

# Lunenburg Public Schools



I, **Superintendent of Schools**

## SPECIAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, July 31, 2019

Regular Session, 6:30 p.m.,

LMS Collaborative Room #D132

### MINUTES

#### School Committee

Heather Sroka, Chair-present  
Wendy Bertrand, Vice Chair-present  
Brian Lehtinen, Secretary-present  
Carol Archambault-present  
Jim LaVeck-absent

#### Superintendent

Dr. Kate Burnham

#### Business Manager/ HR Director

Michael Cassidy

#### Recording Secretary

Liz Petersen

#### Guests:

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*In accordance with the requirements of Open Meeting Law, please be advised that this meeting is being recorded and broadcast over the Lunenburg Public Access channel.*

1. *Call to Order*- Ms. Sroka called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.
2. *Chair's Report*: Explained the two sessions of public comment, length would be 21 minutes for first, second would be 10 minutes. Attorney Tim Norris introduced to answer questions from committee members. Mr. Lehtinen appointed as time tracker of public comment.
3. *Public Comment*-Agenda Items-Ms. Dawn Marie Ayles- expressed appreciation for extended comment time. Explained parents have coordinated as a group about concerns and want to provide additional information from their perspective. Understand that some people may not have impact of this proposal in their own home. Previously sent list of Central Mass school districts that utilize Dee Bus. Commented that the bus company works for the school district and therefore adheres to any procedure the district implements. Have surveyed parents with active document having 46 comments. Knows intention of school system is safety for children, but wants to foster children's independence. If deemed appropriate for their child to get off the bus independently, this should be the parent's decision and not the school.  
Mr. Chris Sullivan: - has children in the fourth and sixth grade, both he and his wife work at least 45 minutes away, use extended day. Changes seen recently with increase in price, led to decision that son is responsible to be let off the bus. Daughter going into 6<sup>th</sup> grade could go home early and meet him but this would be detriment to her after school activities. Parents feel they are losing their rights. Noted no cost analysis for change to families, next step would have been a survey, but no survey done.  
Peter Beardmore asked to extend public comment until public are done speaking. School Committee needs to respect time people have taken to come speak. Time for SC to take a leadership position, not go to lawyers who have nothing to do with policy as they do not know about Lunenburg as a community. Responsibility of family once a student gets off bus. A waiver can be provided if we do not agree.  
Stephanie Quinn-3 children. Concerns of timing of proposal, make determinations of childcare in winter/spring, and this decision was made after that time. Dramatic proposal in summer caused anxiety and financial impact. Wants more time for consideration of proposal as these are considerable changes. Late option will cost parents much more. Provide more time to gather more information.  
Mother of two works full time in Watertown, upset with changes. Adjusted schedule but extended day times still a problem. Plan for younger son is to be met by older son, but does not want to limit activities. DCF worker by trade-parents should have decision to determine when to leave child at home w/o considering it neglect. Hard for working families. Needs to be wiggle room. Asking for reconsideration of proposal.  
Mary Foyle- Extended day changes difficult, came very late, plan for family not even set yet. School is supposed to teach children to be independent. Understand there are implications and liability, but have to look at big picture for families. Gone over plan for kids for what to do if not home.  
Elizabeth Lane-There are younger children we need to be aware of when considering the impact. Her daughter has learned about responsibility, not right of school district to make that decision.

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Nicole-mother of three children, will not be getting off the bus, but school does not have right to make that decision. Nowhere in the law does it say that 10 years of age is allowed to be the cut off for kids to be left alone. Change for Extended day drastic effect, left all families scrambling. This is not a school decision, it is a parental decision.

5 *Review and Approve Warrants & Line Item Transfer*-THES Ms. Archambault made motion to accept, Ms. Sroka seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

6 *Review and Approve Minutes*

- June 5, 2019 Regular Session-motion to approve by Ms. Bertrand, Mr. Lehtinen seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

