

LAMOILLE NORTH MODIFIED UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT  
ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES  
GMTCC COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTER  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2023

Present: Mark Nielsen, Lisa Barry, Chasity Fagnant, Katie Orost, Alan Audette, Jeff Hunsberger, Angela Lamell, Tina Lowe, Mark Stebbins, Denise Webster, Patti Hayford, Jan Sander, Cat Gallagher, Deb Clark, Michele Aumand, Rachel Crawford, Jen Hulse, Rene Thibault, Karyl Kent, Brian Pena, Dylan Laflam, Nancy LaRose, Rosemary Audibert, Susan Tinker, Cathy Mander-Adams, Krista Jones, Dana Warren, about 25 other people

Mark Nielsen called the meeting to order at 7:00. He talked about how important Bill Sander was to the school district.

**Article I:**

**To determine whether Roberts Rules (Revised) or other rules of order shall govern the parliamentary procedures of the meeting**

**Denise Webster moved that the parliamentary procedures of the meeting be governed by Robert's Rules (Revised) and the motion was passed by unanimous consent.**

**Article II:**

**To review and approve the minutes of the February 14, 2022 Annual Meeting**

**Jan Sander moved to approve the minutes of the February 14, 2021 Annual Meeting and the motion was passed by unanimous consent.**

**Article III:**

**To elect by ballot the following officers: a) Moderator; b) Clerk; c) Treasurer**

Rachel Crawford nominated Mark Nielsen for moderator. There were no other nominations.

Brian Pena nominated Donna Griffiths for clerk. There were no other nominations.

**R. Crawford moved that the clerk be directed to cast one unanimous ballot for Mark Nielsen as moderator and one unanimous ballot for Donna Griffiths as clerk. The motion was passed by a voice vote.**

Krista Jones nominated Kim Moulton for treasurer. Katie Orost nominated Chasity Fagnant. Voting was by paper ballot. C. Fagnant received 18 votes and K. Moulton received 14. **Chasity Fagnant was elected treasurer.**

**Article IV:**

**To establish compensation for the duly constituted officers and the Board of Directors of said Modified Unified Union School District**

**Katie Orost moved to increase compensation for the board directors and chair by \$100, to \$1900 per year for the chair and \$1600 per year for the other directors and the motion was seconded and passed by a voice vote.**

**Katie Orost moved to increase the clerk's compensation to \$550 per year plus mileage and the motion was seconded and passed by a voice vote.**

**Katie Orost moved to pay the treasurer \$8000 per year and the motion was seconded and passed by a voice vote.**

### **Article V:**

#### **To hear and act upon the reports of the Modified Unified Union School District**

Deb Clark said the FY22 treasurer's report shows cash balances on June 30, 2022 were down \$2.17 million for the year, due primarily to a \$1.1 million increase in grants receivable at the end of FY22 and timing of the end of year pay down on the tax anticipation accounts.

For FY24 there is a proposed education tax funded elementary budget of \$14,229,538 with combined ed spending of \$13,660,143 and per equalized pupil spending of \$23,329. The proposed education tax funded secondary budget is \$16,492,844 with combined ed spending of \$15,442,449 and per equalized pupil spending of \$17,985. The proposed technical center budget is \$3,600,596. These budgets provide educational services, health and wellness services, transportation services and more for 6 campuses, including GMTCC. The number of students served as of November 14, 2022 is 1480. This excludes Cambridge Elementary students. Cambridge remains its own district at the elementary level. Elementary level after school participation is 25.26% in Eden, 14.10% in Johnson, 26.92% in Hyde Park and 24.10% in Waterville and Belvidere.

Catherine Gallagher said typically this meeting has been about numbers and budgets and taxes. She wanted to offer an additional perspective. Taxes fluctuate but one thing that never changes is the need to serve students well, through providing equity, access and opportunity. In Vermont, 20.6% of our population is over 65. Vermont is aging faster than any other state. Another 21% of the population are students. We want them to have every opportunity to compete in the world and also be able to come back here and live here. What do we need to do to make sure they have those opportunities? We know that during the pandemic there was significant learning loss – not just in Vermont or in the U.S. but globally. At the end of the pandemic there were students who were not ready to begin a structured school program. The Agency of Education directed school districts to develop a 3-year recovery plan. We won't recover learning loss in one year. The 3-year plan includes academic rigor and also social/emotional/physical wellbeing and student engagement. We have fewer referrals for truancy than ever this year. We are seeing a return on the investment in student engagement.

