

THETFORD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT
Tuesday, August 14, 2018
Thetford Elementary School

APPROVED MINUTES

Shannon Darrah convened the meeting at 7:01 p.m. The following were present: Kristen Downey (arrived 7:05 p.m.), Charlie Buttrey, Julie Acker, Shannon Darrah, School Board; Colin McLaughlin, Interim TES Principal; Bruce Williams, Interim OESU Assistant Superintendent

PUBLIC PRESENT: Judy Murray (member of Blue Mountain Union and OESU Boards)

AGENDA REVIEW: Agenda approved (with amendments).

MINUTES REVIEW: Postponed.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF ORDERS: MOTION: (Acker/Buttrey) moved/seconded to approve accounts payable orders 6598, 6599, 6597, 6578, 6586, 6552, 6551, 6534, and payroll warrants 6560, 6532, 6518, 6603, report 20873 (unanimous approval). Darrah learned that the Board chair should sign orders between meetings. This is what the select board has been doing. Williams stated he is interested in TTSD's procedure because based on his experience with other boards, one person is designated by the Board to sign the orders at the SU. Acker will look at the current procedure and inquire with VSBA. Buttrey commented that occasionally an order is questioned and needs follow up.

PUBLIC COMMENT/CORRESPONDENCE: Darrah summarized the State recently redrew the OESU boundaries to include the Blue Mountain Union district. Murray would like all of the districts in OESU to agree on and sign a letter to the AOE stating that OESU member districts should not be forced to merge and may continue to operate as member districts. Murray had initially approached Darrah, but Darrah wanted the entire board to consider this request. Murray has already spoken with Waits River and Newbury and they have signed BMU's letter. She is going to meet with AOE representatives tomorrow. Bradford and Oxbow will not sign this letter. It is not clear how the AOE will view the absence of two of the districts. Acker reminded Murray that early on in the Act 46 process, TTSD withdrew from studies regarding mergers with OESU districts. Murray stated that when Act 46 was created, all districts were asked to investigate mergers with neighbor districts. For a year, BMU worked with Bradford, Newbury and Oxbow to see if a merger was feasible. Unfortunately, the majority of the conversations revolved around money and not children. For BMU, kids come first. Six weeks ago, the AOE moved BMU into OESU and in March, BMU lost their superintendent and business manager to OESU. There were not any other schools in the state that wanted to partner with BMU. BMU was created 50 years ago and was the first unified school district in the state. Five schools were closed to create it with their three towns. These communities understand the challenges of mergers. BMU would like to join OESU as a member district. The AGS proposal from Oxbow and Bradford states that they

do not work well with Newbury. An argument for merging is that a merged Board is one less meeting and may be more easily managed by the SU, but BMU questions if this is truly best at this time. Murray is asking TTSD to support BMU in this endeavor to give BMU time to get organized and keep the focus on kids. Downey clarified, what is Murray asking? Murray clarified that the AOE's plan is that BMU merges into a new district with Newbury, Oxbow and Bradford within the OESU. BMU does not want to merge – they want to be a member district in OESU. They want to be a stand-alone district like Thetford. Acker stated she feels BMU has a very strong case to make before the AOE. Acker recalled there was not support from the BMU towns to merge into this new district before. BMU did surveys in 2015 and 2017 and the results were clear what the community wanted.

There is an advisory vote today in BMU's three towns on three articles: 1.) To accept or reject the district merger proposal as put forth by the AOE; 2.) To accept or reject BMU as a pre-K-12; 3.) If BMU is forced to merge, do you want BMU to be a choice school and close the high school. The BMU communities are adamant they will not be absorbed into Oxbow. By statute the State does not have the power to close schools or reorganize grades within a district, however the study committee report, dated November 9, stated that BMU's high school should be closed based on financial analysis. Kids were never discussed. Many programs are already collaborative between BMU and OESU districts. About ten students go between OESU and BMU, and BMU students go to Riverbend. Murray acknowledged this issue does not affect TTSD. Buttrey recalled that historically TTSD has not fit into OESU, and after conversations with every district within a 30-mile radius, no district wants to partner with TTSD. TTSD is unique in its configuration. Discussion followed. Bradford, Newbury and Oxbow have a combined \$1.7 million in debt and BMU has no debt, but if forced to merge they would be folded into that debt. The savings of Act 46 have already taken place with moving the business manager and superintendent to OESU. There is not much more to save.

While Murray is hopeful Darrah will sign the letter to the AOE, there is no pressure; she is happy to have met the board and to have had the discussion. Acker stated she is supportive and feels TTSD should support BMU's effort that they need time in OESU before considering a merger. Buttrey stated there is nothing for TTSD to lose, and TTSD wants to welcome BMU and be supportive. Buttrey and Downey are in favor of signing BMU's letter. All towns are losing students. Downey believes what makes a difference for kids is the skills of the teachers and the principals in the building, and there is a shortage of both in the state. Murray stated that BMU's population is going up. There are many supports in the schools so they are seeing kids getting off of IEPs. They have worked hard to improve performance and they are seeing that in the test scores. These changes are in their infancy, and these improvements need more time to grow. These changes are not the priorities of a new merged district and would be lost with a merger. The Board agreed for Darrah to sign the letter. Murray expressed her thanks to the Board.

PRINCIPAL REPORT (Colin McLaughlin): The Board welcomed interim principal, Colin McLaughlin, to his first meeting. McLaughlin reported it has been a busy two weeks since he officially started August 1. Fifth and sixth grade teachers had their first of a four-day training for

the new math curriculum, College Prep Math. TA teachers joined them, as it is a grade 6 through 8 curriculum. New teacher orientation is August 22. August 23 and 24 teachers will be working on Bridges, the new math program for grades K-5, with a trainer coming in August 24. The following week, teachers set up classrooms with an OESU in-service on August 28. Joette is painting the sensory room a calming shade of green with some help from other teachers. There is an influx of 17 new students spread out throughout the grade levels. Overall enrollment is ~209. Some class sizes are approaching 22 and 23. There have been some staffing changes, and some are unresolved. A unanimous decision was reached among the teachers to offer the 3-4 position to Ashley Mousley, who is a UVEI graduate originally from Thetford. She is coming from Maine where she was teaching special education. She had glowing recommendations from her former employer. One para-educator is leaving TES, resulting in potentially two para openings. Laura Sharpless has asked for her position as math specialist to be reduced to a 0.5/0.6 position as a support role for implementation of the new math curricula until October, at which time she would take a family medical leave. Discussion followed. McLaughlin stated he really values Sharpless in her current role, and would like to be able to retain her in the long term.

During his first two weeks, McLaughlin's focus has been on ensuring the physical infrastructure of the building is a safe place. For example, he does not know the function or location of certain keys. He is meeting with a locksmith. Next week the alarm company is coming to do a system check with him. ARC is also coming to discuss repairs and bills. There is more he wants to do, but he feels safety is a top priority. Welcome back letters and classroom assignments have been mailed. Another letter will go out to the 3-4 families from Ashley Mousley. Darrah stated she is aware the 3-4 class sizes are getting larger, and asked McLaughlin to keep her informed. There are three 3-4 classrooms of 21, 21, and 22 students. The Board is open to considering support for these classrooms. Other multi-age classrooms include a K-1, and two sections of 1-2. McLaughlin has a background in multi-age classrooms, is a proponent, and would love to see the school continue moving in that direction. Williams stated the importance of having teacher commitment to multi-age classrooms. Downey agreed and added there must be teacher training. Mousley does not have multi-age experience, but since multi-age is new for all the 3-4 teachers, they will create the curriculum together.

