

SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, September 21, 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 7:01 P.M.

B. Public Hearings: None.

C. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar: None.

D. Warrants and Gifts:

Accounts Payable:

2027	6/27/2023	\$88,038.35
3027	6/30/2023	\$31,236.25
3028	6/30/2023	\$21,718.00

***FY23**

3001	7/1/2023	\$8,671.72
3002	7/25/2002	\$3,354.48
3003	8/8/2023	\$17,611.82
3004	8/22/2023	\$9,420.79
3005	9/5/2023	\$6,568.58
3006	9/19/2023	\$20,752.91
3007	10/3/2023	\$38,653.92

Payroll:

326	6/26/2023	\$88,038.35
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***FY23**

301	7/11/2023	\$78,008.32
302	7/25/2023	\$73,266.15
303	8/8/2023	\$79,014.24
304	8/22/2023	\$72,403.89
305	9/5/2023	\$90,940.45
306	9/19/2023	\$86,151.08

Gifts: None.

Grants: None.

E. Approval of Minutes from June 15, 2023:

JULIE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JUNE 15, 2023. JEN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.

F. Unfinished Business / Updates:

1. Capital Projects/Building Process - Discussion (Roof, Boilers, Kitchen Floor):

Jackie related that the summer was very hectic. We have a fantastic new roof and gutters as well as beautiful new Library flooring. We also had a grant-funded weatherization team work on the building to improve our energy efficiency. Cameras are installed and running now. We're super grateful for all of these upgrades. We were approved for the Kitchen floor, but we ran out of time to get that done before the school year started. That's an extensive project involving electrical work, so we'll have to wait until later to get it done. The intent is to fix the rotting along the top and along some of the sides of the building in spring. The next big Capital Planning need is the parking lot, which is really bad.

Fin Com member Susie Mosher noted that the Town will be meeting the rot obligation. No help from the state on this one so far. Jackie thanked all the Town residents involved in committee work to get these projects done for the school.

G. New Business / Discussion Items:

1. Amend FY24 Academic Calendar (adding PD ½ day/early release for students on November 8) - Discussion and Possible Vote:

Jennifer noted that this is no longer necessary, as we ran into issues with bussing availability as well as calendars. We won't be having this extra PD as a result.

2. Family Handbook - Review and Possible Vote:

Jackie said she and Debbie Lee are working to update the Handbook to a format in a live format available on our website. We hope to have this up by October for approval.

3. Comfort Dogs at School - Discussion with Jessica Carlson-Belanger:

SES School Counselor Jessica Carlson-Belanger was impressed with the use of therapy dogs at LES and started wondering how we could bring in a therapy dog to SES with a handler the kids know. She's been training her dog Freddie for this role through Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, and after being certified, he was brought in for a 20-minute visit to 6th Grade, which went extraordinarily well. Jackie asked about insurance: when trained through Bright Spot, she can put the dog on her house insurance and has already done so. The dog's breed is hypoallergenic, and she checks with classes to see if anyone does not want one.

Jennifer noted that this would be the third therapy dog in U#28, as there is also one at SRS. Jessica will start with half a day per week. Freddie will be with Jessica the whole time. Jeremy noted that therapy dogs make a significant positive difference in student engagement at Franklin Tech.

JEN MOVED TO APPROVE THE USE OF A THERAPY DOG (FREDDIE) AS OUTLINED BY JESSICA. JULIE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.

H. Reports:

1. Superintendent's Report:

Bethany reiterated Jennifer's announcement that she will be retiring at the end of the year. It's a very sad thing for U#28, but happy for Jennifer so she can enjoy her retirement. Jennifer shared her appreciation for all the people who have helped her grow as a district leader, as well as for all the U#28 professionals dedicated to a wonderful progressive education.

Jennifer reported on the press event with Community Network for Children, a well-attended and excellent event; she thanked CNC and DESE for supporting this. We had our Opening Day with a breakfast and welcome, then a fun activity led by Jackie that got people laughing and moving. We had a district presentation from CES on culturally responsible education. Across U#28, we'll be using two new tools to gather and share data across the district. She looks forward to her next nine SES meetings, some of her favorites.

Bethany asked about the Superintendent search process. Jennifer will reach out to all the SCs to start putting together a search committee. We have great resources, some from MASC, to get the ball rolling. SSC reminisced about the search committee process that brought us Jennifer.

