

SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, October 19, 2023
Final Minutes

Present: Jen Taylor, Anna Heard, Jeremy Mailloux, Julie Martel, members; Bethany Rose, Chair; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Caitlin Sheridan, Director of Finance & Operations; Jennifer Culkeen, Superintendent; Public Guests

A. Meeting Called to Order by Bethany at 7:02 P.M.

B. Public Hearings: None.

C. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar:

Julie noted that the Superintendent Search Committee will be meeting for quite some time. Should we add their report to the agenda as a regular item? Jennifer agreed to add that in.

D. Warrants and Gifts:

Accounts Payable:

3008	10/3/23	\$23,835.79
3009	10/17/23	\$15,320.74
3010	10/17/23	\$432.00
3011	10/31/23	\$38,633.26

Payroll:

306	10/3/23	\$85,250.79
308	10/16/23	\$86,438.96

Gifts: None.

Grants: Jennifer noted that SES is receiving more money in Rural Aid this year, just over \$86K (not technically a grant, but we need to report this as grant funds on our EOY reports). Susie asked how we can use this money: Jennifer said we can use it to support our programs. Could we use it to help with the OOD costs? Caitlin: We haven't had that conversation yet; we need to look at how we can use this. Jennifer said other schools have been tending to use it to support positions that used to be funded by ESSER. Jackie said that might be a good fit for our Rural Aid, since we do have some important positions that are no longer supported by ESSER.

JEN MOVED TO ACCEPT RURAL AID. JULIE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.

E. Approval of Minutes from September 21, 2023:

ANNA MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 21, 2023. JEREMY SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.

F. Unfinished Business / Updates:

1. Capital Projects/Building Process - Discussion (Roof, Boilers, Kitchen Floor): No update.

G. New Business / Discussion Items:

1. Family Handbook - Review and Possible Vote:

Jackie said we're still working on this and should have it ready for next meeting.

H. Reports:

1. Superintendent's Report:

Jennifer reported on the efficiencies study from the Collins Center. Overall, the main recommendation was for a regionalization study, but since our focus will be on a Superintendent search this year, that should come in the future.

We've done great Union-wide safety training for staff and are doing literacy walkthroughs with our Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Statewide, we are seeing continued academic recovery from the pandemic in our MCAS scores. ELA and Math scores were improved across the Commonwealth, although Science scores decreased slightly this year (not at SES!). The next topic the state will address is chronic absenteeism.

Jennifer said that absentee rates are still high, and now resurgences of COVID, flu and RSV are adding to that problem. The view of the state is not to punish, but to find opportunities to work with families to improve attendance. Jackie discussed the significant impact of missing class in Elementary School. She and the School Counselor try to find ways to motivate students to come to school or talk with doctors to try to support students who are out due to illness. Chronic absenteeism is 18 days (a whole month of school). We need to make a plan for helping students come back. SSC discussed the importance of attendance and how that positively impacts student success.

2. Director of Finance and Operations:

FY23 End of Year Report - Submitted - Vote to allow the Chair to sign the EOY Certification Statement:

Caitlin reviewed the FY23 EOY Report for SSC.

JEREMY MOVED TO ALLOW THE CHAIR TO SIGN THE FY23 EOY CERTIFICATION STATEMENT. ANNA SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.

Caitlin noted that district allocation for the U#28 Budget have gone down slightly for Shutesbury (~1%). JSC voted to move to a 5-year rolling average for the allocations recently, so we'll be adjusting these allocations increasing one year at a time until we're at the full 5-year average. Rural Aid has shot up to \$86K from around \$30K last year, which we're very grateful for. Susie said Fin Com would like to run things as we did last year, walking them through the SES budget with an SSC member present.

Jennifer noted that we're going to be bargaining with the teacher's union this year. Jennifer explained the process: SSC has to wait to hear a request from them to begin negotiations. Jennifer will reach out to see if they're ready. She'll add an agenda item to the next meeting for selecting two SSC members to serve on the bargaining team.

