

GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

The Gateway Regional School District will provide an exemplary education that challenges all students in an instructional setting appropriate to their needs.

All visitors attending the school committee meeting should sign in at the security booth.

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 19, 2025

GOOGLE MEET

Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/fdc-sozg-rpn>

6:00 P.M.

6:00 PM I. OPENING OF MEETING & QUESTION TO SEE IF ANYONE IS RECORDING

Call to order: Mr. Forgue, Chairperson

BLANDFORD

Keri Morawiec

CHESTER

Jeana Briggs

Brian Forgue

Jason Forgue

HUNTINGTON

Lisa Goding

MIDDLEFIELD

Alex Seid

Tasha Strong

MONTGOMERY

Peter DeGregorio

RUSSELL

Tara Balboni

Lyndsey Papillon

SECRETARY

Stacy Stewart

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Kristen Smidy, Superintendent

Stephanie Fisk, Assistant Superintendent

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

Martha Gendron, Littleville Asst. Principal

Deanna LeBlanc, Curriculum Director

Melissa McCaul, Littleville Principal

William Sullivan, GRS Principal

Melissa McCaul, Littleville Principal

Val Zeh, GRS Assistant Principal

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

OTHERS: Kathy Gallagher, Hanna Sullivan, Jen Bak, Jen Pappas, Jess Martel, Kayla Brady, Jenna Kakimoto, Wendy Long, Tasha Chapdelane, Shay Main, Russell Dupere, Cheryl Wright, Amanda McFarland, Amy Mason, Chery Harper, Cindy Snudt

6:01 PM II. NEW BUSINESS/ACTION ITEM

- A. Discussion and potential vote to approve Superintendent's request of assigning an outside investigator on all pending investigations

- No one is recording the meeting.

- Mr. Jason Forgue said Mrs. Smidy mentioned the idea of a special investigator for the current process in Chester regarding the principal on leave. He liked the idea and rather than wait, he thought we would have a meeting to discuss it.
- Mrs. Strong asked who would decide who the outside investigator would be would we vote?
- Mr. Jason Forgue yes the committee would decide.
- Mrs. Strong asked where do we start looking.
- Mr. Jason Forgue said the attorney for the school has suggestions, and Mrs. Balboni has a suggestion of someone she had dealt with. He is also open to suggestions,
- Jason are we going to move forward or not
- James Duggan asked if it would only be for the ongoing investigation in Chester.
- Mr. Jason Forgue said it would be limited to that.
- Mrs. Briggs asked why wasn't an impartial investigator brought on two months ago.
- Mr. Jason Forgue said no one proposed it. With the amount of references to vendettas, personality conflicts all the things that have been mentioned in the past couple of meetings, that is why it was suggested. He wasn't anticipating personal vendetta clouding judgement. When it came up he thought it would eliminate it.
- Mrs. Briggs asked what happens with the past two months.
- Mr. Jason Forgue said the process has been ongoing and that is not going to change anything. The investigator may expedite it. The people who are involved now have other obligations and duties.
- Mrs. Briggs asked if they start from scratch, or
- Mr. Jason Forgue said if we have a special investigator, it would be shared.
- Mr. Jason Forgue asked Attorney Dupere to confirm.
- Attorney Dupere said with any investigation, what would occur, you don't always, use an investigator, you don't usually, you would provide them with all of the information and then they would continue. They would write up a report and it would go to a decision maker.
- Mrs. Strong asked who is the person who makes the final decision.
- Mr. Jason Forgue said Mrs. Smidy.
- Mrs. Strong said if we bring this investigator in, can we set an amount of time. Is this going to prolong it more?
- Mr. Jason Forgue thinks it would expedite it. He wouldn't be comfortable giving them a deadline. He would want them to have a packet of information. We could set an expected timeline, but not a hard and fast time line to demand it by.
- Mrs. Briggs asked if Mrs. Maffuccio had been given the opportunity to give her side of the story, besides to her lawyer.
- Attorney Dupere said this meeting is about allegations where the administration has a difference of opinion, based on the finding what is the outcome based on the findings of fact. It is not about a particular person. He wants to be careful of that.

