

SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
THURSDAY October 16, 2014
Final Minutes

Present: Dan Hayes, Mare Fox, Fred Steinberg, Sean Woodard-McNiff, members; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Bob Mahler, Superintendent; Public Guests

A. Meeting Called to Order at 7:05 P.M.

B. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar

No comments on perpetual calendar.

C. Warrants and Gifts

Warrants signed:

4002: \$1,735.94

D. Approval of Minutes from September 18, 2014

Bob offered one clarification of the minutes.

DAN MOVED THAT THE SEPTEMBER 18, 2014 MINUTES BE APPROVED. MARE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

E. Public Comments and Announcements

Nancy Birtwell noted that the carpet in one of the SES hallways is buckling and rising up, posing a safety concern. Bob and Jackie responded that it's a capital improvement item that is being looked into; perhaps the carpet will be replaced with the same kind of non-slip flooring elsewhere in the building. Dan suggested that Jackie send an email to the Selectboard and Fin Com notifying them of the problem and requesting approval for an estimate on the job. The problem is a persistent seasonal one; according to Bob, the carpet has been glued down a couple of times to no avail. Moreover, the fabric is quite worn now. Sean suggested the carpet be replaced in segments since the problem will diminish as we head into winter, but Bob noted that students will be bringing in a lot of moisture with their boots. Sean said that it would be good to get two estimates: one for the whole job, one for a piecemeal approach. An update on the issue has been placed on the upcoming agenda.

Dan shared that this Sunday, his aunt is being recognized in Washington, D.C., for her service in WWII as a marine sharpshooter (though she never went overseas); he also noted that Shutesbury had the highest percentage of volunteers signed up during WWII of any town in the nation. Dan shared photos of her in uniform as well as of her shooting practice targets.

F. New Business / Discussion Items

1. Principal's Report (Moved up due to early day tomorrow)

Enrollment is unchanged at 155, although one family has recently opted to home-school. The one student on the preschool wait list has started attending a different school. As for the budget, some changes in staff and salaries as well as other savings are projected to cover the extra costs of a part-time para-educator and bus monitor. Jackie and Bob will continue to monitor the budget closely. Recently, SES has suffered a number of bounced checks, to the tune of \$220 so far. Jackie wants the committee to craft and adopt a bounced check policy. This is not a new issue, but the amounts are increasing. Next year, SSC members will have email addresses at the school, but it may not be possible to set them up this year.

The '13-'14 School Council survey produced only 19 responses, so School Council is taking a look at revising it as well as at an advertising campaign to push it school-wide. Sean suggested that the survey be distributed during Parent-Teacher conferences. School Council is also interested in a joint meeting with SSC, per Sean's previous suggestion. Dan expressed a concern that School Council not be influenced by SSC due to the very different charters and purposes of each respective group. Sean responded that he thought School Council could present the School Improvement Plan to SSC as a way to increase dialogue about and input into the SIP process. Another idea of School Council is to add a student representative, since the students are not directly represented at present. Dan supported the idea but added that the selection process should be equitable.

There are some challenging demographics coming through the lower grades now, including only one male in the first grade and only 8 preschoolers moving into Kindergarten next year. Bob noted that the large upper classes will result in a higher 5-year assessment for Shutesbury when they graduate to middle school, and that this will coincide with lower enrollment at SES. Jackie said that these issues are certainly on her radar, and that she's working with staff to look at more innovative ways to deliver instruction under these circumstances.

2. MCAS Scores

Jackie noted that the small population at SES can produce large differences in score results year to year, depending on which students come in or leave in a year and how strong their skills are. While the "Warning/Failing" category went up last year, the overall trends for each achievement level at SES have remained relatively constant over the years. Next year, since U28 schools are taking PARCC, it will be hard to compare results. Jackie also overviews ideas for improvement in scores, including examining interventions, a school-wide study in Growth Mindset and meeting diverse needs, professional development in assessment and how to use it to drive instruction, and examining and understanding the Common Core in order to make sure our

curriculum is aligned. Finally, in terms of personnel, there is no essential skills teacher at SES, so it might be necessary to hire one in order to deliver math interventions.

