

LAMOILLE NORTH SUPERVISORY UNION
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
AUGUST 11, 2015

Executive Committee Members in Attendance: David Whitcomb, Eden Central; Dan Regan, Hyde Park Elementary School; Raven Walters, Hyde Park Elementary School; Jeff Hunsberger, Eden Central School; Katie Orost, Johnson Elementary School; Jan Sander, Cambridge Elementary School; Becky Penberthy, Waterville Elementary School.

Others in Attendance: Edith Beatty, Superintendent; Marilyn Frederick, Business Manager; Charleen McFarlane, Human Resources Director, Michele Aumand, Beth Bailey, Steve Dale, Executive Director, Vermont School Board Association

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Public Comment

The meeting was called to order at 6:07 p.m. Jeff Hunsberger made a motion, seconded by Dan Regan, to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Beatty requested, and the Executive Committee supported, a moment of reflection and silence for Lara Sobel, the DCF social worker murdered several days ago. Beatty then introduced and thanked Steve Dale, Executive Director of the VSBA, for discussing Act 46 with the Committee.

Discussion on Act 46 (formerly H.361) with Steve Dale: Steve Dale distributed information to the Board, which provided an introduction to Act 46. He explained that the bill was created to respond to state-wide issues of equity and quality. Additionally it hoped to temper the increases in cost-per-student. While there was a reasonable amount of money available for all children, what that actually translated to within various communities was quite different. He noted there were 300 separate boards. Some school districts had had budgets voted down and the picture for those communities was bleak. Act 46 hoped to create somewhat larger districts with a single board or, where necessary, a multi-board structure (supervisory union) with as few boards "as practicable".

Dale stated there was a strong bias on the part of the Legislature for regions with union high schools to become single school districts. It was clear that the intent was to move toward larger school districts. There were also people in the State who had been pushing for county school districts, which the School Board Association was strongly against.

Dale explained that in order to take advantage of the incentives offered to those groups that chose to be a single school district, the Executive Committee would need to move quickly on this process. To that end, they should be prepared to speak to the LNSU Board on August 24th and to ask the local boards to start discussing Act 46. Tonight's information was being provided to ensure that members could discuss the creation of a study committee with the entire Board prior to the meeting on the 24th. Moving quickly through this process and bringing this to a vote in March or May would be financially advantageous to the district.

Whitcomb stated the Board would be inviting some of the Representatives to explain to the Board why they voted the way they voted. Further, he mentioned that Stowe was thinking of separating from Lamoille South. His understanding was that all of this needed to be done by 2018 or the state would make the decision. The money and incentives were there to motivate school boards to become a district, but there would also be changes in the upcoming Legislature that might impact all of this. The Lt. Governor had stated there would be a deficit in January when the session started. Further, Whitcomb asked about \$300,000 that was going to be paid to a consultant.

Dale explained the \$300,000 was for an adequacy study. Early in the legislative session people believed there should be an adequacy formula similar to one in Massachusetts. An adequacy study would determine what dollar amount was needed per student to meet the educational quality standards. The money raised through the state finance system would pay that per-student dollar amount and that's what the schools would receive from the State of Vermont. The towns could then raise more funds above that amount if they wished. However, it was unclear if the adequacy formula would pass in Vermont, as Massachusetts has different laws and it would again feed a tremendous disparity that the bill was trying to avoid. Dale also noted the Agency was not given any money to implement this bill.

Dan Regan appreciated the explanation of the bill and asked how to move forward with the process. Dale replied that a study committee should be created, options should be reviewed, and a determination made on what a single district might look like. Finally, he noted that nothing could happen until the electorate of every single town bought into the idea and they weren't likely to do that until and unless the Board was in agreement.

Walters asked what would happen if six of seven towns said yes. Could the six towns proceed? Dale explained they could not if they wished to move forward with the accelerated merger. Every district in an SU had to agree to become a single district. However, if a Supervisory District wants to join, they could. Following a vote, if one or two towns decided not to join, the Board could go back out with a different plan, which would create something like what they have in Chittenden East. If it lost in one town you could create a modified union high school. Mt. Mansfield Union District currently had a high school that serves six towns and an elementary school for 5 of the six towns. Huntington had its own elementary school.

