

**LNSU/LNMMUUSD Special Board Meeting  
November 13, 2023  
Minutes of Meeting**

**Board Members Present:** Belvidere: Stephanie Sweet; Cambridge: Mark Stebbins, Sue Prescott, Amy Listenik, Jan Sander, Denise Webster; Eden: Jeff Hunsberger, David Whitcomb (phone); Hyde Park: Patty Hayford, Lisa Barry, Tina Lowe; Johnson: Allen Audette, Katie Orost, Angela Lamell, Monica Stearns; Waterville: Bart Bezio

**Board Members Absent:** Cambridge: Christy Liddy; Hyde Park: Philip Kiely; Johnson: Mark Nielsen

**Administrators Present:** Catherine Gallagher, Deb Clark, Michele Aumand, Betzi Goodman, David Manning, Jan Epstein, Denise Maurice, Bethann Pirie, Mary Anderson, Diane Reilly, Rene Thibault, Dylan Laflam, Erik Remmers, Jennifer Hulse, Blake Nemeth

**Minute Taker:** Sue Trainor

**Call to Order, Approval of the Agenda, Announcements and Public Comment:** Orost called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. Stebbins made a motion, seconded by Bezio, to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously. There was no public comment.

**LNSU/LNMMUUSD Routine Business: Consent Agenda Items**

**Minutes of September 11, 2023 LNSU/LNMMUUSD Board Meeting; Minutes of the September 21, 2023 Personnel Committee Meeting; Minutes of the October 9, 2023 LNSU/LNMMUUSD Board Meeting; Minutes of the October 16 2023 Finance and Capital Committee Meeting; Minutes of the November 1, 2023 Personnel Committee Meeting:** Stebbins made a motion, seconded by Bezio, to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

**Board Orders – July, August and September:** Bezio recommended approval and expressed appreciation to the team that put the Board Orders together. Barry made a motion, seconded by Hunsberger, to approve the Board Orders. The motion passed unanimously.

**Bond Update:** Gallagher informed the Board that she and Chair Nielsen had discussed the current situation with the \$14-\$16 million-dollar proposed Cricket Hill Project. At this point in time the request to the voters to approve a bond for this project was untenable. Therefore, they requested that Laflam look into itemizing the student-focused bond items and looking at a lease for Central Office. Gallagher stated it appeared the lease option for Central Office would be less expensive in the long run.

Laflam reviewed the project and costs of the previously proposed bond vote. He was concerned that the dollar amount noted by Gallagher could actually come in 10-15% higher as project costs have been increasing over the past few years. Laflam would be providing a list of individual projects and their dollar costs to the Board in December to review.

The second option was to work with MSI in moving Central Office into the building in Hyde Park Village. MSI was confident but not positive that they could match their previous estimate. The first year would cost \$84,000 with a 3% annual increase over a ten-year lease.

Laflam noted that the annual payment for a twenty-year bond for \$14 million dollars at 5% interest would be \$1.1 million dollars. A \$16 million-dollar bond would be \$1.2 million dollars. Pulling Central Office out of the project and leasing from MSI would be much less expensive long-term. Laflam stated they did not currently have a building they could all use. The CO2 level was high. The only time the CO2 level was normal was when the building was empty.

Gallagher asked the Board whether they wanted to move forward with the lease option. In response to a question, Laflam stated the timeline for being able to move into the building would be eighteen months from signature of lease. Laflam stated he had been having this conversation with

the Board for over three years and it has taken a substantial amount of time. He stated it would be good to make a plan and see it through. Gallagher agreed. Sweet stated she liked the lease option. She reported that from what she had heard from the community their concern was about spending so much for a building. She believed the community would prefer the second option.

Stebbins stated it was difficult not to go with the lease option. Stebbins was concerned about the eighteen-month window considering that those individuals currently working outside of the Central Office building may need to be moved from their temporary locations. Gallagher stated the length of time wasn't optimal but if they were to build a new building it would be as long.

In response to a question from Lamell, Laflam explained that when they originally were discussing building their own offices, the costs were estimated to be \$369 per square foot. Now construction costs were between \$600-700 per square foot. Lamell questioned whether leasing was the right decision and wondered if they would regret not going for a bond. Gallagher stated a vote on this would not pass. Stearns asked about a five-year lease and Laflam said they had discussed that. If they went with a five-year lease, the first year of the lease would cost \$91,000.

In response to a question, Laflam stated that MSI would build to the design already presented. There were two extra office spaces and one conference room planned that could house additional employees if needed in the future. Laflam stated the building was in an ideal location, parking was great, it was between the elementary school, high school, middle school, and tech center. The District would be responsible for electricity and utilities but MSI would be responsible for everything else.

