

November 15, 2017

- 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.*

## **State Board of Education Meeting**

### **Draft Minutes**

#### **Present:**

**State Board of Education (SBE):** Krista Huling, Chair; William Mathis, Vice Chair; Connor Solimano; Mark Perrin; Peter Peltz; John Carroll; Stacy Weinberger; Bonnie Johnson-Aten (arrived 8:45 a.m.); Callahan Beck; Rebecca Holcombe; John O'Keefe, Absent

**Agency of Education (AOE):** Donna Russo-Savage; Brad James; Heather Bouchey; Robert Stirewalt; Haley Jones; Suzanne Sprague

**Others:** Jay Nichols, VPA; Tiffany Pache, VTDigger; Dan Ryan, Flemming School, EWSD; Amy Cole, EWSD; Deb Anderson, EWSD; Wendy Cobb, EWSD-FMS; Kevin Briggs, EWSD/EMS; Beth Cobb, Superintendent, EWSD; Brand Donahue, EWSD COO; Peter Farrell, EWSD, EES; Rob Reardon, Essex High School Principal, EWSD; Marcie Lewis, Westford Principal; Martha Heath, EWSD Counsel; Tess Hastings, EWSD; Jamaal Hankey, EWSD; Donna Hill, EHS; Jefferson Goodrich, EHS; Jessica Borte, CTE; Alexander Goodman, WHS; Denver Wederin, CTR/CVUHS; Erin Maguire, EWSD; Alex Riziana, EHS; Ellen Thompson, EWSD; Kim Gleason, EWSD Board; Eva Bosley, EWSD Board; Mark Floyd, EHS School Counseling Director; Nicole Mace, VSBA; Jeff Francis, VSA; Linda Cloutier-Namdar, EHS; A.J. Ruben, Pittsfield; Matt Levin, VT Early Childhood Alliance; Ned Kirsch, Superintendent, FWSU; Diane Clemens, EWSD/EJ

#### **Item A: Call to Order**

Chair Huling convened the meeting at 8:36 a.m.

#### **Item B: Roll Call and Introductions**

Chair Huling asked the State Board of Education members to introduce themselves. She invited Superintendent, Beth Cobb, to address the Board.

Superintendent Cobb welcomed the State Board of Education to Essex High School and to the newly merged Essex-Westford Educational Community Unified Union SD. She said it has been a lot of work getting to this point. She credited much of the work to the Leadership Team and the hard work to the School Board. Superintendent Cobb asked the Essex-Westford SD (EWSD) Leadership Team members in attendance to introduce themselves.

Chair Huling extended her thanks for hosting the meeting. Additionally, she said that it will be an honor to congratulate the Vermont Teacher of the Year who works at Essex High School.

**Item C: Public to be Heard**

None

Secretary Holcombe asked the EWSD Leadership team to update the Board on its progress and to share anything that might be helpful for the Board. Kevin Briggs, Principal of Essex Middle School said the impact has not been negative at all. He continued that the teachers have not been impacted either, except with a few system changes. He added that there is an excitement amongst the staff to get together and discuss kids K-12. Mary Heath, School Board Chair, said their merger is different as it combined two superintendencies. It was a challenge to run two school districts, while planning to become one. She said there was not much talk about students in the transition, but rather the focus was on getting systems ready to operate. Heath added that the new leadership has been inspiring. Cobb said that it was a great time to work on individual values and consistency and shift to common values. She said that they are all learning together. Amy Cole, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, said that merging the business side was complex.

Perrin asked if there was any difficulty with the technical center. Cobb said there were no issues.

**Item D: Consent Agenda**

Carroll made a motion to adopt the consent agenda. Peltz seconded the motion. Vote passed unanimously.

**Item E: Board Announcements**

Peltz said that he and Vice Chair Mathis attended a conference titled, *Public Education that Works for All Children* on November 1<sup>st</sup>. He said break-out groups discussed critical issues needing to be pursued. One measure discussed was returning the selection of the Secretary of Education back to the State Board of Education. Vice Chair Mathis said there was a strong sentiment to have this function returned to the State Board of Education. He said that the focus was on equity and moving education forward as finances and student population are on the decline.

**Item F: Chair's Report**

Chair Huling said the strategic plan work continues. The discussion group is struggling with measures and how to move forward. She said the discussions have been constructive.

Chair Huling advised the Board that the next State Board of Education meeting will take place on Wednesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Item G: Committee Reports**

Johnson-Aten addressed the Board regarding the Approved Independent Schools Study Committee and is concerned where the committee will be at the end of the process. She said a lot of time has been spent on the financial disclosure of approved independent schools mostly regarding standards and documentation. The language is being cleaned up for the next meeting. Johnson-Aten said that the committee reviewed a draft proposal from the Approved

Independent Schools on how they will successfully handle special education. She said the Approved Independent Schools can provide service to special education students and want to serve as long as the public schools provide all staff and resources. Johnson-Aten is concerned with the language around the term “best fit” that keeps coming up in the Approved Independent Schools proposed language and how it will affect open enrollment. There has been discussion regarding the Approved Independent Schools creating their own Independent Schools Supervisory Unions to handle special education.

Johnson-Aten said that the next meeting is November 17<sup>th</sup>. The committee will see a presentation from the Agency of Education on special education reimbursement and the rate setting process. She added that Senator Baruth, Chair of the Approved Independent Schools Study Committee, believes that the differences with the groups represented on the committee are not irreconcilable as long as the Approved Independent Schools are willing to shoulder some of the expenses.

Johnson-Aten said there has been a lot of discussion regarding financial certification and accountability of the approved independent schools as well as the required documentation necessary to be sure that the approved independent school can meet their financial obligation. She said that there must be clear standards that the Board could use to make judgements around financial capacity.

Johnson-Aten said that the approved independent schools want to provide services to special education students as long the public schools provide all the staffing, supervision, training and any additional resources. She said a concern is that the approved independent schools use the term “best fit” and how special education students are accepted into their schools. Johnson-Aten said there was discussion around the approved independents schools creating their own independent school supervisory union to support special education within the approved independent schools.

Secretary Holcombe added that the Agency of Education (AOE) was asked to develop and present to the committee a possible general special education approval process for Approved Independent School systems with a special educator on staff, in the hope to make the approval process easier for Approved Independent Schools to obtain approval to serve students with disabilities.

Carroll asked Johnson-Aten if she was satisfied with the financial accountability provision and Johnson-Aten replied no. Carroll asked if there has been any discussion about bonding. Johnson-Aten replied that it has not been discussed. Carroll said that a concern to the Board is if a school’s financial circumstances decline and the school closes that there are many financial consequences. He added that in the private sector, a contractor must be bonded or take out insurance and should the company have issues, the insurance company covers the damage. Carroll continued that he is not aware of this occurring in the education sector and why that model could not address the concerns that the state legitimately has. He said the approved independent schools are contractors with the state and the state has financial responsibility for closure of an independent school. Secretary Holcombe said that the AOE asked for bonding

provision in the wake of the Burlington College closure to be applied to higher education and were unsuccessful in getting the provision added through the legislature.

Discussion followed regarding the financial accountability, complexity of the issues, risk involved, bonding, graduated intervention and early warning system.

Huling said that the committee report should be with the State Board of Education in early January 2018. Johnson-Aten said that there is a lot of work still to do and only two meetings remaining to accomplish it.

#### **Item H: Student Reports**

Solimano reviewed the steps involved in the college application process. He said that the process can begin as early as freshman year when thought is being put into the types of classes that students will take. Junior year is when students take the standardized tests that most colleges look to for academic proficiency. The tests taken are mostly the SAT, ACT or SAT subject based tests that some colleges and universities may require to show proficiency in a particular subject. He added that some students will take AP tests.

Solimano explained that the Common App is the main way students apply to college. Students make one application and send it to multiple colleges. Students are required to write an essay, supply transcripts and have 2 letters of recommendations from teachers. Solimano said that the actual cost can be high. The cost includes application fees, costs for testing, and costs to send scores. There are some colleges and universities, UVM is one, that waive the application fee if the student applies by a certain date and applies for early action.

Solimano said that challenges, other than cost, include staying on top of deadlines. Students who don't have a lot of support at home may fall through the cracks. The reasons may be that parents are unfamiliar with the process which can be daunting without assistance. Solimano said that the Board should focus on the cost and supporting students if it wants to encourage more students to pursue college after high school.

Discussion followed regarding the missing demographic, the FAFSA application, support systems, peer dynamics, financial literacy, Naviance.

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

Skipped due to time. Chair Huling will try to find time for it later.

