

July 18, 2018

- 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.*

## **Draft Minutes**

### **Present:**

**State Board of Education (SBE):** Krista Huling, Chair; William Mathis, Vice Chair; Mark Perrin; Peter Peltz; John O'Keefe; Callahan Beck; John Carroll; Kyle Courtois; Heather Bouchey; and Stacy Weinberger and Oliver Olsen (via phone until about 11:00 a.m.)

**Agency of Education (AOE):** Donna Russo-Savage, Molly Bachman, Emily Simmons, Haley Jones, Maureen Gaidys.

**Others:** Charlie Hancock, Chairman, Montgomery Select Board; Emilie Knisley, OESU; Brian Williams, OESU; Tong Demasi, Kingdom East; Pam Greene, Franklin; Dave Benneron, Franklin; Catherine Howell, Montgomery; Eric Beauregard, Mississquoi Valley Union and FNWSU Board member – Franklin; Ryan Young, Highgate Elementary and FNWSU Board member-Highgate; Peter Clarke, Hartford, VT; Kasey Talbot, Newark, VT; Mary Niles, Montgomery, VT – Chair; Mary Lahar, NCSU/Charleston; Ed Barber, Derby – Newport Daily Express; James Farr, Maple Run USD; Peggy Stevens, Charleston; Penelope Newcomb, East Charleston; Mary Lou Booth, Franklin; Suzanne Hull-Parent, Enosburg and Franklin; Tracy Wrend, LSSU; Corey Parent, St. Albans and all Franklin County; Felisha Leffler, Enosburg and Montgomery; Victoria Von Hessert, Lakeview Union/Greensboro; Rebecca Milthun, East Charleston; Vicky O'Keefe, Brighton; Norman McAllister, Highgate; Karie Quintin, Montgomery; Harry Milcer, Craftsbury; Jennifer Schoen, Craftsbury; Patrick Flood, Woodbury; John Miller, Lakeview-Stannard; Anne Morse, Craftsbury; Chip Troiano, Stannard; Leigh Elliot, Charleston/NCSU; Paul Normandeau, Dummerston; Johanna Crane-Godin, Franklin, VT; George Godin, Franklin, VT; Melanie Farrow, Holland, VT/Charleston Elementary; Vera Gates, Franklin; Josh Worman, Franklin; Nilah Cote, Franklin; Holli Sears, Franklin; Shawn Sears, Franklin; Joyce Hakey, Franklin; Louanne Collins, Highgate; Adird Maynard, Franklin; Paulette Tatro, Franklin; Emily Long, Newfane; Diane Janukajitis, Stannard School Board; Shawn Stebbins, Sheldon School Board; Jennifer Fliegelman, East Hardwick; Mike Metcalf, Hazen Union/Greensboro; Jeff Francis, VSA; Morgan Daybell, FNESU/Montgomery; Lynn Cota, FNESU/Enosburg; Joseph Gresser, The Chronicle; Michael D. Howrigan II, Enosburg School Board; Richard Bartholomew Jr., Enosburg School Board; Kevin Blaney, Richford School Board; John Castle, NCSU; Chris Lawson, NCSU; Laurinda Maxwell, Charleston NCSU; Jody Normandeau, Dummerston; Peter Magnant, Franklin; Paul Tremblay, Franklin; Jay Denault, Franklin; Kim Gates, Franklin; Kristina Naylor, Dummerston; Chris Shepard, Highgate; Jeanne Gervais, Brighton; Sara Rainville, Franklin; Brooke Rainville, Franklin; Rick Zamore, Guilford; Jean Richard, Franklin; Krista Birkheimer,

Franklin; Carole Richard, Franklin; Dan Favreau, Franklin; Devin Bachelder, Franklin; Ashley Bachelder, Franklin; Connie James Beyor, Highgate; David Roddy, Highgate; Tom Gates, Franklin; Julia Callan, Sheldon; Emily Norris, Sheldon; Steve Lafar, Highgate; Bruce Butler, Highgate; Margaret MacLean, Peacham; Jen Botzjoorns, Concord, VT/Kingdom East; Katie Mientka, Brighton Board; Darren Chaffee, Enosburg, VT, Sheldon School volunteer; April Lane, Brighton principal; Cheryl McVetty, Lunenburg/Gilman principal; Tish Hankinson, Kingdom East; Mark A. Maskell, Sr., Highgate; Jared Jewett, Montgomery; Christina Suarez, Montgomery Board; Sarah Silva, Montgomery; Michael Frett, St. Albans Messenger; Lisa Wells, FNWSU-Highgate Board; Matthew DeGroot, WCSU-Worcester; Scott Thompson, U-32-Calais; Dorothy Naylor, Calais, VT; Samantha Stevens, Charleston; Theresa Caron, Brighton, VT; Shelia Trembley, Brighton, VT; David Yashovian, Brighton, VT; Diane Benoit Kittell, Realtor and Broker, Franklin, VT; Liz Dulcers, Franklin, VT; Susan Sartwell, Franklin, VT; Robert Berger, Franklin, VT; Nancy Jewett, Franklin, VT; Jim Jewett, Franklin, VT; Daniel Favreau, Franklin, VT; Pauline Favreau, Franklin, VT; Susan Clark, Franklin, VT; Dorothy Clark, Franklin, VT; Kathy Clark Rouleau, Franklin, VT; Angie Clark, Franklin, VT; Dan Clark, Franklin, VT; Jon and Karen Gates, Franklin, VT; Andy and Stacie Godin, Franklin, VT; Kesha Patel, FNWSU; Christie Martin, Sheldon, VT.