Bezio asked Clark for her recommendation. She stated she would recommend leasing the MSI building. She was concerned the project costs would increase and the bond vote wouldn't pass. Bezio stated that considering the events of the summer, he now supported the lease option.

Webster made a motion, seconded by Sweet, to move forward with leasing. Orost stated she did not want to vote on this item at this meeting. Orost wanted a firm number from MSI before a final vote and she preferred a five-year lease. She also wanted it placed on the agenda so that voters knew what was being decided. Webster withdrew the motion.

**Confidentiality Training:** Hulse asked that the Board review the PowerPoint presentation in their packet so as to have an understanding of how it impacted Board members. Also attached to that packet was the Vermont School Board's Code of Ethics. Hulse asked that all Board members sign off on the ethics code.

**January Meeting Schedule:** Clark noted that January 8<sup>th</sup> was the date of the regular Board meeting. The FCC would be meeting prior to that meeting and would like to have a budget ready to present. The budget needed to be adopted and approved and the warning finished by January 20<sup>th</sup>. If the budget wasn't ready on January 8<sup>th</sup>, the Board agreed to tentatively meet on Tuesday, January 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Meal Charge Policy Update:** Clark reported that with the State providing meals to all students, it was recommended that the meal charge policy be changed. All schools in the District also qualified for CEP, which meant a higher reimbursement from the State and the federal government. The policy changed to reflect that meals would be offered to all students at no charge. Second meals could be charged. This was the first reading of the policy update.

**Wellness Policy Replacement:** The wellness policy was being fully replaced. The biggest difference was that there were now goals for comprehensive health education that took into

account curriculum, tobacco, alcohol, and abuse prevention education and defining a course of study. This embedded health education throughout the day. This was the first reading of this policy.

**Board Member Conflict of Interest Policy Review:** Gallagher informed the Board the District had been asked by the Agency of Education and Vermont School Boards Association to review policies on a consistent basis. Two pieces of the policy needed to be reviewed. The first was, “A Board member shall not give the impression that they have the authority to make decisions or take action on behalf of the Board or the school administration.” There were violations of this across the United States. The second was, “A Board member shall not give the impression that their position on any issue can be influenced by anything other than a fair presentation of all sides of the question.” Gallagher stated that if a parent came to a Board member and said a change needed to be made on something, the School Board member needed to remember they were only a member when in a School Board meeting. The best thing to say would be to request that the parent speak with the principal or the superintendent. This was the first reading of this policy.

**Personnel Matter:** Sara Reed, a recent recipient of a Fulbright award and a teacher at the high school, would be going on sabbatical. During the sabbatical she would lose 40% of her salary and would incur the cost of some of her benefits. Reed had come to the administration to ask for any assistance in this matter. Section 6.7 in the Master Agreement allowed for an award and a stipend of \$2,500 for a national certification, which Clark considered the Fulbright to be. This amount would make Reed whole as far as salary and benefits. Hunsberger made a motion, seconded by Stebbins, to approve the request. The motion passed unanimously.

**Central Office Updates:** Gallagher reported that Nick Lodge and Dedra Dolan, both Johnson Elementary School educators, had been honored at the Outstanding Educator Award ceremony. The Harvest Gathering was wonderful, with over 100 people in attendance. Every school made a presentation. This event started a series of conversations with the community.

Gallagher would be holding the first coffee and conversation tomorrow. She had noticed that many meetings and conversations she had held with parents this year would be better served in public gatherings. School issues mirrored community issues and Gallagher felt it was important to be out in the community to do this work. She would start in Hyde Park tomorrow. Some of the conversations would be about the budget and about mental health.

Gallagher reported they had a number of challenges with the mental health of students at the elementary level. Laraway only served grades 7-12. Other groups that had expertise in the field had months-long waitlists. The District was looking for ways to support the students in ways they hadn't had to before. Gallagher was empowering principals to help parents/caregivers stay in the lane of caring for their own student, of volunteering for school activities, etc., but not coming in to discuss other students who were in a classroom.

Clark informed the Board they had hired an IT Director. William Clinton came with seventeen years of experience in school-based IT in Massachusetts. He accepted the position and would begin working on February 1<sup>st</sup>. Stebbins stated Clinton would be a positive addition and the school district that Clinton would be leaving was comparable to Lamoille North.

Clark then reported finance statements had gone out and she was pleased that they weren't as dire as she thought they might be.

Thibault stated there were a number of great events happening around the school district. Denise Maurice explained that the STEM class had successfully received one of the grants from the Vermont Liquor and Lottery division. Today, representatives from the AOE and Vermont Liquor

and Lottery came to watch the students work with CNC routers on designs the students had created. Thibault noted that legislators were in attendance as well.

