

**Hudson School District
School Board Meeting
Approved Minutes**

October 4, 2021

Hills Memorial Library, 18 Library Street
Hudson, NH 6:30 pm

In attendance:

Board Members

Gary Gasdia, Chairman
Diana LaMothe, Vice-chair
Ethan Beals
Mike Campbell
Gretchen Whiting

SAU Staff

Larry Russell, Superintendent of Schools
Rachel Borge, Director Special Services
Jen Burk, Business Administrator
Kim Organeck, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction
Terry Wolf, Director Strategic Engagement & Communication

CALL TO ORDER: (00:17)

Mr. Gasdia called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

PUBLIC INPUT (00:56)

Ms. LaMothe referenced policy BEDH in encouraging Hudson residents to share feedback with the Board on agenda items.

Sean O'Leary of 26 Robin Drive was concerned about the School Board usurping the role of parents regarding a school mask mandate. He was concerned about: child depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide, as children were told to wear masks to fear a virus that did not pose a large threat; health effects from wearing dirty face masks; and developmental effects on children not being able to read enunciation of words and facial cues. He felt that mask mandating was politically motivated.

Fumi Otaku of 17 Garrison Farm Road mentioned that Health Canada issued a warning about blue and gray disposable face masks that contained an asbestos-like substance associated with early pulmonary toxicity. The masks were not tested for effectiveness or safety and caused plastic fiber, and sometimes fiberglass, inhalation and over time would remain in lungs and cause harm. He felt that parents should push back and demand science and data. He favored having no mask mandate and having parents decide.

Tony Lekas of 30 Barrett Hill Road asked about the citizen petition and the process. Mr. Gasdia replied that the petition asked the Board to hold a special election; as an SB2 town, a deliberative session would be held followed by a Town vote. Tonight, the Board would discuss what action to take on the petition.

Patrick Quinlan of 10 Harley Street asked the Board to honor the September 17, 2021 petition allowing citizens to vote on masks being optional. He noted that the RSA was law and petitioners wanted their voices heard (for parents to make decisions on children's mask-wearing).

Linda Bianchi of 12 Castro Lane is a mother and respiratory therapist who said that masks could not filter the tiny particles of Covid-19. She mentioned possible issues with mask-wearing such as headaches and brain fog and felt that parents knew their children and should decide on them wearing masks or not. She suggested having parents sign something for their child not to wear a mask

Randy Brownrigg of 2 Little Hales Lane in Hudson was concerned that this had not been done before and the RSA was unclear of the direction. He suggested consulting with Bill Gardner at the State Department. Mr. Gasdia informed that the Board received the petition and consulted with legal advisors. The decision in front of the Board tonight was to have a Town election or not. Superintendent Russell stated that he would be willing to consult with anyone and that Concord was contacted.

At 6:50pm, Gretchen Whiting made a motion to allow three people to speak (as the 15-minute public input session had ended). Diana LaMothe seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0.

Craig Powers of 31 Cedar Street stated that he signed the petition with "misgivings." He felt that policy was being made based on the number of Covid-19 cases. He proposed that the metric be reconsidered such as looking at hospitalizations and deaths of children up to age 19 and make the petition inapplicable.

Peggy Huard of 13 David Drive supported the petition. She was concerned about there being no Board secretary and meeting minutes being just a transcription of motions (not a summary of meetings) and people being directed to watch videos of the Board meetings. She also had concern about the increase in the snowplowing contract. The Town offered to do the work for \$25,000 five years ago (vs. \$135,000 for contracting it out) and she felt this was not cost-effective to taxpayers.

The Board gave consensus to hear more public input.

(33:19) Mark _____ (no address given) felt that a Town vote should be held regarding mask-wearing. He was concerned about the effects on children and how they were being taught, for example not seeing people's mouths when they talk or understanding people's speech while wearing masks. He hoped the Board would hear the input and do what was right for children.

Suzanne Dozois of 25 St. Anthony Street referred to the survey taken in August in which the majority did not want a mask mandate and was concerned that these people were not listened to. Though she understood that care was being taken for students, parents should ultimately make decisions for them. She wondered if RSA 197-2 could be held or changed – to make mask-wearing optional but mandatory in situations such as in hallways. She felt that everyone should work together for the sake of children. She had a separate question about students being able to play basketball in the gyms.

GOOD NEWS UPDATE (42:43)

Ms. Organeck reported that there was good collaboration between administration and staff to help English language learners get the services they needed.

POLICIES (44:13)

Ms. Organeck mentioned that there was an adjustment to Policy KCD – Public Gifts & Donations: the Board approval amount changed from \$500 to \$1,000. There was discussion about adding a statement that approvals could be done electronically like with manifests. The Board favored tabling the vote on Policy KCD for revision.

Diana LaMothe made a motion to accept the following policies as presented:

- **KA/IJO - School, Family & Community Partnership**
- **KB - Title I Family and Community Engagement**
- **KDA - Public Information Program**
- **KDCA - Use of Students in Public Information Program**

Ethan Beals seconded the motion.

