

**Lamoille North Supervisory Union and
Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District Board
Minutes of Meeting
August 16, 2021**

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

Board Members Absent: Cambridge: Mark Stebbins, Bill Sander

Administrators Present: Catherine Gallagher, Deborah Clark, Michele Aumand, Charleen McFarlane, Wendy Savery, Betzi Goodman, David Manning, Denise Maurice, Diane Reilly, Jan Epstein, Melinda Mascolino, Bethann Pirie, Erik Remmers, Brian Pena, Jeremy Scannell, Flo Kelly, Jen Hulse, Jake Moulton

Others Present: Terri-Lynn Ayers (phone), Brian Sylvester (phone), Savannah McKenzie, Jim Osborn, Jeremy LaClair, Cynthia Tighe

Minute Taker: Sue Trainor

Call to Order, Approval of the Agenda, Announcements and Public Comment: Chair Nielsen called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. Hunsberger made a motion, seconded by Moulton, to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Cynthia Tighe, a special educator at the high school and liaison to the Vermont-NEA Health Care Council, read a statement to the Board about the ongoing negotiations of the statewide health insurance agreement. The statement can be found at the end of these minutes.

Savannah McKenzie, parent of an incoming kindergartener, spoke about her concern about a mask or vaccine requirement. She asked that parents be allowed to determine whether their child should wear a mask. She stated her child would not be wearing a mask and she asked if her child would be expelled.

Jim Osborn asked the Board not to let discussions about masks and vaccines distract the Board from doing their job: providing quality education. He encouraged the Board to do more to get parents to engage with the Board.

LNSU/LN MUUSD Routine Business: Consent Agenda Items

Minutes of the June 28, 2021 Meeting: Bezio made a motion, seconded by Moulton, to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Board Orders: Miller made a motion, seconded by Moulton, to approve the Board Orders. The motion passed unanimously.

Updated Policy F20, Fiscal Management and General Financial Accountability: Clark informed the Board that Act 72 had passed and was signed on June 8th. Section 8 of the Act changed the dollar amount required for bids from \$15,000 to \$40,000. The District's policy had always mirrored the State's policy, so this updated policy would bring the bid policy up to date. For any expenditure greater than \$40,000 not planned for in the budget, approval for the purchase would need to be made by the Board.

Clark stated there was a second guideline. The Superintendent or designee would have the authority to transfer funds for planned expenses between two line items in the budget up to an amount not to exceed \$40,000. Moulton made a motion to approve the update, seconded by Miller.

Following discussion about the change, Clark explained that it was rare for this type of situation to come to the Board. Generally it involved federal grant purchases or capital reserve expenses, which often came to the Board for approval anyway. Laflam explained that the bid process was very time consuming. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion of Fall School AOE Guidance with Council: Gallagher explained an Executive Session was required in order to receive legal counsel because premature public knowledge put the District at a substantial disadvantage. The Board and Administration were invited to stay. Orost made a motion, seconded by Hayford, to enter into Executive Session. The motion passed unanimously.

The Board went into Executive Session at 5:25 p.m. The Board came out of Executive Session at 5:53 p.m.

Orost stated that based on the District's duty of care that if adequate safety measures were not put in place there was the potential for liability against the school district. Orost made a motion that based on legal counsel's advice, the Board would require masks be worn across the District and would adopt the AOE mask guidance as it was now and as it changed over time. Moulton seconded the motion. The motion passed, with Hayford abstaining.

Review Additional Special Education Contracted Services under ESSER: Hulse stated they had tried to find a special educator for Waterville. They had interviewed five individuals, two of whom turned down an offer and the others were not viable candidates. They were working with ProCare to contract a virtual special educator. Contracted services cost more than a salaried position, which was why this item was on the agenda. Fourteen students were eligible for special education services. Lowe asked how long the contract was for. Hulse reported it was for the school year.

Review Contracted SEL Services under ESSER: Clark stated this pertained to the Engagement Specialist under the recovery strategies. This was a contracted service that was already in place at .60 FTE. The request was to increase the position to a 1.0 FTE. This would be an increase of \$48,000 and would be funded through the ESSER grant. Moulton made a motion, seconded by Hunsberger, to approve the request. Savery informed the Board that this was part of the Lamoille Restorative Center truancy prevention project. Rather than talking about truancy, they were looking at engagement. The motion passed unanimously.