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

Chair Huling called the meeting to order at 8:38 a.m. and reminded the group to sign in for attendance and to sign up separately up front for public comment. She introduced Kyle Courtois, newest non-voting student member, and announced that this is his first State Board of Education meeting. She asked Board members to introduce themselves.

#### **Item B: Recognition of Albany**

Chair Huling asked if there were any representatives present from Albany Community School; there were none. She proceeded to recognize the Albany Community School for its high test scores, high equity, low student-teacher ratios and serving some of the poorest students in Vermont. She shared the certificate of excellence. She said that two other schools will be recognized. Underhill Central Elementary School will be recognized at the August meeting and Saxtons River Elementary School will be recognized at the September meeting.

#### **Item C: Panel Presentation**

Chair Huling explained that she had invited a panel from two districts who have merged to share their challenges, successes and suggestions for what should be considered as articles of agreement are drafted.

Panel members were: Celeste Girrell, chair of the Kingdom East School Board; Jen Botzjoorns, superintendent, Kingdom East; Kasey Talbot, Newark representative; Tisha Hankinson, Kingdom East; Cheryl McVetty, Lunenburg/Gilman principal; Sean O'Dell, Fairfield principal; James Farr, chair of Maple Run Unified School District Board; Kevin Dirth, Maple Run Unified School District and Bennett Dawson, former chair of the Fairfield School Board and parent of St. Albans School student.

The panelist from Kingdom East spoke about being in operation for 18 days and acknowledged that they were not the most willing Act 46 participants in the beginning and that might still be true. They talked about certain towns not wanting anything to do with other towns, resistance

in coming to the table, and that work is ongoing to find what would build a strong future for the communities. They spoke about their board having a culture of being highly efficient and respected and that they don't necessarily agree on everything. They talked about making an effort to always ask what is in the best interest of the children, which helps to refocus the group. They shared a sheet that they prepared that lists questions/concerns that community members asked and responses to how the articles of agreement addressed them.

The panel continued to discuss intra-school choice, smaller schools, schools that now have bussing, schools with a stringed instrument program, a colorful flyer that showcased the great communities and schools, the idea that one voice on the board does not feel any less respected, that they started with arms crossed and now there is good communication, but this required retraining ways of thinking. They spoke to the opportunities to personalize education and tax payers voting for this because they got to keep their small schools grants and that this was changed, but not changed retroactively. There was a large volume of changes – health insurance, chart of accounts, etc. which added to the workload. It was shared that they might lose Title funds for two schools, and were notified recently that they would also be losing “flex” funds. Professional development was a positive change.

Members from the public interrupted and asked for panelists to speak up and possibly to stand up; several people asked that the panel not have their back to the public. Chair Huling explained that this was the typical set-up for Board meetings and asked that folks raise their hands if they were having trouble hearing so the panelists would know to speak up. The discussion continued but there were more interruptions that speakers could not be heard.

Maple Run superintendent, Kevin Dirth was asked to stand up to better address the group. Dirth spoke about his schools, votes with a good mandate to move forward, second year in operation, and he shared some handouts and articles of agreement. Farr talked about the articles of agreement, how board members are elected by all communities and represent all communities – which is unique and has worked really well and that there is a very clear chain of command now. There was discussion on the challenges, the fear of change, the need to show the benefits of the merger, that this takes time and that trust is key as the mindset changes from “me” to “we.” A page on cost savings was offered, but it was stated that the reason to do these mergers is not savings, it is efficiencies and greater benefits for kids. O'Dell spoke about loss of identity, ownership of schools, and voice in decisions. He listed some of the benefits to Fairfield: new PA system installed that allowed the principal to communicate with entire campus, able to share a foreign language teacher with the high school, had a FT librarian position split between two schools, replaced 50-year-old bathrooms, was able to send students to *Odyssey of the Mind* program at St. Albans, students able to participate in baseball, able to offer after school transportation to sports as did other schools, professional development with teachers from other schools and forming alliances among staff. He said that his school worried the most – but the school was saved and has reaped great benefits. He thanked the group for listening and acknowledged that this is hard. Dirth spoke about adopting the new definition of equity and invited Bennett to talk. Bennett spoke about working to eliminate his position on the Board after seven years, budgets voted down year after year, his son's experience at a small school and how moving to a city school was a great choice for him, opportunity to provide for kids in Fairfield

that could not be provided for otherwise. Dirth spoke about the need to structure themselves, and that they have a 5-year plan.

Chair Huling asked the Board if they had any questions and encouraged members of the public to move closer to the front where there were empty seats if they were unable to hear the discussion.