Motion passed 5:0.

SNOW PLOWING BID (47:06)

The District was in the third year of a three-year contract on landscaping services and there was not much of a possible consideration to work on the contract. It was unclear if the Town still offered to do snow plowing for the District. A prior arrangement was that the Recreation Center would use the District's gyms and the Town would plow the school properties. In 2016, the Department of Public Works (DPW) asked for \$25,000 to defray the cost of extra salt, etc., but the District did not grant the money so the DPW stopped plowing for the District. An outside company was used for about \$75,000. There had been issues with the company regarding timing, communication and sand/salt treatment applications. Expectations were laid out in the contract. Issues were addressed as they occurred. It was suggested that the contract have safeguards for the District. The contract would be for three years, with optional year four and five. It was suggested that there be a clear understanding of expectations between the School and Town joint committee that would review cost-savings strategies. There was discussion about the current contractor, TDD Earth Tech, and having a one-year contract because of familiarity in the school properties and in order for the joint committee to review cost savings. However, the bid went out as a three-year contract with the option of two additional years; the vendor could reject an amended contract. Another positive was aligning landscaping and plowing together. There was concern about not having a vendor in place before snow started to fall.

Ethan Beals made a motion to approve TDD Earth Tech for a one-year plowing contract at \$96,000, second by Ms. Whiting. After no discussion, Chair Gasdia called for a vote. Motion failed 2:3 with Ms. LaMothe, Mr. Gasdia, and Ms. Whiting voting nay.

Diana LaMothe made a motion to award the snow removal contract to Inner City Materials starting with FY22 in the amount of \$135,950, for three years with the option of years four and five. Gretchen Whiting seconded the motion. Motion passed 4:1 with Ethan Beals voting nay.

ALVIRNE RENOVATION (1:04:57)

The Board discussed the possibility of putting the Alvirne renovation on a warrant article in March 2022 or at a later date. Architects at Lavallee Brensinger were consulted by the Capital Committee. The project would be the original plan from 2020 that included separating the parent pick-up/drop-off loop from an independent bus loop (this was a high traffic area). A slideshow was presented showing other parts of the plan including: a new secure main entrance; renovated music room, cafeteria, kitchen and locker rooms; and a new auditorium near the main entrance. The original plan and costs were subject to change as public (and Budget Committee) input was received. Part of the mission statement is to provide a safe, dynamic environment. The District would be applying for school building aid in January 2022; if granted, construction would begin in July 2023. Of concern with waiting was the increase in costs. Interest rates might rise also. Fundraising could be explored as well. The Board cannot fundraise. Board consensus was to wait a year and get information and public feedback from the Town, though it was agreed the project was a big priority. A calendar of target dates would be drafted for public input in October 2022 and a warrant article in March 2023.

CITIZEN PETITION FOR SPECIAL ELECTION (1:18:36)

The Board received a petition from a citizen with 146 signatures. Signature verification was ongoing through the clerk's office. The petition was to change the Board's decision to vote for mask use as given by the plan that was presented at the beginning of this school year. Counsel was sought and the secretary of State's office was contacted. Deputy Secretary of State Dave Scanlan had stated that citizens could petition to hold a special election and advised ensuring the petition was non-binding or binding. RSAs 197-2, 189-15 (Regulations) and 189-1A (Duty to Provide Education) had been reviewed also. Costs (from \$9,000 - \$12,000, split between Town and District), timing, and logistics of holding a special meeting were discussed (two voting locations were required when the District had one, counters, moderator, police, etc.). Even though the Board wanted to hear public input, the results of such a special meeting vote would be advisory only and non-binding based on legal counsel input.

Mr. Russell noted the positive level of civility shown by people in Hudson and that he was willing to have conversations based on input received tonight. The plan had been developed with consultation by the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and local health authorities and legal advisors. He spoke about his efforts to see the side other than his own regarding mask-wearing and he realized people disagreed in either case and science was used in multiple arguments. It was important to compromise and that it seemed that the number (of Covid cases) were in a positive trend.

Diana LaMothe made a motion to deny the call for a special meeting dated September 17, 2021 on a matter that is not in the voters' purview. Ethan Beals seconded the motion. The motion passed 5:0.

CO-CURRICULAR NOMINATIONS (1:39:18)

Ethan Beals made a motion to approve the co-curricular nominations as presented. Gretchen Whiting seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0.

Event dates would be made available to the Board in case they wanted to attend.

SKI CLUB (1:40:34)

Ethan Beals made a motion to approve the Alvirne ski advisors. Diana LaMothe seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0.

MANIFESTS (1:41:23) Recommended action: Make necessary corrections and sign. These are all set.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES (1:41:54)

Gretchen Whiting made a motion to approve the minutes from July 19, August 2, and August 16, 2021 as presented. Diana LaMothe seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0.

