

State Board of Education

Physical Location:
Essex High School Library
2 Educational Drive
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Virtual via Microsoft Teams Details:
Dial in number: 1-802-552-8456
Phone conference ID: 163 263 932#
[Meeting Link](#)

Draft Meeting Minutes

Date: October 16, 2024

Present:

State Board Members (SBE): Jennifer Samuelson, Chair; Tammy Kolbe, Vice Chair; Mohamed Diop; Grey Fearon; Kim Gleason; Caleb Greenwood; Lyle Jepson; Tom Lovett; Jenna O'Farrell; Rich Werner (arrived at 2:25 p.m.); Zoie Saunders, Interim Secretary (arrived at 2:16 p.m.)

Agency of Education (AOE): Roseanne Neddo; Pat Pallas Gray; Jill Briggs Campbell; Maureen Gaidys; Suzanne Sprague

Others: Jordan Butterfield; Sarah Warrington; Natasha Wheel; Cole Picard; Donald Van Nostrand; Emily Stempek; James Steward; Logan Chalmers; Brian Donahue; Harland Kiskey; Jeff Francis; Marlon Verasamy; Erin Maguire; Robert Carpenter; Mary Kay Jurovcik; Meghan Metzler; Peter Drescher

Item A: Call to Order, Roll Call, Amendments to the Agenda

Chair Samuelson called the meeting to order at 1:38 p.m. and asked for a roll call. Chair Samuelson mentioned that Secretary Saunders would be late to the meeting due to a conflict and Werner would be remote when he is able to join. Chair Samuelson asked if there were any amendments to the agenda. There were none.

Item B: Public to be Heard

None

Item C: Resolution for Jeff Francis

Vice Chair Kolbe acknowledged and honored Jeff Francis, former Executive Director of the Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA). Gleason read this [resolution of appreciation](#). Francis thanked the State Board and shared remarks.

Item D: Approve Retreat Meeting Minutes from August 21, 2024, and Meeting Minutes from September 18, 2024

Jepson made a motion to approve the [Retreat Draft Meeting Minutes from August 21, 2024](#) to include the sticky notes and white paper and draft norms document; Fearon seconded. The motion carried. Lovett abstained.

Lovett made a motion to accept the [minutes from the September 18, 2024 meeting](#); Kolbe seconded. The motion carried.

Item E: Board Announcements

Chair Samuelson reminded State Board members to let her know when they have completed the Code of Ethics training and to share the certificate of completion with Gaidys and Sprague.

Chair Samuelson reminded State Board members of public comment received at the September meeting regarding Open Meeting Law, Executive Session questions and transparency. She reshared her email responses in the agenda packet.

Chair Samuelson said that the AOE has received the questions from the State Board pertaining to the AOE listing of independent school materials and resources. There will be a broader discussion at the November meeting.

Chair Samuelson said that the Essex Westford presentation will take place around 2:30 p.m. and some agenda shifting may be necessary to accommodate this.

Discussion followed regarding additional independent school materials.

Diop said he will be presenting at the upcoming VSA/Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) Conference on October 25th regarding accessibility of board meetings. Chair Samuelson asked him to report back to the State Board at the next meeting. Gleason will be attending the meeting on the 25th as well.

Item F: Student Report

Fearon said that it's a busy time for seniors who are focused on their essays, applying to colleges and committing to colleges. He is a class officer and is busy planning for class meetings and senior events. They have planned a senior walk-a-thon to support the Wounded Warrior Project. The walking course is 18 miles. Fearon said that the school schedules will be changing, and they are trying to figure out what the schedules should look like. He added that there has been a lot of discussion around a cell phone policy at his school. Cell phones are not allowed by students or teachers for any reason. The administration is considering a lock box for cell phones which isn't going over well.

Greenwood acknowledged the students at North Country High School who have been taking their classes in tents due to high levels of PCBs in their school building classrooms. The students have recently been allowed to move most classes back inside the regular school building. Many of the students are not happy to be back inside and have enjoyed being able to move around outside between classes. Greenwood added that his school's principal is leaving and he acknowledged Mr. Messier. He added that, like Fearon, his school is changing schedules too. Greenwood said he will be touring a couple of colleges in Boston in the next month.

Discussion followed regarding Greenwood's master calendar project and Fearon's walk-a-thon.

Item G: Review of Board Committees and Membership

Chair Samuelson forecasted that she would like to retire the Education Quality Standards Committee which was created in December of 2021. The work of the committee was completed this past summer. The Student Performance Standards Committee is the next iteration of the committee's work and is comprised of the same members.

