

THETFORD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT
Tuesday, September 20, 2016
Thetford Elementary School Art Room

APPROVED MINUTES

Charlie Buttrey convened the meeting at 6:33 p.m.. The following were present: Julie Acker, Charlie Buttrey, Shannon Darrah (arrived 6:49), Kristen Downey (arrived 6:40), Scott MacPhee, School Board; Kevin Petrone, TES Principal; Beth Cobb, OESU Superintendent

PUBLIC PRESENT: Stuart Rogers

AGENDA REVIEW: Agenda approved with amendments.

MINUTES REVIEW: MOTION: (Buttrey/MacPhee) moved/seconded to approve the minutes of the September 6, 2016 Board meeting as amended (unanimous approval).

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF ORDERS: MOTION: (Acker/MacPhee) moved/seconded to approve accounts payable orders #5648, 5622, 5625, and 5627, and payroll warrant # 5587 (unanimous approval).

PUBLIC COMMENT/CORRESPONDENCE: None

TA REPORT: The last meeting was short because most of the agenda was subcommittee meetings. There were 338 students on the opening day of school. A comparison was made between the number of Thetford students per grade level at TA vs. TES. There are ~8 more Thetford students per grade level at TA as compared with TES. Darrah posed, where were these students before coming to TA? Coincidentally, Petrone is working on an exit survey for families who have left TES. Special education numbers are rising at TA. It was discussed it has been getting harder to accept every student who applies because the special education staff is maxed out. Per State authorization, TA is allowed to charge extra for students who have IEPs. TA loses about \$3,000 per student with an IEP. Throughout the state, there are more students on special education plans, not just at TA. TA strives to be mindful of adding more cost in order to keep tuition level. A rise in TA tuition affects the TTSD budget. TA is closely following developments with the state board's rule making process for independent schools. A proposal that has come out of that is a recommendation that independent schools which receive public school funds must serve all areas of special education. The impact of such a proposal, if it were approved, would have a much large impact on schools like Sharon Academy.

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT (Kevin Petrone): Rori Kelleher and Doug Moody have bolted on an almost finished mural backdrop for the climbing wall. The back to school picnic is on September 22 at 5:15. School Psychologist Ray Chin will lead a Zen Archery ceremony to welcome the new playground. Last week was the first 5 day school week. Student support team meetings began last week during lunch to discuss students' social-emotional and academic needs. This group meets twice per month. On the alternate Mondays grade level clusters meet. There is a new schedule this year. All grades now have recess prior to lunch based on research that indicates children are quieter at lunch and eat more. There is also a new half hour block on Fridays when there are no specials so that the all school meeting can occur. There are only 12 all school meetings per year, one per classroom teacher. On the alternate Fridays with no school meetings, teachers get creative with grade level buddies and sing alongs in the younger grades. A giant elm tree at the front of the school is set to come down soon because it is dead. Parent Leif LaWhite plans to mill the boards for the TA design tech class to make shelves for TES. TA students will come to watch the milling. Petrone presented the attrition survey he is developing. He is gathering families' names now and then will send out the surveys. The exit survey is for students who left TES for other schools. Board members reviewed the survey.

DISCUSS DRAFT OF NON-RESIDENT TUITION POLICY UPDATES: Downey did not have a draft to present. She presented Board members with several example policies from other schools within and outside of OESU. She suggested comparing them with the recommended VSBA policy. Policies reviewed included Oxbow High School, Newbury Elementary, Bradford Elementary, and the VT School Board Association. Strafford's policy was not on their website. Norwich's policy is very different from the others, which are very similar to one another. Cobb commented she is not sure Norwich's policy is legal. Buttrey agreed. The VSBA policy was amended after the OESU schools' policies were drafted. Discussion followed regarding why TTSD's current policy is being re-evaluated. It has to be non-discriminatory, but TTSD Board's obligation is to the Thetford school children and to the tax payers.

Various examples of student special education scenarios were discussed and the high unlikelihood of these situations occurring was acknowledged. If accepting a child with special education needs creates a "financial burden" to the district, was discussed as policy language. There is no school choice in elementary school. It is parent paid tuition. However, who is responsible for additional special education costs? There is some reimbursement from the State for special education. The most money that could be spent on a student is \$35,000 - \$40,000 for a one on one aide. TTSD pays extra to TA for special education services.

Acker asked if there is someone at the State to assist the Board. Cobb stated there is a lawyer at the AOE who deals with special education. She volunteered to contact this person with TTSD's questions. Buttrey believes part of TTSD's current policy is illegal.

Darrah asked, how can TTSD be protected financially without discriminating? Downey stated a school can't be asked to create new services; this is a protection. TTSD would not be required to hire special staff, for example. Acker noted the recommended VSBA policy is an improvement over TTSD's current policy. Downey will have a draft for the October 18 meeting.

ACT 46 UPDATE: Downey stated there is no official update. She conversed socially with a Sharon board member about resuming the study group, but there has been no official word. Acker recommended being prepared to provide documentation of why TTSD doesn't "fit" with another district. Data would need to be provided to the AOE. The newly configured OESU is TTSD's default. TTSD would still be its own district. TTSD would need to make a case that it is ok to remain its own district within OESU, as well as prove efficiencies.

BOARD DISCUSSION OF PROJECT BASED LEARNING (PBL): Darrah noted MacPhee was not on the Board during the development of PBL. MacPhee wants to know the origin of PBL. Cobb recounted that PBL came about partly because there are many places within the TTSD strategic plan where PBL strategies apply. Board members were guided through the plan and noted places where PBL fits. PBL is not the curriculum. It is a strategy. The Board oversees curriculum. Cobb cited OESU's compact plan and summarized the collective vision written in 2013 by the OESU Board. Cobb noted that before it was called PBL, it had been termed Placed Based Learning, which is what TES has been implementing for a long time. PBL has made teachers and students accountable and training has added. Petrone stated the instructor who led TES's professional development in August, shared that TES is a prime school for PBL.

PBL has given teachers common language to use, and a rubric to follow for developing engaging PBL projects. Petrone stated PBL engages the standards into what TES is doing. TES has not thrown everything they were doing before away. Teachers and students are still practicing those things, and figuring out how to apply skills in the real world. Petrone continued to explained that PBL came from OESU leadership at the same time the TES leadership was discussing how to move the school forward and make some positive changes. TES was already gravitating towards PBL and it happened to align with what OESU was doing.

MacPhee asked for the origin for how PBL came to TES. Cobb answered, it was a collaboration. Cobb stressed that it was not she alone who adopted PBL. As an SU, the leadership team had been talking to Boards and schools, and one school piloted it. People became inspired. As a collective group OESU chose PBL to implement the learning expectations that are across the SU, put in place by the AOE. Petrone stated TES is aiming for two learning expeditions this year. MacPhee stated he was interested in how PBL was adopted because of a comment from Cobb during the Board retreat, that she told the five districts, "we're jumping in." He was concerned this was a unilateral decision made by Cobb alone, and that districts were told this was what they were doing.

Discussion followed. Cobb explained that "jumping in" meant everybody already knew this was the direction in which the SU was moving. Some schools have been moving more slowly than others. MacPhee expressed concern about teachers who don't adapt PBL, and a comment he heard at an OESU meeting that teachers who don't use this methodology will be fired. He will not agree to that. Cobb replied that PBL is the direction the OESU districts are going, as a collective group. If there is a teacher who doesn't want to go in that direction, Cobb would ask, what are you doing to engage students? Are there assessments that are in line? Maybe what the teacher is doing is actually PBL. If teacher is adamantly refusing, Cobb would consider moving that teacher out.

MacPhee asked, what if the TTSD Board says, we're not interested in this strategy? Buttrey stated it is not the Board's job to direct the Principal. MacPhee stated he is looking for a clear chain of command from the AOE to the school board. Darrah acknowledged this is a different governance structure than MacPhee is familiar with at Mascoma, where he teaches. Darrah reviewed the various roles of the OESU Board vs. the TTSD Board. Darrah feels as a Board member, her job is to hire the staff to do the job and she relies on Petrone to inform the Board of any gaps in the curriculum. The Board did not vote on progressing towards PBL. Buttrey acknowledged wanting to evaluate the strategies as time passes. MacPhee asked, what are the parameters with which this program will be evaluated? Discussion followed regarding evaluating standardized test scores. Cobb suggested using data and questions to gather that data. MacPhee asked if PBL is something that is going to be used at TA. He fears there will be one set of parameters at TES and a different set at TA, which does not set students up well for the transition. Cobb and Downey explained that grant funding has allowed TA to consult with UVEI for professional development around differentiation. MacPhee stressed that his only objective is that the children of this district have the finest education possible and the skills they are learning at TES allow them to go on to whatever they want to do next. It is very important to have meetings between TES and TA to make the transition successful. Petrone reminded the Board of the success of the 1st grade Farm Stand as a PBL. MacPhee stated most of his concerns were how the PBL came to be and the hierarchy of decision making. He is a proponent of checks and balances. There needs to be representation, not a single person making top down decisions. Buttrey commented that the TTSD has always been good at disagreeing agreeably. Acker looks forward to hearing anecdotes about PBL at the end of the year from students and teachers. Discussion followed regarding setting aside funding for teachers to use for projects. Petrone added he encourages teachers to implement PBL without spending extra money and grant funding is available.

UPDATE ON TEACHER NEGOTIATIONS: Buttrey stated this needs to be a standard agenda item. In next couple of days he will notify teachers of the next meeting in October. The negotiation meetings will be warned and public. They are not subject to executive session and minutes will be taken. Buttrey is planning on a single year contract because there are too many unknowns due to Act 46.

OTHER BUSINESS: Acker gave a playground update. She referenced an update that Joette sent to the committee. The bike pump track getting a lot of use. The garden area of the playground is almost complete, but may need some seeding or ground cover. The zipline is getting a lot of use. The brake system will need new rubber and a new strap. Beth McGee is working on a sign for the new garden. Bruce has been doing a great job watering the new plants during the drought. Moving the shed is in progress. Petrone stated the sledding hill will be moved to its original location, as early as next week. Acker stated now that such a big investment has been made with the playground, when the state of the facilities of the grounds and maintenance is completed, it is important to include the playground. There will be maintenance upkeep costs to keep it functional, safe and beautiful. Buttrey suggested a playground upkeep line in the budget. Acker agreed and stated the investment was hugely volunteer and donations, and it needs to be protected. Acker has challenged the playground group to calculate the cost of maintenance and present to the Board before budget season. Darrah suggested the October 18 meeting.

Trailhead project (Rogers): The entrance to the TES parking lot was planed down and prepped for paving. The culvert was not replaced. Rogers reviewed the scope of the trailhead project. Originally the town was going to make a trail between Thetford Hill to Thetford Center with grant money that was federally earmarked. However, after a lot of planning the trail ended up not being possible. Rogers then approached the Board to ask if the TES parking lot needs renovation. Because of its proximity to Mimi's Trail it qualifies as a trailhead. Engineering proposals were requested. Stantech Engineering has been hired, and the Town now has their proposal. Once Stantech gets the design work done, they will handle the bidding process. The hope is this can get fast tracked to happen next summer. All parties including VTrans and Two Rivers Ottaquechee, agree the remaining funds are adequate for design and construction. No local funds had to be raised for this project. A goal is to improve traffic flow, child drop off, and parking. A wetlands permit will be triggered and will go through the Core of Engineers. The cat tails in front of the school are considered wetlands. This wetlands area is also why the culvert wasn't done during the current paving project. Rogers stated the next phase is a meeting with all the stake holders, ideally on site. He invited Board members. Petrone asked about the sidewalk - pedestrian project. Rogers replied it is going out to bid this winter and the hope is that both projects will happen next year. Rogers will keep the Board updated. The parts that have been completed are the portions the State agreed to pay for as part of the paving project.

EXECUTIVE SESSION (Administrator Evaluation): MOTION: (Buttrey/Downey) moved/seconded to go into Executive Session at 8:37 p.m. to discuss administrator evaluation. Out of executive session at 9:12 p.m. No action taken.

ADJOURNMENT: MOTION: (Buttrey/MacPhee) moved/seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:13 p.m. (unanimous approval).

FUTURE MEETINGS:

10/4/16 OESU Meeting (Oxbow)	6:00 p.m.
10/4/16 Thetford Town School District Meeting	7:00 p.m.
10/18/16 Thetford Town School District Meeting	6:30 p.m.

Minutes Prepared By:
Amy Bosco, Minutes Clerk

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Julie Acker, Board Clerk