COMMITTEE REPORTS (1:42:41)

Ms. LaMothe (Budget Committee liaison) noted that the current committee preferred to have requested information emailed versus being part of the Board agenda packet; this would be done as well as continuing to add the information in the agenda packets. The SAU81 website contained information as well.

INDOOR USE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT FACILITIES (1:44:00)

There was discussion about indoor usage of school District facilities. Last year, there were no permits for school facility use. There had been discussion with the Recreation Director and Fire Chief and it was determined that it could be revisited after seeing how things progressed (with Covid cases) in schools and in town in general. A concern was having people coming in from various towns. The Recreation Department was internal to Hudson and could be allowed to use the facilities, however, there was concern about allowing for one and not others such as Scouts. Upkeep was a question as well.

REPORTS TO THE BOARD

SUPERINTENDENT (1:50:05)

Mr. Russell reported the difficulty in filling part-time positions such as lunch monitors, kitchen workers and a School Board secretary. A transcription service was being utilized which was verbatim. Another option was to just record motions in the minutes. HCTV recordings of meetings were also available. There were two levels of the transcription service: one that was AI that pulled out items and the second was a person reviewing the video and confirming the information in the transcription. The Board would need to review everything. Of concern was the cost of transcription vs. having a person take minutes. There was concern, as expressed with the past School Board, of posting transcripts of meetings which potentially left things out. Suggestions included noting the times of item changes in minutes and having the Strategic Communications person take minutes. This would be revisited.

Mr. Russell reported that there was a United Way donation of masks. They were thanked for being an excellent community partner. There was a recent TikTok challenge to destroy things in restrooms, film it and then post it. This was an issue at the middle and high schools where there was damage. Policies on consequences were followed. There were other monthly challenges including slapping a teacher – this would not be tolerated. Any violation of law would result in calling the police. The District was short-staffed in Technology and other staff and substitutes. He said Hudson was an excellent place to work. Upcoming events included: Teacher Workshop Day (October 8th) and the next Board meeting on October 18th.

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT (2:06:51)

Ms. Organek stepped in to substitute teach grade six at Memorial on Friday.

DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL SERVICES (2:07:51)

Ms. Borge reported that work continued in program redesign for the elementary level program serving the needs of students with emotional behavioral challenges. This work has inspired the high school to do the same. The team started by re-branding the program name. The name RISE was selected to stand for Reaching Independence through Support and Education. Next the group will begin looking at look at entrance and exit criteria.

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR (2:10:05)

Ms. Burk noted that food service was also short-staffed and she acknowledged the new director and the good work being done there since the start of the school year. There was an increase in meals (which were free) and more a la carte options were being offered.

CORRESPONDENCE: TRUST FUND SUMMARY AS OF JUNE 30, 2021 (2:12:03)

The Trustees had sent a report for year-end value as of June 30, 2021. The main accounts were: school renovation, capital reserve, school emergency fund (about \$177,000), and special education fund (around \$580,000).

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS (2:12:47)

Board of Selectmen: Kara Roy thanked people for their input and she hoped to see more if it at the various Town departments. She noted that, when thinking of holding a special meeting, only 14.9 % of registered voters voted last March.

Ms. Whiting agreed that it was nice to see public and wished there were more on a regular basis and that everyone's views were appreciated.

Ms. LaMothe spoke about social media and suggested that the best way to get information was to go to the SAU81 website as well as other Town resources. Referencing Tik-Tok challenges, she mentioned a social media parent monitoring resource named [parentsforsaferchildren.org](https://www.parentsfor saferchildren.org).

Mr. Gasdia said that children were in school and learning in new ways with new experiences, as well as sports and extracurricular activities. The situation was better than last year.

(2:20:01) **NON-PUBLIC SESSION** PER RSA 91-A: 3 II b (The hiring of any person as a public employee) and c (Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of the body or agency itself, unless such person requests an open meeting)

At 8:50 pm, Gretchen Whiting made a motion to go into nonpublic per RSA 91-A: 3 II b (The hiring of any person as a public employee) and c (Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of the body or agency itself, unless such person requests an open meeting). Ethan Beals seconded the motion. Roll call vote. Motion passed 5:0.

Ethan Beals moved to approved the nomination of Stephanie Lafreniere to the position of assistant principal at Hudson Memorial School, second by Gretchen Whiting. Motion passes 5-0.

Gretchen Whiting moved to approve accept a letter of resignation, second by Mike Campbell. Motion passes 5-0.

Ethan Beals moved to deny a Manifest Educational Hardship request, second by Gretchen Whiting. Motion passes 5-0.

The Board discussed a personnel matter; no action taken.

SAU staff dismissed at 9:22 pm.

The board discusses personnel matters.

Gretchen Whiting moved to exit non-public and adjourn, second by Ethan Beals. Motion passes 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:58 pm.

Submitted by:

Susan DeFelice (public)

Kim Organek (1st beginning of non-public)

Diana LaMothe (end of non-public)