#### **Item K: Smarter Balance Update/Discussion**

Secretary Holcombe said the Smarter Balanced results are in the third year. The state continues to administer these tests as part of our federal and state accountability requirement. She said that there have been questions from a board member regarding the accuracy and reliability of the scores. The AOE went to Smarter Balanced to see if there were any changes on the specific items that were used. The response was that there were no anomalies and they expanded the item bank slightly because there was concern that there were not enough items for students performing at a lower level. Conclusion from Smarter Balance was that there was no reason for the lower scores. The AOE then contacted Jon Cohen of the American Institutes for Research who delivers the system for the state. The AOE asked Jon to evaluate the Vermont state scores

as well as look at patterns and data as to why Vermont scores are falling and to help identify any technical issues that may have impacted scores.

Secretary Holcombe asked the Board if they would like Jon Cohen to present at the January 2018 meeting. The Board said yes. Secretary Holcombe said that the lack of consistent trends nationwide suggests any VT patterns may not be related to technical concerns with the test. Chair Huling would like to know more about local results where obvious swings in scores occurred, up or down, so the board can understand those issues. Vice Chair Mathis had specific technical questions that he would like answered as well. Secretary Holcombe asked him to provide them to her in advance so that Jon Cohen is prepared. Chair Huling said it would be interesting to see the test scores specific to the schools in transition.

**Item L: Dual Enrollment and Early College through and Equity Lens**

Deputy Secretary Bouchey said that her presentation is data heavy. She reviewed the description of Vermont’s Dual Enrollment and Early College programs. She explained the participation rates, equity in student participation and links to postsecondary outcomes. Deputy Secretary Bouchey discussed the current challenges and gave her final conclusions.

Discussion followed.

Chair Huling called a break at 10:50 a.m. The meeting resumed at 10:57 a.m.

**Item N: Student Panel presentation**

Chair Huling invited the Essex High School panelists to introduce themselves. Jefferson Goodrich, Jessica Borte, Alexander Goodman, Denver Wederin and Alex Riziana fielded questions from the State Board of Education.

Questions included:

What are your experiences with dual enrollment? What programs have you taken advantage of? What are the challenges and successes? What was your CTE experience in high school? How do regular and CTE students interact? How does the school help you with dual enrollment? What changes are needed to help students who are economically disadvantaged participate in these programs? Are there any challenges that your peers have identified regarding participating in the programs? How effective were your counsellors? How big of an obstacle is transportation? Would taking a financial literacy course help?

**Item P: Teacher of the Year Acknowledgement**

Chair Huling congratulated on behalf of the State Board of Education Linda Cloutier-Namdar on being named Vermont Teacher of the Year.

The meeting recessed for lunch at 12:00 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 12:37 p.m.

**Item Q: Strategic Plan Update**

Chair Huling said the discussion group is moving closer to having a draft to present to the Board for its consideration. The initial feedback from the Board was incorporated into the draft’s introduction. The Board discussed the term “historically disadvantaged” and using the

language in the draft. Discussion followed regarding the groups that are defined as historically disadvantaged.

Chair Huling said that the strategic plan discussion group is trying as much as possible to align the State Board of Education goals with the goals of the Agency of Education. The three priorities are equity, excellence and efficiency. She said that excellence is looking at the academics and will be discussed later when the Board discusses EQR next steps. The discussion group would like to incorporate the EQR indicators and identify both the inputs and the outputs for each. Carroll said it looks at goals in two ways, leading and lagging indicators. He continued that leading indicators are done now and lagging indicators occur after. Discussion followed.

Chair Huling said the discussion group will continue to work to bring a proposal to the Board for consideration.

### **Item R: UUSD Proposals**

Russo-Savage said that the proposal being presented is a 3x1 from the Pittsfield School District and the Windsor Central Modified Unified Union School District. The Pittsfield School District is a tuitioning district for its K-12 students and the MUUSD operates all grades. She said that if the Board approves the proposal, the Pittsford School District will receive early assurance that it will not be merged with another district in the State Board's final Statewide Plan. The MUUSD is already eligible for tax rate reductions and other assistance and approval of the 3x1 does not affect the eligibility. Approval of the 3x1 would also imply that the Statewide Plan might maintain the current SU boundaries.

The presenter for this proposal was A.J. Ruben, School Board member. He said that their board has worked very hard for many years and considered many school districts to merge with under Act 46. Ruben said he was very disappointed by the Secretary's recommended action that the State Board of Education take no action at this time. He urged the Board to vote against the Secretary's recommended action. He said that his school district has worked with a consultant and considered merging with Granville and Hancock and determined that it was not a good fit. Ruben said that 75% of Pittsfield School District students attend the Windsor Central School district. He is asking for peace and assurance as to what will happen to the Pittsfield School District. Ruben said he has not heard a good reason to deny the request other than the Agency of Education wants to keep options open.

