

June 25, 2015

Strategic Goals: (1) Ensure that Vermont's public education system operates within the framework of high expectations for every learner and ensure that there is equity in opportunity for all.
(2) Ensure that the public education system is stable, efficient, and responsive to changes and ever-changing population needs, economic and 21st century issues.

MINUTES

Present

State Board of Education (SBE):

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

Agency of Education (AOE):

Amy Fowler; Jill Remick; Vaughn Altemus; Patrick Halladay; Andrea LaRocca; Perry Thompson

Others:

Mill Moore, Vermont Independent Schools Association; Nicole Mace, Vermont School Boards Association; Amy Nixon, VTDigger.org;

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

Chair Stephan Morse called the meeting to order at 9:40 AM. He 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)

Mill Moore suggested 2 revisions to the Minutes from the May 19, 2015, SBE Meeting. Specifically he noted a misspelling of the acronym for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). He also said a citation from the State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices from discussion during Item L was listed as 2225.0 when the specific subsection of that Rule (2225.9) was the only portion of the Rule being discussed. He asked that the citation be corrected as well.

Item C: Consent Agenda

Motion: Oller moved to approve the Consent Agenda, including the 2 revisions to the Minutes from the May 19, 2015, meeting as suggested by Moore. Seconded by Peltz.

Oller commended the Agency for incorporating action taken at the May meeting into the items on the consent agenda this month.

Vote: The motion passed unanimously (6-0).

Specifically, the items approved on the Consent Agenda were

1. Minutes of the May 19, 2015, SBE Meeting
2. Approvals
 - a. Initial – Independent Schools
 - i. Central Vermont High School Initiative, Plainfield
 - ii. Pacem School, Montpelier
 - iii. East Meadow School, Morrisville
3. Renewals
 - a. Independent Schools
 - i. Village School of North Bennington, North Bennington
 - ii. Killington Mountain School, Killington
 - iii. Laraway School, Johnson & Hardwick
 - b. Other Education Programs (Teen Parent Education Programs)
 - i. The Family Place, Norwich
 - ii. Northeast Kingdom Parent Child Center South’s New Reflections Program, St. Johnsbury
 - c. Tutorials
 - i. Beckley Day Program, Barre
 - ii. Mountainside House Tutorial Program, Ludlow & Proctorsville

Updates

Item D: Board Members’ Announcements & Student Representatives’ Emails

Oller reported that she and Mathis had attended a meeting on Educational Quality Reviews (EQR), which was very well organized and informative.

Mathis asked about the reauthorization of the federal education statute. Holcombe said there would be at least a two week delay. Floor amendments related to Title I and the pilot assessment program were among several up for discussion and consideration.

Oller noted that NASBE had reached out to its members several months ago regarding data privacy. Holcombe said she would schedule AOE I.T. Manager Brian Townsend to come to a meeting and discuss what safeguards AOE has in place regarding data privacy.

Weinberger talked about the recent celebration of magnet schools in Burlington. Holcombe said it was a great example of intradistrict choice for students in the District. Peltz noted that it was unique because the move to magnet schools had been driven by the local level.

Item E: Chair’s Report

Morse said he had attended the signing ceremony for Act 46. He was impressed with how well organized it was and with the number of students involved with the ceremony.

Item F: Governance Changes

Holcombe reported that the AOE has been working with the Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA), Vermont Principals Association (VPA) and the Vermont School Boards

Association (VSBA) to develop a plan to move forward with the implementation of Act 46. She has met with 24 SUs/SDs at this point; the meetings have been very productive. Another dozen have requested such meetings. The meetings are helping to establish an understanding of how the various boards are approaching the new law. Morse said he was very impressed that 36 SUs/SDs have already stepped forward to begin talking about the Act.

She noted some areas of concern that she has observed so far: wealthier towns not wanting to consider forming a district with less-wealthy neighboring towns, the perceived loss of local control, and the fear that a town's sense of local community togetherness will be affected. She has also been very impressed with the willingness to take risks to improve the educational opportunities for children in their districts. Some districts clearly would prefer not to change, but are starting to realize that such a change is necessary. She noted that Steve Dale of the VSBA has made it clear to the groups they have met with so far that if a district should choose to do nothing it is throwing itself on the will of the State Board of Education to determine its fate.

She estimated that perhaps as many as six SUs would be able and willing to move forward and take advantage of the accelerated merger provision of the Act.

Altemus said he has fielded a large number of questions about the Act, as well. He has been working on a framework for the SBE to help it determine the information it needs to evaluate the merger proposals, as well as the AOE's ability to provide that information. He reviewed the five goals that Act 46 states are to be considered by all involved parties when working towards decisions on district mergers. That information, and more, can be found on the AOE's website at this address: <http://education.vermont.gov/laws/2015/act-46>.