Whitcomb asked about changes made in Essex. Dale explained that the Boards of Essex, Essex Junction and Westford had decided to merge and would be taking this decision to the voters and to the State Board. Westford would be giving up school choice.

Whitcomb then asked for a recommendation on how to elect the Board. Dale informed the Executive Committee they would need to discuss the composition of the committee. He believed that population needed to be considered. One member from each town was required to be on the committee and, in order to address proportionality, members at large could be elected. Following the formation of the study committee, the group would map out the direction for the next few months. Their product would be the creation of a report, which would include articles of agreement. Dale stated the State Agency's website lists seven

districts' articles of agreement that were drafted, some of which were passed, which provided a flavor of the kinds of things people have thought through. The creation of this report would occur over a six-month period. The report would then go to the State Board for their stamp of approval. Following that, the issue would go to the voters in each town. The Study Committee would also be responsible for mapping out the kind of information that goes out to the public and what the meetings would look like.

Dale mentioned that 18 should be the maximum number of Board members. He suggested it was important to have the names of the suggested members lined up so they could be placed on the ballot and, once voted on, they could start immediately.

Regan stated that once people are on the Committee a good bit of development would need to happen because the habit had been to fight for the individual elementary schools. Now the Committee would need to be concerned about all students. Dale agreed it was an adjustment and it would take time to build a sense of oneness, of a team. He stated it tended to have a tremendous leveling impact, as one school may teach four languages while another school did not or technology services may be better at one school while another school had much less to offer their student in that regard.

Dale then went back to the subject of the composition of the Study Committee, reading from Section 706 of Title 16. "With the advice of the Superintendent, the boards shall establish a budget and shall fix the number of persons to serve on the study committee that prepares the report that's required." Dale's recommendation was that the Executive Committee decide this evening on the recommended make up of the Board, which would be the number of representatives from each district. He also noted that, "Representation of the committee shall be in the proportion of equalized pupils of the district" (K-12, not just elementary). Therefore, the High School Board would not officially be part of the Study Committee.

Dale continued, stating that each District Board would have to agree, hopefully on August 24th, to be part of the Study Committee, with members selected at that time. There needed to be at least one School Director from each of the districts. There would be no limit on the number of people on the Committee; however, it was recommended not to have more than 12-15 people.

Once the Committee was created, grants could be applied for. The initial grant of \$5,000 was available to start the exploration with an additional \$20,000 available if the Committee was seriously considering becoming a single district. The Committee could apply immediately for the \$5,000 grant and then a month later apply for the \$20,000. Beatty asked what the grant money could be used for. Dale replied it was for various kinds of consulting. Examples included paying for a facilitator, paying for someone to write the report, to perform a financial analysis on what impact a single district would look like or what the financial impact would be if nothing were done. Dale also offered that community engagement could be paid for and legal issues could be reviewed as well, such as property ownership and building maintenance.

Whitcomb asked how much money had been set aside for this bill. Dale responded that no money had been set aside. The funds for incentives were coming out of the Education Fund and being paid for by everyone.

Dale returned to the topic of the implementation timetable. He explained that if the Board wanted to vote on Town Meeting Day to receive the accelerated incentives, a final product needed to be ready by the 5th of January. This was due to the fact that the State Board would have to approve it at the January 19, 2016 meeting and then it would have to be warned. This would require three months of intense work to get it ready, but there were other communities throughout the State attempting to have their work done by that time. If that timetable was too tight, a special meeting could be held in May.

Both Whitcomb and Regan stated it would be difficult to get the work done before Town Meeting Day. Dale recommended that in order to move this Study Committee forward successfully in the amount of time that was available, all of the Boards would need the Executive Committee's leadership. The Boards needed to hear the Executive Committee state their preference for the Study Committee. Dale suggested that the Executive Committee explain the proposal to the entire Board, with the individual Boards then taking it back to their groups to discuss. Finally, Dale reminded the Executive Committee that according to the language in Section 706, the Study Committee was to be approved and created by the individual Districts.

