

UNION #28 JOINT SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

Monday, September 18, 2023

Final Minutes

Present: Barbara Doyle, Becky Tew, Bethany Rose, Jennylou Powers, Julie Martel, Jya Plavin, Kate Woodward, Mandy Blackbird, Jess Rocheleau, Mark Blatchley, Jeremy Mailloux, Jessalyn Zaykoski, Emilee Felton, Miriam Maynard-Ford, Steven Blinder, Mackensey Bailey, Members; Erik Semb, Chair; Corrina Wcislo, Director of Student Support Services; Lindsay Rodriguez, Director of Curriculum and Instruction; Caitlin Sheridan, Director of Finance and Operations; Jennifer Culkeen, Superintendent; U#28 Principals; Public Guests.

1. Meeting Called to Order by Erik at 6:31 P.M.

Erik asked Jennifer for her Superintendent Report.

2. Superintendent Report:

Jennifer read a statement about her retirement at the end of the year. She reflected on her cherished moments and relationships at U#28, thanked the Leadership Team and her wonderful Central Office staff, and read inspiring pieces of literature related to change. JSC members thanked Jennifer for her years of leadership, service, and vision.

Erik proceeded to the Superintendent Evaluation Report (New Business #3).

1. Superintendent Evaluation Report:

Erik noted that only 7 SC members contributed to the evaluation. Jennifer was rated as Proficient or Exemplary by 100% of respondents for Standard 1, 85% for Standard 2, 85% for Standard 3, and 85% for Standard 4.

2. Reorganization of the Committee - Chair and Vice Chair:

Erik invited nominations for Chair and Vice Chair. He declined a nomination, as he is too busy to serve in that role now. JSC agreed to table reorganization until next meeting.

BECKY MOVED TO TABLE REORGANIZATION UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING. STEVEN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.

3. Public Hearing: None.

4. Approval of the Minutes from May 15, 2023 and June 27, 2023:

STEVEN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF MAY 15, 2023. MANDY SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.

STEVEN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JUNE 27, 2023. MANDY SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.

6. Report on Study of Operational Efficiencies - Collins Center:

Jennifer introduced Heather Michaud, the head of the Collins Center project team studying operational efficiencies through a grant. Heather praised all the U#28 staff and community members they worked with; their commitment is unwavering and their care for their schools deep. The final report is 100 pages; she encourages all to read it. In her presentation, she noted these key takeaways: Union personnel are extremely loyal to their schools and work extremely hard; the greatest fact impacting operation is the decentralized governance structure; there are insufficient staffing levels to support operations and service delivery; the Union lacks a cohesive bond and shared

vision among all schools; the Union is not spending significantly more than other Massachusetts school districts on operations; general procurement practices lack an overall strategy, resulting in worse pricing.

She reviewed the history of U#28 and the delineation of responsibilities between the Union and Elementary School Committees. The variance between U#28 and state average spending on Operations & Maintenance is 1.05%, so it is unlikely that savings can be found here. Transportation expenditures demonstrated large variances within the Union, which the team suspects has to do with quality control of the data submitted. Erving's historical spending on technology was by far the highest (~\$83K, versus \$47K to \$54K for the other Towns). The team identified more advantageous pricing as available in at least three areas: Food Service, Custodial, and Technology. Economies of scale could be achieved through bulk purchasing for all schools rather than multiple smaller purchases by each. Also, accessing educational and municipal pricing contracts would help. However, the team does not believe that centralized purchasing strategies will result in material savings (although it's good practice in general).

Heather listed a number of general findings, mainly having to do with the lack of sufficient resources. As for general recommendations, Heather noted:

- Pursue a regionalization study
- Adopt a single policies manual for all schools
- Adopt a single bargaining unit contract for all Union personnel
- Create a consolidated reporting calendar and centralize mandatory reporting at Central Office
- Review the Central Office personnel complement and pursue additional staffing
- Engage in a space utilization study for CO
- Certify at least one CO employee as a Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official
- Perform a human resources review

She reviewed further specific recommendations for food services (centralizing and sharing systems, services, and ordering, among others), facilities maintenance (automate work orders, improve clarity of reporting, etc.), transportation (get single transportation contract, record transportation issues and complaints, etc.), information technology (create shared technician positions, a central Director of Information Technology position, centralize ordering and work orders, perform technology audit, etc.), HR, Payroll and Benefits (set up a central benefit tracking system, clarify HR processes, automate payroll, consider adding a HR Manager or Director, etc.), and Grants Management (leverage software systems to account for all grants activities, consider combining all grants management under a single position, etc.).

