



**HUDSON SCHOOL DISTRICT ♦ Hudson, New Hampshire
Hills Memorial Library, 18 Library Street**

**6:00 pm Non-public Session
6:30 pm Regular Meeting
 Non-public Session**

**Hudson School Board
Minutes of September 20, 2021**

Present:

Gary Gasdia, Chair
Diana LaMothe, Vice-chair
Ethan Beals, Member
Mike Campbell, Member
Gretchen Whiting, Member
Kara Roy, Board of Selectmen Liaison
Larry Russell, Superintendent
Kim Organek, Assistant Superintendent
Rachel Borge, Director of Special Services
Jen Burk, Business Administrator

A. Call to Order

Mr. Gasdia called the meeting to order; Mr. Campbell led the Pledge of Allegiance.

B. Non-public Session

Mr. Beals made a motion to enter a non-public session according to RSA 91-A: 3(c) at 6:00 pm, second by Ms. Whiting. Ms. Whiting, aye, Mr. Beals, aye, Mr. Campbell, aye, Ms. LaMothe, aye, Mr. Gasdia, aye. Motion passes 5-0.

A parent requested a meeting with the School Board to present her perspective regarding her son and why she is seeking to appeal to the School Board for a Manifest Educational Hardship (MEH). Mr. Russell explained why he declined the petition for MEH, presenting the district's position regarding circumstances in this case and legal guidance regarding MEH requests.

The School Board asked questions and asked for copies of emails that were referenced. The Board then asked for an extension to October 5, 2021 before providing a written response to the parent regarding the appeal for a MEH so that time would be allowed to review additional information received through October 4, 2021. The parent agreed with the extension of time for the School Board to provide a response.

The Board will make a decision regarding this matter in a non-public session of the October 4, 2021 meeting.

Motion to exit non-public at 6:26 pm by Mr. Beals, second by Ms. Whiting. Motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Gasdia call the (public) meeting to order at 6:30 pm. Mr. Campbell led the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. Public Input

Shawn Clark, 65 Wason Road: To expedite future donations, Mr. Clark requested an increase in the value limit for donations that do not require board approval. It is currently \$500 and he is in the process of securing 80 box fans for Hills Garrison and Nottingham West totaling \$1600 but cannot do anything until the board approves the donation acceptance.

Mr. Gasdia thanked him for the donation.

Without closing public input, Mr. Beals motioned to move up #3 under new business (Donation of Box Fans), second by Mr. Campbell. Motion passes 5-0.

Mr. Gasdia told the audience that the board did receive some comments since the last meeting, mostly about masks. Comments were fairly split between the current policy of them being optional vs. making them mandatory for everybody. With that, he closed public input.

D. Donation of Box Fans (moved up from F3)

There was a brief discussion about the amount and Ms. Whiting asked that it be noted that Policy KCD is in the process of being revised by the Policy Committee.

Mr. Beals moved to accept the donation in the amount of \$2400, second by Mr. Campbell. Motion passes 5-0.

E. Good News

Ms. Organek shared a slide show from the Summer Scholars Program. Comments and survey results showed that parents were in favor of the program, its length, the length of the school day; it was both fun and beneficial to their kids with them learning a lot. The teachers also had favorable comments. One of the big hits for the kids was Kona Ice on Wednesdays and the trip to Canobie Lake Park.

Mr. Campbell asked to see the survey results. Mr. Gasdia asked about tracking these students to see if there is a marked difference for those who participated as compared to those who didn't. He also asked about making this an annual offering. Ms. Organek stated that the program will run next summer and was budgeted for using ESSER funds and that the iReady diagnostic will indicate the benefit of the program to those who attended. They should have less "summer-slide because they were in school until the end of July.

F. New Business

1. 2021-2022 Tuition Rate: Tuition rates are set based on the DOE-25. Last year's was \$16,350 and Ms. Burk recommends setting this year's at \$16,500.

Ms. LaMothe moved to set the tuition rate at \$16,500 with a second by Mr. Beals. Motion passes 5-0.

2. Extracurricular Nominations

Mr. Beals asked what Little Buddies is. It is when high school students are paired with Hills Garrison students. Ms. Whiting asked if this could happen at Nottingham West in the future. Ms. Borge responded that that would require transportation and part of the reason Hills Garrison was selected is because kids can just walk. We can look at that morning period of time when our high school kids

are in session, but our elementary school kids are not, or it could be an after-school period of time when the elementary school kids are in session. There's a little bit of flexibility in the schedule there without having to tap into additional transportation resources.