Carroll thanked the panel for coming and praised their work on educational equity. He asked if there was disparity in schools. The response was that each community believed they had the better schools, and maybe still do, but that they are moving toward collective ownership. There was discussion on: town identity vs. school identity, keeping small schools intact, support of the voters, pushing towards excellence, incentives, presentation of data by the study committee, Australian ballot vs. open floor voting, getting input to protect what is valuable for the communities, how incentives helped but that they would have got there anyway, how the fear of small school closure is alleviated, needing the diversity of different schools. Carroll cited language from Act 46 specific to the the intent being not to close schools.

Botzojorns thanked everyone for coming to Newark. Girrell wanted to make it clear that none of them were fans of Act 46, but offered to come to anyone and offer assistance, as it is overwhelming and there is a lot to it.

Chair Huling thanked the Newark School for hosting the Board. She acknowledged the inconvenience of hosting this meeting in the summertime. She thanked both panels for their participation.

Huling asked Russo-Savage to give an update on the draft articles of agreement as these need to be contemplated and voted on by the Board by November 30. Russo-Savage stated that Act 46 as amended by Act 49 of 2017 requires that when the Board issues its State Plan, it must include default articles of agreement for any districts that they are requiring to merge so that there is something in place for them to move forward. Act 49 also included provisions by which these default articles could be amended before they become fully operational on July 2019. She reminded the group that there is statutory authority to amend articles at any time in the future, as amended by Act 49. Russo-Savage explained that the Agency has draft articles, considering various articles and concerns of communities and incorporating as much information as possible to move the process forward to have a vote to amend before they are fully operational. The working draft is being fine-tuned. The hope is that by August 1 a draft will be shared with Board members and posted on the website. Highlights are that it includes protections for small districts (closure of school buildings, reconfigurations of grades, protections of voices for small districts, equal votes for merged districts), process for completing initial duties, process for warning the meeting for amendment of articles and based on current law and expressed concerns, sets out which articles can be amended by voters and which can only be amended by the board. Russo-Savage stressed that what is being prepared is a draft, intended to be a starting point for the Board to consider.

Chair Huling explained that under Act 46 the next steps for the Board is to “study and analyze the plan” between June 1 and November 30 and that they “could take testimony.” As a Board,

they felt it was important to take testimony and decided to do this because they wanted to give voice. She explained that there are 43 decision points spread over three meetings. She shared that the plan is for 10 minutes of presentation and 10 minutes for questions from Board members. She advised that speakers will be held to 10 minutes of presentation, and shared the system for timekeeping.

Chair Huling reminded members of the public to sign in and for those wishing to give comment under the public to be heard section, to sign up in the front of the gym.

**Item D: Mississquoi Valley UHSD and Franklin, Highgate, and Swanton School Districts**

Chair Huling invited the Mississquoi representatives to speak. Robert Berger, chairman of the Franklin North Supervisory Union Study Committee, invited representatives of Sheldon to the table. He spoke to why this plan was impossible or impracticable. He spoke about a legally warned vote to be an existing district based on geographic isolation and the vote of 170:0, the question and anomaly of declining enrollment, that their school is not in crisis, that the plan accused them of being parochial, cornerstone of plan is based on faulty/misleading data, tax rates, goal #5 of Act 46, historical tax rates, increased costs in tax rates, a plan put forth that doesn't raise taxes, test scores that were questioned, designation by DOE (now AOE) of Franklin as *Roots of Success School* in 2009, spending less than 92% per pupil of all other schools in the state. He noted that their Sheldon partners are at the table, and who are being proposed to move away. He spoke to aligned curriculum and relationships with students. His plan does not harm a single student and he does not believe the Secretary's plan does the same, nor does it meet all the goals of Act 46.

Connie Janes Beyor, Highgate school board member/Act 46 study committee member introduced herself and spoke in opposition of the State Plan. She addressed 5 school districts with per pupil costs below the state average, principal chosen as elementary principal of the year, another principal named assistant principal of the year, elementary school where teachers are encouraged to build communities within the school. She stated that she hopes the Board will have the good judgement and courage to acknowledge that one size does not fit all.

Chair Huling opened the discussion to questions from the Board. There were questions on student choice that would require legislation, their own admission of differences in literacy and math and interventionists available, and staying local but acting merged.

The response spoke to creating solutions and that not being in statutory authority does not preclude it from being a possibility, sharing resources, realizing efficiencies without a forced merger, accountability in the delivery of curriculum, leadership/board members in separate buildings. There was continued discussion on what evidence there is that any of these schools will be required to close, that articles referenced by Russo-Savage can be amended by a co-joined electorate. There was discussion on meeting the criteria in section two, discrepancies in opinions (EQS), applying best practices, sound plan to ensure positive outcomes for all students. Chair Huling offered for representatives to provide any additional information to the Board that they would like to have considered.

**Item E: Cambridge Elementary School District**

Chair Huling shared that Cambridge declined to attend and had no further information to convey, per Mark Stebbins, Board Chair.