In short: there's a lack of sufficient and/or trained staff, lack of singular governing policies, lack of unified operating standards, and adopting centralized procurement will likely be immaterial. These changes are only likely to happen after the governance structure is adjusted, which is why a top recommendation is a regionalization study.

JSC asked clarifying questions about some of the language used in the presentation as well as what the cost per student would be if all recommendations were followed. Heather noted that the variances among all the processes at the four schools are such that it's difficult to follow all the recommendations with the structure the way it is. Regionalization is also a complicated question because the respective schools might instead better be regionalized with surrounding districts.

7. New Business:

1. Social Justice Standards for Union #28:

Jennifer shared that the Leadership Team has been working with CES around social justice and equity. We're looking to implement social justice standards that teachers would use in curriculum and development, administrators would use to change processes and resources, and students would use in their work and their lives. It's one of the PD pieces we'll be looking at across the Union.

2. Erving proposal to withdraw from Union #28 - Discussion:

Erik reported that a committee is being formed to look at the pros and cons of leaving. Mark responded that it's

premature to frame this question in this way. It was considered around 10 years ago. The committee will consider the pros and cons of remaining in the Union, rather. The committee will have done the research on facts to respond to public comments about this either way. Becky inquired about the general feeling among Erving residents; Mark said there's some unease or unrest with the Union in general and specifically some events that were held over the past year. The committee has not yet been formed, and its purpose will be to be able to address these concerns with facts.

Erik handed control of the meeting over to Steven, as he needed to leave.

3. Superintendent Evaluation Report: See 2 above.

8. Old Business: None.

9. Director of Finance and Operations Report:

1. FY24 Budget Process:

Caitlin reported on the first draft of the FY24 Budget. To balance contractual increases, some lines have been reduced to reflect actual spending. She also previewed proposed changes to the salary Steps in order to increase retention among Central Office staff. Caitlin clarified that the draft she presented included the impact of increasing Steps in this way. This is in line with a lot of other salaries in comparable districts in the area.

10. Director of Curriculum and Instruction Report:

Lindsay reported that we're using two screening tools in all four schools now, so we're able to reach some efficiencies there. We have new curricula in all four buildings as well: Into Reading, EL Education, Bridges in Math, and You Fly. This summer, we worked on a shared platform for resources for teachers of You Fly. Our PD in October will feature different educators as presenters on various topics. We'll do the second part of our equity PD with CES then as well. All four schools are qualifying for Title I grants this year, so this will help at Leverett, which was not previously eligible.

11. Director of Student Support Services - Updates:

Corrina presented on the Roadmap for Continuous Improvement within Student Support Services. The Roadmap addresses how to provide equity for students, stakeholder feedback, school and classroom visits, Coffee & Conversation sessions for families, Professional Development collaboration, providing resources for identified needs, training Education Support Professionals, instructional walkthroughs, alternatives to exclusionary practices (especially in discipline), and strengthening partnerships.

12. News/Updates from Each School and Union #28:

Wendell/New Salem: Mandy said there was lots of work done last week to open the school. The gym lights have been replaced, and the water system should be up and running very soon. Barbara added that we have new barriers for the bus drop-off that look like three gigantic, beautiful planters.

Leverett: No report.

Shutesbury: Julie said SES will have our Open House on Oct. 4. 6th Grade is having Nature's Classroom in this week. There was a poetry slam recently that raised the roof. Also, our roof is getting replaced, and we have new security cameras.

Erving: No report.

13. Future Items to Discuss:

- Next Meeting Date: November 20, 2023

- Budget & Personnel Committee - October 10, 2023

14. Adjournment at 8:29

JULIE MOVED TO ADJOURN. BARBARA SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.