LNSU Heating Fuel Oil and Propane Bid: Laflam reported that two out of three companies had responded to an RFP: Fred's Energy and Bourne's Energy. The Administration recommended that the Board move to award the 2021-2022 fuel contract to the lowest bidder, Fred's Energy, with a bid of \$2.589 per gallon fuel oil and \$1.57 per gallon propane. These prices were locked in. Moulton made a motion, seconded by Lowe, to approve the recommendation. The motion passed unanimously.

Other Business: Gallagher informed the Board that they would be hosting their first public forum for the community next Monday, August 23rd, at 6:00 p.m. Dr. William Raska, the chief pediatric epidemiologist at UVM and the lead on the State Task Force would be answering questions about Covid and children, transmission, and where all of this was going. He would present during the first hour and then discussion would take place about the Recovery Plan and ESSER funds. This would be in-person and virtual.

Adjourn: The Board adjourned at 6:14 p.m.

Greetings School Board Members!

My name is Cynthia Tighe and I am a Special Educator at the high school. I am here representing Lamoille North Unified EA as liaison to the Vermont-NEA Health Care Council. As you're likely aware, negotiations over the next statewide health insurance agreement for Vermont's public-school employees have been ongoing since April.

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly address you about the status and potential impacts of those negotiations. Lamoille North Unified EA believes that open communication between teachers, support staff and members of the Board is critical to ensuring affordable, accessible, high-quality health care for employees in this school district.

As you know, health insurance for Vermont's public-school employees is bargained at the state level by a 10-person commission with 5 commissioners appointed by the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) and 5 commissioners appointed by the unions representing public school employees (Vermont-NEA and AFSCME).

After intensive negotiations at the end of June and mediation in early July, the two sides were not able to reach a settlement. A fact-finding hearing took place during the second week of August. If the parties do not reach a settlement before then, the process will move to binding arbitration in November with an arbitration decision expected in December.

The VSBA's team, two members of which are not elected school board members, has proposed significant increases in the cost of health insurance for school employees, including a quadrupling of out-of-pocket costs for teachers and a quintupling of those same costs for support staff. The proposed increases would make health care much less affordable and accessible for teachers and support staff in our school district, particularly our lowest paid colleagues.

Comprehensive, affordable, and accessible healthcare is one of the strongest recruitment tools to attract school employees and moving in the opposite direction – as proposed by VSBA healthcare bargainers – will hamper our district's ability to attract and retain the best education professionals for our students. Local school boards and local educators have a shared interest in a healthcare package that makes it easier to attract and retain the best talent - not one that drives people out of the profession.

The VSBA bargaining team's proposals to make healthcare more expensive, harder-to-obtain, and more difficult to manage sends the wrong message to the dedicated educators and support staff in our district who were essential in providing an outstanding education during a pandemic. Local school boards worked hand-in-hand with school employees during this once-in-a-century public health crisis. The VSBA team's approach to healthcare is an insult to you as local school board members and to the educators you employ. Please do not let their actions harm educators, support staff and students in our district.

The VSBA Board of Directors needs to hear from you - its constituents - about the impacts its proposals will have on our school district. We strongly encourage you to attend the regional VSBA meeting on September 9 @ 6 PM to ask questions of your representatives and to hold them accountable.

Finally, the Board and the Association share an interest in achieving statewide healthcare reform because that is the only true way that we will begin to clamp-down on annual, double-digit increases in the cost of private health insurance. While the VSBA refuses to join Vermont-NEA's call for systemic

healthcare reform, educators and local school boards can make a difference by working with legislators and others in the coming weeks and months.

We call on you to join us in supporting the work of the newly-formed Legislative Joint Health Care Affordability Study Commission to explore creative policy options for improving health care affordability statewide. Because when all Vermonters have access to affordable, equitable, and quality healthcare, boards and educators can devote all of our energy to providing a world-class education for all students.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to continuing this important conversation.

VSBA Regional Meeting Schedule

1. 09/09/21 - Eastern & Western Chittenden & Franklin/Grand Isle Regions
2. 09/14/21 - Bennington Region (Date changed from 9/15/21)
3. 09/21/21 - North & South Kingdom Regions (Date changed from 9/16/21)
4. 09/23/21 - Addison & Rutland Regions
5. 09/29/21 - Windham & Windsor Regions
6. 10/07/21 - Central Vermont Region