

**Lamoille North Supervisory Union and  
Lamoille North Modified Unified Union School District Board  
Minutes of Special Meeting  
August 18, 2020**

**Board Members Present:** Belvidere: Stephanie Sweet; Cambridge: Bernard Barnes, Laura Miller, Jan Sander, Bill Sander, Sue Prescott, Mark Stebbins, Eden: David Whitcomb, Jeff Hunsberger; Hyde Park: Tina Lowe; Johnson: Angela Lamell, Katie Orost, Bobbie Moulton; Waterville: Bart Bezio

**Board Members Absent:** Hyde Park: Chasity Fagnant, Lisa Barry, Patty Hayford; Johnson: Mark Nielsen, Allen Audette, Jr.

**Administrators Present:** Catherine Gallagher, Deb Clark, Charleen McFarlane, Michele Aumand, Denise Maurice, Brian Schaffer, Melinda Mascolino, Dylan Laflam, Darcy Fletcher, Flo Kelley, Tommy O'Connor, Diane Reilly, Diane Lepikko, Wendy Savery, Brian Pena, David Manning, Erik Remmers, Janet Murray, Mary Anderson

**Others:** Galen Reese, Jake Moulton

**Minute Taker:** Sue Trainor

**Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Public Comment:** Gallagher asked for nominations to serve as Acting Board Chair. Miller nominated Hunsberger who declined. Hunsberger then nominated Katie Orost. With no objections, Orost called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Clark requested that the Discussion of Emergency Purchase Procedures Related to COVID-19 and CARES Act Grants agenda item be moved and placed before the Review and Award Technology Bids agenda item. Whitcomb made the motion to approve the amended agenda. Hunsberger seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously. There was no public comment.

**LNSU/LNMMUSD Routine Business: Consent Agenda Items**

**Minutes of the August 7, 2020, Special Meeting:** These minutes should be changed to reflect Bobbie Moulton's attendance at the meeting. Hunsberger made a motion to approve the revised minutes and Whitcomb seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**Board Orders:** Miller made a motion to approve the Board Orders, seconded by Bezio. The motion passed unanimously.

**Discuss Emergency Purchase Procedures Related to COVID-19 and CARES Act Grants:** Clark informed the Board that in relation to COVID-19 response purchases, the State had provided districts with an emergency purchase procedure. This new procedure exempted districts from bidding for items as long as the purchases were COVID-19 emergency-related items.

**Review and Award Technology Bids:** Pena reported that the District had requested bid responses from nine vendors to support the distance learning technologies. Funding for these purchases would come from Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds for K-6, Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) for grades 7-12, and School Improvement Grants (SIG) for the 50 iPads going to Eden and 75 iPads going to Hyde Park. The additional purchases would support the 1:1 devices by providing storage for newer devices, cabling to wire storage, panels to support breakout and education to non-standard rooms, and expansion of outdoor wireless fidelity. Administration would like to expedite the shipping of the products and each vendor would calculate shipping.

Pena stated that the administration requested that the Board approve the total amount of \$190,553.77 and allow an additional not to exceed \$1,905 to cover shipping-related costs. Hunsberger made a motion to accept the bid, seconded by Moulton. The breakout of expenses and vendors is attached.

In response to a question from Lamell, Clark stated they had been allotted \$500,000 of the ESSER funds and there were also CRF funds available that the State was distributing. Those funds weren't allotted, but were reimbursed until the money was gone. There was several million dollars in that fund and it was part of the \$1.6 billion that the State had received. Therefore, at the very least, there was \$500,000 available. Gallagher noted that while there was significant money available, it was unclear how that money would be treated in years two,

three and four and what cost would come to the District because of that. Clark stated there were also some very large strategic purchases that needed to be made in order to maintain safety. The devices that Pena was purchasing were being provided to each student. These devices were dedicated to the student so that the device didn't need to be cleaned between uses.