**Item F: North Country UHSD and 11 Member Districts**

Chair Huling invited the representatives from North County to speak. Chair Huling asked for introductions: Katie Mientka, Brighton Board Chair; Jason Brueck, Charleston Board Chair; Jeanne Gervais, Brighton school board member; Dave Yashovian, Brighton. Mientka spoke to their opposition to the State Plan – that they are already sharing resources and collaborating on summer programs and field trips, joint sports teams, shared library and media specialist, Secretary’s contention that there are few instances of sharing of resources is not accurate, this is done while maintaining separate and independent schools. She shared that enrollment is increasing and that Brighton was able to not just level spend, but decrease their budget by 3.5%. Brueck spoke about moving to Vermont from Michigan, distributed model of governance, difference of a forced merger and that it feels different and puts deep divisions between the communities, especially when these communities are working well together already.

Chair Huling opened it up to questions from the Board. There were questions and discussion on doing things together and the need to remain separate, one budget, running two buildings, length of bus rides, other contentious questions with hard work and no obvious proof that this will result in improvements, teacher contracts, some held under contract by SU, some by contracts with different schools, where this pairing came from, how it was working with North Country being so large and having some schools already closed, having a superintendent in favor of small rural schools, how the role of the SU Board has changed in recent years, governance challenges with large Boards, differences in terms of academic outcomes and challenges of disadvantaged students between the two schools, how they are similar but different, what the downside to merging would be, transportation, teachers, some of who have been in the schools for 26 years, the forced nature of this, and the desire to have kids in a building where staff is happy and how this puts that in jeopardy.

Chair Huling spoke to how complicated North Country is and asked where other voices might be – Holland, Derby and Jay/Westfield. Brueck surmised that Holland did not want to lose ownership of their school, and that Derby didn’t want to have one voice and lose ownership of their building. He noted that some of the frustration from today’s group came from the fact that nobody came to their schools and sat down with the parents or the school board. Chair Huling offered for anyone who was not present to provide information if they so choose.

Chair Huling called a recess at 10:29 a.m. and asked the Board to reconvene at 10:45 a.m.

Chair Huling called the meeting back to order at 10:47 a.m.

**Item G: Enosburg School District and Richford School**

Chair Huling invited representatives from Enosburg and Richford to address the Board. Representatives introduced themselves: Rick Bartholomew, Enosburg Falls school board member, Michael Howrigan, Enosburg school board; and Kevin Blaney, Richford school board. Bartholomew spoke in opposition to the State Plan and discussed decreased transparency, SU budget that the voters cannot directly vote on, less community board member interaction, the worst of both worlds, a forced merger resulting in increased animosity and fear, taking on

others debt, affect on equity, closure of Richford Jr./Sr. high school, protections voted down, district's ability to meet the goals, nowhere have two districts done more with less. He asked to continue collaborative work with separate districts.

Chair Huling asked for questions from the Board. There were questions and discussion on how inequity is addressed with two separate boards, a joint council between the two schools, communication, reconciling the difference of de facto closures, and circumstances that arise from a forced merger that lead to closure, and equity falling second to efficiency. Carroll questioned that he heard right – that default rules will not protect closure – and asked what made him so sure. There was discussion on enacting those levels of protection, protection offered in the default rules, room for amendment, that a lot of equity concerns are addressed at the SU level, council is not formed yet, waiting for November 30, constantly trying to address equity, which schools are vulnerable, how this gets fixed when adults are not in the same room and clarification on the plan for equity in services, intent for protections in the plan, and that there were three people from three towns that submitted a joint proposal.

Chair Huling thanked the representatives and said that if there was anything to add, to please forward that to the Board, as the Board looks at the state regionally and as a whole.

#### **Item H: Montgomery School District**

Chair Huling invited representatives from Montgomery to address the Board. Representatives introduced themselves: Catherine Howell, Montgomery; Mary Niles, Montgomery school board Chair; and Christina Suarez, Montgomery school board member. Niles thanked the Board and spoke in opposition of the Secretary's assessment and determination and said that her board stands behind their AGS and emphatically opposed the Secretary's plan. She spoke about their AGS being a distillation of years of a thoughtful, engaged process, that this thriving school is not subject to the same forces as everyone else, that the law acknowledges that the preferred model is not the best for all, lowest per pupil costs, merger will not increase efficiency or lower tax rates, voters have voted this down, precedent for legally warned vote being rejected, votes only matter if they support a predetermined outcome, consolidation is not the best or only path forward, fixing things that are not broken, evidence of consolidation ruining communities in West Virginia and Maine. There was further discussion on unintended consequences, that AOE's plan is arbitrary and inconsistent, Stowe being trusted as an example, distance for Lowell and Troy, trust is afforded some but not others, proactive and engaged board, supported by a proactive and engaged community. She implored the Board to reconsider this bureaucratic, top down, one-size fits all process and said that people are fired up because they feel silenced and ignored.

Another representative spoke to why the proposed plan was not appropriate and that the State Plan is arbitrary and capricious. She strongly encouraged a visit to Montgomery with their class three roads. She continued to speak about the functionality of their SU, being petitioned by community members to submit this AGS proposal, the will of the people, that the Legislature provided the opportunity for towns to approve mergers, argument that we are incapable is a subjective statement that ignores the evidence of hard work, comparisons and inconsistencies with Stowe's plan, socioeconomic bias, errors in Secretary's proposal from border to border, measured from border to nearest school, travel distances, class 3 and 4 roads, debt ratio, and

Act 60. She implored the Board to review, or, send this back to the Legislature, or impose a moratorium until existing mergers are evaluated.