7 *Superintendent's Report*

- Registration Updates-Conference Keynotes, focused on equity. Love to see if feasible to bring speaker to area. Enrollment update, no spike in any grade level. School Choice- 8 students in grade 9, one 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Extended Day numbers AM-92 to 84, PM most days full, 2 on waitlist Thursday. Monday 3 spots available, Friday, 5 spots. One hour option- Primary no registrations submitted, THES AM 1 student registered. PM Primary 3 students M, W no students on other days. THES PM 5 students M,T,W, 4 students Thurs, Fri. This option may not be self-sustainable at each school, move those students to TCP. Based on number of part time registrations, opened another classroom to accommodate all students who submitted a registration. Conducted water testing, some lead and copper this year. At this point, have had conversation with water dept. will take a closer look at levels. Letters to families will go out and post on website. Post fact sheets on lead/copper. First day on August 27<sup>th</sup>, school closed on August 30<sup>th</sup> and Sept. 2<sup>nd</sup> for Labor Day. MS sports, introducing reduced fee based on a percentage-gave totals. School lunch program due to audit, increased to \$3 fee for lunch pricing. Hiring update, two new secretaries-gave bios. Chapter 70 funds, Lunenburg increase 3.1% which is 231,668 increase. Contract with Dee Bus signed by Town Manager. Mr. Lehtinen asked about increase-go to town or school directly, town decides appropriation.

8 *New Business*

*Discussion*

a. Personnel Report-Mr. Cassidy gave recent updates on resignations, new hires, retirement-Deb Hitchcock paraprofessional. Review and assessed this report. Ms. Bertrand made motion to approve, Mr. Lehtinen seconded. Hiring update-2 current open teaching positions, ready to receive offers. Will be closing new hires after that.

*Action*

a. Non-Affiliated Salary Schedule Update-reflects the adjustment to minimum wage requirements. Will be back again at the end of school year with another change. This aligns mostly with entry level positions for minimum wage. This also bumps steps to align the shift. Proposed new position called Program Aide-located in Extended Day program between admin and senior aides. Hope to recruit some trained paras for restraint training. Will hold responsibility as supervisor and leader when Coordinator/Director are not there. Ms. Sroka asked if it was in budget? YES. Recommending approval. School café substitutes are paid minimum wage, not on salary schedule. This will expedite process. Ms. Archambault moved to accept, Mr. Lehtinen seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

b. Donation-parent of graduated senior had balance left on lunch account Superintendent recommended applying to LHS or the senior class. School Committee decided to apply to the largest balance districtwide. Ms. Bertrand made motion to accept, Mr. Lehtinen seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

c. Primary/Elementary Dismissal & Bus Procedures – at June 19<sup>th</sup> meeting SC approved procedures for bus. K-5 students must be met by someone (6<sup>th</sup> grade or older) at the bus stop. Possible to receive student standing at front door waving and not physically present at bus stop. Remove original consent form required. As long as someone is there to receive the child. Parents in Grade 5 will have option to sign consent to have their child get off bus alone, not with younger children. Only grade 5 students will be allowed to walk alone. Superintendent gave example of student across street being able to walk alone with administration supervision. Need to balance school policy with parental right. We could not take into account every person's needs. The age of 10 based on the school's judgement was reasonable, Ms. Archambault questioned whether school district is responsible for child from door to door. Tim Norris answered, not exactly. Determination on when and how they get off bus is a district determination. Mr. Lehtinen questioned liability to district. Not lawyer driven decision, policy decision. Lawyers look at worst case scenario-can't prevent all bad things from happening, but if question is raised to school about a decision to leave child unattended, district would have to answer for that. If parents sign waiver-law is that parents can waive simple negligence around voluntary activities. Received some feedback from Dee Bus, as they were involved in our discussion. They feel if they could reasonably implement, it was our decision as a school. Mentioned accurately implementing process and procedure, how will we know which students on bus (4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>) this applies to? Will provide list to every bus driver and tag as a backup identifier. Mr. Lehtinen interested in exploring 4<sup>th</sup> grade as a waiver also. Understand that some people are comfortable, but from a negligence or liability standpoint school is not comfortable implementing this for 4<sup>th</sup> grade. This is a bus procedure, not policy. Ms.

