

BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
REGULAR BOARD MEETING
Spaulding High School Library and Via Video Conference – Google Meet
December 13, 2023 - 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Giuliano Cecchinelli, II (BC) – Chair
Chris Parker (BT) – Vice Chair
Paul Malone (BT) - Clerk
Michael Boutin (BC)
Nancy Leclerc (At-Large)
Sarah Pregent (BC)
Terry Reil (BT)
Emily Reynolds (BT)
Sonya Spaulding (BC)

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Chris Hennessey, Superintendent
Karen Fredericks, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Reed McCracken, Interim Director (SEA)
Lisa Perreault, Business Manager

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dave Delcore – Times Argus	Michael Charbonneau	Jody Emerson	Alice Farrell	Garrett Grant
Sarah Helman	Sarah Hill	Josh Howard	Prudence Krasofski	Karen Moran
Andrea Poulin	Brody Priddy	Rachel Van Vliet		

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Mr. Cecchinelli, called the Wednesday, December 13, 2023, Regular meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., which was held at the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

2. Pledge and Mindfulness Moment

The Board recited the Pledge of Allegiance. The Board held a Mindfulness Moment.

3. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

On a motion by Mrs. Pregent, seconded by Ms. Parker, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Agenda as presented.

4. Public Comment for Items Not on the Agenda

4.1 Public Comment

None.

4.2 Student Voice

None.

5. Executive Session (as needed)

No items were proposed for discussion in Executive Session.

6. Faculty/Staff – Reports/Presentations

6.1 CVCCSD Budget Presentation

A copy of the CVCCSD Budget Overview Presentation for FY25 was distributed.

The presentation was displayed on-screen. Ms. Emerson provided an overview of the presentation and answered questions from the Board. The meeting recessed at 6:18 p.m. (building evacuation due to fire alarm). The meeting reconvened at 6:36 p.m.

Questions from the Board included questions pertaining to; the status of relocation of the Career Center (including goals of expanding capacity), expansion of existing programs, implementation of a full-day educational program, the admission process, wait lists (due to lack of capacity), budget development (including acknowledgement that tuition will not be officially set until 12/31/23 – current

estimate is \$19,423 with \$8,058 – 11.9% to be paid by sending schools.), and the count of SHS students anticipated to attend the Career Center in FY25 (approximately 60).

6.2 Superintendent Report

A copy of the Superintendent's Report (dated 12/06/23) was distributed.

Mr. Hennessey introduced Interim SEA Director Reed McCracken and lauded him for his performance over the past six weeks. Mr. McCracken addressed the Board and provided a brief overview of his experience as well as an update of activities at SEA, current enrollment (approximately 60), and staff openings. Mr. Hennessey answered questions from the Board, including; updates on student counts, confirmation that recent hires are for existing open positions, transportation of students from Berlin and Montpelier, open support staff positions (including custodial positions), the Guidance Department opening at SHS, concerns regarding the process of providing proof of residency, and the increase in the number of unhoused BCEMS students.

7. Consent Agenda

7.1 Approval of Minutes – November 29, 2023 Regular Meeting

On a motion by Ms. Parker, seconded by Mr. Malone, the Board unanimously voted to approve, as amended, the Minutes of the November 29, 2023 Regular Meeting.

7.2 Warrant Approvals 11/30/23 and 12/07/23

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mr. Malone, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Warrants dated 11/30/23 and 12/07/23.

8. Current Business

8.1 New Hires

The resumes and BUUSD Notification of Employment Status Forms for Johanna Rodgers, Timothy Mallard, Karen Guthrie, and Amber Charbonneau were distributed.

In response to queries, Mr. Hennessey advised regarding licensure of candidates, and addressed concerns regarding filling of a Special Educator position (many supports are in place).

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mr. Malone, the Board unanimously voted to approve new hires Rodgers, Mallard, Guthrie, and Charbonneau.

8.2 Financial Management Questionnaire

Two copies of a document titled 'Financial Management Questionnaire' were distributed.

