Miller reported she had worked previously with Mascolino and she had great confidence in her. The motion passed unanimously.

Approve Non-Represented Administrative/Exempt Staff Increases for FY22: McFarlane informed the Board the recommendation was to approve a 3% increase for the non-represented administrative/exempt staff. McFarlane noted that the comprehensive increase for teachers had been 3.24%. Whitcomb made a motion, seconded by Stebbins, to approve the recommendation. The motion passed unanimously.

Personnel Matter: Gallagher requested that the Board go into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter, the premature general public knowledge would place the public body or person involved at a substantial disadvantage. Gallagher requested that the Board members, Remmers, Clark, and McFarlane participate. Stebbins made a motion, seconded by Bezio, to go into Executive Session at 6:28 p.m. The Board reconvened at 6:34 p.m.

Purchased Services Discussion: Clark requested the Board go into Executive Session, as the premature public knowledge of what would be discussed could put the District at a disadvantage. Prescott made the motion to go into Executive Session. Clark requested that the Board members, LaFlam, Manning and Karyl Kent (not present) participate. The Board went into Executive Session at 6:37 p.m. The Board reconvened at 6:52 p.m.

Use of Capital Reserve Funds for Architectural & Engineering Fees: LaFlam requested the Board go into Executive Session, as prior public knowledge of the discussion could place the District at a disadvantage. Stebbins made a motion, seconded by Sweet, to go into Executive Session. LaFlam requested that the Board members, Gallagher, Clark, Mascolino and McFarlane participate. The Board went into Executive Session at 6:53 p.m. The Board reconvened at 7:12 p.m.

Clark requested that the Board authorize the use of Eden capital funds to cover architectural and/or engineering fees to explore expansion of instructional space at Eden Elementary School. Hunsberger made a motion, seconded by Bezio, to approve the request. The motion passed unanimously. Cambridge members abstained from the vote.

Whitcomb stated he had wanted to discuss this item and was unable to unmute himself before the vote was taken. He stated he was an Eden resident and had things to say about this item. Nielsen stated Whitcomb could make his comments now if he would like to. Whitcomb said it wouldn't do any good, as the vote had already been taken. Whitcomb stated he didn't believe in hiding things from the public. As taxpayers he believed they should know what was going on at all times. He stated he would have a lot to say about it when it came out to the public and he may even bring it out to the public himself. Whitcomb stated Nielsen should wait to ask if everybody had spoken who wished to speak because he couldn't get in before the vote was taken. Nielsen stated that he would advise Whitcomb, as chairman alongside Nielsen, that what was said in executive session should stay in executive session and it would be unwise to discuss the executive session information. Whitcomb stated he was not a fan of executive sessions.

Miller asked if the vote could be retaken. Whitcomb stated it couldn't be. He stated that this was a study and not something that had been fully decided. Whitcomb didn't know how much money was in the account. Whitcomb stated the Board didn't want that information to be available to prospective bidders but he believed companies were honest and would provide an honest proposal.

Bid Approval and Approve Use of Capital Funds for Wireless Access Point Upgrades (ERate): Pena informed the Board that the District was in Phase 2 of the Wireless Access Point (WAP) project. Items were submitted in March for payment through the E-Rate Program. However, the program did not cover some items and had needed to be bid out. GMTCC funding for upgrades would come from the GEER grant. Bids were received and Pena would like to continue with the purchase of the items noted in his memorandum to the Board. Administration recommended the Board move to accept the vendors identified through the bid process in the amount of \$337,137.93. Additionally, Administration requested a 10% overage allowance of \$33,714 to cover modifications required to support the project. Stebbins made a motion, seconded by J. Sander, to approve the recommendation. The motion passed unanimously.

Use of the LU/GMTCC Campus by Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Management District (LRSWMD) to Host Household Waste Collection event on 9/18/21: LaFlam stated that the LRSWMD had contacted him about moving their hazardous waste pickup to the Lamoille campus. They had seen the success the District had with food distribution with the National Guard. This would mean a small interruption to sports events. Set-up would take place on Friday evening, September 17th and the collection would take place on Saturday, September 18th. Stebbins made a motion to approve the use of Lamoille Union GMTCCC campus for the LRSWMD household waste collection on September 18th, seconded by Whitcomb. Miller asked if there was a potential problem with hazardous waste being on the campus. Whitcomb stated he was on the Solid Waste Board and this company was very experienced in handling hazardous waste. Whitcomb suggested that GMTCC students might be interested in watching the event. The motion passed unanimously.