Chair Huling opened the discussion up to questions from the Board. There were questions and discussion on the vote for Bakersfield and Berkshire to merge, the decision to cut off any future merger talks, the second vote being a closer one, people might not have been as informed, petitioned by the community to have a vote on AGS, school's performance being very impressive, and that the State Board admires what they are doing and the passion presented is appreciated. There was continued discussion on a forced merger compromising all that has been accomplished, what might be different, worry of the loss of an autonomous board, laser focus on the school would be diluted, the working relationship with the FNESU, and that what makes Montgomery special is crafted by their own board and identifying on an individual level and that there is great fear of losing this level of intimacy.

Chair Huling thanked the representatives and said that they if there was anything to add, to please forward that to the Board.

#### **Item I: Sheldon School**

Chair Huling invited representatives from Sheldon to address the Board. Representatives introduced themselves: Julia Callan, Sheldon board chair; Emily Norris, Sheldon board member and parent; Shawn Stebbins, Sheldon board member, parent and educator.

Norris spoke in opposition to the Secretary's proposal. She explained that much of their concerns mirrored Montgomery's, and include geographic isolation, that Montgomery is 25 miles away and not even on their border, that it is impracticable for staff and students to travel this distance, that salary indexes with current SU is very different, that this creates huge challenges and financial issues, curriculum is different, retraining all teachers, and that this would disadvantage students. Discussion continued that sharing of resources is not practicable due to lengthy driving distances for teachers, difficulty hiring and retaining teachers in this area, that Sheldon is embedded in the community of FNWSU, loss of investment since they have put a lot of money into teachers and their development, test scores are on the rise despite a lot of poverty, and that per pupil spending is almost the lowest in the state. She stated that the State Plan is inaccurate in that Montgomery is not in favor of joining with Sheldon. Norris said they are open to discussion to staying where they are and have recently heard from Alburg that they are interested in teaming. She continued that it would be detrimental to the community to make this change as they are already sharing resources and doing it well and will risk losing students.

Chair Huling opened this up to questions from the Board. There were questions and discussion on test scores being on the rise, reason to go with FNESU, looking into the weeds, starting from scratch, school performance, new superintendent and curriculum coordinator, pulling them out of the SU will not change anything that was just discussed, but will instead put them at a disadvantage, the lack of a foreign language teacher, and how that will be addressed.

**Item J: Public to be Heard on Items D, E, F, G, H and I**

Chair Huling advised that each member of the public who had signed up to be heard would have two minutes to speak, to keep things moving quickly.

Charlie Hancock, Montgomery – spoke in support of his school board and thanked them for their efforts. He asked the Board to please respect the choices his family/community wants to make for themselves.

Mark Haskell, Highgate – spoke to the history of Act 46 and his high school and to numerous reasons for why they do not want to merge. He told the Board that they need to adopt what Franklin is doing, work collaboratively, and they need to talk and should not be silenced.

Pam Greene, Franklin – spoke to the Board and asked them to overturn the forced merger of the Franklin Central School.

Sarah Silva, Montgomery – spoke to the Board on twice having voted merger proposals down and that it feels un-democratic to ignore the vote of the electorate and this opens up the state to lawsuits.

Randy Brock, Swanton, represents several towns in the area – spoke to towns with positive experiences of Act 46 and different views from different towns because they are different. He spoke to how one size does not fit all and that not one legislator would say that their intent was this. He added that statistically and factually there were many errors in the State Plan.

Paula Tremblay, Franklin – spoke to moving here because of the small school, that data is skewed, that Franklin is a golden community, vested in the elderly community center, school, churches and community. She asked the Board to fix the problems and added that the schools present were not the problem.

Peter Magnant, Franklin Select Board chair – spoke to moving to Franklin for the schools and how well informed the teachers were, and how the community has changed, but the school has not, how homes are affordable and this is attractive and that there is strong community support for inter-generational contacts.

Jay Denault, FNWSU Chair – spoke that the camouflaged intent of Act 46 is to consolidate and close Vermont schools, that the Legislature refuses to take responsibility, that Governor Scott said that Franklin is a place where this doesn't work, that all elected members took an oath of office to not be injurious, that forced mergers are injurious, and that the AGS process is in violation of Act 49.

Devin Bachelder, Franklin board member – spoke to predicting the future and concerns with small schools, difficulty passing state budgets this year and next year, mandated student-staff ratios and that this will ultimately result in schools closing. He asked the Board to look for where community support is because that is where you will find what is best.

Margaret MacLean, Peacham – spoke to the value that votes count and democracy matters, that they count in all the communities that spoke this morning, that their proposals are the best because they are local and meet the goals of the law. She asked the Board to please remember that votes count and democracy matters.

Steve Lafar, Highgate – spoke to not having fancy numbers but really needing to listen to the public, that this audience and their signs speak for themselves, that the Board is taking the wrong path and that they need to listen to their heart and listen to the people who spoke.

