Washington Central Unified Union School District

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Washington Central Unified Union
School Board Meeting
4.8.26
6:15-9:15 PM
East Montpelier Elementary School
665 Vincent Flats Road
East Montpelier, VT 05651
(In-Person & Virtual)

Present: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate, Daniel Keeney, Chris McVeigh, Patrick Whelley, Ursula Stanley, Elizabeth Brown, Zach Sullivan, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Julia Hewitt, Natasha Eckart, Dave Lowther, Marty McMahon, Andrew Boye, Karoline May, Michael Sherwin, Julia Pritchard, Barry Bernstein, Alicia Lyford, Susanne Gann, Lisa Hanna, Allison Fayle, Dell Waterhouse, Sonja Andrews, Gillian Fuqua, Ainsley Burroughs, Jarrod Weiss, Celia Guggemos, ORCA Media, Alison, Ari Preston, Blakely Gilmore, Cadence Burgess, C Ecklund, Danielle Mackay, David Lawrence, Dawn Dumas, David Delcore, Dena Brown, Denise Wheeler, Ellen Knoedler, Emi Harlow, Hannah Fair, Hannah Brown, Holly Weiss, Honi Bean Barrett, Jamie Bohn, Jenna Howard, Jennifer Chambers, Joanie Smith, Kathleen, Laura Giammusso, Lauralea Curavoo, Lisa Richardson, Lisa Hanna, Liz Bevins, Liza Ziering, Marilyn Martin, Mark Brown, Megan McLane, Michael Duane, Michelle Lynch, Noah Weinstein, Samantha Johnson, Veronica Fair, Will, Anna Matheson, Emily Connor, Heather Clark Warner, Elizabeth Hall, Griffin, Jillian Zeilenga. **Student Representatives:** Elise O'Brien, Kathryn Saunders, Lei DeGroot

1. **<u>Call To Order:</u> Diane Nichols-Fleming called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.**

2. **Welcome**

2.1. Adjustments to The Agenda: Chris McVeigh moved; Daniel Keeney seconded to accept the agenda. This motion carried.

2.2. Reception of Guests: Diane Nichols-Fleming shared the hope for creating this meeting/forum to enter into dialogue - the topic tonight being preschool programming since this is a topic that she has heard there are concerns and questions and confusion around. She explained the forum - a presentation first from the administration and the time for questions from the public and online, as well as questions that had been received via google document.

3. Presentation: PreK Programming: Superintendent Dellinger-Pate shared a slide deck describing PreK programming.

3.1. Q&A: Diane Nichols-Fleming invited public comment/questions. Griffin, East Montpelier parent: Are we explaining a decision that has already been made? Or is there still room to make a different decision? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that the preschool programming has been structured for the coming year, as shared in the slidedeck. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that the decision has been made, and there have been questions about what is the role of the board. Our role is supervising the superintendent; the superintendent oversees leadership and programming. However the board is tasked with being sure that we are responsible and attuned to how our students are being educated. She stated that the board is struggling, understanding our role, while being respectful to the leadership. Steven Dellinger-Pate explained the planned configuration: AM and PM PreK program EM (Calais and East Montpelier), AM program Rumney (Middlesex and Worcester), AM and PM PreK program Berlin (Berlin). If there are available spots at any of those programs, they will be offered to students outside of those communities. He shared that Community Connections will support all of these programs for full day child care offerings. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate shared plans for transportation. Question from document: Please explain why benefits outweigh the costs for Calais families sending PreK students to East Montpelier. Karoline May explained that an advantage is the ability to educate preschoolers at their developmental level (e.g., 3 year old, 4 year old, 5 year old). Financially, she indicated that sustainability is a factor. Gillian Fuqua stated that we are balancing not only what we do next year but what we will be doing five and ten years from now. We are looking at the information we have in front of us right now (re population, enrollment projections). Celia Guggemos stated that we are trying to provide as much full day care as we can in the district and we are using the three schools as hubs. Zach Sullivan asked, if we were to split preschool between East Montpelier and Calais, would we be able to provide full day care for families? Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that we are not confident that we would be able to do this - staffing is a barrier. Sonja Andrews asked the board to answer the question of disadvantages to students regarding attending a school outside of their community. Karoline May explained her experience of full day child care for preschool children. Steven Dellinger-Pate acknowledged that the enrollment for East Montpelier and Calais is equal this year; however the full day program is in place at East Montpelier, and we have heard the desire from families to have a full day program. Sonja Andrews stated that she does not believe child care is the responsibility of the school and should not be a deciding factor. Marty McMahon suggested that we make sure to hear all of the questions from the public. Chris McVeigh asked whether it is a possibility or a consideration to transport East Montpelier students to Calais and have the full day program at Calais. Steven Dellinger-Pate spoke briefly about the impetus to continue full day preschool at East Montpelier. Alicia Lyford spoke about the desire of the school administrators to not move staff, if not necessary. She stated that East Montpelier is

