

**March 17, 2015**

*The state of Vermont is a national and international leader in education. From exceptional teachers and visionary leadership to creative instruction and leading-edge assessment, Vermont enjoys a highly regarded educational system which serves as a model for other states and schools.*

**Approved MINUTES**

**Present**

**State Board of Education (SBE):**

Stephan Morse, Chair; Sean-Marie Oller, Vice Chair; Krista Huling; Bonnie Johnson-Aten; Peter Peltz; Dylan McAllister; William Mathis; Mark Perrin; Stacy Weinberger; Rebecca Holcombe

**Agency of Education (AOE):**

Bill Talbott; John Fischer; Wendy Geller; David Kelley; Jill Remick; Vaughn Altemus; Frank Gerdeman; Cindy Moran; Richard Boltax; Nicole Tousignant; Karin Edwards; Perry Thompson

**Others:**

John A. Castle, NCSU Superintendent; Keri Geleman, Rivendell Academy School Director; Julie Longchamp, VT-NEA; Martha Allen, VT-NEA; Howard Weiss-Tisman, Brattleboro Reformer; Michael Giangreco, UVM; Tammy Kolbe, UVM; Aly Richards, Governor's Office

**Item A: Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance, Roll Call**

Chair Stephan Morse called the meeting to order at 9:35 AM and welcomed new SBE member Peter Peltz. He then led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and reminded those in attendance to sign the attendance sheet. The members of the SBE introduced themselves.

**Item B: Public to be Heard** (Items not on the day's agenda)

John Castle and Keri Geleman addressed the Board regarding the upcoming Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) assessment. Geleman reviewed the results of some research he had done regarding the time that his staff had already spent in preparation for the SBAC assessment and wondered if the benefits that may be derived from the assessment were truly worth the investment of time and resources. He asked what the connection was between standardized testing and improved learning and said that a process that involved teachers more would produce more personalized and actionable results. He said he appreciated the SBE's proposed resolution on the SBAC assessment, but asked that it be even stronger and suggested the state could fight the requirement for annual assessments based on constitutional grounds.

Morse noted that neither the SBE, the AOE nor the State of Vermont had authority to waive the annual assessment requirement and said he trusted Geleman and Castle understood that.

Castle agreed, saying that the state is being held hostage by the federal government with the annual assessment requirement. He said he appreciated the assistance Secretary Holcombe has been giving in that regard. He asked that she and the SBE continue to work with everyone they can to advocate for an end to the requirement for annual assessments. Holcombe noted that the current requirement for annual assessments is tied to schools receiving federal education dollars and refusing to administer the assessments would mean schools would no longer receive that money, which would likely impact children with disabilities and those living in poverty the worst.

Oller said the SBE appreciated their comments and assured them that the SBE will be taking action later in the meeting to make a statement on the SBAC assessment and to put the word out about what can and cannot be inferred from the assessments.

**Item Z: Statement and Resolution on Appropriate Use of SBAC Standardized Tests and School Accountability**

Huling reviewed the draft Resolution. She noted that California had decided to suspend the use of SBAC scores for a year and added that other states are taking other measures to ensure that the first year's scores are not used in a negative way against the schools that have worked so diligently to administer the online assessment.

**Motion:** Huling moved to adopt the Statement and Resolution as presented. Seconded by Perrin.

Peltz noted he knows a family that has kept their children away from electronic devices and wondered if those children might have a harder time working on the computer-based test. There was discussion about the online format of the assessment. There will ultimately be benefits from such a format, which is highly adaptable for each student taking the test. However the transition from paper and pencil to the electronic format will be more difficult for some. Gerdeman added that, after last year's trial, the feedback received was generally positive, saying that the experience was more productive and students found the online format to be more engaging.

Johnson-Aten noted that this year's assessment truly is a pilot, but said the field had not necessarily clearly received that message. Huling added that when her colleagues learned this was going to be considered a pilot year for the assessment they were very relieved because they all wanted both their students and their school to do well.

**Vote:** The motion passed unanimously (8-0).

A question was raised regarding what would be used for AYP determinations if the SBAC scores are not going to be used and whether or not the U.S. Department of Education would have to approve. Holcombe noted that decision was still being contemplated and would be shared at the April SBE meeting.

There was discussion about the need to publicize the newly adopted Resolution as broadly as possible. Sending it to school boards and posting on the website were suggested.

**Motion:** Huling moved that the Chair or his designee write a Letter to the Editor summarizing the Resolution in everyday language to be sent to media outlets throughout the state. Seconded by Oller.

**Vote:** The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

### **Item C: Consent Agenda**

Action on the Minutes from the February 17, 2015, meeting will be taken at the April SBE meeting.

### **Updates**

#### **Item D: Election of Officers: Chair and Vice Chair**

Morse proposed electing the Vice Chair first, who would then lead the meeting during the election of the Chair. He called for nominations.

**Motion:** Huling moved to nominate Oller to serve as Vice Chair. Seconded by Weinberger. There were no additional nominations.

**Vote:** The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

Oller assumed control of the meeting and called for nominations for the Chair's position.

**Motion:** Weinberger moved to nominate Morse to serve as Chair. Seconded by Perrin. There were no additional nominations.

**Vote:** The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

Morse reassumed control of the meeting and noted, for the record, that Oller had been reelected as Vice Chair and Morse had been reelected as Chair.

#### **Item E: Board Members' Announcements & Student Representatives' Emails**

Mathis reported on a meeting he had attended at the Economic Policy Institute that focused on each state and their achievement levels. Vermont is a high achieving state and continues to improve, and the results are not exclusively due to the state's demographics.

