

LNSU/LNMUUSD BOARD MEETING MINUTES
GMTCC COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTER
MONDAY, APRIL 14, 2025

Board members present: Cambridge – Mark Stebbins, Denise Webster, Jan Sander*, Amy Listenik*; Eden – Jeff Hunsberger, David Whitcomb*; Hyde Park – Lisa Jones, Tina Lowe, Phil Kiely; Johnson – Mark Nielsen, Monica Stearns, Kyle Nuse; Waterville – Bart Bezio; Belvidere – Stephanie Sweet*;

Administrators present: Catherine Gallagher, Deborah Clark, Dylan Laflam, Cole Hayes, Blake Nemeth, Paula Beattie, Chris Hennessey, Diane Reilly, David Manning, Bethann Pirie, Jan Epstein
Others present: Robin Bryce, Eric Hutchins, Margaret MacLean*

*remote attendance

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

Call to Order, Approval of the Agenda and Public Comment

M. Nielsen called the meeting to order at 6:00. He said Policy C-4 should be removed from the Policy Review item. It was moved and seconded to approve the agenda with the recommended change and the motion was passed.

Eric Hutchins said he sees that the board is considering Jeremy Scannell for a position. He has worked with J. Scannell for 17 years. They have had many disagreements but all have been resolved in a professional manner. J. Scannell is a consummate professional who puts kids' interests first. We couldn't hope to have a more professional person in that position.

He sees that renewal of principal contracts is also on the agenda. He is a teacher at Lamoille Union. The assistant principal and principal at LUHS are outstanding professionals. No one works harder than they do. They are thoughtful and deliberate in making decisions. Bethann Pirie is a consummate professional who always puts students first in everything she does. It is reflected in the way the climate of the building has changed during her tenure. There is no principal he would wish to work for more than B. Pirie.

He has often disagreed with superintendent Cat Gallagher but they have often found common ground in putting kids first in whatever they do. It is difficult to be a superintendent in these times, with the cultural, technological and political changes. C. Gallagher has done an outstanding job listening to people and putting kids first. We center that in our district and that is why we keep improving.

He has been following potential legislation closely and has lobbied people to vote against H.454. It is unlikely to pass the Senate in its current form. Something different will come out of the Senate. There is a real danger that rural schools will get shortchanged. The only part of that bill that will affect property taxes is the foundation formula. All of the consolidation and governance changes are aimed at small rural schools. He just sat in on the curriculum committee meeting where they went over student data and talked about test scores and survey results showing how students felt about their school and connectedness. That is data that the legislature is not seeing. Kids feel cared for, safe and part of the

community. That is invaluable for a learning environment. Part of the duty of school board members to uphold the district's mission is making sure legislators are well aware of the impacts the law will have on our district. He strongly suggests reaching out to legislators let them know how the bill will impact our schools.

Robin Bryce, school librarian at HPES, said she has been serving libraries in our district since 2001. One of her major issues has been to get a selection and reconsideration policy. There is now one ready for the board to consider. District librarians feel this policy will protect us. It will reduce the amount of challenges and give specific structure to any future challenges. It will back up schools, collections and librarians. If there are any questions during the deliberation process, she is here.

Consent Agenda Items (Minutes of March 10, 2025 LNSU/LNMUUSD Board Meeting, Curriculum Committee Meeting, Social-Emotional Wellness & Safety Committee Meeting; Personnel Committee Meeting on March 20, 2025)

J. Hunsberger moved to approve the consent agenda and the motion was seconded and passed.

Board Orders

S. Sweet said she reviewed the board orders dated February 7, February 21 and March 7 and all looked to be in order. It was moved and seconded to approve the board orders and the motion was passed.

Legislative Updates

B. Bezio said board members have probably seen alerts about the major piece of legislation that was approved on Friday by a vote of 87-55, H.454. It will now go to the Senate and it could end up looking very different. Many believe Governor Scott is looking for in-fighting as a reason to go back to his original proposal and push it further. H.454 is an imperfect bill. A lot of what is in it can change. He encourages board members to continue to monitor it and talk to legislators and advocate for our schools.

Rural School Community Alliance Presentation/Q&A

Margaret McLean said she is a Peacham resident and a volunteer committee member for the Rural School Community Alliance. A group of 5 school boards voted in January to create the Alliance. They contacted other school boards throughout the state from schools with enrollment below 200 (or below 300 for K-12.) They now have 92 voting groups from 80 towns throughout Vermont. They include school boards, 8 selectboards, 2 parent-teacher groups and 2 early childhood groups. The Alliance was formed to make sure the voices of rural communities are heard at the statehouse.