Copies of Vermont Statutes 16 V.S.A. § 242a, 32 V.S.A. § 163, and 16 V.S.A. § 822a were distributed.

Mrs. Perreault provided background information regarding the annual questionnaire that is required by Statute. Discussion included; questions pertaining to reconciliation, confirmation that the Barre City Clerk (District Treasurer) has access to view all account information, confirmation that this document is held in an audit file, questions pertaining to financial training opportunities for Board Members (VSBA offers some), a suggestion that training be discussed at the Board Retreat, a query regarding completion of adjustments suggested by the auditors, confirmation that stale dated checks have not been addressed (due to capacity issues), and a request that a future agenda include information regarding the annual questionnaire,

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mrs. Pregent, the BUUSD Board unanimously voted to approve the Board Chair to sign the Financial Management Questionnaire as presented.

8.3 Winooski Valley School Choice

A document titled 'Agreement to Join the Winooski Valley & Statewide Choice of Public High School Collaborative for the 2024 – 2025 School Year Under Act 129 (SEC. 34§ 822d 2A)' was distributed.

This form is presented to the Board (for approval) on an annual basis.

Mr. Hennessey provided a brief overview of this annual agreement and answered questions from the Board.

On a motion by Mr. Malone, seconded by Ms. Parker, the Board unanimously voted to approve signing the Agreement to Join the Winooski Valley & Statewide Choice of Public High School Collaborative for the 2024 – 2025 School Year, and authorized the Board Chair to sign the document.

8.4 First Reading Personnel Recruitment, Selection, Appointment and Background Checks Policy (B20)

A copy of the policy was distributed.

Ms. Parker provided an overview of the VSBA Policy Notes which advise the policy was changed based on a recent court case.

Brief discussion was held.

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Ms. Reynolds, the Board voted 6 to 2 to approve the First Reading of the Personnel Recruitment, Selection, Appointment and Background Checks Policy (B20).

Mr. Boutin, Mr. Malone, Ms. Parker, Mrs. Pregent, Ms. Reynolds, and Mrs. Spaulding voted for the motion. Mrs. Leclerc and Mr. Reil voted against the motion.

8.5 First Reading Child Nutrition Act Wellness Policy (C9)

A copy of the current policy was distributed.

A copy of the Vermont AOE Model Local Wellness Policy was distributed.

Ms. Parker advised regarding the VSBA Policy Notes and recommendation to temporarily replace the current policy with the AOE Policy Guideline until an official VSBA Model Policy is crafted. Brief discussion was held, including confirmation of the future involvement of the SHAC Committee (School Health Advisory Committee).

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mrs. Pregent, the Board unanimously voted approve the temporary replacement for Policy C9, which is the Vermont AOE Model Local Wellness Policy.

8.6 First Reading Community Use of School Facilities Policy (E20)

A copy of the policy was distributed.

Ms. Parker advised regarding the VSBA Policy Notes. Lengthy discussion was held regarding which option to choose relating to firearms on premises (Hunter Safety Courses and or Gun Shows), and it was noted that legal counsel has not weighed in on this policy. It was noted that many Hunter Safety courses are held at schools and Fish and Wildlife assures that firearms present at Hunter Safety courses have been disabled and cannot fire ammunition. It was suggested that legal counsel be contacted for an opinion and possible wording amendments, including the removal of the optional policy wording that pertains to allowing gun shows.

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mrs. Leclerc, the Board unanimously voted to table discussion of the Community Use of School Facilities Policy (E20) until the District gets an opinion from an attorney.

The Board recessed at 8:03 p.m. and reconvened at 8:07 p.m.

8.7 First Reading Fiscal Management and General Financial Accountability Policy (F20)

A copy of the policy was distributed.

Ms. Parker advised regarding the VSBA Policy Notes. Discussion included District audits and concerns related to the number of items that were removed from the recommended policy. Ms. Parker advised that at the Policy Committee, one Committee Member suggested that the policy be discussed by the Finance Committee. It was noted that the District does not currently have a Policy F21.

