

LAMOILLE NORTH SUPERVISORY UNION  
ACT 156 COMMITTEE MINUTES  
GTMCC COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTER  
JANUARY 26, 2015

Board members present: D. Regan, M. Stebbins, D. Whitcomb, J. Sander, W. Sander, P. LaFlamme  
Others: E. Beatty, C. Gallagher

The meeting started at 6:30. D. Regan chaired, as C. Szlachetka was not able to attend.

C. Gallagher summarized where we are. LNSU is centralizing special education professional staff, including the special ed coordinator at the high school and her assistant, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, and a physical therapist who will be working .8 FTE. That much is required by law. The LNSU board decided to table for up to one year the idea of centralizing support staff, which is not required by law. In an effort to be transparent we would like to hear from our support staff, not because they can decide if we consolidate or not, but to make sure we answer any questions they have.

D. Regan said he has long been concerned about other kinds of special ed costs – for instance, Laraway tuition. C. Gallagher said that would fall under what we call purchased services. For next year the only costs that will be centralized are the costs of special ed staff salaries, tuition, and benefits. Purchased services will stay at the local level. Next year if there is a desire to pursue an outside placement for a student, building administrators will make the decision with central office input. If purchased services are centralized, decision on outside placements will be made by central office with LNSU board guidance.

D. Regan said he doesn't see why this committee shouldn't discuss centralization of purchased services as well as support staff. C. Gallagher said she thinks it is the understanding and desire of the LNSU board that the committee go in that direction, but the big question about support staff centralization is what support staff think about it. Board members felt there should be more communication with them and they should have a chance to weigh in. She is recommending that school board reps go into the schools with administrators to talk to support staff about centralization. (*E. Beatty arrived at 6:35.*)

M. Stebbins asked if Belvidere should be involved if we are going to expand centralization to purchased services. E. Beatty said Belvidere pays tuition to Waterville and the expenses are Waterville's.

C. Gallagher said she would like to start making plans to go in and talk to staff at each school. Then, based on questions staff have, we might follow up with a survey to make sure all voices are heard and considered. Then the committee will have the information it needs to make a recommendation.

W. Sander asked if there is any reason we can't address purchased services this year instead of waiting until a year from now. The centralization that is taking place so far doesn't really change costs for districts at all. One of the main purposes of centralization was to act as an insurance policy by spreading costs over the whole SU.

E. Beatty said she thinks the committee could address that question at any time, but it won't go into effect until FY17 because FY16 budgets are already done.

W. Sander said he thought next year's budgets were drafted under the assumption that we would have centralization of purchased services in place. M. Stebbins said his understanding was that we couldn't plan on centralization of purchased services because it hasn't explicitly been spelled out.

C. Gallagher asked if we should make sure we understand who the chair of this committee is. C. Szlachetka previously served as chair. It was agreed to reappoint a chair after town meeting.

D. Regan said he doesn't see any reason why the committee needs to wait a long time to come back to the full board with a recommendation about centralization of purchased services. He understands that the support staff issue is the most complex, but for board members the magnitude of purchased services expenses makes that the most important item. W. Sander said he would hope the committee would communicate to local boards after this meeting the intent to recommend centralization of purchased services so that the full LNSU board could take action on that recommendation at its next meeting.

C. Gallagher asked for more discussion about face to face meetings at schools with support staff. She plans to come to all of those meetings. Should she schedule the meetings? How would board members like to see that work?

W. Sander suggested that she come to each board's next regular meeting. D. Regan asked if she is thinking that each district's Act 156 committee rep would join her at the meeting with support staff for that district. C. Gallagher said yes, and she is thinking building principals would be there as well. Committee members agreed that there is no need for C. Gallagher to come to regular board meetings in addition to meetings at schools. D. Regan suggested that she write something up for board reps describing the decision ahead and why it makes sense and addressing some of the questions that might be posed.

P. LaFlamme said we seem to be talking about two different things – meeting with support staff and informing boards. C. Gallagher agreed. D. Regan said he understood that Act 156 reps would meet with their boards before conversations with support staff took place. C. Gallagher said she will provide reps with information to bring to their boards. Then afterwards meetings in schools will be scheduled.

W. Sander said he would like to get a decision on purchased services at the next full LNSU board meeting. M. Stebbins said even if we talk about it at the next meeting, we can't actually do anything until next year. W. Sander said with the 5-year cushion he doesn't know that we can't centralize purchased services for next year even if existing budgets are not structured that way. M. Stebbins said he doesn't think we could move purchased service costs to central office for next year. He doesn't think we could make the necessary shifts between the assessment and other budget items. W. Sander said he thinks it could be done.

E. Beatty said once the budget season and town meetings are over, she thinks it would be fair to ask M. Frederick to take a look at budgets and ask what the worst case scenario would be if we centralized purchased service costs. By the end of March we could have that information. There is no need to wait any longer before making a decision about centralizing purchased service costs. She

thinks all boards would be in favor of it. Since there may be variance from what was originally budgeted anyway, perhaps we could look at making the change for next year.

M. Stebbins said his only concern about centralizing purchased services for next year is that it might lead to some schools seeing an increase in cost that they weren't expecting. E. Beatty said that will happen anyway. When M. Frederick first shared which districts would be "winners" and which would be "losers," that was based on the assumption that professional staff, paras, and purchased services would all be centralized. When it was decided to centralize only professional staff, that changed who the winners and losers were. M. Stebbins asked if we can now roll in purchased services because we would be adding to someone's budget.

D. Regan said he thinks this committee's work is to bring a recommendation to the board. The question of when it would be implemented is separate.

C. Gallagher said she will write up information for board reps to take to their local boards. D. Regan suggested she include a proposed timeline for discussion. C. Gallagher said she would like to meet with the committee after all reps have met with their boards and before the meetings with support staff at schools. She asked board reps to email her after they have met with their boards. C. McFarlane can poll committee members about dates for the next committee meeting.

**MOTION: W. Sander moved to recommend to the full LNSU board at its next meeting that special education purchased services be centralized, seconded by M. Stebbins.** W. Sander said this was previously discussed extensively by the committee and it was probably only through oversight that it was not voted on by the full board. M. Stebbins said we should probably make sure we haven't left anything out this time that we intend for the board to vote on. E. Beatty said C. Gallagher and M. Frederick should get together and discuss whether the term "purchased services" covers all special ed costs other than professionals and paras. D. Regan clarified that he believes the intent of the motion is to centralize all special ed costs not already centralized, except for support staff. Others agreed that is the intent. **The motion was passed.**

C. Gallagher asked if committee members will be discussing centralization of purchased services at local board meetings in addition to discussing centralization of support staff. M. Stebbins said it wouldn't hurt to mention that also. He thinks everyone has a pretty good grasp of what it would look like. D. Regan said he thinks that is a less complicated discussion than the one about support staff. He is pretty sure he can fit it into the next HPES board meeting.

D. Whitcomb asked if the legislature is likely to change any of this. Is there any bill related to this? W. Sander said he will look into that. E. Beatty said from what she's heard, there is no going back on this.

**MOTION: W. Sander moved to adjourn at 7:12, M. Stebbins seconded, and the motion was passed.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*