Jean Richard, Franklin – spoke to equity for students, watching laws go into effect that were supposed to help towns and taxpayers, but they continually needed to be fixed because they didn't work. She said that the Board thinks adults need to be in the same room by forcing mergers and said this may backfire in places where this is to be accomplished on their own. She shared part of a letter from a public member who could not be present that addressed keeping Franklin school run locally.

Senator Branagan, Franklin – spoke to loving her work in the State House when she can listen, that at least one school board member has resigned because it became a dreaded task and because local input has been eroded. She asked the Board to please listen to these people opposing forced mergers.

Jim Jewett, Franklin – spoke to equity and how he does not know how the plan to put everybody's students on the bus for as long a time as is suggested might be achieved and asked the Board to reconsider their AGS.

Krista Birkheimer, Franklin/Highgate – spoke to including and not excluding Sheldon, that an entire education is not based on test scores, that a forced merger does not mean a forced unification, that they are unified against a merger and that they do not have the same problems as others. Birkheimer continued to speak after being asked to stop. Chair Huling repeatedly called her out of order and she continued to speak.

Samantha Stevens, Charleston – spoke to selling her home in Winooski to build in Charleston, that the town has always met or surpassed state's mandate to educate children affordability. She stated that they take their role of stewards of education very seriously, and that the town needs to feel that the board and school are accountable to the process.

Peggy Stevens, Charleston – spoke to living in Charleston for 40 years, seeing the town grow together, over time the town has come to trust the board to make the best decision for their children, not understanding the need to push everybody into the same mold. She told the Board that this should go back to the Governor and Legislature to be reconsidered.

David Bradshaw, Charleston – spoke as a veteran of the civil rights movement, the strong will to deprive citizens of their vote, and that everybody in this room is providing the state the perfect out, to say that they made a mistake.

Penelope Newcomb, Charleston – spoke that it takes a community to raise a child, that the community wishes to do this, that the biggest influence on identity is community. She told the Board that to take that away and force the children and community to be separate, is harmful to both and that this sort of forced consolidation removes individuality and is typical of totalitarian societies, and that she is ashamed of Vermont for participating in this.

Greta Quintin, Montgomery – spoke to several reasons why it was not being possible for Montgomery to merge because articles of agreement require the sale of town property and the town is not authorized to sell this property, that the majority electorate prohibits the sale of property, and other restrictions.

Suzanne Hull-Parent, Enosburg and Franklin – spoke to connections to both communities, that she was a member of the school board for 16 years (until yesterday), the lack of value about schools and communities and that connection, and that forced mergers decimate scores of boards.

Chair Huling thanked everyone for being respectful and letting all voices be heard.

Chair Huling called lunch recess at 12:38 p.m. to reconvene at 1:10 p.m.

Chair Huling reconvened the meeting at 1:16 p.m. and reminded the group to sign up for public comment.

**Item K: Hazen UHSD and Lakeview USD and Greensboro, Hardwick, Stannard and Woodbury School Districts**

Chair Huling invited representatives to introduce themselves and address the Board: Mike Metcalf, Hazen Union school board; Jennifer Fliegelman, Hardwick school board; Patrick Flood, Woodbury school board; Victoria Von Hessert, Lakeview Union school board; John Miller, Lakeview Union school board; Diane Janukajitis, Stannard school board; Jennifer Schoen, Craftsbury school board; Ann Norris, Craftsbury school board; Joanne Leblanc, Orleans Southwest superintendent; and Harry Miller, Craftsbury school board.

Flood thanked the Board and his colleagues and expressed that they agreed with the goals of Act 46 and explained that they are working hard towards these goals and feel that they can be better achieved without the merger. He expressed concern over two statements in the plan, 1) that they might make Woodbury merge later on and 2) that SU boundaries can be redrawn. There was discussion on the plan to create an arts academy that would be available to all students in the district more than once a week, that there is collaboration with their communities, the Highland Center, that GMCT students and community folks have built hiking trails together, that this happens because of local involvement, that there is new collaboration between Woodbury and Hardwick, that Hardwick now handles food service for Woodbury, that they have different units with different structures and across different counties, and how this would be addressed with governance and bureaucratic structures.

There was continued discussion on working over the years to make sure that they have the services needed in the school, regular meetings with mental health and health and human services to meet and expand services provided, not just in the school building, but in the home and community as well.

Carroll shared a story, triggered by seeing his old friend Mike Metcalf and referencing their days together in the Senate, and how they had to report out, even if there was no excitement for this. He said, "I didn't build this wheelbarrow, I didn't load this wheel barrel, I'm just trying to get it in the barn." There was discussion on statute, clarification of board meetings and rotating superintendent, how they will deal with needs of other populations, that human services has a different language, different budgets and different ideas of how things work. Discussion continued on special education costs, human service costs per county, the correlation between special education costs and human service costs, the enormous challenge to bring these together, cross-pollination with Craftsbury, belief that all kids have an interest in creative arts and giving all kids at an early age the opportunity to experience the arts. Chair Huling noted that the Highland Arts Center, a multi-million dollar facility that was recently opened, is a real attraction to the area.

