

SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, April 15, 2021
Final Minutes

Present: Lauren Thomas-Paquin, Katie Fiander, Stephen Sullivan, Jen Malcolm-Brown, members; Dan Hayes, Chair; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Bruce Turner, Director of Finance & Operations; Jennifer Culkeen, Superintendent; Public Guests

A. Meeting Called to Order by Dan at 7:06 P.M.

B. Public Hearings: None.

C. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar: Dan reminded SSC that Town elections are coming up, and he hopes that members will take out election papers. We're working on the Superintendent evaluation in the calendar now, and it's time for the school community survey. Jackie noted that people are sick of surveys, so she proposes a simple one with just a couple of questions and perhaps a place to share their thoughts. Dan suggested she not call it a "survey," which she heartily agreed to.

D. Warrants and Gifts:

#3022 3/22/21: \$16,206.33

#3023 4/5/21: \$40,944.17

#320 4/5/21: \$67,507.79

#321 4/19/21: \$69,575.89

No gifts... wah-wahhn...

E. Approval of Minutes from March 18, 2021:

JEN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF MARCH 18. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

F. Unfinished Business / Updates:

1. 2020-2021 Reopening:

Jackie provided her entire report under this agenda item. Return to full-day school has gone as well as could be hoped. Students are building up stamina for this much socializing and paying attention; they're very happy but very tired! All lunches are outside, served in bento boxes, and classes are held outside under the tents as much as possible. An Artist-In-Residence event is happening in May (an improv theater). Shout-out to our 5th Grade teacher who got that grant for us! As of the Monday after break, two Home School students returned to SES. As of Monday after this coming break, we'll only have six virtual students left. The bus transition has NOT gone smoothly, but it is what it is. It's very nice to be together again and to have some feeling of normalcy back. Dan praised all SES staff for their hard work to serve our children safely and caringly. It's been a very hard year.

2. Capital Projects (heat, roof, sliders, etc.) - Information / Updates:

Dan said he'd received a letter from the chair of the Buildings Committee, which he'll share with SSC. He appreciates the responsibilities that the chair of that committee has, and noted SSC has been working all along in good faith and with fiscal responsibility in mind. Steve noted that the letter was not endorsed by the Buildings Committee and is on the agenda for the next meeting. Jackie and Bruce said that we're willing to work in a professional and respectful manner to find a solution to this problem. Steve read out the letter, which asserted the charge of the Committee and noted how its work has resulted in significant savings in the past. The letter also expressed frustrations with recent requests for upgrades and repairs from SES, claiming that the Buildings Committee has been excluded from these discussions deliberately by the Town Administrator.

Bruce said he's been working to finalize a plan for the roof that they can go out to bid with. There's a significant redesign of drainage that includes the creation of a sloped swale to handle the main flow of water, with the scuppers as a secondary drain. Dan asked whether this would address the issues with sidewalk heaving (it would). Bruce will be submitting an application for funding for the heating system as well.

Steve said that a member of the Buildings Committee and one from the FinCom went to the school Monday, semi-unannounced, to look at the boiler, and the Buildings Committee afterward agreed that we do need new controls. The custodial staff has reconsidered the plan for replacing the windows; Dan noted that to ask them to do something like that, outside their ordinary duties, was probably not a good idea to begin with. We need to get them replaced immediately, and the custodians are already more than busy with their regular work.

G. New Business / Discussion Items:

1. School of Choice - Vote:

The current number of School Choice students is 26 (a good number of them are staff children). Jackie asked SSC to vote to accept School Choice. The numbers are looking better in the town, so she's keeping to her promise not to open Choice seats if that would put the number of students in a grade above 18. She would like not to accept students after Grade 3 unless they're the sibling of an SES student. She prefers to grow a relationship with students throughout their time here. We have a very large number of kids waiting for Preschool, and we're getting a lot of people looking for houses in Shutesbury. We seem to have more than the normal amount of Choice applications this year, particularly from surrounding towns.

Dan said he wholeheartedly supports Jackie's plan, for the reasons she's given. Executing the plan is up to the Principal, and she can change it if necessary.

JEN MOVED TO APPROVE SES AS A SCHOOL OF CHOICE FOR AY21-AY22. LAUREN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

H. Reports:

1. Superintendent's Report:

Jennifer reported that all U#28 schools had as smooth a reopening as they could have had during a pandemic. Principals and school staff have shared many stories with her about how happy they were to see

children return to school. It was wonderful for Jennifer to visit schools and see the kids doing all sorts of things outside. It's just wonderful to interact with kids in real time. It looks like we're due for some snow at the end of the week. DESE has said that elementary schools cannot do remote days anymore, so if need be, we will take a Snow Day. We've decided to hire U#28 Adjustment Counselors and had some interviews today. When we return from vacation, it will be time to interview for a new Director of Student Support Services - sad, because she's worked with Prudy for six years, but also exciting to bring in someone new. Bussing has been a bit of a problem that we're trying to work through, as the proposal was to put primary and secondary students together on the same buses, which we expressed a concern about. We will have to continue the conversation; she'll be taking this to JSC.

