

LAMOILLE NORTH SUPERVISORY UNION  
SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION COMMITTEE MINUTES  
GMTCC COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTER  
DECEMBER 17, 2015

Board members present: Dan Regan, Jan Sander

Others: Edith Beatty, Catherine Gallagher, Harry Frank

The meeting started at 5:40.

H. Frank said we need to finalize the survey questions, decide who to ask them of, and discuss the methodology. He thinks we are clear that we are using Survey Monkey but we should be clear on the logistics. This committee needs to meet to review the collated feedback and discuss it with E. Beatty before the LNSU board meeting on January 25. The date M. Aumand proposed for that meeting is January 12. We can get the survey out in the beginning of January and have results by January 12.

H. Frank showed the committee possible questions to use on the survey. He said they were the ones he had showed previously, with some revisions. Those with numbers beside them were identified by someone on the board as one they liked. He did some slight editing based on comments people made. He put asterisks next to questions he identified as good choices based on what he heard at the LNSU board meeting and what he has heard here. He would suggest 10-12 questions at the most.

C. Gallagher said she assumes E. Beatty has weighed in on what she is being evaluated on. Maybe she has identified one or two things she would like to look at. E. Beatty said she set goals for last year, but she thinks what she is being evaluated on came more from the executive committee. D. Regan said the 5 dimensions of the VSBA evaluation tool form the basis for our conversations. E. Beatty has been involved in those conversations. The committee and E. Beatty checked the inclusiveness of those 5 dimensions against other LNSU-specific documents, some that formed the superintendent selection process but also perhaps some from E. Beatty. C. Gallagher said she thinks it is wonderful that the process is so participatory. It provides a model for evaluation of principals and students. E. Beatty will be able to say to them that she was evaluated in the same way she is going to evaluate them. H. Frank described the documents the committee referred to and tried to align with the 5 areas VSBA uses. D. Regan said by and large we found the 5 dimensions from VSBA did a pretty good job of covering the right terrain.

H. Frank read a note C. McFarlane had sent him. She said she isn't sure whether we are going to have one set of survey questions or different sets for different audiences. She thinks central office staff and administrators should be included but she is not sure it would be fruitful to survey teachers, students, or community members. We have a Survey Monkey account. Who would own the survey? LNSU? January 25 is the tentative date for the next LNSU board meeting. E. Beatty needs to be notified whether she will get a successor contract by February 15.

H. Frank said he recommends that VSBA hold the survey and collate it. Others agreed.

D. Regan said on the question of whether to have a single set of items or items tailor-made to different constituencies, he thinks H. Frank's suggestion at the last meeting seems practical and makes sense – that it might be better to have a common set posed to all with an opportunity for someone to indicate they lack information to make a judgment or the question is not applicable. H. Frank that is still the advice he would give. It narrows down the range of variables we have to grapple with.

E. Beatty said if VSBA owns the survey, which she thinks is better, she has questions about who sees what and what is discussed in open session and what in executive session. H. Frank said the evaluation document is confidential and belongs in E. Beatty's file. It would be shared in executive session. Any hard copies would be collected at the end of the executive session. It is not a public document. VSBA would collate the results and then wipe it from their system. E. Beatty said she would think the final report might be public, but she is more concerned about the raw data. H. Frank said that is what he is talking about. If there is some report to the LNSU board, that would be in open session and the work plans that come out of the evaluation would be public documents.

D. Regan asked what he means by hard copies. H. Frank said graphs and raw comments would be printed out. D. Regan said he wonders if all of that could be electronic. E. Beatty said she wonders who would see it. H. Frank said VSBA's practice is not to do it electronically because you can't be sure it will be held confidential. They bring hard copies to the review meeting. D. Regan said Survey Monkey is electronic and thus carries a certain risk and by adding hard copies we introduce another type of risk. H. Frank said typically either he or the superintendent collects hard copies at the end and destroys them.

H. Frank asked what people's priorities are for the survey.

D. Regan said Educational and Operational Leadership is on the top for him. It is symbolically and substantively important. Of the 5 potential survey items under that heading, he would pick the first two and the fourth. E. Beatty said the ones he didn't pick are the ones she would say she has spent the most time on. If priority areas were set for her to focus on, the ones D. Regan named would make sense. D. Regan suggested it would make sense to have questions that address a mix of things E. Beatty does a lot now and things to focus on in the future.

C. Gallagher said some of the questions would be easier to answer if the superintendent had been in her position for longer. For example, Community Relations and Operations and Finance are areas that evolve over time and become more important in the third year of a superintendency and beyond. Are all of these going to be measurable?

J. Sander said question #1, about providing effective leadership and support for school and administrators and staff, has always been uppermost in her mind. H. Frank noted that it is a little different from the first asterisked question, which also mentions promoting learning and growth of students. It is related but has a different focus.

D. Regan said based on E. Beatty's comments, he might be inclined to include just the first 3 questions under Educational and Operational Leadership. H. Frank suggested perhaps the first

asterisked one could be combined with #1. Perhaps the second asterisked one is addressed by the School Board Relations questions or could be moved to that category.

