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Minutes for the Thursday, April 20, 2017 South Hero School Board Meeting at Folsom Education & Community Center

Called to Order:

Meeting called to order at 6:02 pm

In attendance:

David Cain, RJ Sweeney, Bentley Vaughan, Melanie Henderson, Tim Maxham, Board members; Barbara Burrington, Superintendent; Peter Gregg, Sandy Gregg, Kathy Robinson, Luke Tremble, Windy Heyn, Sue Bumbeck, Tom Nolan, Alison Perry, Laura Myler, Julie Pidgeon, Farryl Bertmann, Andre Bertmann, Kari Banas, Bill Banas, Maia Skutel Jensen, Isolde Frank, Helen Bishop, Mike Wickenden

Adjustment of Agenda:

- Added brief Executive Session during Board Discussions

Board Discussion:

Administration Update:

- D.Cain made the following statement:

After some discussion with the Board, Mr. Badeau decided to resign, effective at the end of the year. He was not terminated nor was his resignation demanded. We understand that Mr. Badeau reached the decision because he considered it the best course of action for him, his family and the school. Since Mr. Badeau had a contract for next year, the Board concluded that it would be equitable to provide some severance for him.

The Board will start a search for a new Principal for next year immediately. The Board thanks Mr. Badeau for his service to the school and the community. We wish him continued success in his career.

Board Development with Harry Frank:

- Harry Frank came from the Vermont School Board Association (VSBA) to discuss good governance practices. He offered several insights, such as:
 - School Boards are required to meet in public, which leads to some level of transparency. Inclusivity is valuable, and input should be gathered from staff, parents, and community members. However, only the Board is charged with making decisions on behalf of all students, staff, and tax-payers. Ultimately, the final decision-making process is not inclusive.
 - Community engagement involves both listening and informing the community. If tax-payers are unfamiliar with modern educational practices (as T.Maxham suggested), the Board should engage and educate the community.

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- B.Burrington stated (and H.Frank agreed) that good governance is based on reciprocity. The Board must set a vision and goals for the school and students, and constantly measure its own performance against those goals.
- If a distressed parent pulls a board member aside with a complaint regarding her child's classroom teacher, the Board member should first listen to the parent's concerns. Next, recommend that the parent speak directly to the staff member involved. If the parent feels uncomfortable, or if their discussion with the staff member proves unproductive, suggest to the parent that she next speak to the Principal. If that conversation also proves unproductive, the Board member should suggest that the parent speak with the Superintendent. Explain to the parent that the School Board's only real role is to ensure that the process has been followed.
- While it is important to show concern, the Board member should not gather too many details from the complainant, since the Board may be required to act in a quasi-judiciary function. The Board must maintain impartiality.
- The School Board should not be involved with the daily operation of the school. Rather, the Board's function is to provide long-term vision and goals for the school.
- The Board Chair should work with the Superintendent to develop meeting agendas. B.Burrington mentioned that it's very difficult when an agenda item is added without first notifying the Superintendent (and giving him/her time to prepare).
- H.Frank recommends that the Folsom School Board schedule a retreat this summer to address Board vision and goals for the school. The retreat is a warned meeting, and the public is allowed to attend. He suggested that the Board consider adding a Board training session to the retreat as well. J.Nichols also suggested that the goal of the retreat should be to develop a work plan.

Climate and Culture Survey with Jay Nichols:

- J.Nichols is currently the superintendent of the Franklin Northeast SU. He offers consulting services to schools to provide feedback on their climate and culture.
- His program includes an 11-question anonymous survey for the staff. There are no identifiers, and responses are only seen by Jay Nichols. The questionnaire only includes 1 question on the Principal.
- Surveys would also be given to middle-school students regarding their learning experiences, either in their home room or guidance period. J.Nichols mentioned research showing that 5th graders give the most astute feedback.
- In addition, staff would be interviewed 1-on-1. Each interview takes 15 minutes, during which J.Nichols asks 3 open-ended questions. Interviews would also be conducted for a finite number of parents and community members. Interviews are anonymous...J.Nichols only asks the person's role (staff, teacher, parent, etc.).
- It would be impractical to interview every family in town, so the Board must carefully select candidates to provide a true cross-section of perspectives. Many community members have strong opinions but may not feel comfortable speaking in a public meeting.

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- The results of the surveys and interviews would not be compared with those from another school. Rather, the "scores" (ratings on a scale from 1-5) would be compiled. If the results are consistently less than 4, the school has a problem.
- J. Nichols charges \$100/hr for face-to-face interviews, and \$75/hr for paper work & compiling responses. Interviewing staff 1-on-1 would require 0.5 – 1 day, and would be done during a school day. Questionnaires could be done at any time, and parents and community members could be interviewed in person or by phone.
- If the Board chooses to move forward, Jay Nichols would need ~1 month advanced notice.
- F.Bertmann asked if this process has been done before. J.Nichols said that the process has been vetted through REL (Regional Education Lab). F.Bertmann asked whether the surveys have been scrubbed to remove bias from the questions. J.Nichols explained that the questions are open-ended, and that he looks for trends in responses. Answers are recorded and transcribed, and J.Nichols also takes notes.
- The Board believes that this type of information would be valuable, and is interested in pursuing at least some of the options. Further discussions will be needed before a plan is finalized.

Health Memorandum of Understanding:

- The State would like Folsom school to become an emergency/medical services distribution site for the entire GI county. This would become necessary in the event of an extreme community emergency, such as an epidemic, pandemic, release of toxins, natural disaster, etc.
- Emergency health workers would gather at Folsom to coordinate distribution of medicines and emergency services.
- T.Maxham asked if each town will have a point of contact. B.Burrington confirmed that they will, and those individuals are identified separately.

Act 46 Update:

- M.Henderson explained that the Vermont State Senate has drafted an amendment to Act 46 that would provide some flexibility for towns struggling to meet the requirements of the law. The Vermont House Committee on Education held a public hearing on April 4th, and Andy Julow and Melanie Henderson both testified in favor of adding flexibility to Act 46, and those testimonies can be seen at <http://cnuz.tv/voiceofvermonters>.
- M.Henderson then explained that Rep. Ben Joseph has proposed an amendment to the House legislation that would allow a 1x3x1 side-by-side merger. In this configuration, the three central towns (Isle La Motte, Grand Isle, and North Hero) would operate side-by-side with Alburgh to the north and South Hero to the south. Alburgh and South Hero would not be required to merge. Effectively, this would allow the island towns to remain an SU and work together. However, none of the towns would benefit from the temporary incentives. At first this proposal was struck from the House legislation, but it appears to have been reintroduced to the final version of the House amendment.

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- M.Henderson also recounted her latest meeting with Ben Chiappinelli from the Georgia School Board. Although the Franklin West supervisory union has ruled nothing out. However, at this time, they are likely to seek an Alternative Governance Structure, asking that the State allow them to continue to work together under their current SU structure.
- M.Henderson also explained that she's been providing map-making services for a large group of towns that are struggling with Act 46. The map shows communities that have merged, those that are seeking an Alternative Governance Structure, those that are exempt from merging, etc. There are more than 100 towns that are struggling, and they have recently banded together to retain a lobbyist who has been working to introduce more flexibility into the law.
- Finally, M.Henderson explained that when the Folsom School Board first tackled Act 46, we believed there was ~\$350,000 at stake (~\$100k in small schools grant, and ~\$250k from phantom students). Since that time, Folsom's population has grown (mostly due to the inclusion of 3- & 4-year-old PreK students in the equalized pupil calculation). The growing population has eliminated the phantom students, and also decreased the small schools grant. Consequently, we no longer stand to lose \$350k. The amount of money at stake is closer to ~\$67,000. If Folsom chooses not to enter a preferred merger structure, it will be much more plausible to find \$67k worth of savings in the budget than \$350k.
- D.Cain stated that whether South Hero pursues an alternative structure with our neighbors in the islands, or attempts to remain a stand-alone district, we will need to get started on our report to the State ASAP. B.Burrington suggests waiting at least until the end of the legislative session (1st week in May), but agrees that we need to get started after that.
- B.Burrington feels that much of the information that will be required has already been gathered by the original Act 46 Study Committee, and that South Hero is equipped to write a report on our own. She confirmed that legal counsel will be required to review the report before it's sent to the Agency of Education, but mentioned that there is money remaining in the Act 46 budget that can be put towards those legal fees.

Board Actions:

- B.Vaughan made a motion to approve the Minutes from April 6th and April 17th. All voted in favor.
- RJ. Sweeney made a motion to authorize B.Burrington to sign the Health Memorandum of Understanding from the State. T.Maxham seconded, and all voted in favor.
- B.Vaughan made a motion to pay the bills, T.Maxham seconded it. All voted in favor.
- D.Cain asked for volunteers to take minutes at future meetings. B.Vaughan will take minutes on May 4th, RJ Sweeney on May 20th, and T.Maxham on June 1st.

