

UNION #28 JOINT SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE
Monday, March 18, 2019
Final Minutes

Present: Carl Seppala, Jenn Eichorn, Brian Guerin, Bethany Seeger, Johanna Bartlett, Carla Halpern, Erik Semb, Beth Erviti, Dan Hayes, Members; Lauren Thomas-Paquin, Chair; Prudence Marsh, Director of Student Support Services; Bruce Turner, Director of Finance and Operations; Jennifer Haggerty, Superintendent; Public Guests

1. Meeting Called to Order by Lauren at 7:00 P.M.

2. Approval of the Minutes from January 14, 2019:

DAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 14, 2019, AS EMENDED. BETH SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

3. Public Hearings: None.

4. New Business:

Warwick Community School: Officials from Warwick, including a Select Board member and some associated with the school, explained that Warwick Community School is facing severe challenges within its district at present and is looking around at options. What might joining U#28 mean for the Union?

Johanna thought it would be good to have a new school in the Union because it strengthens us, but its constituent school committees are quite clear that we can't agree to anything that costs the Union money up front; we're all stretched to the limits, and our Towns are too. The Superintendent would have to agree to an increased workload as well. WCS would have to find another lawyer as well since it currently shares a lawyer with U#28. The Warwick guests agreed they wouldn't want to incur up-front costs to the Union. Lauren added that each of the Towns would have to vote WCS in as well. JSC explained the structure of the Union to their guests.

Dan asked what attracted them to U#28? The threat of closing WCS, which would save the district something like \$160K out of a \$14 million budget. They haven't gone deeply into any concrete plans to save WCS yet; they're in the data gathering phase. Johanna sympathized: all the Towns are facing demographic decline, which puts increased pressure on our small, rural schools. Dan noted the attraction to U#28: sharing services and Superintendency administration does help. Jennifer explained the per-Town contribution to the Union budget (a per-capita number based on a 5-year rolling average) as well as the Central Office staff and the services they provide to all the schools. A Warwick guest responded that those shared services are quite attractive, since Warwick has to shoulder all the administrative costs by itself at present. WCS has been operating under an umbrella of uncertainty for a couple of years now.

A Warwick guest noted that WCS can't leave its district next school year, per DESE, and school funding has become something of a political football in the Town. To leave the district, they'd have to negotiate everything about what they keep, where they operate, what personnel they have, etc. Dan advised them to look into the Worthington model, since that town recently left its Superintendency arrangement. He went on to say that should we add a fifth school, we might think more broadly about reorganization within the Union; would the Superintendent need to attend all school committee meetings, for example?

Carla asked what WCS could offer concretely to the Union, and what Jennifer thinks the impact of incorporating WCS into the Union might be on her workload and position. Johanna said she's uncomfortable with asking that of Jennifer here and now; that's a discussion we should have at another time, more privately. Dan said with additional revenue, we might be able to think about new positions.

The Warwick guests went on to discuss WCS: they have 65 students right now and a part-time principal. WCS is a Level 1 school and has about 50% Warwick residents and the rest almost exclusively from Orange, with a few families from Athol. This participation of multiple towns gives WCS a vibrancy that makes it the heart of the community, in the view of many. The building is only 20 years old. The cost of the school has become the main flash point in the district dispute over the schools. Last year, the budget was slashed considerably and the Principal took a \$7K pay cut in order to preserve special programs and classes. The Warwick community also stepped in in a major way to support these, so there's broad support for WCS within Warwick.

Lauren said moving forward, we'd have to look at some kind of concrete proposal, and the Warwick guests agreed there are a lot of nuts and bolts to work out. Only one, a Select Board member, represents the Town, while the others represent WCS. The Select Board member voiced his primary concern: why would you want to close an outstanding, Level 1 school? It's small, but it's excellent, and its success should be studied by the other schools. Johanna said WCS would be a good match in that respect and urged Warwick guests should look into what's going on in the U#28 schools: we're all excellent too, mainly due to dedicated staff who get paid less than they might elsewhere.

Carl asked what WCS needs that it can't provide for itself? In other words, what would put WCS on solid footing? The Warwick guests said help with administration, as well as support from the district; one option they're investigating is converting to a Charter school. Beth asked whether WCS would still want to leave the district if it didn't threaten the school's closure? One problem is that the district agreement is being rewritten in such a way that the threat of closure would hang over the school year to year. Half of Warwick is fighting hard for WCS, and it doesn't make a lot of sense to stay in a district that has this attitude toward the school.

The Select Board member addressed Carl's question: the district is looking at a significant deficit every year for the next several years. In his opinion, the district officials don't seem to have the wherewithal to make the cuts they need to manage this problem successfully, so it doesn't make sense to stay in the district. Carl's follow-up: what within the Town can't WCS handle? Going it alone would be too uncertain because of Special Education costs, which vary significantly. Jennifer noted U#28 SPED costs are paid at the district level; each Town works that out with its local School Committee. Bethany added that schools also share some personnel (hiring the same teacher at half-time each, for example). Bruce added that budget reports and so on are handled at the Central Office.

The SB member asked about collective bargaining agreements: Jennifer answered we have four separate Agreements, one in each district. The SB member opined that part of the deficit stems from retirement benefits in place from their Agreement.

