

# NEW SALEM/WENDELL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, November 2, 2023

Swift River School – 7:00 p.m.

## Final Minutes

Attending: Carla Halpern, Steven Blinder, Mandy Blackbird, Barbara Doyle, Miriam Warner, Nancy Slator, Anna Wetherby (minutes), Beth Erviti, members; Kelley Sullivan, principal; Jennifer Culkeen, superintendent; Caitlin Sheridan; director of finance and operations

Teachers: Angela Worden-Corey, Rachael Basdekis, Kate Koonz, Guinevere Skellie, Jennylou Powers

### A. Meeting Called Order at 7:01

### B. Public Hearings

- The committee will go into executive session to discuss the matter brought to the committee regarding additional pay for paraprofessionals during the Nature's Classroom class trip
- Wishing to set aside the correct amount of funding for future experiences to include full payment for support staff now that they are a part of the Union and union agreement
- The additional cost for the hourly employees is \$1300
- There is a stipend for all employees who participate in Nature's Classroom

### C. Warrants – Record in minutes with numbers

- Gifts: Acceptance Vote if needed - none
- Grants: Acceptance Vote if needed
  - CFCE FC 237 - \$117,325
  - Rural Aid - \$131,483.79
  - REAP -\$18,502

Anna moves to vote on all grants in one vote; Beth seconds - vote passes unanimously  
Steve moves to accept all three grants; Beth seconds - vote passes unanimously

### D. Superintendent's Report - nice manicure

- B&P and JSC approved the proposed budgets for FY 25
- In the final year of ESSER funding - any positions funded by these grants will cause an increase in budgets going forward
- JSC has created a screening committee for Superintendent Search
  - Public acknowledgment of thanks to Steve and Mandy for participating in the screening and search committee
- Meeting for Erving subcommittee for pros/cons of leaving U28
  - Open meetings with access to minutes
- Discussed chronic absenteeism in schools across the country
  - Missing 18 days (10% of the school year)
  - Accountability measure for MCAS testing
  - There may be grant funding to support families attending school (healthily) every day
- Is the absenteeism more indicative of truancy or lingering effects of long-term COVID
  - Swift River has indications of chronic absenteeism - the MCAS rating was 0, which is poor
    - Partially from attending other programs
    - Car issues - some students have a 2-mile travel distance between home and bus stop

- Preschool attendance issues
- Scheduling appointments anytime is challenging, especially when trying to not conflict with the school day
- Request for comparison of absentee rates with other schools in the county
  - Recent reports have Swift River at the same rating as Erving and Sunderland
- Some of the parameters are being created by people who are unfamiliar with rural schools and post-COVID dynamics
  - Curiosity regarding any connection between IEP and 504 with absenteeism

#### E. Director of Finance and Operations Report

##### Accounts Payable Union 28 Vouchers

2809	10/18/2023	\$1,434.06
2810	10/18/2023	\$142.00
2811	11/1/2023	\$4,451.73

##### Payroll NSW

408	10/12/2023	\$94,591.34
409	10/26/2023	\$93,464.04

##### Accounts Payable NSW Vouchers

4021	10/18/2023	\$3,016.78
4022	10/18/2023	\$52,173.91
4023	11/1/2023	\$273.28
4024	11/1/2023	\$11,568.22
4025	11/1/2023	\$37,498.36
4026	10/31/2023	\$1,774.57
4027	11/1/2023	\$73.22
4028	10/2/2023	\$36.31
4029	10/31/2023	\$79.96

##### Payroll Union #28

808	10/12/2023	\$29,696.75
809	10/26/2023	\$29,582.57

##### Payroll Monthly Deductions

8080	10/12/2023	\$103,610.81
8090	10/26/2023	\$103,040.68
8093	10/31/2023	\$1,626.11
8091	10/26/2023	\$40,683.21
8092	10/26/2023	\$54,630.35

- Emilee is due any day now, and Caitlin has been covering accounts payable
- U28 budget was passed - slight difference due to October enrollments; an increase of .03%
- End of year yearly audit will begin in February
- The budget will have the first draft in December
  - There will be time between December and annual town meetings to make all changes necessary

#### F. Principal's Report

- October 1st enrollment numbers were the basis of the budget
- Assessment letters have been sent home
  - Request to bring the scores to conferences
- Successful Track or Treat and Spaghetti Supper
- Can drive, butter braids, Hillside Pizza fundraisers going well
- Literacy walks - UFLI - free phonics program
  - Small groups working on lessons
  - Observed by teachers from other schools

- Students engaged and on task k-6
- Attended the Wendell Money Managers Meeting
  - Bus contracts
  - PFAS
    - Wendell asked for a long-term plan (5-10 years) for the building
- Completed performance testing for PFAS on Saturday - hoping to have the system turned on on November 11
  - Are the results coming out unclear because of the filter?
    - There was one tank that may have been damaged in transit and could have been causing the problems to occur in the tank