Ms. Whiting moved to approve the nominations as provided in the agenda and in the hand-carry, second by Mr. Campbell. Motion passes 5-0.

3. Box Fan Donation (already addressed)

4. Palmer Center Part-time Employee Requests

Mr. Russell presented a request for three part-time employees - a culinary aide, natural resources/forestry aide, and a bus driver. There was discussion of the need for the positions, especially the bus driver since First Student is currently covering the route. There was also concern that any of the positions would be difficult to fill at \$15/hr. The consensus was to increase it to \$20/hr.

Ms. Whiting moved to approve the culinary aide and the natural resources/forestry aide part-time positions with the capability of up to \$20 per hour, second by Ms. LaMothe. Motion passes 4-1 with Mr. Beals voting nay.

5. Location and Police Presence

Mr. Russell stated that Hudson residents who attend board meetings have been respectful, asking for permission to speak and to add items to the agenda. There have been other municipalities having a difficult time. He asked if this (Hills Memorial Library) is the best place to hold the meetings or if there should be flexibility to use another site. Police presence is an issue that has been brought up in a couple different superintendent meetings and it was a big topic in the public input webinar that the NH School Boards Association put on last Wednesday. He added this topic to the agenda to see if there's an interest in having a discussion on it.

Mr. Beals stated that he thinks that so far, we've done things the right way. If there is a meeting that is really packed, the board could call a timeout and move or reschedule the meeting. He also cited how lucky we are to have this space and for HCTV to have a setup here. Ms. Whiting and Ms. LaMothe also agreed that the current arrangement works well.

Ms. LaMothe asked what the conclusion on the police presence topic was during the NHSBA webinar. Mr. Russell replied that districts had concerns with the authority of the police at board meetings as different departments had different stances on it. Some will intervene if there's a disruption where others would not unless there was almost a physical assault. Mr. Russell wanted to the board to know that if the board has a perceived need for police presence, we could do that. Ms. Whiting asked if there's been a discussion with our police department to see when they would step in. Mr. Russell replied that he thinks that our PD's attitude would be to deescalate and work from there on out. Mr. Gasdia mentioned that when we recently had them at a board meeting held at the Hudson Community Center (HCC), their goal was not to escalate anything so it's a high threshold. He reiterated that our citizens are respectful. If we see something on the agenda that could be a big deal, we go for the HCC but it might be worth having a backup. Using the HCC can sometimes be tough to get, such as during basketball season.

6. Snowplowing Bid Award

Ms. Burk shared that there were five responses to the RFP for snow removal services. The first bidder did not meet the requirements. The second has been our provider but we've struggled with

their service and do not recommend extending another contract to them. The other three bidders did meet the requirements. Inner City Materials has really good solid references and was the lowest of the top three cost-wise. After speaking with John Pratte, our recommendation is to award the bid to Inner City Materials. We are looking at three years plus two additional option years. There's been talk about joint services with the town. We'd be covered for three years and then if there's something going on with the town, we could possibly start that in year four.

Ms. Burk addressed questions from the board regarding the services and cost. Mr. Beals suggested perhaps there would be cost savings if we went with Knott's Land Care who currently do our landscaping. He also asked what it would look like at the end of three years if we did it ourselves. Ms. Whiting asked if we had a contract price for Knott's to do both and if it's worth asking them to see if we can save money? Mr. Campbell asked how long we've used Knott's to which Mr. Russell replied that he believes it was four years ago. Mr. Gasdia agreed that we should contact Knott's to see what they can do for us. It sounds like we are tabling this until our next meeting; does that work from a time standpoint? Ms. Burk replied that it should be as long as the board decides so that if the company needs to purchase additional equipment or hire additional workers, they have time. Jen confirmed that the cost is per season, regardless of the number of storms. We will talk about this on the fourth.

7. Facilities Use Request – Haunted Hayride

Ms. Burk presented a request from Class Act to use the Hills House Field for the annual Haunted Hayride.

Mr. Beals moved to approve the request, second by Ms. Whiting. Motion passes 5-0.

8. Joint Cost Savings Committee

Mr. Gasdia shared that during a joint meeting between the Board of Selectmen and the School Board a decision was made to form this committee to see if as a team, money could be saved. There was such a committee formed previously that started, failed, restarted, and failed again. The committee will be restarted with the hope that it does not fail. It will include members of both boards and the library. Ms. Burk's help will be needed along with that of her counterpart for the town. The board discussed the makeup of the committee and frequency of meetings. Mr. Campbell and Ms. Whiting will be members.