Where do we go from here to continue this conversation? We could come back, send any information you need, etc. JSC is welcome to ask any questions they have. Bethany noted that whatever we decide, we can't go back to the Towns to ask for more money in order to incorporate WCS. Johanna agreed: without being able to offer some clear benefit to the Towns, JSC can't really pursue the matter. The Warwick guests concurred; they don't want to be a burden, but rather a contributor. JSC thanked the guests for coming and promised to be in touch.

5. Budget and Personnel: No report.

6. Superintendent's Report:

Jennifer reported on her Mid-Cycle Goals and the upcoming Academic Calendar. She reviewed calendar details, which will be distributed to JSC. As for her Goals:

- 1) Integrating Universal Design for Learning: She and the Leadership Team have created a UDL Integration Team with two members from each school, facilitated by the Director of Learning Design. This team is conducting walkthroughs and workshops and is on target for the year's Goal.
- 2) Rewriting the Guidelines for Accommodation Plans: She's gathered information from other districts about their practices as well as from state bodies in order to create a new, living document that will be of service to the U#28 students.
- 3) Survey on School Climate and Culture: We got 98 responses to our survey, which was distributed to the school staff who attended the Professional Collaboration Day last fall. The Leadership Team is

analyzing the results and will report on them by the end of the year.

7. Director of Finance and Operations Report:

Bruce reported that he and Johanna went to Boston two weeks ago to participate in the Rural Day on the Hill. They met with representatives and got to speak with them about the unique challenges and problems that rural schools face. We have a windows and doors project underway at SRS. Shutesbury applied for an MSBA grant for a new roof and will be hearing back next month about that. It's been a stressful year for all the school in terms of budget; hopefully the state will step up to help us out. The U#28 budget will be tight this year. We've had to pay out for some PD that will be funded with grant monies that we expect are coming. Dan asked how much Shutesbury contributes to the U#28 budget: about \$160K. Bethany asked what in particular is tight about the budget: where are we suffering at the U#28 level? Bruce responded that we cut back on getting a new computer (some of our computers are outdated), and we have an EES employee come over to do maintenance in the building (we pay him, but he charges less than an outside contractor).

8. U#28 Policy Subcommittee:

Policy Update and Review

Lauren noted that the Subcommittee has reviewed several policies so far. Bethany clarified that U#28 policies don't apply to individual district policies; Policy AC has some confusing language because it uses "school district," but there *is* no school district at the Union level. Jennifer will look into the proper term to use here instead.

First Reading on:

- AC - Nondiscrimination
- ADDA - Background Checks
- ADD-R - DCJIS Model CORI Policy

9. School Updates:

Wendell/New Salem: Carla reported that about five teachers showed up during the Public Hearing section of the last SRSC meeting to praise Jennifer and to thank her for her work. We've chosen our SRS Community Action Award recipient. Saturday, April 6 at 9 a.m. is our 5K Pancake Walk/Run to raise money for Nature's Classroom. The second Saturday of April, we also collaborate with the Mahar Track team to promote Run 4 Kids at 100 Mile Club. Also at Mahar on June 10, Mahar X will be held (a fair showcasing all the Mahar student clubs and activities).

Leverett: Bethany reported that the Principal Search just got underway. Hopefully, we'll be interviewing candidates by April 8. There aren't a lot of overlapping candidates with the EES search. Bethany also attended the MCBA Books in Action event, which was greatly enjoyable. There were all sorts of creative events and games. PTO's putting out a Bingo Morning, where people can come have breakfast and play bingo. LSC is thinking about the possibility of bringing a grant writer position to U#28 who could serve all four schools.

Shutesbury: Dan reported that he attended the MCBA Books in Action event; it was great! The kids had a great time, everyone got a great tour, the Teacher Librarian did a wonderful job getting students involved in coming up with events, and everyone was excited about reading. Jennifer added that SES is receiving a state-wide award for its excellence in MCAS testing. A group of 4th Graders will be presenting at the next SSC meeting in the hopes of reintroducing chocolate milk to SES.

Erving: Erik reported that we have a new chef who creates wonderful, fresh food. The All-School Play is coming up ("all-school" means "every student") April 3, and everyone's invited; park at the bowling alley and walk up. The Principal Search is going well; they have two finalists who've done their site visits already. Jennifer thanked Erik and the Search Committee for their incredible work: hats off to them.

10. Future Items to Discuss:

Lauren requested that JSC members send her any questions they have for the WCS representatives. Johanna also requested that Jennifer prepare some reflections on how adding WCS would impact the Union and the Superintendent position. Lauren and Jennifer haven't been able to get answers on how the process would work because we share a lawyer with the Warwick school district. This is a conundrum. JSC went on to ponder several broad questions about the possibility of WCS joining U#28.

- Next Meeting Date: Monday, May 20, 2019, 7:00 p.m. at Central Office (if needed)
- Joint Supervisory Policy Sub-Committee: Monday, May 20, 2019, 6:45 p.m. at Central Office (if needed)
- Budget & Personnel Committee: TBD (if needed)

11. Adjournment at 8:30:

CARLA MOVED TO ADJOURN. DAN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.