Central Office Updates:

Gallagher welcomed Fagnant back to the Board. The Superintendent then informed the Board that new guidance had come out regarding COVID. Schools would no longer be screening students and staff and the distancing guidelines at the middle and high school had changed to three feet. Students were being invited back for four days of in-person instruction after the April break. Gallagher stated they were finding that students who were participating in in-person instruction were doing better than students in a hybrid model. Those students participating in fully remote learning were also doing well in certain subject areas. More information on this would be available to the Board in a week following the District's report to the State. The District was planning a robust K-12 summer program and was looking at how to transport students. There would be an academic component to the program, with tutors and clinicians on site. Gallagher reported that as long as the state of emergency ended, a remote program would not be offered next year.

Clark reported that year-end projections had gone out on Friday. Overall they looked good. The LNSU had some healthy projected reserves that would be helpful in FY23 and FY24. The elementary schools and GMTCC had been very conservative with their projections so the numbers were the lowest they would go. The numbers for the high school and middle school represented underutilized athletic budgets and unfilled positions.

Jeremy Scannell informed the Board that they had been awarded the Youth Employment Specialist Program grant. Vocational Rehabilitation would now fund a youth employment specialist position at the high school for two years. He thanked the Board and the Central Office for their help and support with this.

Principal/Director Updates:

Belvidere/Waterville: Epstein informed the Board that because of their small size they had been able to have most of their students in school four days a week early on. Looking at the recent data, some of the students with higher needs had made some gains but not quite what she would like, so she was excited to be able to offer a summer program to them. Alice Godin of NVU had received a grant and would partner with the school librarian and the 5th/6th grade teacher to create two story walks, one in the village of Waterville and the other on school property. The custodian had made posts and housing for the story

walk so they could be reusable. The teachers were preparing for the SBAC. It was Paraprofessional Day and they had held a nice celebration. Epstein stated her appreciation for the amazing work the paras do in helping to make the students successful.

Cambridge: Anderson stated the majority of Cambridge staff had had their second dose of the vaccine and the school had been fortunate to be able to keep the school open following the administration of the vaccines. Cambridge had two open positions: a special educator and an early childhood educator. They were busy interviewing for those positions. They had hired a new second grade teacher who had been a long-term substitute this year. SBAC testing was underway. The majority of their remote students were coming in to take the test. Anderson was happy to say that the 5th grade students had been able to participate in the StarBase Program. She reported she had been surprised to find that people from her school had applied for an Innovate/Educate Technology Grant.

Eden: Mascolino thanked the Board for their vote of confidence in her becoming the Director of the Early Education Program. She was looking forward to the plans for the summer program. It was clear there were some literacy challenges to address. The proficiency rates had been better two years ago. The school didn't have data for last year because they hadn't been able to do spring testing. Therefore, this year there would need to be a focus on literacy.

Hyde Park: Reilly informed the Board they were digging into the data to plan for next year. Some of the practices they had done this year had been very helpful in supporting students. The Leadership Team would be looking at practices that had taken place while at the Plaza. Out-of-classroom referrals were down 85%. It was clear this was because there weren't as many transitions, the students weren't going to the cafeteria, teachers were having lunch with the students and building relationships. The school was currently involved in the SBAC. Reilly stated almost all students were back in school, with 14 students continuing their remote learning. The remote students were thriving and enjoying it.

Johnson: Manning reported that having the PE teacher leave was a big loss to Johnson Elementary School and a huge win for the high school. They were now in the process of collecting resumes for that position. The second grade teacher position was now down to two finalists and each of them would be teaching a lesson to students this week. They had also posted a position for a literacy interventionist.