Member groups have one or more representatives. Representatives use a Google Group to talk about their different perspectives and develop responses. They have testified in the House twice and last week they testified in the Senate. They were asked to return this week with an alternative proposal to deal with the issue of quality education at a cost hard-working Vermonters can afford. They have a group of steering committee members and they call on other members at different points. They have had a group of superintendents from Alliance schools work with them on Zoom. When they have

testified, they have testified with superintendents who present the rural perspective. There may be a time when they testify in conjunction with teachers or community members. They won't be recruiting for new members beyond April. They think others will join in April, possibly bringing the number of member groups over 100. There is no cost to join. They are fund raising to pay for a lobbyist. There is no financial obligation but there is an opportunity for individuals or boards to make donations. They are already at almost half what they need to pay a lobbyist. The lobbyist has been invaluable in getting them taken seriously and invited to give testimony. One committee they met with said their testimony was better than anything else they had received so far. Through their Google Group, members get regular communications about what is going on. Membership is not necessarily a lot of work. It is mostly a communications tool and an opportunity to give input. Anything they send out can be shared with the board or the community. They hope Lamaille North will be interested in joining them.

B. Bezio said he feels the Alliance has done fantastic analysis work. It is tough to show that consolidation actually yields any savings. He asked M. McLean if she sees ways that any of the priorities of the Alliance could be folded into H.454. M. McLean said yes. The Alliance was asked to present an alternative proposal. They are going back this week with a proposal and an analysis of H.454 and the issues they see that are counterproductive to creating thriving schools and communities.

K. Nuse said she has been following the issue and the Alliance's work. She doesn't see any reason we wouldn't want to join the Alliance. She asked if there is any reason C. Gallagher or M. Nielsen thinks we would not want to.

M. Nielsen said he sees this as more of an informational session and would not necessarily expect the board to make a decision now about whether to join.

B. Bezio said he personally would be comfortable advocating for the board to sign onto the Alliance. There is strength in numbers. The Alliance could give us a greater voice. That could be valuable in the coming weeks. He doesn't know that he would want to push off a decision for another month.

C. Gallagher said she wants to be a part of anything that moves education transformation forward in a way that is best for our kids. She thinks much of what she hears about the Alliance is very much in line with our thinking. We treasure our small schools. She doesn't know that there is a downside to joining. She would advocate for anything that will be thoughtful, without engaging in anything disruptive that will take the attention off our children.

It was suggested that a special meeting might be needed to vote on joining the Alliance, as that was not on the agenda.

Margaret said there are 12 superintendents whose communities have joined the Alliance who meet regularly. They are happy to have superintendents join as well as board members. It is members of that superintendent group who have testified.

The board agreed to schedule a virtual meeting for 6:00 on April 16 to vote on joining the Alliance. That will be the only agenda item.

Appoint Johnson School Board Member

M. Nielsen said Carri Ferrari is the only candidate from Johnson for the open seat. It was moved and seconded to appoint Carri Ferrari to the open seat for Johnson and the motion was passed.

FY26 CFP Applications

D. Clark said this agenda item is actually about the subgrant agreement. LNSU receives federal grants and subgrants to LNMUUSD and Cambridge. It was moved and seconded to authorize M. Nielsen to sign the subgrant agreement with LNSU and the motion was passed.

Principal Contract Renewals

C. Gallagher said 3 principals have contracts up for renewal: Bethann Pirie, Jan Epstein and Diane Reilly. She recommends a 3-year renewal for all of them. She suggested the principals could share where they are with their goals. They are on track to meet them by the end of June. They chose 2-3 goals each, centered around the school improvement plans and the standards. B. Pirie, J. Epstein and D. Reilly described their goals and the progress they have made on them.

It was moved and seconded to offer 3-year contract renewals to B. Pirie, J. Epstein and D. Reilly and the motion was passed.

Approve Interim Director/Assistant Director of Student Support Services Hires

C. Gallagher said we have been searching for a director of student support services. Two people were interviewed but neither of them moved to the final round. We started to think creatively and it became evident that we have two people who are very well positioned to take on this role. It is proposed to hire Jeremy Scannell as director, working primarily with grades 6-12, and Carrie Bullard as assistant director, working primarily with grades PreK-5. She would like to hire them both for next year in interim positions to see if they are comfortable in these roles.

It was moved and seconded to approve hiring Jeremy Scannell as director of student support services and Carrie Bullard as assistant director of student support services. The motion was passed.

IT/Facilities

D. Clark said the purchases to be discussed are investments that were budgeted, but we wanted to hold off until determining near the end of the year that we had funding. Projections indicate that we have the money to make these purchases. The money will come out of the general fund. We will look at projections one more time before moving forward with the purchases.