Secretary Holcombe said that the final decision is the State Board's decision. Carroll asked Ruben how making a decision on the 3x1 proposal will affect the children and taxpayers in his district. Ruben said that if the State Board takes no action at this time, the Pittsfield school board must advise the people in the area that they don't know what will happen and that does not give the town closure. He continued that his district has worked hard with consultants over the years and there would be nothing better than what they have now.

Secretary Holcombe clarified that the State Board cannot change how a district delivers its education and that nothing it can do in the Statewide Plan will change the district's full-tuitioning status. She said the question to consider is whether the district remains a very small

single town district or becomes part of a larger one. Secretary Holcombe said that Pittsfield, as a fully tuitioning district, is exempted from paying any penalty if the district goes beyond the excess spending threshold. She said the rest of the state has to pick up the difference. This is less likely to happen in large districts, and is related to, for example, why the NEK Choice district pursued its merger.

Chair Huling said that the proposal supplied does not contain detail and has very little information. She added that the proposal doesn't show how a positive vote will be better for students versus the adults or the state. Chair Huling continued that the months of work are not reflected in the proposal. She said the State Board is used to receiving much more detailed reports.

Carroll asked what practical difference will be the outcome of approving or not approving the 3x1 proposal at this time. Ruben said that there will be no difference to the children or to the taxpayers. Discussion followed. Chair Huling said the proposal contains no evidence to support a favorable decision on the 3x1.

Johnson-Aten made a motion to take no action now as written in the Secretary's recommendation. Carroll seconded. There was no additional discussion. Vote was unanimous.

#### **Item S: Act 46/49 – Next Phase**

Donna Russo-Savage shared an updated merger activity map. She said that as of the end of October there were three proposals that were before the voters on November 7 and an additional five proposals scheduled for a vote later in November.

Russo-Savage shared some statistics on the progress of Act 46: 129 towns voted to merge 139 school districts into 32 unified districts for a net reduction of 107 districts; 41% of students in the state are in new school districts. As of current final votes: 4 districts became operational in 2016; 8 in summer 2017 and; 17 are becoming operational in summer 2018.

Secretary Holcombe said that some SUs are quite small and likely will be merged with other SUs. She has signaled to some of these SUs to make shorter contracts for the superintendents under the assumption that SUs will be merged under the State Board's final Statewide Plan.

Russo-Savage said that the Board has considered all the proposals under phase one or phase two of the voluntary mergers. She said that the Board may consider another set of mergers under phase three. The districts will still receive tax rate reductions. She clarified that the phase three proposals have no voter approval deadlines and that the State Board could also merge the districts before the towns vote.

Russo-Savage said that the Section 9 proposals are presented to the Secretary and to the Board. She said the Secretary will have conversations with the school board(s) over the next several months and ultimately will decide whether or not to incorporate the proposals into the proposed Statewide Plan issued at the beginning of June 2018. The State Board will have an additional 6 months to take testimony from these districts before deciding on the final Statewide plan due by November 30, 2018.

Russo-Savage said there is one year to finalize the Statewide plan and additionally, the metrics for small schools is required by June 2018. Secretary Holcombe said she is aware that some supervisory unions may not be viable and these may need to be reassigned by the Board. Also, it is possible that some of the proposals that come forward may make it advisable to reassign districts to new SUs. She continued that the Board has the authority to reassign a school district to a supervisory union at any time. Discussion followed. Russo-Savage said that there are approximately 75-100 communities that haven't done anything to date. Some of these communities will submit Section 9 proposals jointly therefore, making it impossible to predict the number of merger requests that remain.

Chair Huling asked Russo-Savage what is needed from the Board for the next phase to be successful. Russo-Savage said whatever information the Board deems important is what the AOE will be asking to have included in the new proposals. Weinberger said that she would like details provided regarding how the school districts will improve to include student-centered improvements as well as to reflect on opportunities for growth. Carroll said that he would like data facts expressed numerically. He said that the Board should be more intentional moving forward and the proposals should include improvements in equity, excellence and efficiency. Chair Huling said that she would like the green sheets to look at the proposal from a statewide context and how the proposal may affect all taxpayers. Discussion followed regarding small schools and independent legal counsel for dealing with this next phase. The Agency agreed to look at how to present performance data in ways that speak to the Board priorities: excellence, equity and efficiency.

Chair Huling called for a break at 2:18 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 2:45 p.m. Chair Huling moved to the Legislative Committee update.