Peltz asked how many SUs could become SDs with no other changes. Altemus explained there is no hard and fast number at this point given the tight timelines for accelerated mergers set forth in the statute.

Perrin asked what would happen if one town in an SU voted no. Altemus explained it would prevent that SU from completing an accelerated merger. Such a vote would not, however, have a similar effect on a conventional merger. He noted that the statute directs the SBE to be wary of creating "orphan districts" as it is approving other districts' merger proposals.

Peltz said that it's imperative for people to know that when/how to merge is a local decision. The last resort is when the SBE steps in to make a decision if a district is unable to. Altemus added that he sees the SBE as the representatives of the students and parents of the entire state and the SBE's role is to keep an eye on the less well-off so they do not get lost in the shuffle.

In summary, Altemus explained that the SBE's role in the accelerated merger process is to accept and act upon merger reports recommended by the Secretary. Regarding small school grants, the SBE needs to create criteria for what will permit a school to keep its grant if it is not pursuing a merger opportunity.

Item G: Secretary's Report

Holcombe reported that the SBAC testing had gone well with high participation rates and mostly positive feedback. She added that a large number of the complaints were from smarter students who may have, for the first time, been tested to the point of fatigue or failure due to the adaptive nature of the tests themselves.

She also briefly reported on the following:

- The AOE continues to work to create capacity to support EQRs.
- The new online licensing tool is up and running. The Educator Quality Division has over 3,000 license renewals it is working on.
- There are two major concerns regarding the reauthorization of the federal education statute: maintaining separation between assessment and accountability as well as language related to the Consolidated Federal Programs.
- The AOE could incur a higher percentage of retirements than most Agencies as the State prepares to release its early retirement guidelines. Payment for the early retirement benefits will come from the Agency's budget. She also noted that each Agency will be allowed to re-hire for only 1 out of every 4 staff members who retire.

Discussion Items

Item H: High Spending Report

Fowler reviewed the report. Few districts are spending exceptionally high or exceptionally low amounts. The extremes tend to be most common in very small districts. The reasons for exceptionally high spending do not seem to be related to staffing ratios; child count can have a big impact for some schools. She noted that in very small districts with high spending it can be difficult to determine if the extra spending is driven by IEP needs or not, but it looks like that is the case in most instances.

Item I: PreK Rulemaking: Status Update

Holcombe reported that the public comment period had been extended after the Head Start program made some changes.

Mathis said he had attended the public information session via interactive television. He said private providers expressed concern about getting paid in a timely manner. He reiterated his concern about potential inequities between private and public providers and who chooses which option for their PreK child(ren) and why. He said it would be prudent to keep a careful eye on that and if troubling irregularities arise then the Legislature will need to be made aware of them and develop a solution.

Perrin asked how flexible the rules will be going forward if they need to be adjusted as a result of unforeseen circumstances. Holcombe explained that Vermont's PreK is based on a market model and systems will need to adjust to fit the conditions, which is one of the risks associated with market models.

Action/Tabled Items

Item J: Rule 2240 Review

Oller noted there are no specific rule suggestions at this time. Holcombe said that the Agency is looking for guidance to determine if the SBE agrees with the direction the Agency is taking. She noted that independent schools can use a NESAC review as part of their application process and the Agency is researching the possibilities for something similar for post-secondary institutions. The consensus of the SBE was that it did support the direction the Agency is going with its initial review of Rule 2240, but noted that the rulemaking process itself had not yet been initiated.

Item K: Video Contract

Motion: Oller moved to renew the contract with Video Unlimited, as recommended. Seconded by Perrin.

Vote: The motion passed unanimously (6-0).

Item L: NASBE Dues

Oller said she was hoping to be able to do what she did last year: contact the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and negotiate a discounted dues rate. There was discussion about the value of NASBE membership, especially in light of the anticipated increase in SBE expenses related to their work under Act 46. It was agreed that until a final number for NASBE dues was known that the SBE would defer making a decision on whether to renew.

Motion: Oller moved to table action on this item until the August meeting. Seconded by Peltz.

Vote: The motion passed unanimously (6-0).

Adjourn

Motion: Weinberger moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:25 AM. Seconded by Mathis.

Vote: The motion passed unanimously (6-0).

Minutes recorded and prepared by Perry H. Thompson

Note: The State Board of Education held its Annual Retreat from 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM on June 25 and from 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM on June 26. They discussed Educational Quality Reviews and their expectations of and responsibilities under them on June 25. On June 26 they discussed Act 46 and began the process of reviewing criteria to be used for the various categories of mergers contemplated within the Act. Since accelerated mergers will be the first type they will be facing, discussion focused on that type. The SBE decided to meet on Friday, July 24, at the Capitol Plaza in Montpelier to continue their work regarding planning for the implantation of Act 46.