2. Director of Finance and Operations:

Caitlin noted SSC must sign some paperwork that she'll collect. We're due for an audit (on a three-year cycle) this fall. She attended a professional conference; it's always good to connect with other Directors across the state to discuss issues. We're proposing a salary schedule change for the staff in Central Office, adding some steps since the salaries there are calculated based on the average COLAs of the school staff. These COLAs have been lower lately as other areas of the staff contracts have improved, so adding these steps will address that.

Susie noted the Fin Com will be meeting to discuss the draft SES budget Jan 16. We're asking for level services. We know it's a contract year. There's a deadline of Feb 1 for Capital Planning requests. The Fin Com voted to support the new format for the budget that came out last year. SSC discussed how there was a "perfect budget storm" last year due to some mismatches in the budgeting calendar cycles. Caitlin said we'll be coordinating in a better way this time around. Anna asked if the Regional budget was being renegotiated at this point: SSC Emeritus Steve Sullivan said yes, this is the year the assessment gets renegotiated. Caitlin added this is the last year for ESSER money, which won't be in the next budget.

OOD Placement Cost Update:

Caitlin said we have an Out of District transportation cost that's unanticipated. She and Jackie have been seeing what we can use out of ESSER III money, since we need to spend that down by the end of the school year. We might not get much back in Circuit Breaker. Jackie said the cost is over \$100K right now, which is very reasonable for OOD in general. We'll have this cost for several years going forward, so we need to think about putting it in the budget next year. This year, Jennifer said, we need to figure out what we can do and what we need to ask the Town for. Jennifer said we could get 75% of 75% of the expense next year through Circuit Breaker.

3. Principal's Report:

Jackie said we have a new teacher, Vanessa Bergman in 5th Grade (she's back!). We're rolling out new Math and ELA curricula and continuing our social-emotional learning work. Nature's Classroom is coming out soon. We got our MCAS results back, and SES continues to do very well. We didn't do as well on attendance; she'll be writing a letter to the community about this next week. COVID has impacted this because we were asking kids to stay home when they were sick. We have too many students in the "chronically absent" category (greater than 10% of the school year), and part of the issue is that the school has been somewhat lax on this over the past couple of years. She's going to explain chronic absenteeism as well as things SES can do to help students. Part of it is not having vacations scheduled during the school year (use school vacation times for that). She looks forward to Parent Teacher conferences coming up soon, an enjoyable evening.

4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report:

Anna reported that it's been a busy season. We were able to finalize the APA Contract, which was good, but also increased a lot of costs. Not sure how much that will impact Shutesbury's share. Superintendent Morris has left, and Doug Slaughter has been appointed Interim, serving through the end of the school year. We're starting our Superintendent search now. There are ongoing Title IX and MCAD complaints being investigated.

Steve thanked Anna for her great work and noted that it's been years since the track was supposed to be fixed. He'll keep SSC updated on other infrastructure problems at the regional schools.

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

Julie said there was discussion about a subcommittee for the Superintendent search. The Chair and Vice Chair have not been decided yet; that's tabled until the next meeting. Heather Michaud, project leader of the Collins Center efficiency study, made a presentation that will be shared on the U#28 website. Julie reviewed positive and less positive findings. While we could improve expenses by pooling purchasing, the savings seem to be insignificant, so efficiencies need to be found elsewhere. Director of Student Support Services Corrina Wcislo presented a roadmap for continuous improvement going forward. Jennifer added that ESC is in the early stages of having a discussion about the pros and cons of staying in U#28. As soon as we know anything about this decision, we'll keep the other SCs and Towns abreast.

6. CES Report: No report (meeting next week).

I. Policy Review: None.

J. Future Business:

- Shutesbury Policy Committee – Thursday, October 19, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.
- Shutesbury School Committee – Thursday, October 19, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory – November 20, 2023
- Budget and Personnel Committee – TBD
- Future agenda items –

Susie thanked everyone for jumping in and swimming hard, especially new members of SSC! The Town support its school. Jackie echoed that sentiment and encouraged SSC to get vocal about getting the Superintendent search underway ASAP so we don't miss the ordinary hiring cycle.

K. Adjournment at 8:26

JULIE MOVED TO ADJOURN. JEN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.