## G. Committee Reports

### o Report from Mahar Representatives

- Emergency meeting to approve funding to repair and replace boilers
- New smart-pass system - an electronic system for bathroom breaks
- Student council attended Massachusetts Student Council officers
  - Trying to make more career options for students
    - Firefighting
    - Army Jr - ROTC
      - Not a 'pipeline to the military'
      - Addressed having an issue for low-income families being funneled into the military above other options
      - The program will "create well-rounded individuals with critical thinking skills"
- Summer programming in ELA, Math, and STEM
  - Fascinating dissection of sheep parts
  - STEM project of crime scene investigations
  - Budgeting in math
  - Onboarding for new school committee members
  - Revising Mahar Handbook

### o Collaborative for Education Services

- Ask for information about absenteeism from other schools
- Next meeting December 6

### o Massachusetts Association of School Committees

- Brief overview of happenings
  - Many awards given
  - Roles of the school committee in the budget process

### o Budget and Personnel – none at this time

### o Joint Supervisory

- The primary focus is the search committee for the new superintendent
  - MASC is providing help
  - Ready to post the job opening
    - Job posting on Schoolspring
    - It is good to have pictures and demographics of the schools and towns
    - Clarification of the terms "search" and "screening" committees
      - Different open meeting laws apply
    - The search committee is meeting on November 8th
      - Generating questions and matching questions with members of the committee
- Erving developments

- Nothing to report at this time
- The sense is there is not anything close to exiting the union - they are looking at the school and the situation they are currently in and if it is best serving the community
- Next Meeting – November 20, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.

#### H. November Items

- o Date for December's meeting (December 7<sup>th</sup>, the first Thursday in December, is the start of Hanukkah, and the committee mentioned at an earlier meeting that they wanted to discuss when to meet in December)
  - Put a line in the posting recognizing the meeting is occurring on the first night of Hanukkah and that the minutes will be available as always; any questions needing to be addressed by the committee can be directed to Carla
    - No angry faces noted from committee members
- o Kate Koonz: idea for food insecurity assistance
  - As the school does not fund the project, does the item require a vote?
  - A notice will go home to parents; parents can sign up their children for the backpack food program. Younger students are eligible for this program if a sibling is a student at Swift River
  - As a committee, we can lend support to the program through a vote of endorsement
  - As this is something that is done at and during school, it is advisable to have the committee take a vote
  - Will this be available for homeschooled families?
    - Yes, they should be included
    - Homeschooled families can be notified via a mailed letter
  - Request for funding letters are being sent out to businesses and civic organizations next week
    - Would like to see the school participate in the fundraising
    - Rabbit Run would be a good fundraiser for this program
    - The program operates under Wendell Good Neighbors, and they have applied for a grant from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts
  - Request for reports and updates to be sent through Kelley
  - Identified potentially 15-20 students (not counting younger siblings)
    - Need to have enough funding and food to make the program successful
  - Beth moves that the committee supports Backpack Buddies to support the school and community; Mandy seconds - vote passes unanimously
- o Family Handbook –
  - Beth moves to approve the family handbook; Barbara seconds
    - Are the sections describing learning tools up to date?
    - How frequently is the document edited?
      - Usually, over the summer
      - It is a fluid document and can be changed
    - Impressed with how cohesive the document
      - P. 20 exclusions - check wording and reference policy
    - Request to expand Arts description
    - Request to update DIBELS
    - Request to correct from school committee meets virtually
    - Will there be a date as to when the handbook is approved and note when changes are made
      - It is hard to approve a fluid document
  - The committee unanimously votes not to approve the handbook at this time
    - Request to track changes and put a date of reviewed and edited

o Policy Update and Review:

School Committee November 2, 2023

First Reading on:

- o AA-1 Regional School District Legal Status
- o CHA/CHC Development and Dissemination of Procedures
  - o BDFA-E – School Improvement Plan
  - o BDFA – School Councils

Final Vote on:

- o JB – Equal Educational Opportunities
  - Beth moves to adopt this policy; Steve seconds - passes unanimously
- o JFBB – School Choice
  - Beth moves to adopt this policy; Barbara seconds - passes unanimously

- o Next Meeting Date – December 7, 2023 (TBD) – 7:00 p.m.
- o New Salem/Wendell Policy Committee – December 7, 2023 (TBD)– 6:30 p.m. I.

Approval of Minutes:

- o September 7, 2023
  - Beth moves to approve the minutes; Mandy seconded- passed unanimously
- o October 5, 2023
  - Steve moves to approve the minutes; Beth seconded - passes unanimously

J. Executive Session

- Anna moves to, in accordance with Open Meeting Law (Chapter 30A Section 21 (a)), move to go into Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation and possibly to return to open session for a vote; Beth seconds - roll call was taken; administration invited to participate in the executive session
- Executive session began at 8:24 PM
- Returned to open session at 8:51

K. Adjournment

Beth moves to adjourn; Barbara seconds - meeting adjourned at 8:54