larger and has more staff and the schools take seriously not uprooting staff when not necessary. Elizabeth Hall, East Montpelier spoke about the difficulty finding daycare in the area. She thanked the board for supporting before and after school care options. Zach Sullivan spoke about his experience considering preschool for his children and the importance of full day offering. Barry Bernstein suggested honoring the Calais vote and keeping preschool at Calais, even if it is a half day program. Emily, East Montpelier, stated that Calais families had a vote with regards to their school and they voted, knowing the preschool plan. She noted that East Montpelier families did not have a vote. Elizabeth Brown asked how many preschool classrooms are planned for East Montpelier. Alicia Lyford stated that preschool registration ended in March and if there are spaces remaining, additional families get the available slots. Currently there are 18 students enrolled. Elizabeth Brown asked why we are not considering offering preschool programming for all families who are interested. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that increasing programming is costly. Kathleen asked whether there is a Community Connections program at Rumney. Steven Dellinger-Pate clarified. Kathleen stated that when Principal Lyford stated that she takes seriously not causing staff to move, it doesn't sit well when we are asking Calais families to move their preschool children. Ursula Stanley read questions that had been received in writing. Some responses were provided. Karoline May stated that this was a very difficult budget season for board, administration and staff. She stated that we have reflected on how we can move forward in a better way next year. She stated that she hopes this meeting is the first of budget discussions for FY28. Elizabeth Brown spoke about nurse to student ratio and equity in access to nurse services for students at all of the schools. She expressed, regarding Calais, this is a huge change for a community who worked so hard to preserve their school. She also asked for data supporting the idea that combining preK with kindergarten does not work for students. Julia Hewitt stated that as a board we voted to affirm the vote from the towns. She asked how the decision to remove approximately 20% of Calais student body was in keeping with the spirit of that vote. Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that we are not looking at that number of students (20% from Calais) at East Montpelier past this year - the number reflects preschool students. Some discussion followed. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that she and Superintendent Dellinger-Pate will work to answer all of the questions on the google doc that were not addressed tonight. Steven Dellinger-Pate stated that this is not a quality-of-staffing issue. He knows that our staff is going to take care of all of the children no matter what school they attend. Marty McMahon asked about the dollar amount - if students do not attend the preschool program, then what is the loss in revenue. Susanne Gann indicated that preschool students bring $4K.

4. **Personnel:**

4.1. **Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE: Daniel Keeney moved to approve new hire: Ruairi Hutchison – U-32, Special Education Teacher, 1.00 FTE, and Hayden Roberge – U-32, PE/Health Teacher, 1.00 FTE. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously. Daniel Keeney moved to accept resignations for the following, with great appreciation: Ronald (Randy) Brown, U-32 Science - resigning .20 FTE of their position (6/30/26), Sharon Spector, Rumney School Counselor - resigning .20 FTE of their position (6/30/26), Amy Molina, U-32 Assistant Principal resigning effective 6/30/2026,Scott Benerofe, U32 MS Science, resigning effective 6/30/2026,Amy Young, Doty School Librarian, resigning effective 6/30/2026, Makenna Lund, EMES/Rumney Music, resigning effective 6/30/2026. Seconded by Chris McVeigh.** Daniel Keeney asked whether these resignations are indirectly or directly related to budget cuts. Superintendent Dellinger-Pate shared that the first two are changing FTE. He also noted that Amy Molina has been with us for a very long time; she is taking on a Principal position at Hartford High School. He noted that Hartford High is very lucky to have her and we will miss her at WCUUSD. Natasha Eckart expressed disappointment in the loss of female administrators. She indicated that she fears there is a "good ol' boy" network at play. **This motion carried unanimously. Daniel Keeney moved to approve the following changes in FTE: Ronald (Randy) Brown, U-32 Science- will be .80 FTE in the 26-27 school year, Sharon Spector, Rumney School Counselor – will be .60 FTE in the 26-27 school year, Heather Clark-Warner, EMES – will be 1.00 FTE in the 26-27 school year, Katie Walczak, BES – will be 1.00 FTE in the 26-27 school year. Seconded by Zach Sullivan, this motion carried unanimously.**

4.2. **Approve Job Descriptions:** Superintendent Dellinger-Pate stated that we have been awarded grants through Community Schools; these job descriptions are connected to these grants programs. **Chris McVeigh moved to approve the job description: Project Director (Youth Community Educator Work-Based Learning Afterschool). Seconded by Patrick Whelley; this motion carried unanimously. Chris McVeigh moved to accept as a slate the remaining job descriptions included in the board packet tonight: Site Director (Youth Community Educator Work-Based Learning Afterschool), Workshop Facilitator, Student Leader Designer, Youth Community Educator Trainee, Youth Community Educator Intern. Seconded by Michelle Ksepka. This motion carried unanimously.**

5. **<u>Future Agenda Items:</u>** Funding for PreK/equity in programming, transfer of students from one location to another - short term vs long term and Criteria to move students between schools.

6. **<u>Board Reflections:</u>** Chris McVeigh stated that he enjoyed this format; having enough time to have interactive discussion. Marty McMahon reiterated Chris's sentiment. He also noted that Calais voted by ⅔ to keep their school open and he is hearing a lack of trust, and we need to

work on rebuilding trust. Daniel Keeney expressed that the public can focus on their own perspective; the contrast of the board is to balance all perspectives and to hear also from the people who are not in the room. Chris McVeigh stated that it is important to explain our decision making process and our rationale.

7. **Public Comments: Time limit strictly enforced, see note:** Heather Clark Warner, preschool teacher at East Montpelier, invited those present to take a look at the preschool and community connections space. She stated that this has been a difficult year and we would like to move forward, back together as a district, knowing that we all want what is best for our children. Emily Connor, East Montpelier parent, stated that there has never been a proposal to move students from East Montpelier to Calais for preschool. The board has worked very hard to work within the funding boundaries, to create what is best for all of the students. She spoke about towns becoming very isolationist and pitting "us" against "them." Lauralea Curavoo read a letter from Calais teachers. Anna Matheson, Calais resident, spoke about roles and responsibilities of the board. She stated that stewardship and health of the school district as a whole is one of the roles - thinking about the future as well as the present. Has there been any consideration of putting together a document - charter perhaps - stating the roles and responsibilities of the board and how they work with the role and responsibility of the superintendent.

8. **Adjourn: Michelle Ksepka moved to adjourn at 8:27. Seconded by Natasha Eckart, this motion carried unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary