

THETFORD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT
Tuesday, October 24, 2017
Thetford Elementary School

DRAFT MINUTES

Shannon Darrah convened the meeting at 6:36 p.m. The following were present: Julie Acker, Charlie Buttrey (arrived 7:01 p.m.), Shannon Darrah, Kristen Downey, School Board; Kevin Petrone, TES Principal; OESU Superintendent, Sandra Stanley

PUBLIC PRESENT: None

AGENDA REVIEW: Agenda approved with amendments.

MINUTES REVIEW: MOTION: (Buttrey/Acker) moved/seconded to approve the minutes of the October 10, 2017 Board meeting (Downey abstained, unanimous approval).

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF ORDERS: MOTION: (Acker/Downey) moved/seconded to approve accounts payable order # 6219 and payroll warrant # 6192 (unanimous approval).

PUBLIC COMMENT/CORRESPONDENCE: Petrone and Darrah received email correspondence from TES parent, Megan Snyder, regarding buses arriving before 8 am and students allowed off the bus before supervision was available on the playground. Petrone responded. The plan for early bus arrival had already been in place, directing the bus driver to keep the children on the bus until 8am. Petrone contacted the bus company to remind them of the plan.

TA REPORT: The Lyme partnership agreement was signed. Lyme must have an agreement in place in order for them to play tuition to TA. TA revamped the Lyme partnership agreement to use as a template for future partnerships. The template is a little different, so TTSD will have to look at it because TA intends to use it for designating towns (Thetford and Strafford). Darrah cautioned TA that TTSD's agreement should be different because it is designation, not partnership. Darrah stated that designation is statutory and partnership is voluntary. Committee meetings followed. Darrah gave the TA Board an Act 46 update for TTSD. TA is also heading into budget discussions.

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT (Kevin Petrone): Petrone gave Darrah a contract from a preschool provider for her signature. Petrone presented a letter from teacher Sarah Atherton, notifying the Board she is not returning from her current maternity leave this academic year. No Board action is needed because per Atherton's contract, she can take the entire year off. Atherton's substitute is available and happy to remain throughout the school year. Petrone passed along a letter from math specialist, Laura Sharpless, regarding salary advancement because she has completed some credits. Petrone recently met with Stuart Rogers and Mariah and Chad Whitcomb because TES is

the town's emergency shelter. During the July 1 storm, there were some troubles with the water systems in the building. Petrone led them on a tour of the boiler room. Friday is the all school hike for hunger, close to 5 miles round trip on Mimi's Trail. All parents and community members are welcome. The walk kicks off the food drive for the Thetford Food Shelf. Mrs. Bradley's third grade class has been putting on a puppet show for several years. This is a fantastic community connection and tradition with the senior citizens, who help decorate the puppets with students each Wednesday. The performance is a historical perspective of Thetford. Following the performance, there will be a tea with the seniors. The seniors return to TES over the holidays for the senior luncheon. This week is the primary wing's after school farm stand. It has evolved into a farmer's market, with five stands run by all of the primary classes. This was started by Ms. Porter. The students sell pumpkin muffins, sunflower seeds, popcorn, and crafts, and make all the signs. Everything costs 10 cents. The older students want to get in on it, and are considering selling compost and seeds next year. This is a great example of project based learning.

DISCUSSION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION POSITION AS LEA AT TA: Stanley has been working on the special education service plans for next year for TA and TES students. There is a significant increase (i.e. several hundred thousands of dollars) in cost, due in large part to budgeting for liability for HRAs and HSAs for special education staff and para educators. Another contributing factor is there are additional numbers of students with very high needs. Some of these costs are reimbursable. The new LEA position is not included in Stanley's analysis. Discussion followed. Buttrey asked, where can the budget be cut to accommodate these increases? Petrone responded, cutting multiple small items with hopes it adds up, and cutting staff.

Vermont Secretary of Education, Rebecca Holcombe, published a memo regarding student to staff ratios. TES's is 3.98. Holcombe spoke at the recent VSBA meeting attended by Downey and Acker. She reported there has been a trend to supplement children with special needs with para educators, but the data suggests that students with special needs who are taught by classroom teachers or special educators do better. Petrone stated it is not legal for a para to give specialized instruction. However, children can receive small group instruction from a para. i.e. a reading group. In the primary grades, the paras and teacher run small groups that the children rotate through. Some paras are contracted to spend 50% of their time on special ed services. Their time must be tracked and data submitted to the State. Stanley stated that some districts budget for 90% special ed and they get that reimbursement. However, then the school has to place that para with a student 90% of the time to stay in compliance, and that student is then with a para almost all the time. Stanley commented that in a classroom where the teacher is not skilled at differentiation, a para is often given to the student to catch him up (for example, a student who is reading at a lower level). The para is not teaching reading, but just accessing the materials for the student. This may not be in the best interests of the student.