Weinberger said she had attended several events and hearings at the Legislature.

Huling talked about a meeting she had had with representatives of Vermont Public Television and said she had also been to the State House several times.

#### **Item F: Chair's Report**

No report.

### **Item G: Legislative Update**

Remick noted that March 20 is crossover day in the Legislature. The House Education Committee had put forth a bill, but had recently been reconsidering portions of it, such as a proposed cap on spending and a section about school governance. The Senate Education Committee has its own version of a bill. Both contain versions of some of the governor's education proposals. There has been discussion in the Legislature, as well, regarding collective bargaining. She added that the miscellaneous amendment bill regarding EQS seems to be moving forward and noted that the details for next year's budget are still very much up in the air.

Altemus discussed the most recent version of H.361 and the current language regarding voluntary governance changes, what would happen if districts do not volunteer to undergo governance change, and the criteria for decision-making the either the SBE or the Secretary would need to consider when making such decisions.

The meeting recessed from 10:50 – 11:00.

Morse reported he had testified to both the House and the Senate Education Committees. He explained that he knows the SBE has a big role to play and asked that the Legislature provide as much direction as possible as it finalizes its work on the Education bill(s).

Mathis reviewed the outcome of the most recent meeting of the SBE's Legislative Committee. He reviewed a document produced after that meeting addressing the various components of the Education bills. He sought and received feedback from the full SBE on the positions the Legislative Committee proposed so that when the Legislature begins to move at full steam ahead on its bills both he and Morse can speak on issues confidently, knowing they are expressing the opinions of the SBE.

### **Item H: Secretary's Report**

Holcombe discussed the Agency's proposed budget. She noted that state government budgets to its funding and not the other way around. The funding is declining and will likely continue to decline for another year. The AOE has identified two main priorities as it worked to prepare its budget: support continuous improvement in learning for all learners PreK-12 and to preserve resources to support the implementation of EQS, including EQRs. She reviewed other tactics being employed in house to maximize efficiencies.

She then distributed a press release that explained the errors in data recently released by the U.S. Department of Education (US-ED) regarding school funding inequities. The US-ED has acknowledged its data was incorrect.

She noted that SBAC had completed the white paper Vermont had requested regarding valid uses of and for assessments. Once it is ready to distribute she will share it with the SBE.

## **Discussion Items**

### **Item I: Special Education**

Holcombe introduced Giangreco, a professor at UVM, who presented a condensed version of the testimony he gave to the House and Senate Education Committees. There are 3 big issues related to special education: concerns with the current, reimbursement based model of funding; ensuring equitable access to inclusive schooling; and ensuring equitable access to educational support from highly qualified personnel.

He reviewed data pertaining to the amount of instruction given to special education students from paraprofessionals and asked if it would be acceptable if the receivers of that instruction were general education students. He said that the intention behind the use of paraprofessionals may be benevolent, but it is not meeting the spirit or intent of IDEA. He suggested some ways to make the best, most productive use of paraprofessionals and noted that schools that do a good job keeping kids out of special education who don't really need it by providing them the right type of education and support are being penalized financially under the current funding system.

### **Item J: Special Education**

Holcombe introduced Kolbe, also a professor at UVM, who reviewed her PowerPoint presentation about the various funding mechanisms for special education. She provided a framework for understanding special education costs, the core principles for reform, a review of existing funding approaches, the way special education is funded in Vermont and key considerations for moving forward with special education funding reform.

The meeting recessed from 12:40 – 1:15 for lunch.

### **Item K: PreK Rulemaking: Status Update**

Edwards reported that on April 5 from 5:30-7:30 PM the first forum for public input into the Rulemaking process for PreK would occur via various interactive television locations around the state. There have been 4 webinars held on the PreK rules, which are archived on the AOE's website; 3 more are scheduled. Questions raised during the webinars are being used for an FAQ on the subject, as well.

Perrin asked about perceived obstacles. Edwards said that most of the questions have been regarding confusion regarding prequalification to be an approved PreK provider. She noted that every program that would receive universal PreK funds needs to be prequalified, whether it is a new program or not. There was also discussion about funding for PreK, the STARS program and the use of federal funds to pay for PreK.

She said that the current plan is to have the Rules ready for the SBE to review again at its June meeting.

## **Action Items**

### **Item L: Strategic Plan: Looking Ahead**

Johnson-Aten reviewed a method of breaking up the Plan and covering various areas of the Plan in different months. For the next few meetings the SBE will focus on learning to

understand the issues and then work to put together a plan to address the issues. Holcombe noted some upcoming meetings about EQR and encouraged members of the SBE to attend both days of the EQR meetings if they were able to.

**Item M: Youth Education Alliance of Vermont Proposal**

McAllister reviewed his revised proposal. He explained the biggest change from the prior version would keep the Governor as the appointing authority for the student members of the SBE and the Alliance would suggest several names to the Governor for consideration.

There was discussion about how to include students from all areas of the state in the Alliance as well as the how the Alliance would be funded. McAllister said he would work to put a budget together by using the Massachusetts model and adapting it to meet the needs of Vermont. Holcombe suggested looking into the Vermont Council of Student Councils to determine how or if it might be able to help with the creation of the Alliance.

Morse applauded McAllister for the work he had done so far with this proposal and said he is eager to hear more about it in the coming months.

**Adjourn**

**Motion:** Oller moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:20 PM. Seconded by Huling.

**Vote:** The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

Minutes recorded and prepared by Perry H. Thompson