9. Policies

Ms. Organek presented five policies for their first reading. Discussion ensued, particularly around policy KCD Public Gifts/Donations.

G. Recommended Action

Manifests are all set.

H. Committee Reports

1. Capital Improvement Plan

Ms. LaMothe provided an overview and shared the committee's goals such as preparing a list of high-priority capital needs that will serve as a resource for consideration. This is an evolving document and a brand-new committee. They've also developed a list of action items. One of the first meetings was with the Town Planner and Town Administrator. The committee wants public input which will happen in October. She talked about the budget committee visiting the schools when the time is right as seeing the buildings in person demonstrates the needs very well. Ms. LaMothe continued to describe some of the district's project needs.

Ms. Burk, per the board's request, had requested an updated design for Alvirne based on what we put to the voters two years ago. She outlined the options within the proposal. Discussion ensued including whether or not the district could go straight to the construction company instead of through the architect and what year this would go on the ballot. Costs of updates to the plan were also discussed as were building aid and ELC improvement needs.

Ms. LaMothe moved to accept the agreement from Lavallee Brensinger with option two selected, not option one at this point, second by Mr. Beals. Motion passes 5-0.

Mr. Gasdia commended Ms. LaMothe, Mr. Beals, and anyone else involved for their phenomenal work. Ms. LaMothe concluded by saying, "it's obvious we do want to mitigate the impact on the tax rate as we're managing warrant article decisions, but we do have to keep in mind our overarching goal is to create a safe and dynamic environment. That is stated in our mission statement. I really enjoyed doing this work. Again, school tours were a great eye-opener and all the work, all the input that we received was invaluable."

I. Reports to the Board

1. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Russell shared information on current COVID cases and changes in mask requirements within the district since the beginning of this school year. He is watching local numbers closely and will base decisions on the trends. This is something new for everyone and Mr. Russell asks that people remain patient as we go through building this process.

Mr. Russell shared that there was a petition delivered to our office for a special meeting to change the rules to "mask optional" for all students and staff. He has reached out to district attorneys and will update the board on October 4th. He wants to make sure we are doing this right as it is a new process and he wants to make the public aware that that's out there right now.

Important dates coming up include October 4th, board meeting; October 8th, teacher workshop day (no school for students); October 11th, no school for staff or students.

2. Assistant Superintendent's Report

Ms. Organek addressed the board. October 8th PD day.

About four weeks in now and we've noticed our little ones, especially, are getting used to getting into the swing of things, learning procedures, and learning how to sit in a space and stay there. Staff have been working very hard at getting those kids used to knowing the classroom procedures and protocols and their daily routines. This usually takes six weeks or longer.

Last Friday was Constitution Day and Citizenship Day, established in 2004. We are required by law to acknowledge that. Various activities were held throughout the district. At Hills Garrison, the 2nd graders watched the video "We the People" and learned some fun facts such as there are 4543 words, before amendments, in the Constitution.

3. Director of Special Services

Ms. Borge shared that 13 new staff members and existing staff were trained on Orton-Gillingham principles which is very exciting. She continued to explain what Orton-Gillingham is. Two other staff members will soon do another specifically designed reading training.

We've also had some challenges with staffing, especially at the middle and high schools. It is very difficult to find sufficient numbers of care professionals to fill our positions. It is easier with the younger grades. Our staff is working double duty. This is a time for patience as our staff are giving everything they have.

Ms. Borge also discussed COVID-related fallout with our preschool population. Many early intervention services have had to be done via telehealth which with a two-year-old is tricky. Remote evaluation is difficult. We have incoming three-year-olds that have greater needs than in the past which has a direct impact on our preschool professionals. They are doing an amazing job.

We are struggling to meet middle school speech and language needs and have had a position posted since spring. Now have a contract in place for a teletherapy provider. Not the preference but better than not having anyone. Families have been notified.

4. Business Administrator Report

Ms. Burk addressed the board. The National Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) had reached out to First Student, our regular transportation bus company about going green. Since we have new buses scheduled in the third year of our contract extension, they wanted to see what we might be able to do about going with electric buses. First Student is looking into this. It is very expensive to get electric buses, but there are grants available. Stay tuned.

Ms. Burk asked that the board consider an additional budget meeting between the October 18th and November 1st meetings. The board agreed and the additional meeting will be on October 25th.

J. Correspondence

1-5. Ms. Burk provided explanations to financial documents 1-5, FY21 Actuals, FY21 Audited Financials, FY22 Financial Report, School District Contract, and FY22 Revenue/Revenue Sources Summary. Ms. Whiting asked why the Budget Committee was asking for the information, commenting on the amount of time and effort that had to go into it. Ms. LaMothe replied that she believes they were trying to get information from both the town and district earlier (than when budget season arrives) and that they're trying to gain a better understanding. She agreed that it's a significant amount of work. Ms. Burk concurred but believes it was probably a useful exercise to have some more information available to not on the board and Budget Committee, but also the community in general. The contacts piece may feed into preparing for a conversation about how the default budget is set which is a number that cannot change.

Ms. LaMothe asked about the unassigned fund balance in the FY21 Audited Financials. Ms. Burk explained.

K. Board Member Comments

Ms. Roy welcomed Brett Gagnon to the Board of Selectmen, making it a full board which is very exciting. There are numerous vacancies on town boards. Please consider volunteering if you have time at night.

Mr. Campbell shared that the Cable Utility Committee met last week for the first time since around December of 2019. It was cool getting a tour of the new HCTV truck. They can go places and cover events all over town, including the 911 Memorial and football games. The ELC is holding a fundraiser for school spirit so you can get tees and hoodies and show your school spirit all over town. Thank you to everyone who contributed to public input and to those that will.

Ms. Whiting stated that it's nice to see everyone back in school and the beginning has gone well. When passing the elementary schools, I kids are outside. There are a lot of buses and safety is appreciated.

Mr. Beals thanked Ms. LaMothe for the tremendous amount of work along with other people including Ms. Burk, especially on the Capital Improvement Plan Committee. It's easy being on a committee with her (Ms. LaMothe) because she carries a heavy, heavy load.

Ms. LaMothe mentioned that a perk to being on the board is after three years, she was able to hand her daughter a diploma during graduation which was a great experience. A lot of work and a lot of benefits including getting to know people in the district and town. I went to a lot of Board of Selectmen and Budget Committee meetings so just want to plant a seed on that. There was a donation of backpacks delivered to preschool – grade 12 students prior to orientation. PTO presidents and vice-presidents helped distribute the backpacks. There was an event coordinated by Katie Buxton that got rained out, but they were still able to collect backpacks and supplies, around 20 to 40 for each school. Expressed gratitude for the work by Katie Buxton at the Hudson Speedway and also our Hudson PTOs.

Mr. Gasdia: I think this meeting started off on a very high note, not just the good news from our assistant superintendent. But it was fantastic to see a parent come up and be so involved and donate like that and ask us to raise our limit because there's more. Then, we see the bag. We hear about the backpacks, and we have the fundraiser going on at the ELC. I think one of the things that is a perk of being on the school board is you get to see a lot of that.

Yes, you get a lot of some of the things Mr. Campbell was alluding to and especially when there are some hot topics, but it's nice to see that. In whatever way you want to get involved, if you're a parent out there, whether it's making a donation we'll always accept. But showing up to your kids' schools, it's great to go back to the football games and see so many people there, see people out at different events. But find a way to get involved because that's really what makes all this really work.

We can sit around here. We can talk policy, we can talk this, we can talk that. At the end of the day, the school is all about the town. It's all about everybody getting involved. Everybody chipping in to do the best they can. I'll never say we're perfect. I will take every chance I can to find a way to say something to Mr. Russell about how we can do better. But it's nice seeing everybody back, as Ms. Whiting said. Think about where we were last year at this time and where we are now.

We should all feel really good. If we have to wear a mask, yes, it stinks. I don't want to wear one. Nobody wants to wear them. But we're back in school. We're going to football games. We're going to band. We're trying out for plays. We're doing after-school activities. We're complaining about too much homework. We're doing the things we're supposed to be doing. So, I think there's a lot of positive things happening in this district right now, and I hope people feel upbeat about that.

With that, we are about to go to non-public. Mr. Russell.

L. Non-Public

Mr. Beals moved to enter non-public under RSA 91-A (b), second by Ms. Whiting. Rollcall vote with all voting aye. Motion passes 5-0.

The board entered non-public at 9:22 pm.

Mr. Beals moved to approve the nominations, second by Mr. Campbell. Motion passes 5-0.

Mr. Campbell moved to accept the intent to retire letters, second by Ms. LaMothe. Motion passes 4-1 with Mr. Beals voting nay.

Mr. Beals moved to approve a request for a waiver of the separation pay date, second by Mr. Campbell. Motion passes 5-0.

Mr. Beals moved to accept a letter of resignation, second by Ms. Whiting. Motion passes 5-0.

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

Meeting adjourned at 10:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Gail Porter (public)

Diana LaMothe (6:00 non-public)

Kim Organek (9:22 non-public)