Middle School: Maurice reported they had begun their SBAC testing and it had gone very well. This Wednesday they would hold their next virtual Q&A with 6th grade parents. This week they would visit with Johnson and next week would be Waterville. The school counselor had been zooming with alumni and 6th graders. However, with the new guidelines, she was hoping to be able to bring sixth graders to the school. The gatherings would have to be smaller than in the past and scheduled over several days. Students missed being able to see the middle school and visit with the teachers last year.

High School: Pirie stated they had been inviting more students back to school for four-day instruction. Details had gone out to families about the summer programs. The program would run from July 5th through July 30th. A focus of the high school during the summer program would be on some recovery work. Pirie noted she had been able to participate with staff and LaFlam on graduation planning. Scheduling for next year had started. Remmers, Maurice and Pirie had been meeting to discuss lunch blocks for the campus and some next steps included continuing to meet with the District recovery team, analyzing data and determining student needs. Their hope was to come out with a structure that supported opportunity and rigor for each student. They were in the process of hiring a handful of positions. Pirie stated she was thankful for the committees that had been formed to take part in the interview process. Committee members included teachers, special educators, school counselors and students. Students had given up their free time to participate in the process.

GMTCC: Remmers provided the Board with a link to a video of the Skills USA event. This year the event was a little smaller because it was primarily remote. The Building Trades did not host a competition this

year. It was focused on digital media design and culinary classes. There were a number of first place winners, particularly in the creative media class. Remmers was very proud of the students and stated their success was a testament to the fact that they had been able to work very hard this year in their programs. Remmers also expressed appreciation to the teachers for all they did to support the students.

Other Business: Nielsen stated that last week was Support Staff Week. He expressed appreciation on behalf of the Board for all of the work that support staff did.

Adjourn: Orost made a motion, seconded by Miller, to adjourn the meeting at 7:57 p.m.

Sunday, April 10, 2021

Dear LNMUUSD Board Members,

I am writing to you all as it is my understanding that the School Board will be meeting on Monday, April 12th to discuss the Belvidere/Waterville Preschool Program. I would like to note that as of the evening of Sunday, April 11th the LNMUUSD School Board April 12th Agenda w/ login has not been posted on the LNSU website. Furthermore, I would like to apologize for not being able to attend in person due to work obligations. However, I felt it important to provide public comment as I believe in equal access and opportunity to education, particularly the early childhood education program serving Belvidere and Waterville – 2 of the 5 LNMUUSD communities.

I would like to begin by stating that my family was significantly impacted by the decision to suddenly close the school/program for the FY20-21 school year. At the Belvidere School open house in August, I was informed that five children were signed up to attend, which was approximately 80% of expected enrollment due to family decisions surrounding the pandemic. Immediately prior to the start of school parents were informed that the program lacked a required paraprofessional, and the class would be housed at Johnson in the interim until a para was employed. Three out of the five families decided to wait until a para was obtained due to distance and I was in regular contact with the preschool teacher during this time. The community rallied and found a qualified individual who applied for the position. The day prior to her interview she received word that the interview had been canceled and parents were later informed, without prior discussion, that the Johnson program had been made permanent in order to serve additional Johnson students. Therefore, less than half of the children in our community who chose to attend in-person public preschool at a program and location that received prior voter approval, were able to receive said education. Furthermore, the alternative offered was just unreasonable. Sending my daughter to school outside of the community would have required two hours of driving per day, not factoring in an employment commute. Due to everything the school system was going through at that time, phone calls were made but ultimately we kept quiet, did the juggle, tried to teach our kids the basics, asked our employers for compassion, etc. And the takeaway from those phone calls was administration, not the School Board per the Articles of Agreement, made a decision to close a school based on inaccurate information (i.e., there were only two students).

Now to present day, due to the situation my daughter, her classmates and their families were placed in this fall I inquired about next year's program after voting day and was informed that while included in the budget the Belvidere/Waterville program was up for debate. In March of this year, I contacted our Board members as well as administration and was informed that an analysis was being conducted with a summary/report to be issued in advance of a late March/early April meeting. I spoke with administration last week in order to gather information so I could provide an informed written statement for public comment. However, administration was unwilling to provide any information in advance of the meeting and stated nothing was in writing.