There was more discussion on other collaborative efforts to get students more active and healthy, financial literacy, that the colleagues here show some urgency and a long history of collaboration, but things have really been ramped up to provide more equity for students, and that Stannard does not want kids jumping from high school to high school, but all kids to have better access.

#### **Item L: Craftsbury School District**

Chair Huling invited Craftsbury representatives to address the Board. Representatives expressed that they agree with the proposal as stated on page 145 of the State Plan, that it is not practicable for Craftsbury to merge at this time, but they do not agree with the suggested merger proposal stated on pages 144 and 145. There was discussion on travel time, school board members being doubled or tripled, increased travel time for students, inclement weather compounding travel time, that the MUUSD has brought them closer and created shared resources, the importance of relationships, inefficiency of carving up the SU at this point, that county lines do not define communities, and equity of opportunity for struggling students. Representatives requested to remain a part of the OSSU and to be allowed to continue what they have begun, as it is in the best interest of their students.

Chair Huling opened it up for questions from Board members. There were questions and discussion on an upcoming construction project, receipt of the best energy efficiency award, increased enrollment, early stages of a new facility that would serve zero through sixth grade, and the difficulty in moving forward, not knowing what the governance structure will be. There was further discussion on connecting with neighbors to think outside the box about supporting each other, students participating in dual enrollment for the first time at Craftsbury College, work done in the SU over the years that ties communities together socially and economically, building on relationships outside of school relationships, and that there is overlap on discussions on the opiate crisis, community needs, social outings, etc.

#### **Item M: Elmore-Morristown UUSD and Stowe School District**

Chair Huling invited representatives to introduce themselves and address the Board. Cara Zimmerman, Stowe school board chair and Stephanie Craig, Elmore-Morristown school board chair, introduced themselves. Zimmerman expressed appreciation and support for the Secretary's recommendation. She discussed working hard as an SU to collaborate to advance the goals of Act 46 across the SU. There was discussion on financial data provided to prove

financial efficiency, continued efforts for collaboration, curriculum implementation, cooperative sports teams, Rwanda visit program, growing of Chinese language and culture programming, enrollment of Wolcott in the PK school-based program, Stowe School Board shifting policy development to the SU board, improved communications and community engagement. Craig thanked the group and discussed work done around equity and excellence across systems, appreciation for approval of the merger, the complexity and time needed to come together as a community, that if forced to merge at this time, it would affect students and families, the need for improved communication with communities, poor attendance/participation at the annual meeting, difficulties with creating two school districts, need to create new accounts and policies, school safety, and the Chinese culture program.

Chair Huling opened the discussion to Board questions. There were questions and discussion on lessons learned from the first merger, that communication is key, increased opportunities at their school, working through a complicated merger (that gave up school choice), and that this was done voluntary which shows commitment, demonstrated ongoing commitment to making things better, last year offering a lottery to Morristown students, changes in community perspective/interest, discomfort with difficult conversations, hypothesizing on a merger, the difficulties of this coming on the heels of a difficult merger, distraction of meetings and ongoing resistance to mergers, team rivalry, shared opportunities and equitable opportunities across SUs. Chair Huling encouraged the representatives to send any additional information to the Board.

#### **Item N: Fairfax, Fletcher, and Georgia School Districts**

Chair Huling shared that superintendent had emailed her to say that no representatives would be present.

#### **Item O: Public to be Heard on Items K, L, M, and N**

Rick Zamore, Guilford – spoke on the AGS side, said the process has felt greased for merger proposals, starting with the incentives, that he thinks there is an assumption that the crafters of this law are experts, that his town voted merger down 2:1 and said that if the Board is pushing the wheelbarrow, it has the opportunity to change what is in the wheelbarrow.

Jody Normandeau, Dummerston – spoke to the hope that there would be microphones at the next two meetings, expressed appreciation for hearing all these proposals, noted that it is hard to see this when you are insulated, that these discussions provide ideas and that is the only good thing that Act 46 has done. She liked the analogy of the wheelbarrow, but hopes that the Board will take what is in it and send it back to the Legislature.

Peter Clarke, Hartland – spoke to the fundamental conundrum and that ever since Act 60, the responsibility was to think about the education of children in Vermont, all of the children, not some of the children. He commented that the morning's discussion was disturbing in that there was "us" and "them" and that we are having trouble getting through on this level. He spoke to how hard it is for people to hear that your kids are my kids and vice versa, that everybody's decisions affect everyone else's, that we are all in this together, that the law requires not to say what is possible, but what is in the best interest of the children and that the Board's responsibility is to judge each report and have it stand on its own merits.

Diane Janukajitis, Orleans Southwest – spoke to a letter that was sent to the Board regarding geographic isolation and her concern that the momentum built will dissipate when one has to travel to a board meeting, because so much of this work needs to happen at the SU level. She urged the Board to consider the geographics and to get into the weeds with the map.

Margaret MacLean, Peacham – spoke to the idea that every group has embraced the goals of Act 46, that the outcome is different but that they have put forth their best plan, that the State Plan has many inconsistencies, that progress has been made and should be allowed to continue.