#### **Item W: Legislative Committee Update - part 1**

Peter Peltz, Legislative Committee Chair, reviewed the Legislative Committee work which occurred over the previous weeks. He said the committee members include Krista Huling, Bill Mathis, John Carroll and Connor Solimano. Peltz spoke about how discussion took place around the Board's strategic plan work, the legislative report as well as how State Board members will represent themselves at the State House. He said that a draft Legislative Report will be available for the Board to review at the next meeting in December. He said the committee aligned the report around equity, excellence and efficiency which are the State Board's guiding principles. Peltz said the Legislative Committee is concerned with topics including staffing, Rule 2200 Series, Act 46/49, special education, education funding and CTE. He thanked AOE staff, Robert Stirewalt, for his assistance.

Peltz said that he would like a better working relationship with the Legislature and how the Board presents themselves at the State House will be critical. He said the committee has drafted some language for the Board's consideration which will be included in next month's consent agenda for a vote. Discussion followed regarding the draft language.

Chair Huling paused the discussion at 2:52 p.m. and moved to Item T.

#### **Item T: Overview of Governor's Priorities**

Jason Gibbs, Governor Scott's Chief of Staff, presented to the Board on the Governor's 2018 Strategic Plan. He discussed the necessity to move with clarity and purpose and explained the key elements of the strategic plan. Gibbs discussed the vision, values and principles of the Governor's Office. He explained the top three priorities and the key performance indicators of each. Gibbs described the Governor's Office's S.M.A.R.T. goals. He additionally discussed the Governor's Legislative Initiatives and the five buckets of planning for the 2018 Legislative Session.

Gibbs discussed the complexity around attracting high paying jobs and workforce development. Peltz said that Vermont can do a lot with what it's got. He said as educational leaders he feels they can do more with CTE workforce development and preparing students for their adult lives. Chair Huling asked Gibbs to use the State Board as a resource and to bounce ideas off of it.

Chair Huling called on member of the public, Jeff Francis, Vermont Superintendents Association. Francis asked Gibbs to comment on the letter from the Governor addressed to every superintendent and school board members and what he is hoping for the education sector.

Gibbs said the letter identifies the Governor's perspective on what to be aware of when going through the budgeting process. He said the letter includes specific suggestions and requests related to budgets and level funding. Gibbs said the Governor will not allow state spending to grow any faster than growth in the underlying economy and wages. He said if school enrollment is on the decline then the budgets should go down and, conversely, if enrollment increases then budgets should go up.

Chair Huling thanked Mr. Gibbs for presenting to the Board and hoped that he will be able to come back after the educational summit in December.

#### **Item W: Legislative Committee Update - Part 2**

Chair Huling continued the Legislative discussion. She asked that any feedback on Peltz's draft language regarding State Board representation at the State House to please send directly to Peltz.

#### **Item V: EQR Next Steps**

Secretary Holcombe shared a few slides related to the Education Quality Standards and the data dashboard for measuring EQR. She said the dashboard will represent things that can be counted, including validated data, typically from mature, robust collections. Secretary Holcombe said it is hard to talk about measures of quality without talking about how it will be used. She said the dashboard should be used to indicate where a school is doing well and identify where it may need improvement or extra attention, but will be most meaningful when used together with findings from the Integrated Field Reviews.

Secretary Holcombe briefly explained the Integrated Field Reviews (IFR). She said this is qualitative data that is obtained on site at the schools via interviews with parents, students, educators and community members and through observations. IFR teams have access to the quantitative data, but use the field visits to better understand factors that lead to observed

results. Secretary Holcombe said that following the IFR, the school systems are given commendations on what the school is doing well, and recommendations on areas that may need improvement. She said the IFRs have been very powerful in provoking conversations around continuous improvement. Secretary Holcombe said that the schools that participated in the pilot IFRs are using the feedback in planning their continuous improvement process.

Johnson-Aten left the meeting at 4:17 p.m.

Carroll asked if the graphics can be changed. Secretary Holcombe said that yes, it can be reworked.

Chair Huling asked that any feedback for the legislative committee be sent to Peltz by November 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Secretary Holcombe asked the members the Board to advise Suzanne Sprague or Maureen Gaidys of their plans to attend the Governor's Educational Summit. The event will need to be warned if a quorum of the State Board is represented.

Perrin asked if a financial literacy presentation will be discussed at the December meeting. Secretary Holcombe said yes unless there has been a delay that she has not been made aware.

Weinberger made a motion to adjourn. Mathis seconded. Vote to adjourn passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

Minutes recorded and prepared by Suzanne Sprague

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