

Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District
Special Board Meeting
Minutes of Meeting
August 30, 2017

Members Present: Belvidere: Angie Evans; Cambridge: Mark Stebbins, Eden: David Whitcomb (Chair), Hyde Park: Chasity Fagnant, Lisa Barry, Patti Hayford; Johnson: Heather Rodriguez, Bobbi Moulton, Katie Orost

Administrators Present: Catherine Gallagher, Michele Aumand, Jennifer Stevens, Diane Reilly, Principal, Hyde Park Elementary School, David Manning, Principal, Johnson Elementary School

Others Present: Mike Salvaty, Chelsea Salvaty, parents; Sgt. Christian Watson, Lamoille County Sheriff's Department

Minute Taker: Sue Trainor

Call to Order, Adopt the Agenda, Announcements and Public Comment: Whitcomb called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. Moulton made a motion, seconded by Stebbins, to adopt the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Parent Request for In-District Student Transfer – Possible Action and Possible Executive Session: Gallagher explained that the Salvatys had a daughter in second grade. On Monday, August 28th, Gallagher received a call Chelsea Salvaty expressing concerns about her daughter attending Hyde Park Elementary School. During the initial conversation safety was cited as the reason for her concern. At that time, Gallagher stated there was a policy in place for transfers and the deadline to request a transfer had passed. Section 5.4 allowed the Superintendent to make a different determination based on “extenuating circumstances.” Gallagher informed Mrs. Salvaty that she could request a formal transfer with the Board Chair. Mr. Salvaty then e-mailed Chair Whitcomb and made a request for transfer, citing safety concerns. On August 28th, Mr. Salvaty attended the Board meeting and spoke during Public Comment about his concerns.

Diane Reilly, Jen Stevens and Gallagher had a meeting with the Salvatys on August 29th. Following the meeting Gallagher denied the request. The Salvatys stated they had some personal concerns and Mrs. Salvaty stated she believed her child learned better within a traditional environment. Gallagher, in denying the request, cited the following: Hyde Park Elementary School had highly effective staff members who built great relationships with students and children. The staff, not the building, was the driver for any meaningful education. The school had the necessary resources to teach children, Smart Boards, number corner, literacy centers, Chrome Books, iPads and a safe school environment which has been inspected by law enforcement and the Fire Marshall and it met all codes. The school staff had created safety drills and practiced them with children.

While there had been two other requests for in-district transfer, those had been presented prior to this policy being adopted. At the time of those particular requests the hotel had not yet been converted into a school and anxiety in the community about the location of the temporary school was high. Gallagher believed that approving this request would send a message to the community that the children currently attending Hyde Park Elementary School were unsafe. She did not believe the school was unsafe and she didn't want that message to be sent to the community.

Stevens reiterated Gallagher's point that the box that education took place in didn't need to be a traditional red building schoolhouse. Quality instruction could happen anywhere. Stevens believed that all student needs could be met at Hyde Park Elementary School. Stevens also noted that policies were put in place for a reason and it was important to stay true to them.

Reilly explained they performed an extensive search for an appropriate building for safety and educational purposes. The Fire Marshall had vetted the building. Six teachers who were some of her more critical teachers toured the facility and were thrilled with the building. The teachers believed it could be turned into a great learning space. Additionally, the Morrisville Police, the Fire Marshall, EMS, and the Fire Department had all studied the facility and made a plan to ensure that it was safe. Reilly said it was a beautiful learning environment and the children were happy. Library books were in all classrooms, physical education was occurring both inside and outside, hot lunch was being brought to the school every day and children were eating in their classrooms. While eating in the classroom was different, it was a wonderful way for the students to spend time with their classmates.

Manning stated his school had received two students from Hyde Park as a result of an in-district transfer request. Additionally, one of his children attended Hyde Park Elementary School. He stated when he learned about the new location of the school he had concerns as well. Being the Principal of Johnson Elementary School, he had considered having his child transfer to Johnson. He also visited Stowe Elementary School. What he realized was that while Stowe and Johnson had gyms and playgrounds, they did not have the teachers that his child felt comfortable with. He believed it was the teachers that made Hyde Park Elementary School special. Manning said that the school had everything that any school would have. He felt very comfortable sending his child to the Hyde Park school. Manning sympathized with the Salvatys, but said the building was safe and acceptable.

Mr. Salvaty then addressed the Board, stating that while safety was a concern, it was not their only concern. They had also been concerned about the lack of a gym, library and cafeteria. Mr. Salvaty noted in reading the policy that the application deadline was in April. At that time they were living in Rutland and not planning on moving and the appeal date of June 1st was the date he signed his lease. He then read the first two sentences of the In-District Transfer Policy which stated that the LNMUUSD acknowledged that the parents' perception of what was beneficial for their child was valid and valuable information, especially at the elementary school level, and that the ultimate goal of the schools was to provide the best possible education to each child by utilizing all resources available. Mr. Salvaty thought his concerns should be treated as valid, and that the resources of a gym and a cafeteria should be available to his child. Mr. Salvaty thought an exception should be made because they were unaware that a transfer was possible. If that information had been presented to them, they would have explored other options. He noted that the policy hadn't been adopted until July 24, 2017 and he felt they were cheated out of the option of applying for a transfer. Mr. Salvaty stated he understood the precedent that would be set if the Board agreed to the transfer request, but reminded the Board that other families had been provided this option.

A Board member noted the Hotel Plaza was not a permanent solution. She wondered if their child would be in Hyde Park in a year when they moved back to the renovated school. Mr. Savery stated he and his wife would probably not stay in Hyde Park if their request were denied. He noted if they had known about the school situation they wouldn't have moved here. A Board member asked if they had been told about the situation in June and whether they had asked to view the new location. Mr. Salvaty stated a number of personal and professional crises had occurred that prevented them from being able to focus fully on the situation.

Evans stated her concern was that his daughter would become attached to people at a new school and then be required to move to Hyde Park. Mr. Salvaty said she had done that twice already because they have moved from St. Albans to Rutland. He stated she was adaptable. A Board member remarked that Mr. Salvaty had stated his daughter would come back to Hyde Park Elementary. The goal was to return students to the renovated school in March or April. Mr. Salvaty was asked if they would transfer their child back at that time. Mr. Salvaty stated the policy required they complete a full year before returning to their home school.

Stebbins asked Mr. Salvaty about his comment that his child learned in a more traditional setting. Stebbins noted that Principal Reilly had outlined how they were addressing concerns and asked Mr. Salvaty if he could be more specific about what his child would be missing out on. Mr. Salvaty stated his main concern was physical education. He said having PE indoors in a small room was inadequate, especially in the winter. Physical activity in a large space was important to him. He believed it was also important to go outside of the classroom to visit the library or eat in a cafeteria.

Mr. Salvaty then reiterated that he felt proper communication had not taken place. His daughter had been enrolled prior to the end of the school year and had not been informed of the option to transfer. Orost asked if they or their daughter had visited the school this week. Mr. Salvaty stated they had not, as Mrs. Salvaty did not feel comfortable bringing their daughter there. Orost asked if they had visited Johnson. Mr. Salvaty stated they had not. Mrs. Salvaty said they had not been given the opportunity. Orost asked if a 7:50 a.m. start at Johnson would be a problem. Mrs. Salvaty stated she would transport her daughter.

Stebbins, noting the Salvaty's interest in physical activity, asked if their daughter had signed up with or was aware of the Hyde Park Youth Soccer Program. They were not aware and Stebbins offered information on the program. Gallagher then asked Mrs. Salvaty if she had anything she wanted to share with the Board. Mrs. Salvaty stated her husband had addressed everything.

Fagnant made a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss past action that would include sharing of student information which could result in premature general public knowledge that would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage. She requested that all Board members and administrators remain. Moulton seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously and the Board went into Executive Session at 6:33 p.m.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 6:50 p.m. Orost made a motion to uphold the Superintendent's decision not to allow the in-district student transfer for the reasons the Superintendent has cited. Moulton seconded the motion. Stebbins noted he wasn't able to vote on this matter as he was a Cambridge Board member. Whitcomb explained to the Salvatys that Stebbins could not vote on elementary school issues. The motion passed, with one abstention (Orost).

Moulton made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Stebbins seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:52 p.m.