In response to a question from Miller, Pena explained that over the past three years they had made significant progress in getting closer to each student having a device. The long-term plan had been to provide all students with a device within five years. Due to the coronavirus, an accelerated plan had to take place in which the work of 2 ½ years needed to be done in a summer. Miller asked how much of the long-term plan had been accelerated. Pena stated getting devices into the hands of students was the only thing that had been accelerated. Wiring, storage, and expansion of outdoor wireless antennae at each school was also needed as a result of the additional devices. Miller asked if the new five-year plan would look different. Pena stated it would.

In response to a question, Clark informed the Board that this would be the first large purchase of the CARES Act funds. The District would apply for all the CRF LEA and ESSER funds. In addition, over the summer \$20,000 had been given to the school district for summer food. Additionally, a private grant of \$25,000 had been received to support the transportation costs of the summer meals. The State was also going to do a clawback of any expenses paid for under the CARES Act that had originally been budgeted for. Most business managers had agreed there's not going to be a lot of budgeted COVID spending. Pena also mentioned that this purchase did not affect the 1:1 devices for Grades 7-12 because that was a self-sustaining program. Pena noted he would have 100 keyboards available for the middle school and 100 keyboards available for the high school. The motion then passed unanimously.

**Fuel Oil & Propane Bid:** Laflam informed the Board he had received bids from Bourne's Energy and Fred's Energy for fuel oil and propane. Bourne's Energy was the low bidder for fuel oil at \$1.74 per gallon. Fred's was the low bidder for propane at \$1.18 per gallon. After reviewing the usage and combining the fuel and propane costs, Bourne's Energy was \$7,000 less. Laflam suggested moving forward with Fred's Energy. They were last year's suppliers. Changing vendors would mean fuel tank and combustible chambers inspections, which meant every school would have multiple vendors inspecting HVAC equipment. At this point the District was trying to keep people out of the buildings. Switching companies for a \$7,000 savings seemed counterintuitive.

Therefore, the administration recommended approving Fred's Energy as the fuel contractor for 2021-2022 school year. Bezio asked if there would be a cost for the equipment inspections. Laflam stated there was no cost for the inspections, but it would require that people go inside the building. Prescott noted that Fred's Energy specified their quote was a fixed cost. Bourne's Energy did not specify that. B. Sander endorsed working with Fred's Energy due to his experience working with Bourne's Energy. Bezio made a motion to accept the recommendation from the administration to work with Fred's Energy, seconded by Hunsberger. Prescott stated the reason she was supporting this was because Fred's Energy provided a fixed cost and she thought that could be important going forward. The motion then passed unanimously.

**Review and Approve Request to Use Capital Funds for Eden Lockers:** Laflam informed the Board they had put together a bid last winter for lockers at Eden. Last winter the Fire Department had been to the school and had provided a list of recommendations of changes that needed to be made. One was a series of hooks and wooden shelves along the main corridor that impeded egress. Therefore, all student storage space for outdoor clothing was removed from the corridors this spring.

With COVID, individual student storage had come to the forefront at elementary schools. Non-combustible lockers needed to be put in the hallways. There would be 120 lockers, which was more than currently needed. Laflam received three bids. A+ Athletics of Maine provided a bid of \$10,200 installed; Lajeunesse Interiors of Barre, Vermont, provided a bid of \$11,650; and MHS Sales of New Hampshire provided a bid of \$13,512. The funds that would be used for this project were from Eden's capital fund. The administration recommended accepting the bid from Lajeunesse Interiors. Laflam noted they were recommending the company because it was a Vermont-based company and was the only company to specify they were using U.S.-made lockers. Laflam stated he now needed to pay attention to whether products were coming from areas that were under

quarantine. Moulton made a motion to approve the Lajeunesse Interiors bid of \$11,650, seconded by Hunsberger.

In response to questions, the Board was informed that Eden's capital fund was \$197,000. This purchase had been planned before COVID so it couldn't be paid for as a COVID expense. The motion then passed unanimously.