Beatty stated that the Board needed to ratify the support staff contract at the August 24th meeting. She believed it was possible at that meeting for the Executive Committee to provide leadership on this issue and to let the individual Boards know they wanted to move forward with a Study Committee. Dale suggested that given the pathway that's out there for the next three years, it would be in the Board's interest to create a study group to determine the advisability of forming a union school district and examine all options in order to receive the maximum incentives. Additionally, the advantage of discussing this on the August 24th was that the Study Committee would be able to start planning in early September.

Whitcomb reminded the administrative staff that the meeting on August 24th needed to be a warned meeting and each individual board would have to warn their meeting in order to make this legal.

Penberthy asked about the logistics of informing the individual Boards of this issue. Dale responded by saying it was best to have a discussion with the individual Boards prior to the large meeting on the 24th. The idea would be that the Boards would be prepared to vote on the matter at the August 24th meeting. Beatty reminded the group that the vote would be to create a Study Committee; it was not a vote to consolidate.

Regan asked what action would be required of the district boards. Dale suggested voting to create a study committee to analyze the advisability of forming a union school district under Act 46. The Boards would not be agreeing to do it; they were merely agreeing to analyze it. If only five out of six schools agreed, it then would become a longer process and maximum benefits could not be achieved.

Dale continued by explaining that the next step would be to determine the make-up of the committee. Ultimately each local board would have to appoint people, and if one of the towns only has one representative it would have to be a Board member. He encouraged the group to identify the members beforehand.

Following a question from Whitcomb, Dale explained that the Union Board would not be a voting member. However, the Committee could include some members from the Union High School Board.

Regan noted that while the members of the Executive Committee would determine whether or not to form a study committee, those members might not even be on it. Dale agreed. Dale reiterated there had to be reasonable proportionality but it didn't have to be precise. Whitcomb stated his concern that whoever was elected needed to be available to attend the meetings.

Beatty asked the Committee members if their Boards would support a study committee. Walters said that Hyde Park had already discussed the matter and were very interested in pursuing a study group. Orst from Johnson said their Board had discussed it briefly and no one said no to the idea. Hunsberger said it was not discussed at their last meeting, however, he didn't believe there would be opposition to the idea. Sander said that Cambridge hadn't discussed it yet, but the Board Retreat was going to be the next day and she would discuss it then.

Penberthy then asked what would happen if the Study Committee decided not to move forward with a unified school district. Dale replied that the steps involved creating a study committee, going through the process, and creating a report at the end. However, the Committee did not need to decide at the end to change the structure of the school district. The outcome was not predetermined. The motion being voted on was to analyze the matter. Dale reminded the Committee that in November of 2018 the Legislature could require school districts to combine. While some districts may hope the Legislature might change their mind, this bill passed with bi-partisan support.

Penberthy stated she couldn't imagine Waterville would oppose the study committee.

Regan asked about the size of the Committee. Whitcomb, noting there were six towns involved, thought there should be between 12 and 15 members. Regan stated there were three tiers in terms of population and suggested that Belvidere, Waterville, and Eden each have one representative; Hyde Park and Johnson each have two representatives; and Cambridge, being the largest, have three representatives, bringing the total to 10. Orst suggested changing Cambridge's number to two and adding two representatives from the high school board.

Penberthy stated her belief that in order to limit competition, two members from each community would create more of a balanced committee. Regan stated he agreed with her in principle and had only suggested the tiered approach due to the concern about the rules in the

statute regarding proportionality. Penberthy stated the charge to the Committee would be to think of all children rather than just their individual community's children. If one person was representing Waterville and three people were representing Cambridge, Waterville would feel marginalized.

Dale agreed that the spirit of the Committee could not be to push a decision through. All towns must agree with the direction. Reading from Section 706, Dale repeated the language, "With the advice of the Superintendent, the boards shall establish a budget, and shall fix the number of persons to serve on the study committee that prepares the report required by this subchapter. The boards' proposal shall ensure that each participating district share in the committee's budget and be represented on the committee in that proportion which the equalized pupils of the district bear to the total equalized pupils of all school districts intending to participate in the committee's study." Dale believed there needed to be some attempt to be proportionally accurate.

Beatty suggested that some at-large members could come from the groups that have only one representative.