On a motion by Mr. Reil, seconded by Mr. Boutin, the Board unanimously voted to accept the recommendation from a Policy Committee Member to send Policies F20 and F23 to the Finance Committee for a deeper dive.

8.8 First Reading Capitalization of Assets Policy F23)

A copy of the policy was distributed.

Ms. Parker provided an overview of the VSBA Policy Notes. Action was taken under Agenda Item 8.7.

Discussion moved to Agenda Item 9.1

8.9 Legislative Breakfast - January

A document titled 'Legislative Breakfast Process – 7:00 – 9:00 am – SHS Cafeteria' was distributed.

Mr. Hennessey provided a brief overview of the distributed document. Mrs. Gilbert can send out a Doodle Poll regarding availability for this event. It was noted that the Legislative Breakfasts are usually held on Mondays (when the Legislature is not in session).

8.10 Policy Discussion – Meeting Times

Ms. Parker advised that she asked for this Agenda item as she believes discussions held later in the meetings receive less attention and discussion that is not as 'rich'. Ms. Parker also cited concerns regarding community member participation (work requirements, parenting, etc.), and noted that potential board members are uncertain that they could commit, and she is concerned that there is a loss of potential candidates because the thought of giving up 5 to 6 hours every other week is untenable. Ms. Parker queried regarding others' concerns and ways to address this matter, so that more in the community can participate and agenda items can be more thoughtfully and richly discussed. Lengthy discussion ensued, including, but not limited to; a suggestion to hold weekly meetings, a suggestion that at 9:00 p.m., the Board hold a vote on whether or not to continue (for the next meeting or the next week), concern that administrators would raise concern that there would not be enough time to prepare agendas for weekly meetings, a suggestion to have shorter agendas, concern that the work of the Board needs to be done and the Board may fall behind on business (especially during busy times, such as budget development), a suggestion that those who want to, can leave early, a query regarding whether the Board is

following Meeting Norms, acknowledgement that meetings used to start earlier (5:30), a belief that the Board's work is important and that Board Members were elected to do a job, committee work, are committees working effectively, the importance of community involvement, concern that the meeting 'norm' is meetings lasting until 10:00 p.m. or 11:00 p.m., the importance of policy work, a reminder that the meeting time was changed to 6:00 p.m. to make it more convenient for community members, so it's also important to end meetings earlier, a suggestion to restructure the agenda to have items that interest community members earlier in the agenda, the availability of videos (community members can watch after the meetings), the need to allow community members to attend and speak at meetings, a belief that 3 hours is reasonable but 5 to 6 plus hours is not, concern that the Agenda Parking Lot is full, community member appreciation for this topic being discussed and a belief that community input is essential, a query regarding interest in having the Policy Committee discuss this issue, a suggestion to hold 'Emergency' meetings the next day (when all business can't be concluded at a meeting), a suggestion to add an additional meeting (occasionally as needed), the unpredictability of how long agenda items should take to discuss, a suggestion to put time limits on agenda items, a suggestion to 'throw' multiple items into the consent agenda (including policies and new hires), a suggestion to have one vote for everything listed in the Consent Agenda, the necessity of being respectful and pulling out of the Consent Agenda, any item that a Board Member wants to discuss, a suggestion from the community to table this item until a future meeting, a suggestion to 'tweak' the existing policy on A20, and the belief that if the rules were followed, (each member is only allowed to speak twice), meeting times would be much shorter.

9. Old Business

9.1 Second and Final Reading Board Member Conflict of Interest Policy (A1)

A copy of the policy was distributed.

Ms. Parker advised regarding contact with legal counsel, as discussed during the First Reading. Legal counsel is fine with the use of the word 'appearance' rather than 'impression'. It was noted that the word appearance is used in the policy in several areas and that he suggested the wording 'Administrative Responsibilities' be change to 'Board Responsibilities', and that pertaining to section 8 b(ii), legal counsel believes the word 'should' is appropriate. Concern was raised that the legal response was general in nature. Mr. Reil stated for the record that he agrees with what is said in the policy, but is curious that there is language that states a member should disqualify themselves as required by Vermont Statute, and that he would like to have follow up with legal counsel because if the statute requires disqualification, the policy should state that they 'shall' disqualify themselves (does statute say should or must?). Mr. Reil reiterated that he does not believe the legal response addressed legal statute.