Correspondence:

- None

Public Comments:

- B.Banas wanted to reassure the Board not to worry too much about the budget. The Board will build a vision and the town will support it.
- W.Heyn is frustrated that discipline continues to be a problem in her son's classroom, and has been a problem for multiple years. She wants to know how she can make her concerns known, and feel confident that if her concerns are valid that they're being addressed. She would like to know if the new Dean of Students role is meant to improve discipline. She's concerned that disciplinary problems seem to have gotten worse this year.
- D.Cain mentioned that the job description for the Home School Coordinator/Dean of Students is nearly complete. B.Burrington recommended that the Board develop a vision regarding behavior and discipline. D.Cain asked if there is data that we can use to inform policy around discipline. B.Burrington said that data exists, but may not be consistent, and may not cover a long enough time period to see trends. B.Burrington mentioned that society is changing...more students experience trauma, struggles with socio-economic status, and homelessness. She acknowledges that work must be done to be more responsive to all students' needs, both academic and emotional.
- K.Banas is concerned that there still isn't a flowchart that explains how behavioral issues are addressed and by whom. B.Burrington reiterated that the Home School Coordinator job description is being assembled, but cautions the community not to expect a single person to address all disciplinary issues in the school. She states that behavior must be managed at all levels, and suggests that T.Seekamp may be able to help develop the flowchart.
- F.Bertmann is pleased that there has been a quick resolution to the concerns regarding the Principal, and thanks the Board for calling emergency meetings to discuss the issues. F.Bertmann would like to see more positive framing of behaviors, and a return to the PBiS reward systems.
- F.Bertmann suggests doing a cost comparison when considering whether to pursue the survey with J.Nichols. She does similar work with nutrition at UVM, and charges a lower fee. She feels there may be similar culture and climate survey services available at a lower price point.
- B.Banas wants to confirm that in a case such as W.Heyn's, where the Principal has not provided satisfactory resolution or even feedback, a parent can go to the Superintendent with her concern (either in person or in writing). B.Burrington confirmed, and would welcome that conversation with W.Heyn.
- M.Wickenden would also like to thank the Board for moving quickly, but would like to know whether anything can be done to address the climate in the building for the remainder of the year. D.Cain mentioned that the climate and culture survey with J.Nichols is intended to address that concern. There are no further investigations planned at this time, but B.Burrington report on her findings to the Board.
- W.Heyn asked if a parent from the community could be included in the next Principal search. B.Vaughan clarified that several board members on the previous hiring committee are also parents. B.Burrington mentioned that, based on feedback from exit interviews, having parents on the hiring board has created

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division in the community in the past (since community members may not have fully supported their non-preferred candidate)

- D.Cain asked whether the Board wants to search for a Principal candidate based on an interim (1-year) or a longer-term contract. B.Burrington recommends searching for the best candidate, and offering that person a longer-term contract. J.Pidgeon recommends developing a vision for what we want in a leader before we start the search for a new Principal.
- J.Pidgeon also wants the Board to consider how we will hire new teachers for next year (if necessary), since that's typically spearheaded by the Principal. Since L.Badeau will finish his tenure on June 30th, it may make sense to consider a different model for hiring teachers for next year. B.Burrington agreed.
- M.Wickenden would like to know whether it makes sense to hire a new Principal for a multi-year contract. He is concerned that interviews and resumes may not be sufficient to determine whether a candidate is a good fit without actually trying them out for a year. B.Burrington mentioned that the new contract template is very different and much more comprehensive.
- K.Banas asked whether we should consider soliciting input from teachers on what they'd like in a leader. B.Vaughan suggested calling a meeting with teachers to discuss it.
- B.Banas feels confident that the board can find an excellent candidate, and offer them a multi-year contract, if we truly develop and follow through on our vision. He suggests perhaps working some kind of probationary language into the contract. He recommends being very transparent with the vision, and how the final selected candidate fits in with that vision.
- D.Cain would like to look back at the process last year to understand what worked and what could be improved upon.
- F.Bertmann suggests that a 1-year contract will not necessarily deter good candidates. She cites the norms at UVM, where candidates are offered a 1-year contract, followed by a second 1-year contract, followed by a multi-year contract.
- M.Wickenden wants a permanent Principal for Folsom. B.Burrington recommends looking for candidates in creative ways (perhaps beyond School Spring), and not settling for the first candidate that comes along.
- H.Bishop noted that our last two Principals had just gotten their licenses, and had no experience as Principals. She would advocate for a Principal with some experience.
- K.Robinson would like to recommend that a new Principal be seconded by an existing, veteran staff member (rather than having another new hire as second-in-command).

Executive Session:

RJ Sweeney made a motion to go into executive session at 9:05pm

Adjournment:

- D.Cain made a motion to exit executive session at 9:29pm
- D.Cain made a motion to adjourn at 9:30pm. All voted in favor

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Next Meeting Date:

- Thursday, May 4th at 6pm, at the Folsom Education & Community Center

David Cain

Melanie Henderson

RJ Sweeney

Bentley Vaughan

Tim Maxham