Jackie said she's extremely concerned about elementary students sharing buses with secondary students, not only for developmental reasons, but also because of the potential for cross-contamination among multiple schools. Parents will be receiving essentially a one-day notice of this change. She's very sad and concerned about it and hopes that SSC will try to address this problem; we've met with Amherst and shared some ideas about solutions, to no apparent avail. She has made the Superintendent in Amherst aware of her concerns. Jennifer wondered whether the U#28 schools couldn't have a single bus contract we share. Bruce said he's disappointed because we seemed to have had a good solution that will change now. Part of the problem is that bus companies are having difficulty finding drivers during the pandemic. We need to try to overcome this challenge because it's only going to get worse otherwise. There are multiple reasons coming from the bus company for this change, as well as the time change in Amherst. Jackie said but we don't see Amherst kids riding buses with secondary students. And who deals with bus issues when a 5-year-old is overhearing inappropriate language now? This decision is extremely concerning.

Dan invited SSC to make a statement about this situation. It's clear that what's happening shouldn't be happening - we have no time to plan and prepare for it, and we're not at the table helping to shape the decision. Dan suggested as a statement, "SSC shares a concern with SES administration that bussing changes are happening without equal representation at the table, and we are not happy with that."

Jen asked how the RSC took this. Steve said they were hit with it at the last meeting, and it was a total shock. Amherst parents were outraged when they were going to put 6th Graders on secondary school buses, but they didn't seem to care about this change for Shutesbury elementary kids. Lauren noted that there's a disproportionate impact in addition to the lack of equal representation in this decision. There may be a breach of contract involved here as well, since we're not even getting all the buses we contracted for. Bruce thanked Steve for sticking up for us at RSC. Not having enough drivers is the company's problem, not ours. Bruce will contact the bus company with our concerns. Jennifer noted that our staff and parents are all working so hard, but so are the Principals: the reason we're so successful in U#28 is because of YOU!

2. Director of Finance and Operations:

Bruce reported that Matt is having issues changing light bulbs and so forth, so they'll be looking into a lift, which would be very useful. We've created a new fiduciary along with New Salem and Wendell to hire the U#28 Adjustment Counselors; we could use this to fund other shared positions and services too. Also, the Governor slightly increased the Chapter 70 funding, so we'll be getting a little more money, which is good news. Jennifer thanked Pam for working so long and hard on these grants, spending many hours calling DESE - she's amazing!

3. Principal's Report: See F1 above.

4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report:

Steve reported that RSC next meets on the 21st. He nearly fell out of his seat when he learned about the bus plan, and when he objected, nobody seemed to care. He abstained from the vote to extend Superintendent Morris's contract, since he had concerns about the process.

5. Union #28 Report, including Budget & Personnel: No report.

6. CES Report:

Dan reported that we haven't had a meeting, but we've been interviewing 12 candidates for the CEO position.

I. Policy Review:

Second Reading, First Vote On:

- EBC – Emergency Plans
- EDCB – Emergency Closing of School Procedure
- EEAEC – Student Conduct on School Buses
- FA – Facilities Development Goals

Final Vote On:

- DA – Fiscal Management Goals
- DJ – Purchasing
- DJA – Purchasing Authority

JEN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY EBC – EMERGENCY PLANS. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

JEN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY EDCB – EMERGENCY CLOSING OF SCHOOL PROCEDURE. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

JEN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY EEAEC – STUDENT CONDUCT ON SCHOOL BUSES. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

JEN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY FA – FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT GOALS. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

JEN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY DA – FISCAL MANAGEMENT GOALS. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

JEN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY DJ – PURCHASING. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

JEN MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY DJA – PURCHASING AUTHORITY. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

J. Future Business:

- Shutesbury Policy Committee – Thursday, May 20, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.
- Shutesbury School Committee – Thursday, May 20, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory – Monday, May 17, 2021 - 6:30 p.m.
- Budget and Personnel Committee – TBD
- Future agenda items –

SSC proposed to send the following statement to the Superintendent of Schools in Amherst:

The Shutesbury School Committee is strongly urging the Amherst Regional School district to reconfigure the busing plan for the remainder of the 2021 school year given the lack of representation and disproportionate impact on the Shutesbury School Community. There is a considerable gap in the range of developmental levels of elementary students compared with middle and high school students. This, along with the lack of supervision on each bus, poses a significant risk to the emotional wellbeing and physical safety of our youngest students. We ask that in the reconfiguring of this busing plan, that Shutesbury have full and active representation in this process.

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE ABOVE STATEMENT. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

K. Executive Session to Discuss Strategy With Respect to Collective Bargaining or Litigation 8:24:

DAN MOVED TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS STRATEGY WITH RESPECT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING OR LITIGATION, TO RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION AFTERWARD. KATIE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYES. UNANIMOUS.

L. Adjournment: 8:50