Sean asked if it might be necessary to purchase new curriculum; Jackie said yes. There are gaps between the Common Core curriculum, which changes regularly, and the one used at SES. Staff feel the current curriculum is strong, but it doesn't match the Common Core one anymore. Jackie assured the committee we could get data on math performance of former SES students at Amherst-Pelham Middle School, which would help inform our response. Sean suggested we look at the cost of a new curriculum since he wants teachers to feel supported, and a piecemeal approach to the problem would not serve students best.

Dan asked whether teachers reviewed curriculum in teams – literacy, numeracy, etc. Jackie responded that they don't currently, but that they would develop at least a numeracy team. Dan then asked whether schools of this size use a single position to deliver reading and math interventions. Jackie said that there are usually essential skills teachers in addition to reading and math specialists; the reading specialist's schedule is completely full at present, for one thing.

Sean reported that people who attended the Harvest Dinner greatly appreciated how much Jackie is involved at the school. She responded that she's trying very hard to make people in the community want to be involved with the school.

3. Fingerprinting

Bob reported that according to state law, we now need to fingerprint everyone involved directly with children. The cost is \$55 for staff with licenses and \$35 for those without. This is an issue the SSC needs to start thinking and making a decision about, especially as field trips approach in which parent volunteers participate. Mare asked why the CORI checks we do aren't sufficient; Bob responded that fingerprinting allows us to learn about crimes committed in other states. Sean said he'd heard we have a lack of substitute teachers because of the fingerprinting cost, and Bob agreed that it cuts down the number of people willing to substitute teach. Bob said there's great and growing concern among legal advocacy groups over the amount of information now being collected by the state.

MARE MOVED TO ALLOW APRIL CANNON'S DAUGHTER TO ATTEND PRESCHOOL THIS YEAR. FRED SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

G. Unfinished Business / Updates

1. Accountant Search Update

Bob reported that Matt Galman has been hired as an Accountant for U28 this year. There's a learning curve involved with Planet Education, but Matt is hard-working and bright; also, Mike Kociela is still advising occasionally when he can.

2. Superintendent Search

The Superintendent Search Committee requires a member from SSC. (The committee comprises 14 members in total, including parents, teachers, and school committee members.) Mare said she's interested if the meetings are late enough in the day; the Accountant search meetings were in the afternoon and cut into the workday significantly. Bob responded that the meetings would be in the early evenings since it's such a large committee. Mare agreed to represent SSC on the committee.

DAN MOVED TO APPOINT MARE FOX TO THE SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH COMMITTEE. SEAN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS (MARE ABSTAINED).

H. Policy Review: None at this time

Sean said that his work schedule makes it difficult for him to make the Policy Subcommittee meetings; is there a telephonic option for attending? Bob pointed to the Apple device on the wall, and Sean said he would be happy to attend telephonically from now on.

I. Reports

1. Superintendent's Report

Health Issues

Bob has been communicating with the principals around current health issues (Ebola, enterovirus). These are serious, but it's important for families to know that we're safe for the moment. His recommendation to the principals is to stay actively informed about events. Mare wondered whether there were some questions we could put to parents about their contact with people who have traveled recently – could they share that information with the school? Bob said we're going to follow the state and federal guidelines to protect the school. Mare said she thought it's important for the school to know about children's illnesses in order to help safeguard the whole community. Bob said that he's basically getting daily updates now, and he informs principals in turn. He emphasized that linking up to the local health department is critical, especially if the outbreak expands.

Best Practices Grant

On another note, Bob said the meeting Jackie is attending tomorrow is related to a grant SES won to share best practices with staff.

Gun Bill / Armed Resource Officer in Every School

Also, a recent gun bill signed by Governor Patrick mandates an armed school resource officer in every school district but provides no appropriations to pay for these officers. Bob noted that school shootings almost always result from mental health issues, so why aren't we putting more funds into mental health workers in schools instead? A further cost is the installation of police radios in schools as well as training to use them properly; we are applying for state grants to pay for two radios in each school. The radios will certainly increase safety at schools. Sean said that he does not support funding an armed resource officer in the building, but he would support a mental health officer. The school can apply for a waiver to avoid having to install the resource officer. Sean also noted that we'd be losing a teacher to provide funds for this officer. The committee decided to continue this conversation at the next meeting.