Mrs. Goding made a motion seconded by Mrs. Balboni to approve an outside investigator on all pending allegations at Chester Elementary.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 9 Nays Abstain 1 Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Tara, Peter, Brian, Lisa, Keri, Lyndsey, Alex, Tasha, Jason

Abstain: 1

- Mrs. Briggs asked how much does this cost.
- Mr. Jason Forgue said I don't know, it would vary by the investigator and the amount of time it takes.
- Mrs. Briggs asked if we get this investigator, would they be able to talk to us about the process?
- Attorney Dupere said the district has used outside investigators in the past. It is not common but does happen. The process is set up, you wouldn't be providing too much guidance. They get the information and they are told to investigate the issue. They will look at evidence and do interviews and write up a report. Then it goes to whoever the decision maker is. That report is used to guide the decisions taken. If it is a staff member, It might be bullying for a student. Not a lot of input for the process.
- Mr. Jason Forgue thinks Mrs. Briggs was asking could this investigator say what this process would be first, second, and third steps.
- Attorney Dupere said a lot will give you a retainer type of agreement, this is what I am going to do. Look at documents, Interview witnesses, look at video footage and write a report. There will be a document to share.
- Mrs. Papillon asked how we are funding the investigator.
- Ms. Fisk said it would come out of rural school aid. We would also notify insurance, depending on what type of investigation it is.
- The next process will determine who the next investigator
- Mrs. Balboni would suggest going with Attorney Dupere's suggestion. Her's was just an idea.
- Attorney Dupere said you have used someone. If you want someone who has no relationship at all you might use Mary Lou Rup, who is a retired judge. She charges \$ 275 per hour and is a well respected individual. Another person in her firm who may be able to do it quicker. Any firm you hire would have to do a conflict of interest check.
- Mr. Jason Forgue asked if the other person would work with Mary Lou or independently.
- Attorney Dupere said most likely independent. You really want someone who is well respected and has never represented any of the parties or witnesses.
- Mr. Jason Forgue and Mrs. Morawiec both agree that the investigator should have no connection to us.
- Mr. Jason Forgue asked if anyone had any other suggestions? These two individuals have already shown interest in taking it on.
- Ms. Goding said it was good to rule out the person Mrs. Balboni, as she is on the board of directors for the Village Closet.
- Mrs. Morawiec said it needs to be both unbiased and expedient at the same time.
- Mr. Jason Forge said \$275 per hour for 40 hours is \$11,000. At 80 hours it would be \$22,000. Hopefully we can get all of the information and satisfy any personality conflicts that people believe there may be.
- Attorney Dupere said the committee should vote to authorize the chair to enter in an agreement with the investigator.
- Mr. Jason Forgue asked if there are other things committee members want
- Mrs. Morawiec is going to assume Attorney Dupere is willing to look at it.
- Mr. DeGregorio asked about their availability, what they have going on, and the expected timeline.
- Mr. Jason Forgue said if they can handle it in a reasonable timeline.

Mrs. Morawiec made a motion seconded by Mr. Seid to authorize Mr. Jason Forgue, Chairperson to sign the agreement with the outside investigator for the Chester investigation.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 10 Nays Abstain Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Tara, Jeana, Peter, Brian, Lisa, Keri, Lyndsey, Alex, Tash, Jason

- Mr. Jason Forgue shares concerns over the cost and he is happy we are moving forward to take away perceived vendettas and bias.

6:20 PM III. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Seid made a motion seconded by Mrs. Morawiec to adjourn at 6:38 p.m.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 10 Nays Abstain Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Tara, Jeana, Peter, Brian, Lisa, Keri, Lyndsey, Alex, Tash, Jason

Respectfully submitted,
Stacy L Stewart
School Committee Secretary