3. Principal's Report:

Jackie missed Open House but heard that it was fabulous. She's very proud of our school for many reasons: our achievements, our culture, and how we look inside the building. It's a really nice learning space for everyone. The big kids went apple picking and made treats that they sold at an "Apple Store" (a 30-year tradition). Younger kids are taking their first field trip of their lives (due to the pandemic) to the Beneski Museum at Amherst College. 4th and 5th Grade are going to an exciting band concert in November. Every day kids ask me if we're going to have a play this year. We've done great on MCAS as well, as we did last year, and would have ranked even higher but for chronic absenteeism (we got 0 out of 4 points for that). We don't teach to the test, although we make sure students are prepared for them.

We did a learning walkthrough recently, which lets instructors from other Union schools see how we teach, and we can all learn from each other. The engagement of the students and the incredible talent of the teachers were incredible. These walkthroughs are very fun and instructive.

Our enrollment is very low right now, at 115. Ten years ago, we were at 159. SSC needs to understand that it's a slippery slope accepting School Choice students. We accept students if there are fewer than 15 students in a class and the needs profile is manageable. We usually don't accept students above 3rd Grade, either. It could be that there isn't enough housing in Shutesbury; some students left the school recently because they were renters that had to leave town. Even though our enrollment is low, these students still need all the necessary staff to educate them at our school. Susie commented that Jackie laid out all the issues clearly. School Choice is a controversial program since it sends money out of towns to follow those students. We really need to start addressing the Funding Formula statewide, including how charter schools are treated. Jennifer noted that we do a School Attending Children Report in February that indicates which schools Shutesbury students attend.

4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report:

Anna reported that RSC is in full swing in their Superintendent Search. We got an update on five MCAD complaints, which have been assigned to lawyers at this point. We're just waiting to see what happens with those. We got a number of new members, leading to a lot more diversity on the Committee. We've been having really long meetings and getting used to new leadership styles. Doug Slaughter is going to try to put together a report about the personnel complaints in a way that doesn't name names or particular circumstances; it's meant as a guide to avoid these problems in the future.

Bethany acknowledged a member of the public, who asked for a report on the Title IX investigation. Will the general public be able to view this report at some point? Anna agrees that the public should be able to see the report, but much of the information cannot be released legally since it is confidential. The public can inquire with the Superintendent whether specific personnel still work for the District, but they can't ask if anyone was fired.

5. Union #28 Report, including Budget & Personnel:

Bethany said ESC has voted to appoint members to a committee to study whether or not to leave U#28. Hopefully, this will continue to be an agenda item at JSC. Julie noted public attendance at these meetings can be helpful to understand their deliberations. Anna asked why Erving is considering leaving; SSC members could not think of good reasons. Bethany said we elected a Chair and Vice Chair as well as members to spearhead the Superintendent Search Committee.

Julie said Steven Butler, who's the new U#28 JSC Chair, was voted in as Search Committee Chair as well. Each SC has members on the Committee, and Gillian Budine will serve as a Central Office administrator on the Committee. Member Towns will supply a staff and PTO member as well, and we're hoping for an additional Central Officer person too. Shutesbury representatives are: Viva Butler (SES Education Support Professional), Elizabeth Murphey (PTO), and Julie. The Committee meets next on Oct 23. Pam and Jennifer have already updated the current position description.

6. CES Report:

At a short meeting, CES overviewed the program that sends students to GCC to learn about entrepreneurship.

I. Policy Review:

Julie noted one copy error in BDFA-E; Jennifer will fix it.

First Reading On:

- BDFA - School Councils
- BDFA-E - School Improvement Plans
- CHA/CHC - Development and Dissemination of Procedures

J. Future Business:

- Shutesbury Policy Committee – Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.
- Shutesbury School Committee – Thursday, November 16,, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory – November 20, 2023
- Budget and Personnel Committee – TBD
- Future agenda items –

K. Adjournment at 8:21

BETHANY MOVED TO ADJOURN. JEREMY SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.