**HR Discussion of Leave during COVID-19:** McFarlane informed the Board that the group VSHRP, the Vermont School Human Resource Professionals, had created a COVID Task Force. The task force compiled responses to questions about staff returning to work, what that would look like, and what leaves might be available to staff. McFarlane reported that all of the work had been vetted by legal. The goal was to have a consistent message to schools across the state.

Earlier in the year, all schools received information on returning to the workplace. It noted that exemptions from the spring were no longer valid. Staff members in a vulnerable situation were encouraged to consult their health care professional to see what options were available for them. Leaves that were available to staff were the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the American Disabilities Act as Amended (ADAA). There was also a new federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). Under this act eligible paid leave was available for employees for a variety of situations. One example was if someone had traveled and was ordered to quarantine under the Vermont state travel restriction and they weren't able to telework, they would be eligible for paid leave under FFCRA.

Additionally, many employees at Lamoille North, including the food service, custodial, paraeducators, bus drivers, etc., who had students in other schools that had a modified schedule which required them to be home to care for children up to the age of 14, would be paid 2/3rds of their regular rate of pay. In a pre-emptive effort to support staff, Lamoille North schools would be offering in-person instruction to any Lamoille North students who were children of a Lamoille North staff member. Therefore, Lamoille North employees with children in Lamoille North would be provided four days of in-person instruction. Wednesday would be a remote day for all learners and all those staff members who could work remotely on those days were being encouraged to. For those staff members who had children in school outside of Lamoille North, McFarlane stated she was encouraging them to talk with those schools to see if they could offer in-person instruction for more days.

McFarlane reported that there was a lot of anxiety, stress and fear that staff were having about returning to the buildings. They were being offered the use of a free and confidential program called Invest EAP (Employee Assistance Program) that was available to all staff members and their family. McFarlane noted there was always the option under both Master Agreements to request an unpaid leave of absence for the school year. COBRA would be available for those employees who wished to continue their insurance while on leave. At present, eleven support staff employees had chosen to resign, retire early, or request an unpaid leave of absence due to COVID-related concerns.

The question that had come in from staff was whether their children who attended schools outside of the district could come to Lamoille North for four days. The advice from the State was to not allow students to cross districts. Miller asked if it would be considered discriminatory to parents who weren't working at Lamoille North. Gallagher stated that according to their attorneys it was not. They were attempting to accommodate as many children as they could and the decisions being made had to do with space and adhering to the guidelines. McFarlane stated that since that message had gone out they had received many expressions of appreciation from employees. In response to a question from Lamell, Gallagher stated that everyone would be working on Wednesdays. Paraeducators would be supporting students through lesson planning and through collaboration with teachers. The misconception was that Wednesday was a day off, which it was not. It was a day for IEP meetings with parents, callbacks or conversations with teachers or paraeducators.

McFarlane responded to a question from Remmers, stating that because in-person instruction was being offered four days a week, staff that elected not to have their students attend those days would not be eligible for the FFCRA paid leave. Lamell asked if the four day a week students would be mixed in with the two day a

week students. Gallagher stated each school would be crafting their own solution to this, within the requirement that there be the required amount of space between all students.

**Central Office Update:** Gallagher stated they had had a strong start to in-service. Students would be placed this week and when the District knew how many students would be fully remote the distance educators would be assigned. Gallagher explained that the Governor had stated they were on Step 2. It was possible they would move quickly to Step 3 within two weeks of the start of school. The directive that was provided stated that even if they moved to Step 3, districts had the ability to choose among in-person, hybrid, or remote instruction regardless of the step level, unless schools were placed on a Step 1 which required that all schools close. The District adopted a very conservative approach based on a slow turn of the spigot, and it was likely they would move into more in-person instruction or move into a complete close.