D. Regan suggested using just the first question under School Board Relations, about preparing timely/appropriate information for boards. The committee agreed to that, as well as to using the first 3 questions under Educational and Operational Leadership.

Next the group looked at the Operations and Finance questions. D. Regan said the first one is about a more specific part of preparing timely/appropriate information. E. Beatty said she is fortunate to have a good business manager who does most of the work of providing financial information to the boards.

D. Regan said he thinks both the questions listed under Personnel Administration are important and others agreed.

The committee returned to the Operations and Finance questions. D. Regan and H. Frank discussed possible revised wording for one of the questions under this heading – something like, “The superintendent, working in concert with the business manager, has established effective management practices that maintain the financial integrity of the SU (or ensure the SU remains in good financial condition.)” There was agreement that something along those lines would be good.

Under Community Relations, D. Regan said he doesn’t think he would include the second asterisked item. He likes the first two questions. J. Sander suggested we could incorporate aspects of the second asterisked question (about supporting excellence in education) into the first asterisked one (about building support for the district through communication with board, staff, families, community groups, media, and governmental decision makers.) Supporting excellence in education is a good goal. E. Beatty said she thinks this is ground yet to be covered by her. D. Regan said he thinks providing meaningful opportunities for members of the public to provide input (addressed in the first question) can just mean a perception of approachability and reasonable access. Is that how H. Frank would interpret it? H. Frank said yes.

H. Frank said he thinks relations with the community is one of the most delicate areas. He will suggest this not be a community survey. D. Regan agreed. He thinks central office staff and board members will have input about community relations. H. Frank said he thinks the process of assessing how you are doing needs to include some input from the community but the slippery slope is the assumption that public comment is somehow critical to the function of this organization. Typically public comment comes from people who are unhappy about something. The challenge for the superintendent is to send a message they we hear and care and will take the input into consideration but that the superintendent governs the organization and doesn’t manage situations. Asking these questions implies that the superintendent needs the pulse of the community because it is critical to her job.

H. Frank said he thinks the first asterisked question under Community Relations is the most important. J. Sander said she thinks the second one pretty much repeats the first one. H. Frank

said communicating is the main task the superintendent should take up. Community relations is more about that than about doing what the community wants.

D. Regan said he agrees with H. Frank that even though these items involve the community at large he wouldn't throw them out to the community for random feedback and comment. But people like central office staff and board members would have a good handle on community relations. He thinks there are two things to ask about – the extent to which people feel the superintendent is open and approachable and her outreach. He thinks she has done more of the former than outreach, but he would like to see questions about both of them on the survey. They reflect different sides of community relations.

J. Sander asked how we would go about getting community feedback. H. Frank said it would be board members and school administration responding to this survey. And central office staff, added E. Beatty. H. Frank said he thinks this is a process to use within the system as opposed to the external community.

The group reviewed the questions that had been chosen so far. After some discussion it was decided to have two questions under Operations and Finance, with wording like what H. Frank had suggested earlier as a rewrite of one question. One would be something like, “The Superintendent, working in concert with the business manager, has protected and enhanced the use of all district resources” and the other would be something like, “The Superintendent, working in concert with the business manager, has established effective financial management practices and maintained the financial integrity of the SU.”

H. Frank said he will send the chosen questions for a final review. We can send out the survey around January 4 and have it due January 11.

It was agreed to use the first 3 questions under Educational and Operational Leadership, the 2 just discussed under Operations and Finance, both the Personnel Administration ones, the first two under Community Relations, and the first under School Board Relations.

H. Frank said based on the previous conversation we would send the survey to all board members, all central office staff, and all building administrators. Does building administrators just mean all the principals? E. Beatty said there might be one or two others who report to the principals. C. Gallagher said maybe the vice principals. E. Beatty said maybe D. Laflam. It was suggested that AdCo members could all be included.

J. Sander asked, are we not including teachers? She has a problem with not including teachers. H. Frank said the question is what you want to get from including teachers. J. Sander said the superintendent is the educational leader and teachers are the ones dispensing the product. If they have no confidence in the leader the product won't be good, or delivered well.

C. Gallagher said where the superintendent may weigh in more impactfully is with the principal, who then impacts the teacher. J. Sander asked, what if there is a disconnect between the principal and teachers? C. Gallagher said she wonders if teachers are just too far removed from the

superintendent to be included in the survey. She thinks they are more closely tied to the principal, who needs support from the superintendent.

H. Frank said alignment among superintendent, principals and teachers is important. But these survey questions don't get at that. He thinks assessing that is a different task. He had previously mentioned a climate survey. That is about the day to day functioning of the school. We have been crafting questions for people with a systemic perspective. Teachers have a different perspective. They have more of a delivery perspective.

E. Beatty said she loves working with the teachers. She would love to have that be important in the next round because it is still work to be done. She thinks if teachers were surveyed about her performance there would be a high correlation between their ratings and their connect or disconnect with their principal. She agrees these are pretty systemic management questions.

J. Sander said the questions we are putting together don't really affect the classroom teacher. She gets most of her feedback about how things are going from talking to teachers.