Penberthy asked if the Superintendent could recommend that any member district with under 600 students have two representatives. The Superintendent stated she would recommend what the Executive Committee supported. Hunsberger stated he agreed with Penberthy.

Whitcomb polled the group on whether to have 12 or 15 members on the Committee. Sander, Penberthy, and Hunsberger voted for 12. Walter thought more numbers might be best, but agreed with 12. Regan suggested giving Cambridge one additional member, bringing the total to 13. Whitcomb said the Committee would have 12 members and all Executive Committee members agreed.

Beatty asked when to have the member names ready. Dale responded by saying if there were people willing to step forward on August 24th that would be best. Those towns that did not have a name ready could have a special meeting so as to move forward on the process.

Whitcomb again reminded the members that the meeting to select a member for the Committee needed to be legally warned. Orost asked for the language of the items that needed to be warned.

Dale stated he would make himself available for any questions. He expressed again his concern regarding proportionality and whether that might impact decisions down the road. Penberthy stated her opinion that fairness for all students was important and overrepresentation on a committee would make it difficult to sell the idea to the voters of an underrepresented town. Dale agreed that their reasoning made absolute sense.

Whitcomb confirmed with Dale that this Study Committee would operate under Title 16, section 706 and would be a Study Committee of the Boards of the Supervisory Union. The High School would not have representation on the Committee. Section 701 directly referenced this point.

Beatty then handed out additional resources to the Committee on Act 46.

Following a question from Walter, Dale explained to the Executive Committee that if one of the towns decided not to approve a merger, the district could look at a wider range of options and work with other schools outside of the district. However, in order to leave a high school, all towns have to agree.

Superintendent Evaluation Process for 2015-16, Update on Proposal and Work: Beatty informed the Committee that H. Frank's contract had been signed. Mr. Frank requested that anywhere from two to four people work with him as facilitators of the process. Whitcomb mentioned that he had signed the contract for Mr. Frank's work; however, he was uncomfortable doing so as this Committee was advisory in nature. He noted that approval of this item would be on the full Board's agenda. There was further discussion as to what Mr. Frank needed the volunteers to do. Hunsberger, Regan and Sander agreed to work with Frank. McFarlane will assist the Committee.

LNSU Board Structure for 2015/2016: Beatty explained to the Board her concern that a number of items needed to be discussed in greater detail than was possible at the full Board meetings. She was looking for ways to streamline the meetings while also providing more information on matters to a committee. She proposed that the Executive Committee or a separate committee review the budget and finances in greater detail. Additionally, the Superintendent expressed her desire to have a committee make policies more common across the Supervisory Union. Her vision was to create one set of policies for the LNSU, with each district having specific procedures related to those policies.

The Superintendent then discussed the work the LNSU Board would need to do on Task Forces on Act 156, Act 46, and the BNC for Teachers. Work was beginning on a search for the new Business Manager to be hired in 2016-17. While C. McFarlane would head up the search, the Board would need to be represented.

The Superintendent then outlined the difficulties the Administration was having with the number of Board meetings being held throughout the month. It was impacting the Administration's ability to fit in negotiating meetings and other events. She was currently attempting to move District Board meetings to the first or third Monday of the month. She also suggested that the Board consider visiting the Chittenden South SU Carousel Board Meeting in September or October.

No action was required on this item.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Beatty reiterated much of the information that had been presented earlier on Act 46. She also provided a link to five Ted Talks, which contained provocative information on education. The Superintendent was delighted to now have new staff members Michele Aumand and Jade Hazard on board. Finally, she informed the Committee that Joe Ciccolo was now the interim principal at Eden.

Penberthy asked the Superintendent if there was any information on the PLC. She stated there needed to be continued support for those. Beatty replied that she had been working with PLC's for almost 20 years and Jade Hazard had already been working on how to continue to support the PLC's. Beatty stated that PLC's were a way of doing business. It took a year to learn the concept, but now the real work was what were the schools engaging PLC's for.

Hunsberger asked about the PLP. Beatty replied they were going to be ready to provide personalized learning and would provide updates.

ADJOURN: Orost then made a motion to adjourn the meeting of the Executive Committee. Penberthy seconded the motion and the meeting concluded at 8:10 p.m.

Minutes taken by Sue Trainor