Lovett made the motion to retire the Education Quality Standards Committee that was created by the State Board of Education at its December 15th, 2021, meeting; Jepson seconded. The motion carried. Fearon abstained.

Chair Samuelson added that the members of the Student Performance Standards Committee are Kolbe, Gleason, Diop and Fearon. Chair Samuelson said the Career Technical Education (CTE) Update Committee members are Jepson, Kolbe, Lovett and Werner.

Discussion occurred regarding a Legislative Committee and considering the topic at a future Roles and Responsibilities Committee meeting.

Item J: Update - Roles and Responsibilities

Chair Samuelson provided an update and said the committee had its second meeting. The committee members are Samuelson, Kolbe, Diop and O'Farrell. The committee has reviewed 16 V.S.A. Section 164 which lays out the board's statutory duties and authorities. The committee identified which duties they are meeting or not meeting and what it would take to meet them. The goal of the committee is to put together a revised budget that incorporates all of the Board's statutory duties and the submission deadline is the week of November 4.

Discussion followed regarding outdated rules and what is needed to bring them up to date, resources needed, mass deletion of outdated and irrelevant rules, regulatory framework reflecting State Board current policy infrastructure and many rules may be in conflict with statute.

Item H: Essex Westford School District Equity Journey

Chair Samuelson introduced Erin Maguire, Director of Equity and Inclusion and co-Director of Student Support Services, of the Essex Westford School District (EWSD). She said that Maguire will talk about the equity journey at EWSD and what the district underwent to get where it is today. Maguire introduced herself and shared this [presentation](#).

Questions and discussion followed regarding a full community approach, curriculum audits and training, Youth Truth Survey, qualitative and quantitative data, harassment, hazing and bullying (HHB) anonymous reporting, Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Combined Incident Reporting System (CIRS) data, family engagement, demographic disaggregation, equity inventory, centering leadership conversations statewide, reestablishing HHB Prevention Advisory Council and surfacing nuances in data when looking for broad averages.

Item K: Independent School Approval Review Committee

Lovett introduced the topic. He said that, at the last committee meeting, they heard from two accrediting agencies. He added for context that accreditation by a recognized agency is required for all independent schools that operate boarding programs. . Other approved independent schools may choose to become accredited by an accrediting organization and, if they do, the Board will treat the accrediting agency's report as the equivalent of an AOE visiting team's report. He added the 11 criteria that the Board considers when evaluating an accrediting organization's request to be recognized are listed in section 2227. Whether a school is accredited has no bearing on the requirement that all independent schools must submit annual assurances as outlined in Rule 2223.4 as a condition of their continued approval.

Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE) Application

Lovett provided background. AISNE accredits 270 schools in 5 states and 21 schools are in Vermont. They require an annual report of their member schools, including reports on enrollment, budget, compensation, the school's audit, any litigation and any major changes in the school over that year. Their main process is a decennial peer review of an accredited school where they send a team to the school for 3 days. This visit results in recommendations and action plans. There is a biennial report and then a 5-year report. They require an addendum for Vermont. Discussion followed regarding the addendum, annual attestation is required for every approved independent school and the renewal process.

Lovett made a motion to approve AISNE as one of the recognized accrediting organizations for the state of Vermont; Jepson seconded. The motion carried.

New England Association of Schools and College (NEASC) Application

Lovett provided background. NEASC accredits 600 independent schools and 39 are in Vermont. They have a similar annual report of enrollment, leadership, finances and changes. Their main process is also a decennial peer review, and the team size varies according to the school. They have a foundation visit that evaluates operations; one semester later, they look at the student experience. They have a curriculum standard that includes diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). They have a DEI expert on the visiting team. This visit results in recommendations both major and minor with reports annually at the two-year and the five-year mark. They require an addendum for Vermont. Discussion followed regarding the addendum.

Lovett made a motion to approve NEASC as one of the recognized accrediting organizations for the state of Vermont; Kolbe seconded. Discussion followed regarding not rubber-stamping applications, looking for supporting evidence and rubric is based on the requirements listed in Rule 2227. The motion carried.

Item L: Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) Task Force Final Report

Chair Samuelson referenced the [Final Report on the Task Force on Collaboration to Benefit all Students](#) submitted by the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA). She included a [draft response](#) for consideration and approval by the State Board. She provided some background and explained the reasoning for her drafted response.

Discussion followed regarding addressing the risk of politicization of the board, level-funded SBE budget, governance conversations should be top priority, creating space for self-

reflection or self-evaluation, not drawing out or naming specifics, the State Board is essentially a volunteer board, structure after the National Association of State Board of Education and format of the letter.