We have a multilayered system of support, with three tiers of interventions for students who need more adaptations, modifications or enhancements to thrive. We make sure every student has access to breakfast. If students come in hungry and not able to focus, how are they going to learn? That is why we believe in universal access to meals. That has been provided by the state

but we don't know if it will continue going forward. We have seen a lot of mental health referrals. We are having clinicians come into schools. We are offering our excellent teachers the professional development they need to make sure they have the tools to help all students. We have coaching in literacy and math in every school. We have strong instructional leadership. This year LNMUUSD brought in Val Sullivan, who is likely the strongest curriculum director in the state. She is working on PK-12 curriculum alignment. It is important to align curriculum at our schools so when students get to middle school they are all on a fairly level playing field. We are looking at consistency in assessment of student progress as well. We have well-defined support systems for students. It is important to keep students in the classroom with their peers when possible because they may feel more stigmatized if they are pulled out.

We have flexible pathways to learning, including early college, outdoor learning and EPIC Academy at the high school. We have counseling, coaching and intervention services. We have universal access to nutritious meals. There are restorative practices in all schools beginning with a foundation of belonging and safety. We have student leadership opportunities. There is student representation on the school board now. Student voice is important. We have increased athletic offerings, advanced placement opportunities, project-based learning options, and education in trades. We are strengthening home-to-school communications.

Extra programming opportunities include a social justice committee, outdoor education, maker spaces, Lego robotics, a computer shop, a literary magazine, music, art and performing arts, gardening, student clubs, student council, and international studies and trips. We have significant community use of all our facilities. We partner with local organizations such as Healthy Lamoille Valley and the Restorative Center.

Investments we need to support students include universal access to meals; training and professional development for teachers in restorative practices, literacy, math and other content areas; interventionists/coaches for instruction, mentoring and behavior management; counseling professionals for our youth and competitive salaries for teachers and staff so they can afford to live in Lamoille County. We want to attract good new teachers and keep our excellent veteran teachers.

C. Gallagher gave some examples of successes at our schools. The AP human geography class taught by Sara Reed at the high school has the highest passing rate in the nation. She described project-based learning at the middle school. At our elementary schools, 85% of students in Tier 2 (the middle tier) have met or exceeded proficiency in language arts and math. There is not as much growth as we would like to see in Tier 1. A small percentage of students receive special ed services. She gave examples of some elementary students who started the school year below grade level in reading and made a lot of progress. She said she was proud of the students who performed tonight. She is proud of our teachers, administrators and board.

#### **Article VI:**

**To receive from the Board of School Directors of said District its estimate of expenses of the Lamoille North Modified Unified Union Grade Schools for the ensuing year. This is a public information hearing regarding the budget. (See Article X.)**

D. Clark reviewed the elementary budget. For FY24, there is a 1.69% increase in general tax funded expenses. There is a reduction in special ed expenses due to a change in how paraeducator expenses are handled. Several years ago special ed was centralized by state mandate. The only thing that wasn't required to be moved to central office was paraeducators. Now we are under a block grant revenue system, which makes it difficult to match expenses at the school level to the block grant. So in FY24 paraeducator costs will move to the SU. That creates an anomaly for one year with regard to the budget change. Without that move there would still only be a 2.4% increase overall in elementary school tax funded expenses. We are benefitting from a lot of federal funds. There is a 61% increase in grant funded expenses, which are matched by grant revenue and do not affect taxes.

General non special ed revenues are decreasing by about 11%. Grant revenue is increasing by 61%. There is a 9.5% increase in non tax supported revenues.

Elementary salaries are relatively level funded. Excluding paras, salaries for FY24 are about 5% higher than current year actual expenses (which are about 4% below what was budgeted for FY23.) Professional services expense is increasing by 11.21%. Repairs and maintenance is increasing by 17.6%. That includes things like HVAC, septic pumping, sprinkler maintenance, hood cleaning in the kitchens, elevator inspections, and inspections and maintenance of fire alarms. Professional services includes an increase related to IT systems security. We had a ransomware event and learned a lot about the need to keep our system secure and what that costs. We also have security that restricts what students can access, to keep them safe. Preschool expense is up about 7.8%. More families are taking advantage of public funding for PreK. The cost of water in Hyde Park has increased considerably. The costs of heating fuel, wood pellets and gasoline are all going up due to inflation. Instructional technology is going up about 31%. These increases are offset by the movement of paraeducators. Moving them to the SU reduces the elementary budget and increases the SU assessment but the increase in assessment is less than the reduction. Without the paraeducator move, we would have been looking at an increase in expenses of about 3.9%, which is still very modest.

**Article VII:**

**To receive from the Board of School Directors of said District its estimate of expenses of the Lamoille North Modified Unified Union Middle & High Schools for the ensuing year. This is a public information hearing regarding the budget. (See Article XI.)**

D. Clark reviewed middle school and high school budget information. For FY24 there will be a 7.5% increase in general tax funded expenditures. The para move contributes to that. There is a 6.11% increase in non-special ed general tax funded expenditures. There is a large increase in grant funded expenditures, matched by an equal amount of revenue.