Outside Advertisements in School

Sean brought up the Interskate 91 coupons that recently went home with kids; aren't these advertisements, and therefore a violation of policy? The committee reviewed the relevant policy. Sean says he's always been bothered by advertisements in the *Road Town News*; he argued that there is a distinction between advertisements of commercial events and notification about community events, and thus the *Road Town News* has been in violation of the school policy. Bob argued that the newsletter does not sponsor or endorse those who advertise in it; the information is simply being passed along. Sean said that these advertisements are not "articles of general interest," which are permissible in the newsletter by policy, but rather advertisements that require the permission of the school committee for distribution. Sean added that he is opposed to the Scholastic book sale for similar reasons.

Mare responded that it seems unworkable to have the SSC approve all such advertisements in a timely way. Sean said that those who want the free advertisement in the *Road Town News* should be prepared enough to come to the committee a month ahead of time to ask for permission. Bob noted that Paragraph 3 contains a loophole, describing activities that support the health or education of the student body. Sean responded that advertisements for single student activities are not community activities; the point, in any case, is that the policy is being violated. Bob disagreed and Sean asked Bob to demonstrate where he approved or disapproved of what goes in the newsletter.

Sean reiterated that his problem is with the violation of policy, not necessarily with the particular advertisements in the newsletter. Advertisers need to ask permission of the committee, period. He added that advertisers effectively have access to the private email network because the *Road Town News* is also sent out electronically. Dan said he was fine with delegating the responsibility for approving advertisements to the principal, though Fred pointed out SSC would have to amend policy to do this. Sean

said that was fine, but it would have to go through the Policy Subcommittee. In the meantime, the issue remains of the policy violation as it stands.

Sean brought up the status of the Scholastic book sale: is what SES gets considered a gift? A donation? The larger point is that we should follow the policies we created. Furthermore, there has never been a discussion before the School Committee about the book fair; it has not been approved by SSC. What allows this clearly commercial enterprise to operate on school grounds, in violation of school policy?

SEAN MOVED THAT THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE ALL PRINCIPAL-APPROVED ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE *ROAD TOWN NEWS* UNTIL THE COMMITTEE CAN REVIEW THE RELEVANT POLICY. FRED SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED (4 IN FAVOR, 1 OPPOSED).

Bob said that he would let Jackie know that the advertisement going home in the homework folders was unacceptable; it ought to have gone out in the *Road Town News*. Fred added that he would like to discuss the student pictures from Lifetouch; how does the process of selecting a vendor work?

3. Regional School District Planning Board Report

RAWG met last night and had hoped to make it their final meeting by coming to agreement on several outstanding points. Mare expressed disappointment that Michael DeChiara, Shutesbury's representative to RAWG, never updated or reported to SSC. Bob noted that he was unsettled about several items in the RAWG minutes, particularly one about non-alignment of curricula hurting SES students. The next step is to present the finalized written proposal to the four towns. After that, all four towns would have to vote to amend the regional agreement in order to proceed with regionalization. Dan expressed his concern about any changes because right now, Shutesbury has more power over its school. Michael DeChiara is looking for input from the SSC.

4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report

A three-year contract for busses was approved with an option for a late start, as well as an option to switch to a different contract after two years. The Life-Threatening Allergy Policy was delivered to the superintendent. The Town of Amherst seems to be in good shape fiscally.

5. Review of Expenditure Report

Bob reported that he and Jackie have looked at the budget carefully, and they think the school should be fine. They will continue to monitor the budget closely.

6. Union #28 Report – including Budget and Personnel: No report.

7. CES Report: No report.

J. Future Business

1. Shutesbury School Committee – November 20, 2014
2. Budget and Personnel Committee – Wednesday, November 19, 2014 6 P.M. LES
3. Union #28 Joint Supervisory – Wednesday, November 19, 2014 7 P.M. LES
4. Future agenda items?

DAN MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 9:21 P.M. MARE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

Adjournment at 9:21 P.M.