School Safety System: It was moved and seconded to enter executive session pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313 because the discussion may involve matters that could compromise security or emergency response protocols and disclosure of such information could endanger public safety. The motion was passed at 6:55.

J. Hunsberger moved to award a 5-year contract to Centegix for their Crisis Alert and Visitor Management system, with a total support and maintenance contract value of \$346,780, which will be paid as follows: \$117,180 as the initial investment from the FY25 budget and \$57,400 per fiscal year in FY26 through FY29. The motion was seconded and passed.

GMTCC Forestry Truck Replacement: D. Laflam said we went out to bid and contacted local dealerships to replace the current 2012 Ford truck with a plow that is at the forestry campus. It is no longer inspectable. We got 3 bids and Lamoille Valley Ford offered a 2023 F550 truck at a bigger discount than any of those bids. It was moved and seconded to accept the bid of \$68,504 from Lamoille Valley Ford for an F550 plow truck and the motion was passed.

GMTCC Program Van Replacement: D. Laflam said the current 2010 Dodge Caravan was inspected in March and we were told that this was the last year it could pass inspection. It was moved and seconded to purchase an all-wheel drive Toyota Sienna from 802 Toyota for \$46,430.50 and the motion was passed.

High School HVAC Project: D. Laflam said we have been talking about air conditioning in our building for the last couple years. The B wing of the high school is one of the hottest parts of the campus. It is proposed to purchase a VRV mini split heat pump system for the B wing. This would provide individual air conditioning for 15 rooms, tied into our existing building management system. Control Tech was the only bidder because we require the heat pumps to tie into our existing Control Tech proprietary system. It was moved and seconded to accept the bid of \$187,500 from Control Tech Inc. for the B wing VRV heat pump system. The motion was passed.

LU/GMTCC Campus Digital Display/School Sign: D. Laflam said it is proposed to replace the existing brick school sign with a digital display sign. It would provide a great way to reach out to the public. We would no longer need to put out sandwich boards. We already have the permits in place if the board approves the purchase. There is only one dealer in Vermont (Vermont Display) who carries the brand we already use for our scoreboards. It was moved and seconded to authorize purchasing a digital display sign from Vermont Display for \$53,700. There was a question about who will manage it. D. Laflam said R. Thibault. We haven't figured out yet who will be the backup. The motion was passed.

LU Campus Furniture Replacement, 12 Classrooms: D. Laflam said the only way any vendor would guarantee the price for 90 days as we require was by making the bids astronomically high. We decided not move forward with any of the bids.

District IT Van: C. Hayes said we have started centralizing a lot of IT support, with more people housed on the LU/GMTCC campus. This van will allow our techs to go to sites to do repairs. They will have the supplies they need in the van and will be able to do repairs in the van. He got all his techs certified as Dell repair technicians so we no longer have to send devices away for repair. We have also been trying to cut back on how much work we are contracting out. We have been doing a lot of wiring jobs internally. This purchase will come from the general fund, using funds we have saved by centralizing purchasing for the district. It will allow us to fix devices on site. D. Laflam said C. Hayes and his crew wired central office so we did not have to contract it out, achieving savings of almost

70%. It was moved and seconded to purchase a van from St. Johnsbury Ram for \$59,690. The motion was passed.

LU/GMTCC Maintenance Truck Replacement: D. Laflam said we need to replace our 10 year old plow truck. We got bids from local dealers and advertised as well. We got 2 bids. The best was from St. Johnsbury Ram. The cost for a truck with a plow is \$95,670. Both dealers offered \$35K for the trade in. The net cost is \$60,670. It was moved and seconded to purchase a truck with a plow from St. Johnsbury Ram at a net cost after trade in of \$60,670. The motion was passed.

General Legal Counsel Regarding Policies

It was moved and seconded to go into executive session with the board and administrators for confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the body. The motion was passed at 7:18. The board came out of executive session at 7:24.

C. Gallagher said at the next board meeting we will break into groups that will spend 10 minutes on the second reading and convey to the full board the content of the policies in broad strokes. There are 3 first readings for tonight.

B. Pirie said the first policy that needs a first reading is a proficiency-based graduation requirements policy from VSBA. It is a state required policy. There was a proficiency-based graduation policy before. This is a more succinct version that doesn't go into detail about what proficiency-based learning is.

Another is a new required policy from VSBA on selection of library materials. It outlines that we will have procedures in place.

The last is a Title I, Part A parent and family engagement policy. It is also required. It is almost exactly the same as our previous policy. We replaced the specific year with "current year" and took out the procedures that outline how the work is done.