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mrs. Pregent, the board voted 5 to 3 to approve this (A1) for Second and Final Reading with the one change that the wording Administrator Responsibilities be changed to Board Member Responsibilities.

**Mr. Boutin,, Ms. Parker, Mrs. Pregent, Ms. Reynolds, and Mrs. Spaulding voted for the motion.
Mrs. Leclerc, Mr. Malone, and Mr. Reil voted against the motion.**

Discussion moved to Agenda Item 8.9.

9.2 FY25 Budget Updates

A document titled 'BUUSD Budget 2024-25 – Proposed & Estimated 12/7/23 – Comparative Tax Rate Calculations – Using \$700,000 Toward Revenue' was distributed.

Mrs. Perreault advised that the Finance Committee was unable to meet on Monday. Receipt of some of the Career Center tuition is helpful, though there are other tuitions needed from other technical centers that SHS students attend. Tuition rates need to be announced by January 15th. Mrs. Perreault may be able to obtain tuition information earlier (before the end of December).

Mrs. Perreault advised that she received an updated student count (3675.33 - a reduction). The CLA is due January 1st and it does not look like that information will be received earlier. EEE and Transportation revenues are estimated and are not expected to change much. A budget focused meeting will be necessary and clear direction from the Board is requested. The budget needs to be approved by the Board on January 10, 2024. Discussion included; concern over the tight timeline to finalize the budget, concern that the CLAs are not available and the Barre City CLA may drop considerably (driving up the Homestead Tax Rate), support for the original 10.3% increase, a request for a Plan B with a lower increase, a suggestion that FY24 surplus funds be utilized to purchase supplies, a suggestion to do budget modeling (utilizing various CLA reductions), acknowledgement that the amount over the 5% cap has to come from somewhere and AOE does not know where those funds will come from, a suggestion to cut some of the ESSER positions that will no longer be funded by ESSER, a suggestion to make cuts that don't directly impact learning, and the difficulty in creating budgets when the CLA continues to drop. Mrs. Spaulding went on record stating that Barre City's decision to delay a reappraisal is a huge mistake that impacts the Board in its ability to pass a budget and the Board has no control over when the City decides to do a reappraisal. Additional discussion included; concern over the number of tax increases (state and city/town taxes), the belief that the 11.7% increase is too high, a suggestion that the Board take time to make goals and review models, a suggestion to start the next Board meeting early, a suggestion that there be a Finance Committee meeting, a suggestion for community outreach to encourage members of the public to attend the next meeting, community concern that last year a particular board member actively campaigned against the lower budget and that tax rates are escalating too fast and it's not doable, a query regarding ESSER funds supplanting the budget (in previous years), the goal of ESSER to invest in educational and social/emotional supports of students, the need to make tough decisions, concern of overburdening the community with high tax rates, and community input that student needs are increasing.

On a motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mrs. Pregent, the Board voted 5 to 3 to table discussion of the FY25 budget until the next full Board meeting on December 20th.

**Mr. Boutin, Ms. Parker, Mrs. Pregent, Ms. Reynolds, and Mrs. Spaulding voted for the motion.
Mrs. Leclerc, Mr. Malone, and Mr. Reil voted against the motion.**

10. Future Agenda Items

- Community Building – Add to Parking Lot
- Executive Sessions for Personnel Updates
- Student Council Presentation
- Financial Management Questionnaire

11. Next Meeting Dates

Special Meeting - Wednesday, December 20, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. in the Spaulding High School Library and via Video Conference (Google Meet). – Packet will be sent Friday with Addendums on Monday.

Wednesday, January 10, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. in the Spaulding High School Library and via Video Conference (Google Meet).

12. Executive Session as Needed

No items were proposed for discussion in Executive Session.

13. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Malone, seconded by Mrs. Leclerc, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn at 9:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Poulin