Thibault then mentioned that Bedtime Stories, a series of readings done by Superintendent Gallagher, were online. Without any promotion there were already 100 views on the District's YouTube site. The feedback was great.

Thibault informed the Board that Superintendent Gallagher, Heidi Richard and Nate Bickford were recently honored by Healthy Lamoille Valley for being stewards in helping to build healthy communities and reducing substance use across Lamoille County.

The Harvest dinner went very well. It was a great chance to talk about community and of the support from across the district. More than 100 people were there.

Thibault stated he and Laflam had attended a school safety briefing in Massachusetts. It was a great opportunity to learn from other schools that have had to deal with safety situations.

### **Principal/Director Updates:**

**Johnson:** Manning informed the Board that they were looking at creating a small classroom in the school that would provide some alternative space for students. This school year there was a much higher level of students running out of classrooms and being angry. Manning stated he and Hulse had recently met with an expert in trauma informed work in schools. At the beginning of the school year there were fifteen students who were struggling and now there were about ten. With District members working as a team to help address this situation, it was clear the school was making progress. However, there were still students who were struggling and that was why they were in the planning stage of creating an alternative classroom. As Gallagher had noted, the out of school placements had dried up and an alternative was necessary.

**Eden:** Goodman stated the school had held their PBIS puzzle party which involved games and challenges. The students moved independently to different activities and were able to travel with cousins and friends in other classes to events. The Harvest Dinner would be held on the 16<sup>th</sup>. The school was working with Mark Scott from the Lamoille Restorative Center to do a climate survey for the staff to look at what their needs were and how to support them.

**Waterville:** Epstein reported they had held their PBIS Celebration. The 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade were going to the Flynn Theatre at the end of the week. One of the teachers at the school had received a grant for a robotics program.

**Hyde Park:** Reilly stated one of the goals of this school year was family engagement. A series of family dinners had started, with teachers doing the cooking and serving. They also presented what was going on at the school. Grades 5 and 6 held their dinner a week ago and November 30<sup>th</sup> would be the next with Grades 3 and 4. The first dinner had 35 students, 58 adults, and 21 staff in attendance. Grandparents Lunch would be held this Thursday with 151 guests expected.

**Cambridge:** Anderson stated this year's theme was love, joy and belonging. As part of that, service learning was continuing with students volunteering at NCAL and at the Cambridge community lunch. The winter wellness program was ready to go. Maria Davies had connected with Chill, a program that was part of Burton Snowboards. The program supported children in learning how to snowboard. Chill provided everything that was needed to learn the sport. There were four groups participating in Junior Iron Chef.

**High School:** Pirie stated a long-term substitute had been hired who was a licensed science teacher and Pirie was very excited to welcome her to the school. Pirie was still looking to fill Sara Reed's position. A number of different trips would be upcoming and would be in the Board report. Pirie attended a Student Council meeting several weeks ago and the students were talking about projects they wanted to do. The students asked permission to celebrate World Kindness Day. The group developed a program where there would be a different daily activity. Today's activity during home base time involved cleaning up grounds and classrooms. Students were very happy to be doing it. Students were learning about community and service to others through the variety of tasks involved in this Student Council program.

**GMTCC:** Remmers stated that all of the labs were very busy. Construction and electrical students were working with Habitat for Humanity, the auto shop was busy with tire changes, and a blood drive was coming up. GMTCC held an open house last week. It was advertised as a community open house and many people from the community came to explore the Center. Prospective students and their families witnessed students giving demonstrations. It was currently tour and application season. Lamoille Union's entire 10<sup>th</sup> grade would be going to the Center to see what programs were available and this year all but one of the sending schools would be sending their entire 10<sup>th</sup> grades to explore the programs. 8<sup>th</sup> grade tours would begin in January. The Center would be holding Career Challenge Day with Vermont Works with Women in February.

**Other Business:** Barry spoke of the Paint and Sip that was held in honor of her daughter. \$1,500 was raised. Barry spoke about the stigma of mental health, depression, anxiety, and suicide. Barry's message to people was they had to have hope. She believed it was important to share the importance of talking to children about mental health.

Stebbins commented on the cross country team. The team had a strong year and he complimented the coach. This year four of the top seven race times the school had ever had on the men's side happened on this year's team. On the women's side, three of the top seven fastest times happened this year. Most of the runners would be back next year. Two Sundays ago, Stowe had the Vermont 10 Miler race. Three of the high school's runners ran it. Three of them finished the race and placed 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> out of 560 runners.

Hunsberger applauded the theatre group for putting on Legally Blonde. The quality of the jazz and band concert was fantastic. He was impressed with the middle school band and how many students were on the stage. Pirie said the school was so fortunate to have the team of adults that they had working with the students.

**Adjourn:** Hunsberger made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:01 p.m.