Non-special ed state revenues are decreasing. They have been decreasing since D. Clark started work here. Secondary level revenue is down by almost 17%.

Salaries excluding paras are increasing by about 10% compared to current year actuals. Professional services is up 13%. The middle school is seeing an increase of almost 34% in off-site services for some students that do not fall under special ed. There are increases in facilities

costs. We are hearing there is a lot of support at the state level for finding funding so universal meals can be a regular continuing activity. There is a reduction in paraeducator expense due to paras moving to central office but the move results in a higher assessment at the secondary level because the assessment spreads the cost across the entire student body. That is a more equitable model. If one school has a high special ed need one year we don't want them to feel they need to cut services. Without the para shift the overall increase at the secondary level would have been 5.5%.

D. Clark reviewed factors in building the FY24 budget. The forecast increase in education spending statewide was 8.52%. LNMUUSD has a combined increase of 8.1%. The state was forecasting a 1% drop in equalized pupils statewide. LNMUUSD is seeing a 2.45% decrease. The forecast average state base property tax rate was \$1.31. The current LNMUUSD FY24 estimated base rate is \$1.33. The state property yield and income yield have gone up, which helps hold tax rates down. The state non-residential property tax rate as of December 1 was \$1.39, down from \$1.466 for FY23. One hundred percent of the unreserved surplus available at the end of FY22 has been applied to the FY24 budget.

The estimated pre-CLA tax rate for FY24 is 6.47 cents lower than last year, which means savings of \$64.70 per \$100,000 of property value. The final tax rate depends on yields, the non-residential rate, equalized pupils and Common Level of Appraisal (CLA.) These can all still change before the final tax rates are published. The state raises property taxes based on market value, not town appraised value. To come up with the CLA they look at the 3-year average of market value and adjust each town's assessment based on that. One town's appraisals may be further under market value than another's. There are drastic changes in the tax rates in our towns based on CLA. D. Clark showed a chart of CLAs and tax rates for each town. Belvidere is the only town with a recent reappraisal that gets its CLA above 100%. Waterville's CLA is only 70% but they are going through a reappraisal and if that is done before the deadline their tax rate will improve a lot.

The state is telling us that they have been very modest with their estimates of statewide revenue. Maybe they will be able to raise the yield and drop tax rates.

D. Clark showed estimated LNMUUSD tax rates for FY24 for a range of different incomes and property values.

A voter asked if the voters ever see itemized elementary school budgets. D. Clark said at this level of budget presentation we don't go line by line through the budget. She is happy to talk to people who have questions. The LNMUUSD board has a finance committee that gets detailed information and works with principals on individual line items.

**Article VIII:**

**To receive from the Board of School Directors of said District its estimate of expenses of the Green Mountain Technology & Career Center for the ensuing year. This is a public information hearing regarding the budget. (See Article XII.)**

D. Clark reviewed GMTCC budget information. The primary drivers behind the 6.89% increase are double-digit increases to health benefits and staff salaries. Health insurance went up 12.5%. There are inflationary pressures on staff salaries. There are also increases to programming expenses due to inflation and the economy.

GMTCC had a \$90K fund balance at the end of FY22. The Regional Advisory Board and school board intend to reserve the funds as follows: \$45,065 to the GMTCC capital reserve and \$45,065 to the GMTCC tuition reduction reserve.

For FY24 the amount of tuition to be raised (the difference between budgeted expense and expected revenues) is \$1,268,028. That means per pupil tuition of \$9,717, an increase of \$318.

General fund expenditures are up 5.31%. Tuition to be raised is up 2.4%. A lot of what is driving the increase is a reduction in the 6 semester average student count. The increase in per pupil tuition is 3.38%.

D. Clark showed the historical per pupil assessment figures for each year from FY12 to FY24. The 6 semester average affects that number a lot.

**Article IX:**

**To transact any other business to properly come before the meeting.**

No other business was brought up.

**At 8:06, M. Nielsen recessed the meeting to March 7, 2023 (Town Meeting Day) for the purpose of voting by Australian ballot at the usual polling places in the member districts.**

On March 7, 2023, ballots were brought to the LUHS library, where they were commingled and counted under the supervision of the LNMUUSD clerk. The number of ballots cast for Article X was 611. Results of the vote for Article X (the PreK-6<sup>th</sup> grade budget) were 378 in favor, 232 opposed and 1 blank. **Article X was passed.**

The number of ballots cast for Articles XI and XII was 935. Results of the vote for Article XI (the middle school/high school budget) were 625 in favor, 308 opposed and 2 blank. **Article XI was passed.** Results of the vote for Article XII (the GMTCC budget) were 752 in favor, 176 opposed, 6 blank and 1 spoiled. **Article XII was passed.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*