Now, I can only assume the administration will advocate for the closure of the Waterville/Belvidere Preschool Program based on what has been alluded to on the phone. I can also only assume the Board will indeed take up this issue tomorrow based on comments made by school officials as the agenda has not been posted stating there is a meeting. Regardless, I ask that the School Board not make any decisions at this time, but rather take the time to fully and thoughtfully investigate this topic, inform and invite impacted communities to the table, hear what impacted families have to say, and take a holistic

view when contemplating one piece of a larger puzzle. With that, I would like the Board to consider a few points.

- **REMOTENESS:** Future use of the underutilized Belvidere School building has come up several times during Board meetings and time and time again remoteness and transportation end up being the stumbling point. I want the Board to understand remoteness and transportation issues also work in the reverse. The other public schools in the district are lengthy drives and in the opposite direction of our main employment center (i.e., Chittenden County) and, to my knowledge, there are zero Act 166 eligible private preschools in our district.
- **ENROLLMENT:** How can the Board make a decision based on enrollment at this point in time? How do we know what preschool enrollment will be for the FY21-22 school year? We are still in the midst of covid uncertainty, its early April and there has only been one FPF post and a News & Citizen notice titled "Kindergarten Registration" that touches on Belvidere/Waterville preschool registration. Furthermore, I am not sure parents even know what they are signing up for at this point.
- **TRANSPORTATION:** It is my understanding that three-year-olds are not permitted to ride the bus and this past year no preschooler was permitted to ride the bus. Has transportation and/or bussing and/or personal transportation time and expense for Belvidere/Waterville preschoolers/preschool families been discussed or considered?
- **SCHEDULE CONFLICTS:** Has the implication of scheduling conflicts (e.g., start/end times, bussing, pick up/drop off, school events, afterschool programs/sports, etc.) for families served by multiple elementary schools been discussed?
- **BELVIDERE SCHOOL BUILDING:** If the Belvidere School building is closed, will the building be heated and maintained? What are the ongoing costs of maintaining the building? It should be noted that the building serves as the community's only emergency shelter, which is especially important given our remoteness and the uncertainty of climate change. Furthermore, the community paid for, invested in and cared for the building for decades. It would be a tragedy to see it fall into disrepair. What are the plans for and costs associated with maintaining the building? Does the Board plan to give the building back to the community for one dollar? If so, when?
- **SPACE ISSUES:** It is my understanding that the Waterville and Eden schools require additional space to function optimally and, perhaps more accurately, properly. Currently, our arithmetic/physical education teacher's office is in the gym equipment closet, which has also been used as space to assist children with special needs. I ask that the Board consider the larger picture when contemplating significant issues/decisions. Perhaps there are solutions or alternatives that would better serve children, families and communities and /or are more cost effective, such as utilizing the Belvidere School more fully, returning the Belvidere School to the town and using those cost savings to place an addition on the Waterville School or utilizing portable classrooms, etc.
- **AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT:** The ARPA, while still being deciphered and monies allotted, may bring significant funds to education/the district. Should we not see how funds will be divvied out prior to closing schools, eliminating programs and/or making significant decisions?

- **PUBLIC PROCESS:** I ask that the board not make this decision in a vacuum without informing effected communities about what is being considered and/or allowing those effected to participate in the public process.
- **LIFELONG IMPACT:** The science is there regarding the impact of early education on future social, educational and economic success later in life. Furthermore, it ensures those in need receive the proper support at a pivotal time in growth and development. Reasonable and affordable access also has a significant impact on families/communities – general socioeconomics, quality of parental care, parental employment/training opportunities, etc. One only needs to read the news to know the devastating impact recent educational disruptions have had on families, especially women in the workforce in Vermont. It has also shined a glaring spotlight on the early childhood education/childcare crisis in this state. The decision this past fall and another rash decision now throws yet more gasoline on the growing fire.
- **ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY:** Lastly, the school merger was sold, not on savings, but equal access and opportunity. And I firmly believe that the preschoolers of Belvidere and Waterville deserve an equal opportunity to attend an ACCESSIBLE and AFFORDABLE early education program.

I thank you for your time and consideration. I am more than happy to discuss this matter further with the Board.

Respectfully,
Melissa Manka