TA REPORT (Shannon Darrah): The bicentennial is being planned. Bob Stevens has been retained as a consultant for the head of school search. He consulted for the last search. The recruitment season is typically mid-late Fall. TA enrollment is ~300. ~16 students are coming from Chelsea. The new middle school math program with TES was discussed. There was a lengthy executive session for personnel. The strategic planning task force has been meeting. Downey has not been able to attend recent meetings. McLaughlin has not yet met with anyone at TA regarding his role as LEA. The bus routes are out. The first day of school for TES is August 29. TA starts on August 28. Buttrey stated the first middle school cross country practice is August 30. Fifth and sixth graders are invited to participate.

SET NEWSPAPER OF RECORD: The Superintendent informed Darrah the Board needs to set the newspaper of record. Williams stated it has to be a daily paper. The Town uses the Journal Opinion. It is much less expensive than the Valley News. MOTION: (Buttrey/Acker) moved/seconded that the newspaper of record will be the Journal Opinion unless it is something that needs immediate posting, in which case it will be the Valley News (unanimous approval).

AUTHORIZATION OF AUDITOR'S CONTRACT: Williams stated \$7,750 is a reduced price. MOTION: (Buttrey/Acker) moved/seconded to authorize the superintendent to sign a one year contract with Wisheart and Wimett for TTSD's audit (unanimous approval).

NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE IN LUNCH PRICES - \$2.95/LUNCH: Williams explained the state sets the amount that schools are reimbursed for free and reduced priced lunch. If a school charges less than this amount, the school in effect subsidizes the non-free and reduced priced lunch with money from the free and reduced priced lunch income. Thetford has the lowest percentage of kids (25%) in the OESU on free and reduced priced lunch.

RATIFICATION OF PARA CONTRACT: Buttrey reported para contract discussions went into mediation and resulted in an agreement, subject to Board approval. Thetford's per capita income ranks in the top quarter of the state, at 54th statewide. Per pupil spending is 3rd in the state, and the homestead tax rate is 7th in the state. This is not sustainable. The agreement is the Board's original bottom line with an addition of a retirement payment. If a para is employed for more than 15 years at retirement, he/she receives \$2,000; after 20 years, \$4,000. It is a two-year contract. The grid is unchanged, and everyone gets one step on the grid. The paras receive the same medical benefits as the teachers (84% of Connect Gold and 95% of the HRA is paid by TTSD). This will soon change because of the new statewide teacher negotiations, date to be determined. Discussion followed. The teachers' contract is due to expire at the end of the upcoming school year. Language related to contracting out on maintenance and custodial services was also agreed upon. MOTION: (Buttrey/Downey) moved/seconded that the Board ratify the contract agreed upon during mediation (unanimous approval).

OTHER BUSINESS:

Annual report: Acker stated Ben Merrill has asked if TTSD wants to use his services again for the annual report. Last year it cost TTSD just under \$2,000 for his services. Merrill did an excellent job. Acker supports using his services again. Board agrees.

EXECUTIVE SESSION (Personnel): MOTION (Buttrey/Acker) moved/seconded to go into Executive Session at 8:24 p.m. to discuss a confidential personnel matter and potential grievance. The Board invited the Principal into the executive session. Out of executive session at 8:34 p.m. No action taken.

EXECUTIVE SESSION (Personnel): MOTION (Buttrey/Acker) moved/seconded to go into Executive Session at 8:35 p.m. to discussing a confidential personnel matter and potential grievance. The Board invited the Principal into the executive session. Out of executive session at 8:45 p.m. No action taken.

ADJOURNMENT: MOTION: (Buttrey/Downey moved/seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:46 p.m. (unanimous approval).

FUTURE MEETINGS:

09/11/18	Thetford School District Meeting	6:30 p.m.
09/25/18	Thetford School District Meeting	6:30 p.m.

Minutes Prepared By:
Amy Bosco, Minutes Clerk

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Julie Acker, Board Clerk