Administrator Updates

C. Gallagher said the Agency of Education asked individual districts to certify our compliance with what we have always complied with – the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But there was language in the attestation form that was tied to the federal government's interpretation of the Civil Rights Act. She thinks the interpretation is undergoing some changes. Some individual districts pushed back and said they would not do it. The Agency of Ed has always responded on all districts' behalf before. Today they did respond for the state. Secretary Saunders said that Vermont's response does not reference or adopt any federal executive orders or guidance documents, does not say that diversity, equity and inclusion work is illegal, does not direct Vermont schools to change practices related to diversity, equity and inclusion, does not require individual responses from superintendents, does reaffirm a strong commitment to protecting students from discrimination, and does support the continuation of diversity, equity and inclusion practices in Vermont schools.

C. Gallagher said H.454 passed to the Senate last week. There are some good pieces to it. Much of it is very similar to some of the tenets of the Rural School Community Alliance. Some things need to change. For instance, there are considerations for geography as exceptions to school closures, but they are not well defined. Exceptions for class size minimums also need to be more clearly defined. The 4000 student district size was suggested as something tangible for the governor to read. We need to be very careful not to engage in infighting with other groups about this because it will be easy for the governor to say in that case that we should go back to his 5 district proposal.

D. Clark said it looks like staff will move back to central office April 28-29. Today she forwarded a letter from the Belvidere selectboard requesting a timeline extension and other considerations. She will bring that as an agenda item next month.

D. Clark said an email was forwarded to her from an ECS parent group email account. Many or all board members received it, as well as some employees. The background is that in November D. Laflam explained to the Eden parent group why the bottle bin at ECS was removed, citing safety and other concerns. It was overflowing onto the ground. It included trash. Broken bottles and trash were scattered around the entrance to the school. Several requests were made verbally to the parent group throughout summer and fall to have it cleaned up and return the bottles. When they were not responded to, the school custodian made several trips to return the bottles and cleaned up the mess. The cost of the hours and mileage was borne by the school district and it was more than the amount from the bottle deposits. Having bottles, cans and trash sitting for extended periods invites unwanted pests. On November 26, D. Laflam offered to meet with the group to discuss, should they wish to put the bin back, a better location for it, expectations and responsibilities such as frequent pickups, and what the school district would be responsible for. In December the parent group replied asking about facilities responsibilities and for details regarding the school's prior request for picking up the area, also noting incorrectly that they believed principals act as committee facilitators and are therefore responsible to coordinate, facilitate and delegate management of the bin. D. Laflam replied on December 3 that it is understood that parents are always facilitators of fundraising, never the principal. Today an email was sent by the parent group about treating schools differently within the district with partiality in providing access to school site based bottle drive bins. There is only one other school in the district that has a collection bin – Waterville. Other schools or parent groups have collection bins in communities, not at the school. The Waterville bin is discreetly tucked into the side parking lot and not easily visible from the road. They had large drops of bottles recently but by today the overflow had been cleared away, along with a chair that had been left there. Facilities has always worked hard to accommodate community requests. It is unfortunate that somewhere communication and collaboration have broken down. If the group would like to work with D. Laflam we can talk about putting the bin back and get an understanding of when it needs to be picked up, who the contact person is, etc. That invitation has been extended. Facilities does not play favorites with schools. School safety and sanitary conditions take priority.

D. Manning said JES has a bin at the school once or twice a year for about a week. They advertise that it will be there and people drop off their cans, then it goes away, so it is not an ongoing problem. That seems to work well.

D. Laflam said in his 11 years of working in the district he thinks he has seen Waterville's bin overflowing twice. Whoever manages that does an excellent job.

C. Gallagher said she saw a wonderful middle school play this weekend – Alice in Wonderland. Chris Hennessey said he was impressed with the production this year. Jeff said several Jamtones vocalists auditioned to be in the music festival in Newport recently. A video of the music festival is available on the festival Facebook page. B. Pirie said the Lamoille Union chess club run by Eric Hutchins won the state championship for the fourth year in a row. C. Gallagher said GMTCC has 175 applications, the largest number in 10 years. D. Laflam said 3 GMTCC students – from the electric, HVAC and networking technology programs – got gold medals at SkillsUSA.

J. Sander asked if there is a way board members can find out about student performances before they happen. B. Pirie said she puts all the dates in her high school newsletter and links them in her reports. C. Hayes said they are shown on the district wide calendar and on Facebook.

Adjourn

It was moved and seconded to adjourn at 7:47 and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths

UNAPPROVED