Goals of the LEA position include freeing up Petrone's time and ensuring thorough and appropriate case management of Thetford students at TA. This is not an ideal budget year, but including the position in the budget is a starting point to see how it pans out. Stanley

recommended a full time position in order to hire somebody with the necessary skills. This person needs to be knowledgeable. There are other things this person can do that will not recoup all of the cost, but will defray it, such as academic testing (currently TA is contracting this out and charging TTSD). There are 17 students between both schools who need re-evaluations next year. Each evaluation costs at minimum \$1,500. There are also several students with programs that cost over \$100,000 each. Overseeing those services is important to ensure that TTSD is being as responsible as possible with programs and spending is appropriate. There are currently 38 students on 504 plans in grades 7 – 12. Stanley suggested recruiting for the position in March. This person will work closely with TA's special education department, and would be an OESU employee. Workspace would be at TES, OESU and TA.

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE: Board members reviewed a draft timeline. Some dates are deadlines that TTSD must abide by, like Town Meeting. November 7 is the goal for the first budget draft followed by November 21 for the second draft. Darrah asked Petrone if he is expecting any retirements. Probably not. Petrone reported that combination classes in the primary grades are saving on one staff member this year. He continues to look at class configurations moving forward. Petrone does not anticipate cutting staff without affecting students. Petrone wants to look at the first budget draft with Thompson. If the Board wants any significant savings, Petrone will have to look at staffing. There are also some facilities needs coming up. There has recently been a lot of staff turnover, resulting in a younger staff. There are not many retirements coming up within the next two years, in the context of not replacing a retiring teacher. There are currently 12 classroom teachers, guidance counselor, psychologist, reading specialist, and math specialist. Four years ago, TES had two reading specialists. The current reading specialist actually cannot keep up with current needs by herself. Discussion followed. Stanley stated there are not many schools that have general education para educators any longer. This is not typical for a school with current class sizes. Health insurance is the big cost of paras. Buttrey asked Petrone if he has a sense of the size of the incoming kindergarten class. Petrone responded he does not have much information yet about class size, but he is aware there are students with known special education needs in the incoming kindergarten class.

DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE BUS SURVEY: Downey reminded Board members that when the bus routes were combined with TA, the plan was to survey the families about how things were going. Discussion followed. Board members brainstormed survey questions. The Board acknowledged there are some things they do not have the power to change. Buttrey suggested asking families how important busing is to them. Busing costs close to \$200,000 annually. Board members are not in favor of discontinuing busing. Petrone reported the buses are full. Buses will be even fuller next week when fall sports end for both schools.

OTHER BUSINESS: Darrah asked Stanley if TTSD needs a consultant for Act 46. Stanley responded that each district needs to complete a self study. TTSD needs to discuss how the five goals of Act 46 are being met by staying in the current configuration. The Board questioned if a consultant needs to be hired to complete the self study. There is a template. Some districts are

working with Steve Sanborn. Discussion followed. Stanley stated that the AOE sees TTSD as unique and isolated, and will not argue that TTSD needs to stay its own district.

Insights from the VSBA meeting: Acker and Downey attended for one day. Holcombe spoke about staff to student ratios. Stanley stated it is a difficult discussion regarding essential vs. desired staff, but districts can arrive at good conclusions. Internal decisions about staffing are best, in Stanley’s opinion. Downey asked Petrone if he needs support to figure out resource allocation. Petrone stated that any changes to a system are a real culture shift, and he believes buy in from the staff is critical and takes time. The reality is there are some things that are going to have to change in order for TES to stay financially stable. Downey and Acker attended a workshop on communication, which focused on how to build partnerships with stakeholders using social media, websites, and other means. TES does not take advantage of social media. Downey stated social media is an avenue to celebrate and advertise what is happening at the school so that the community remains informed and feels connected with TES. Downey would like to continue this conversation at future meetings. Downey is happy to start this, but feels managing social media should come from inside the school. Petrone agreed and stated he will bring this idea to the staff. Teachers have blogs which are accessed through the TES website. They do not have Facebook pages.

Buttrey stated he is up for re-election and he is considering not running.

ADJOURNMENT: MOTION: (Acker/Buttrey) moved/seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 p.m. (unanimous approval).

FUTURE MEETINGS:

11/7/17 OESU Meeting	6:00 p.m.
11/7/17 Thetford Town School District Meeting (Bradford)	7:15 p.m.
11/21/17 Thetford Town School District Meeting	6:30 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Amy Bosco, Minutes Clerk

These minutes are not official until approved by the School Board.