Lovett made a motion to authorize the Chair to send the letter with the two edits: 1) noting that Werner is from a K-6 public school with 7-12 choice, and 2) adding in a sentence that the Board appreciates the recommendation to consider the use of the governance framework set forth in the District Quality Standards section 113. O'Farrell seconded. The motion carried. Chair Samuelson abstained.

The State Board recessed at 3:38 p.m. The State Board reconvened at 3:53 p.m.

Item M: Interim Secretary's Report

Interim Secretary Saunders provided an update on the AOE's Listen and Learn Tour and noted that the next phase includes several public engagement sessions which runs from October 22 – November 7. She added that the prior phases have been very productive and the AOE has learned a lot. The public engagement sessions are an opportunity for Vermonters to provide input around how the Agency can help to support the immediate and the future priorities for education in Vermont and is designed to promote broad based participation.

Interim Secretary Saunders said she received the State Board's questions regarding independent schools. The AOE team is compiling written responses that will be shared with the State Board to encourage a fuller and deeper conversation at the November meeting. Discussion followed regarding a report that shows tuition paid to independent schools from July 2023 – June 2024 by school and amount of public tuition paid.

Interim Secretary Saunders provided an update on the Inspire School for Autism. The AOE opened an investigation in April 2024. The initial investigation prioritized confirming that appropriate oversight for student safety is in place. The initial investigation provided reason to believe the school is failing to comply with several provisions of Rule 2200. The initial investigation also demonstrated that informal means of resolving the non-compliance would not be sufficient. The AOE placed the school on probation due to sufficient areas of concern. When the investigation has been concluded, the AOE will share the final report with the State Board. Discussion followed regarding timeline, nature of complaints, probation status and technical assistance.

Interim Secretary Saunders said that the AOE has launched Read Vermont and has provided two training webinars to make sure that the field is aware of the different types of professional development opportunities available to support that transition. Also, the AOE will be providing some additional resources and tools relating to school budgeting and providing clarification around Vermont's education funding system. The data is very important to school boards and to the community in terms of decision making for this budget cycle. The State Profile Report will be re-released to include additional context based on stakeholder feedback. The AOE is prioritizing the release of this information and will share the release with the State Board.

Discussion followed regarding grounding conversations in data and research, AOE staffing changes and Picus Report.

Item N: Update: Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont

Chair Samuelson provided an update on the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont. She said the next full Commission meeting is on the 21st and will be followed by the Commission's first [public engagement session](#). The Communications and Engagement Subcommittee is working to hire a consultant to assist in fine tuning the public engagement sessions beginning in November. The Education Finance Subcommittee has met a few times. The focus of the meetings has been to identify cost drivers and to determine some short-term strategies that can be entertained.

Discussion followed regarding cost drivers, investing in education, cost shift of the Education Fund, mental health costs, Uniform Chart of Accounts is not designed to capture mental health, differences in how Business Managers code positions and costs, avoid adding pressure on the field, ESSER funds sunset and are no longer available, how to have an integrated approach to providing mental health services to students, breaking down services and educational support services.

Item P: Update: District Quality Standards (DQS)

Interim Deputy Secretary Briggs Campbell addressed the State Board and provided a brief introduction on District Quality Standards and shared this [presentation](#). She reviewed the History of DQS, Rationale, Expected Outcomes, District-level Standards, Quality Assurance Regulations (QAR), Self-Evaluation and Expected Results, Proficiency Scales (Rubrics), Reserve Fund Balance and Upcoming Milestones.

Discussion followed regarding the intentionality about increasing the rigor, process has a lot of utility with other programs and how the AOE will proactively differentiate and target support to districts before they are at a point of being in an operational failure.

Item Q: Future Meeting Planning

Chair Samuelson said that the November meeting will be in-person at St. Johnsbury Academy and will include a tour, lunch and a presentation from St. Johnsbury Academy. The agenda may include an update from Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP), accrediting agency recognition, Roles and Responsibilities Committee update, Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont update, amendment of articles of agreement for an Interstate compact district, waiver for North Country Supervisory Union, discussion with AOE on technical assurance forms and a broader independent school discussion, AOE State of the State on Special Education, array of literacy programs and Portrait of Adult Learners.

Item K: Public to be Heard

Robert Carpenter, Chair Essex Westford School District, welcomed and thanked the State Board for having its meeting in the district. He is excited for future collaboration.

Jepson moved to adjourn; Gleason seconded. There was no discussion. The motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 5:33 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Suzanne Sprague.