

**Lamoille North Supervisory Union and
Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District Board
Minutes of SPECIAL Meeting
March 2, 2022**

Board Members Present: **Belvidere:** Stephanie Sweet; **Cambridge:** Jan Sander (remote), Bill Sander (remote), Mark Stebbins (remote), Laura Miller (remote), Denise Webster (remote); **Eden:** Jeff Hunsberger, David Whitcomb (phone); **Hyde Park:** Patty Hayford, Tina Lowe, Chasity Fagnant; **Johnson:** Mark Nielsen, Katie Orost, Allen Audette, Bobbie Moulton; **Waterville:** Bart Bezio
Board Members Absent: **Cambridge:** Sue Prescott; **Hyde Park:** Lisa Barry; **Johnson:** Angela Lamell
Administrators Present: Catherine Gallagher, Michele Aumand, Charleen McFarlane (remote), Betzi Goodman, David Manning, Denise Maurice, Bethann Pirie, Brian Pena
Minute Taker: Sue Trainor

Call to Order, Approval of the Agenda, Announcements and Public Comment: Chair Nielsen called the meeting to order at 6:49 p.m. Hunsberger made a motion, seconded by Moulton, to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Nielsen noted there were a large number of people online and asked that those who wanted to speak identify themselves.

Gail Whitman, Co-President of the Teachers Union, stated when the principal sent out an email the night before, they had received numerous emails from their constituency. They developed a one-question survey asking how comfortable the teachers were with the idea of not wearing masks in their building. The survey was fairly evenly split. 42% said they were somewhat or very comfortable with no masks, 42% said they were not at all or somewhat uncomfortable and 16% said they were neutral.

Renee Williams stated she recognized that this was a difficult situation and opinions were very strong on both sides. The state was recommending shifting guidelines to making wearing masks optional. One of the reasons masks were required was because the wearing of the mask was protecting others.. A key point was in order to keep yourself safe, you needed to have a KN95 or N95 mask to protect yourself. The staff would continue to be provided masks and she requested that students also be provided masks. As an elementary school teacher, she knew there were specialists who might see 500 students a day. She suggested adding an addendum to consider those people who were medically vulnerable and/or those who saw a larger population.

Eric Hutchins thanked the Board for all the attention paid to COVID mitigation. Governor Scott had passed the buck to each school and Hutchins felt that was unfair. The Board had handled the pandemic in an admirable fashion. He assumed that the Board would continue to adhere to science and to the information from the CDC and the Vermont Department of Health. He believed that whether popular or not the Board would continue to do the right thing. He hoped that they would be willing to change as the factors of the pandemic changed.

Andrea Altman appreciated that the Board was holding this meeting. The current guidance was that masking was optional. She thought allowing the masks to be optional was the fairest way to go. She stated the data did not support masking. She wanted people to have the freedom of choice. Masks caused anxiety, loss of oxygen, and those with asthma had issues.

Reorganization of the Board: Elect LNSU/LNMUUSD Board Chair(s), Clerk: Gallagher then asked for nominations from the floor for Chair of the LNSU and LNMUUSD. Four members today had questioned the merits of having two chairpersons. That decision had been made in the past and it was clear over the past year that one person could manage the job.

Hunsberger stated he didn't think the Board was large enough to have two chairs. The standard protocol under Robert's Rule of Order was to have a Chair and a Vice Chair. He didn't think there needed to be two chairs. The Board members agreed.

Whitcomb stated his agenda did not state they would be electing officers and he thought this item should be postponed until March 14th, especially as this was posted as a special meeting. Whitcomb then asked if those members who had just been elected had been sworn in. Gallagher stated they had been. Whitcomb made a motion to continue the nomination discussion on March 14th because it had not been warned on the agenda.

Nielsen stated that everyone at the meeting had the revised agenda, which included the election of officers. Nielsen stated the consensus of the Board was to move forward with the nominations. Whitcomb stated he would contest the move because there shouldn't be two agendas. He stated what the Board was doing was illegal. Sweet noted that the agenda posted on the website was the revised agenda and, therefore, had been warned.

Stebbins nominated Mark Nielsen as Chair. With no other nominations, the Board approved Nielsen as the Chair of the LNSU/LNMUUSD Board. Nielsen expressed appreciation.

Moulton then nominated Katie Orost for Vice Chair. With no other nominations, the Board approved Orost as Vice Chair. The Board unanimously approved the nomination.

Laura Miller was nominated to be Clerk. However, Miller declined the nomination. Hayford then nominated Chasity Fagnant to be Clerk. The Board unanimously approved the nomination.

School COVID-19 Mitigation Policy: Discussion About Masking: Nielsen asked for a motion, with a discussion to follow, on following the science and CDC guidelines and move to have a mask-optional campus, effective March 7, 2022. This would include all teachers, support staff, students, families, and anyone coming on-site. A Board member made a motion, seconded by Bezio, to approve having a mask-optional campus. Hunsberger confirmed that the CDC guidance was optional mask-wearing.

Gallagher stated it became very hard to hold onto a policy that could not be enforced. She stated some teachers were having difficulty with that and it was a recipe for conflict. The AOE was very clear that they were going to mirror the CDC guidelines. Hospital rates had rapidly declined. There was also weekly testing for staff and students. Kits were given to students over the break. Omicron had a very fast incubation period. The science indicated that there was not going to be another surge.

Stebbins stated that as far as questioning the Monday timeframe, Cambridge saw the issues that Gallagher spoke about and, additionally, the Board felt the community and the schools needed to be prepared to understand there were students and staff who went from one end of the spectrum to the other on this issue. The teachers needed time to prepare themselves and to prepare their students to be accepting of all the different positions. The Cambridge Board wanted people to feel comfortable and not feel bullied about whatever they chose to do. Also, coming out of vacation, with the speed of the Omicron variant it would be clear quickly whether there would be a bump in cases. In response to a question, Gallagher stated they did not have any faith in the information provided by the Agency of Education, as today they told Gallagher that 236 students in Waterville had been vaccinated. The Board then unanimously approved the motion to have a mask-optional policy at the District.

Other Business: There was no other business. Nielsen then thanked the community for attending the meeting.

Adjourn: Moulton made a motion, seconded by Hunsberger, to adjourn the meeting at 7:23 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.