Archambault commented that being a School Committee member means their first responsibility is to the students of the district. When reviewing a decision, always have to look at lens of children and how this would affect them. Heaven forbid anything happened to a child, but if there was litigation, the school budget is so tight, a major incident could affect a whole school of kids for a liability case. Be very cautious of liability piece affecting all children. Ms. Bertrand concurred. Hard to put a stand on age of child for consent. Families need to look for other options in childcare. Mr. Lehtinen commented that he would like to see consent for third and fourth grades. Possibly adding guidelines for exception when needed. Ms. Sroka challenged this regarding a case by case analysis of students and how responsibility varied. Ms. Bertrand commented that from a manpower standpoint, this was not possible, and every other decision cannot be based upon individual need. Dr. Burnham said implementing a daily change would have a negative impact on bus drivers, especially if there were substitutes. Currently Town has had no cases of liability regarding this. Mr. Lehtinen asked, from liability standpoint, would liability increase with 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders added? Attorney Norris commented that research from other states indicated that 10 years old is a defensible age. If you expand it too far, how difficult is it to implement the policy? Increases risk. Ms. Archambault made a motion to accept Superintendent's proposal as submitted. Ms. Bertrand asked if we should review procedures again. Superintendent indicated that they could but legal language will not change, we have considered all questions, concerns, arguments, do not know how prolonging this will have a different outcome. Additional options for parents were considered and instituted including the one hour options before and after school. Tried to provide parents with some level of flexibility while protecting district from liability. Following that we heard that practice was going on where parents were allowing younger children to get off bus alone. We were forced to look at that practice then and make a decision as to whether we were comfortable with this or needed to add additional parameters. All of these decisions ensued because parents asked for additional options. Intention was to provide parents with flexibility. When this practice occurred previously, was not well communicated, not sure when this occurred. Now need to implement practices for safety of students and liability. To clarify, Dawn Marie Ayles, mentioned communication was sent in December by Heidi Champagne, which did not mandate parent presence at bus stop. Not arguing about independence for children, as it is a parent right, but comes down to looking at big picture for a recommendation for all children for safety and successful implementation to reduce errors. Dr. Burnham indicated we have an obligation to adopt policies and procedures focused on the safety of the children. Ms. Sroka motioned to accept dismissal & bus procedures as proposed, Ms. Bertrand seconded. Vote: Three committee members approved, one committee member declined, one committee member absent.

9 Old Business

*Action*

- a. FY20 Calendar Update-Mr. Santry moved date of Washington DC Trip. Often return late Friday night, graduation next day. Many parents have children that are graduating. Will be less congested in Washington a week earlier. Had been going during Memorial Day weekend, this will give families long weekend. Recommend approval by the Superintendent. Motion to approve by Ms. Bertrand, seconded by Mr. Lehtinen. Vote: Unanimous.
- b. Joint Meeting with Finance Committee & Board of Selectmen:  
Approached by committees to move forward with scheduling a date & meeting. Mr. Lehtinen made a motion to set joint meeting with Planning Board and BOS, Ms. Bertrand seconded. Vote: Unanimous.

10. *Public Comment*-Open-Dawn Marie Ayles expressed her disappointment, advocate for safety of children, cannot as a taxpayer believe that parental rights are being affected when deciding options for children. Peter Beardmore-appreciate time spent on this subject by School Committee and Superintendent, have been receptive to his calls and emails. All he wants is what is best for children. As a newly appointed member of Finance Committee, will bring SC news back to Finance Committee. There were a number of hires discussed and water testing. Anticipating any mitigation?  
Mary Foyle- would look at case by case basis for families, as every situation is different.  
Chris Sullivan- Discontent, took a month to receive a response. Frustrating. Email sent by Dr. Burnham, no cost analysis, or survey sent. Extended Day new fee structure is now costing family like 2 children last year. Parents relied on procedure communicated in December by Heidi and now have to scramble quickly.  
Stephanie Quinn-discontent with process, extremely difficult with timeline and financial impact. If making these decisions that affect families, need to be given in plenty of time.  
Does the option of a waiver cover the district if it is a parental right? Basically, this is not about what parents do with kids in their own homes. This waiver liability is tied to defensibility to the policy. If policy is flawed, more risk. Not grossly negligent procedure. Parents who had to sign their kids up for five days for Extended Day, can they now only have three? Answer is No. Motion to extend the public comment period from Mr. Lehtinen.  
Michelle Belleza-Commented that the School Committee and Superintendent have a hard job. Started teen center so

children would have places to go after school. Now worried they are going to lose kids because they have to get siblings off the bus. Taking options away from older children. No one has reached out as to safety concerns in Extended Day. Need to figure out schools responsibility vs. parent responsibility. Frustrated can't help more, want to, and if was approached earlier may have been able to Overreaching letting school decide parents responsibility.

11. Reports-none noted
12. Topics for Future Discussion
13. Adjournment-Ms. Sroka thanked all the public for taking the time to attend and being respectful, including people Reaching out through email. Motion to adjourn by Ms. Bertrand, seconded by Mr. Lehtinen. Vote Unanimous. Adjourned at 8:45p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Liz Petersen