The Governor announced today that three regional childcare centers in Lamoille would be opened within thirty days to support families who needed childcare. Districts were told to tell families that the schools provided education and were not compelled to provide childcare. That didn't feel good for people working within the school system because they knew how many families counted on that. With this push to open three regional childcare centers, that would take some of the pressure off of families who wanted their children to be in as many days of education as possible.

Gallagher outlined the fact that more and more people were being tested and the capacity to get results was being stretched. The District was opening in a way that they felt comfortable with and they had the Board's support. Gallagher noted staff, families and teachers were worried and that was understandable. Teachers were going to be in close proximity with their students. It wasn't enough to say that if students were spaced out enough everything would be fine. That was not the case. The Commissioner of the AOE had stated if there were not enough staff, the school would not open. Gallagher believed it was safe to open schools now but they needed to be clear about what that looked like and to understand that it could change at any moment. Gallagher noted that 75% of the Vermont districts were doing what Lamoille North was doing. She was not willing to put people at unnecessary risk and she appreciated that the Board supported that idea.

Health and curriculum protocols were in place and data showed that the schools were ready for the start of school. Staff and teachers had been included in every decision. Gallagher stated they had teamed with the Vermont Cooperative to have lessons at the ready in the event remote learning had to take place quickly. The fact that the State purchased this program for everyone meant they thought it would happen. Gallagher also noted that while Cambridge was not part of the MUUSD, all resources and teachers would be shared with Cambridge.

Savery stated she was very grateful for the level of collaboration with every school and every principal. The District didn't want to repeat the experience of remote learning that took place on an emergency basis in the spring. A great deal of feedback had been solicited and received over the summer. What came out of that was a need for consistency, a need for resources and training, and a need for parents to not have to figure out many different systems of communication, grading and platforms. Savery noted it was unclear how often the school would have to pivot between in-person and remote learning this year. The administration wanted to be able to offer remote learning in a way that allowed for a common curriculum and provided resources and virtual training. The connection with Vermont Learning Cooperative (VLC) provided, if needed, the curriculum that came fully prepared to go. The curriculum was accredited and vetted. They were experienced with quality K-12 programs online.

The hope was that the remote learning teachers would have access to this program and to use it consistently. Once all the numbers came in from the parent applications there would be a definitive number of students who wanted full time remote learning. That would provide the District with the number of remote teachers they would need. That would be easier at the K-5 level because licensing allowed elementary educators to teach all core subject areas. The secondary level was a bit more complicated because licensure changed and teachers could only teach what they were licensed in. The high school level had the Octave model that had been set up and their work on flexible pathways, independent courses, and the EPIC program could offset the need for full-time online classes.

The work Savery was doing on remote learning programs was also being done in preparation for the event that schools needed to be prepared for adults that might become ill and needed coverage. The State recommended that all teachers use a learning management system. The middle school had been using Schoology for many years and some of the high school teachers had used it as well. VLC also had a learning management system that was considered one of the top systems in the country. Using the same management system and the same curriculum would allow teachers from other schools to step in and teach at other schools if necessary.

In response to a question, McFarlane stated that the parent survey that went out offered all families the opportunity to ask for more than the two and three days. Lamoille North had stepped up and offered this option to all students of the District's employees. It was not discriminatory to offer it. Gallagher stated if there was a situation where they were not able to honor the four day a week schedule it would be because of not being able to adhere to safety guidelines in that particular classroom.

Clark reported they were deep into the audit and FY20 looked good. She would provide more detailed information at the next regular meeting.

Gallagher noted that no one had had a summer. Staff, teachers and administrators were all involved in task forces. Union leadership had been available and worked nonstop throughout the summer. The administrators worked nonstop without complaint. She felt it was important to honor those who stepped up and everyone had stepped up. No one ever said they were busy. Everyone was stretched to the limit, but they all were there to do the work. Gallagher expressed her thanks to everyone for how they had risen to the occasion.

**Other Business:** There was no other business.

**Adjourn:** Moulton made a motion to adjourn at 7:06 p.m. and the motion passed unanimously.