#### **Item P: Consent Agenda**

Mathis moved to approve the Consent Agenda; Peltz seconded. There was no discussion. The vote passed unanimously.

Chair Huling called a recess at 2:29 p.m. to reconvene in five minutes.

Chair Huling reconvened at 2:46 p.m.

#### **Item Q: Updates**

Board Announcements- Mathis shared that he went Washington, D.C. and met with the AASA executive committee on training superintendents in rural areas. Carroll asked if there had been any communication back from NASBE. Chair Huling offered to follow up with NASBE.

Student Reports – Huling asked Courtois to introduce himself. Courtois shared that he lives in Georgia, attends BFA St. Albans, has been interested in politics for a long time, originally was interested in being a legislative page, and then found this opportunity. He is involved with a program that welcomes new freshman, played football and participates in varsity alpine skiing and track and field (javelin, shotput and high jump). Beck shared that she is working at a three-week summer program for freshman, called Operation Creation, where participants learn to make cutting boards, community service, learn how to create a resume, save money and take courses in financial literacy, marketing and leadership. It is optional to attend and participants get paid to attend. This is her third year as a counselor.

Committee Reports – none.

Chair's Report – Chair Huling read next month's reading assignments and said she would follow-up with an email. She advised that a lot of the reports are interconnected, and encouraged the Board to look at them all together. Chair Huling asked the Board to make note of innovative ideas so that these could be shared broadly. Chair Huling shared that Swanton submitted a one pager that was not received but this will be forwarded to the Board.

Regarding the Secretary Search, Chair Huling said she spoke with the Governor's Office, that things are moving and hopefully there will be news in time for the next meeting.

There was discussion on the strategic plan and how to balance this with the Act 46 work, capacity, the need to set agendas, putting the strategic plan on hold, the main work on the strategic plan being the metrics and how we know that we have achieved equity, efficiency and excellence, piggybacking as much as possible on existing and readily available data, qualitative

statements of what matters doesn't need to change, inclination to not spend much time on metrics until November, and the annual report to the Legislature and Governor. Carroll also noted that the Board's website is very out of date, doesn't incorporate the present strategic statement and that a little website maintenance would be good. Chair Huling was advised that the Legislature will be addressing SSGs as stated in the letter from the retreat that was sent to them.

Secretary's Report – Bouchey gave an update on the communications team, that Jones is leaving and that her position and the Agency is actively recruiting. Bouchey spoke to the 2016 findings with OCR on website accessibility, and praised Ted Fisher and Jones for their hard work on this. Fisher was recently approved to be the accessibility auditor and will review every item on the web for accessibility.

Bouchey spoke about the cybersecurity career pathway and the development of a partnership with ADS, and that they are very excited about the connections with the IBM component at Global Foundries and other avenues with resources. The Agency is working on shared curriculum across CTEs. We are one of only a few states doing this at the grade 7-12 level. Bouchey talked about the Governor's "Capitol for a Day" which will be in the Windsor area this month. A tour of River Valley CTE has been arranged as well as a presentation on the Virtual Learning Collaborative, and recognition at Windsor High School with the Governor.

Mathis asked to revisit the strategic plan and what it would be. Carroll said that there is only a statement of first principles. Mathis expressed that he thinks we should be doing something more than Act 46. O'Keefe spoke about still needing a process for the 43 decisions points in the State Plan. Huling suggested looking at them together or grouping them. There was discussion on seeing if there was the beginning of consensus, if there was merging of values, principles, tests to apply and come to a different conclusion, having a big map to assist with this process, concern over being left without data and thus a value judgement, snapshots, need for 43 separate votes, and the importance that, if voted on as groups, it needs to be very clear that each proposal was considered individually.

**Item R: Public to be Heard – General**

None.

**Item S: Updated Timeline for Special Education Rules**

This was tabled until next meeting. Jones said that she brought feedback back, and it was decided that we need a larger meeting with Agency staff, which cannot be scheduled until mid-August.

**Item T: Calendar Review**

Carroll asked to speak to how we handled this meeting and what might be done going forward. There was discussion on framing what Act 46 is and is not, clarifying myths and reiterating that local votes determine the closing of a school, inconsistencies with the legal realities, that there is no home rule in Vermont but that rules are provisionalized by statute. It was suggested that a factual, one-page hand out be created, to address concerns and responses and that the Legislature contemplated involuntary mergers.

Chair Huling asked what the Board would like to see different for next meeting. Beck offered that even though we said repeatedly today that this wasn't about closing schools, people here remain convinced that this was not the case. It was suggested that there be an opening statement for the next meeting of what the Board can and cannot do and what this process is and is not. Chair Huling asked Board members to email her their top five concerns and that she would compile a draft. There was discussion on this being the creation of new municipalities, that the next Board meeting is August 15 at the State House, that September's Board meeting is in Chester, and October's at the Agency in Barre. There was concern that the space at the Agency might not be large enough to accommodate the October meeting.

**Adjourn**

Peltz moved to adjourn; Beck seconded. The vote to adjourn was unanimous.

Minutes recorded and prepared by Maureen Gaidys.

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