H. Frank said there is a delicate balance. The board may be asking the superintendent to move the system in a particular direction and individual teachers may disagree with it, so we need to distinguish whether teachers feel the superintendent is not effective or whether they just don't like what she is doing. He thinks it is critical to engage staff in how we are doing but we need to ask them about what they can address effectively and then ask what that tells us about our system. He thinks it is important to be able to make the statement that the board will be crafting other pieces to look at community, teachers, students, etc. That is part of a comprehensive evaluation and part of our work going forward.

E. Beatty said she thinks H. Frank had a couple of important points. We are going into a really challenging budget cycle. Class size is a huge issue in Vermont. Principals in some regard have seen their job as protecting teachers. She feels like her job is to protect the quality of our offering but also to pay attention to research about class size and comparability across the nation and address the issues we face in Vermont, but that is not a popular position to take. Another thing is that she followed a superintendent who started out as an interim. He was out in schools all the time but a lot of the work she is doing is work that needs to be done but that he didn't take on because he wasn't going to be here for the long haul. She thinks there is some systems work that needs to be done to get central office well oiled.

H. Frank said he thinks it is important to address this and have a plan going forward of how to get data from other sources. C. Gallagher said that would eventually include students as well.

D. Regan said he thinks in principle input from teaching staff and other staff would be important, but this seems not to be the instrument to accomplish that. That does raise the question of whether there should be any mechanism built into this evaluation cycle to give community members and teachers some opportunity to convey any viewpoints they might have.

C. Gallagher said she thinks when we talk to teachers about their satisfaction with anything it will be directed to their building leader.

D. Regan said he wonders if we should at least hold out the opportunity. C. Gallagher asked if H. Frank has an example of that.

H. Frank said he would suggest that one of the parts of the report to the full board be that we identified a need to get input from other stakeholders and that that is part of what we expect the superintendent to implement going forward. Perhaps there could be a year-end climate survey for people who are in the building day to day. This committee would say to the board that one of our directions going forward is to get data from our internal constituents as well.

E. Beatty said we have talked about a more formative model for the evaluation. At this point in the year, this is more summative. But in the future she would prefer a more formative process. Let's have some mechanism for talking to teachers. We didn't want the evaluation process to be a dipstick where people had one opportunity to provide feedback. All should be engaged in ongoing feedback.

J. Sander said that discussion satisfied her.

D. Regan asked if there will be opportunities in the future for community members to provide feedback. H. Frank said he would suggest treating that similarly to teacher input. E. Beatty said we can get feedback from students, teachers, and community members.

D. Regan said some central office staff have worked with E. Beatty for a shorter time than others. Jade Hazard, for instance, has spent less time with her than Rick McCraw did. He wants to confirm that we are going to include just the current central office staff members. He could see some logic in doing something other than that. H. Frank asked if he means surveying past employees. D. Regan said yes – someone like R. McCraw, for instance, who worked with E. Beatty for a full year. C. Gallagher said she wouldn't do that. If we do it with R. McCraw it raises the question of doing it with other past employees. J. Sander said it raises the question of how far back you go. H. Frank said the purpose of the survey is to move forward effectively and the current team is the team moving forward. D. Regan said he agrees with that.

H. Frank said he will send a final version of the questions out by the end of the day tomorrow and ask people to get input back to him by Dec. 23 at the latest.

E. Beatty asked if every survey question will have an opportunity for comment. H. Frank said yes. Respondents will be asked to give a 1-4 rating and provide at least one example the rating is based on. It is possible to make it so a comment has to be provided before moving on, but he hasn't done that in the past. D. Regan said he doesn't think we should. H. Frank said there may be people who don't have computer technology to do the survey easily so we can make hard copies available. He thinks he will include note saying we are happy to collect data in whatever way works for people and give them options including a hard copy or a verbal conversation. We will ask people to identify which group they are in (board, central office, etc.) We will have in the results how many responded from each category. We can break out results by category. D. Regan said he thinks we want to look at results by category and see if there are patterns. He is

not sure if we want to report them by category. H. Frank said he will organize the data by category and also give the total picture.

D. Regan said we have said we hope recommendations for the board come out of this process. Is it possible that we will find recommended areas for action through using the survey tool? J. Sander suggested the board might evaluate ourselves as well. E. Beatty said she thought that was going to be part of it.

H. Frank said recommended areas of action for the board can come from the survey. In another recent evaluation it was clear that while the superintendent's evaluations were very strong one area where growth was needed was communication. That led to a conversation about the board's role in communication. Responsibilities for the board and the superintendent were identified largely through that conversation rather than by the survey instrument. He thinks that kind of board reflection is helpful. It is not a true board assessment. He is optimistic those kinds of things will emerge from this evaluation.

D. Regan asked about the scale presented on the survey. H. Frank said VSBA has used a 1 through 4 rating with an N/A choice. The choices are identified as "exceeds expectations," "meets expectations," "does not meet expectations," or "is consistently unacceptable." He will include that information in the email he sends out with the final version of the questions.

It was agreed to put January 12 on the calendar for the final meeting of this group before reporting out to the LNSU board.

The meeting ended at 7:21.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*