

SLATE VALLEY UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

Regular Meeting

October 12, 2020

Fair Haven Union High School

6:30 p.m.

Participation will be in Person or Virtually Connect by Going to:

meet.google.com/grn-jxau-emp

or by Calling (US)+1 225-414-2284 Pin: 456 101 981#

Approved Minutes:

Name	Role/Term	Town Representing	In Attendance
Pati Beaumont	Board Member	Benson	X
Rebeckah St. Peter	Board Member	Benson	X-Virtually
Becky Spears	Board Member	Benson	X
Toni Lobdell	Board Member	Castleton	X
Tim Smith	Board Chair	Castleton	X
Julie Finnegan	Board Member	Castleton	X
Christin Pouliot	Board Member	Hubbardton	X
Joshua Hardt	Board Member	Hubbardton	X
Vacant	Board Member	Hubbardton	-
Tanya Tolchin	Board Member	West Haven	X
Angela Charron	Board Member	West Haven	-
Vacant	Board Member	West Haven	-
Tara Buxton	Board Member - Clerk of Board	Fair Haven	X
Mike Bache	Board Member	Fair Haven	X
Rick Wilson	Board Member	Fair Haven	X
Peter Stone	Board Vice Chair	Orwell	X
Glen Cousineau	Board Member	Orwell	X
John Wurzbacher	Board Member	Orwell	X
Brooke Olsen Farrell	Superintendent	Slate Valley UUSD	X
Cheryl Scarzello	Director of Finance	Slate Valley UUSD	X
Chris Cole	Director of Operations	Slate Valley UUSD	X
Casey O'Meara	Director of Curriculum I&A	Slate Valley UUSD	X
Kris Benway	Director of Special Services	Slate Valley UUSD	X

Audience Attending: Amy Roy, Deb Infurna, Kim Prehoda, Phil Hall, Margaret Hayward, Rebecca Armitage, Patrick Walters, Ben Worthing, Jen Paquette, Krista Glover, Jessica Thurston

Pledge of Allegiance: Tim Smith led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Call to Order: Tim Smith, Board Chair called the meeting to order at 6:40 p.m.

Approval of Agenda: Julie Finnegan made a motion to approve the agenda with no changes/the following changes or additions: Peter Stone seconded the motion; Motion carried by the full Board.

Approval of SVUUSD Minutes of September 14, 2020: Toni Lobdell made a motion to approve the minutes of September 14, 2020 with no changes/the following corrections: Julie Finnegan seconded the motion; Motion carried by the full Board.

Public Comment: None

Correspondence: None

Committee Reports:

- **Policy Committee:** Julie Finnegan made a motion to Adopt Policy B1, Substitute Teachers. This was seconded by Peter Stone; motion was carried by the full Board.
 - **Policy B1 - Substitute Teachers – Adopt**
 - **Policy E2 - Gifts and Donations - Adopt:** Julie Finnegan made a motion to adopt Policy E2 - Gifts and Donations. This was seconded by Peter Stone. Motion was carried by the full Board.
- **Finance Committee:** Glen Cousineau gave an overview of the Finance Committee meeting stating that Cheryl Scarzello has an overview of the budget process. The Finance Committee discussed Board and Administrative procedures for the budget cycle. Cheryl updated the team on the Covid Funding. We were told that school districts are not eligible for FEMA monies. Cheryl amended the CRF application to \$786,456.00; Cheryl still plans to apply for ESSR monies in the amount of \$465,000.00 She also updated the Finance Committee that the State Department of Education shortfall of \$100,000,000.00 has been reduced to \$67,000,000.00. She also noted that the remainder of the shortfall would not be made up of additional taxes to taxpayers. She noted that the shortfall has been reduced by greater amounts of Sales and Use Tax monies.

Warrants: Glen Cousineau made a motion to pay the warrants for Total Payments in the amount of \$2,412,810.95; this was seconded by Peter Stone; Motion carried by the full Board. Glen Cousineau made a motion to pay the Food Service bill in the amount of \$4,402.43, this was seconded by Toni Lobdell. Motion carried by the full Board. Glen Cousineau made a motion to pay the Grants in the amount of 42,001.27 This was seconded by Peter Stone. Motion carried by the full Board.

Alternative Education Programs: Kris Benway and Bonnie Lenihan gave a brief presentation on the Social Emotional Behavioral Alternative Programs housed in Slate Valley and available to all students that meet criteria for the program. This has been a cost effective way to meet the needs of our Socially Emotionally challenged students within the confines of our own district. When these programs were not in the district we often had to send our students to other Rutland area county programs and in some cases to out of state placements, where this type of programming did exist. We have had tremendous success in the past four years in helping students get regulated enough to attend their own general education classrooms and gradually increase their time with their general education peers. We provide a therapeutic milieu for these students and many opportunities to learn new skills, practice them, and implement these skills. Students are taught self-regulation and self-management tools. There is a significant team approach with Special Educator, School Based Clinician, Parents/Guardians, General Education Teachers, Administration, IA's and other local agency personnel. The success of the program is built on establishing meaningful Relationships, Relevant Programming and Rigor. There is ongoing communication with the general education teachers so that we can incrementally grow time in these general education classrooms as students begin to view themselves as learners and valued members of the classroom community. VT Outdoor Adventure Program is a huge part of our Alternative Programs and is a Partnership with RMH Services and our Alternative Programs. This is an instrumental program that works with students in the outdoor environment to build team building skills, increase self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-control, and also assists them in learning how to manage their emotions, communicate effectively, trust others, take responsibility, work with others as a team, and make positive choices in their lives. Each program K-5 at CES, and Gr, 5-8 at FHGS Middle level program participates in 1 day of VOAP per week. Staff members were announced. CES, Krista Glover, Special Educator, Emily Klee, School Based Clinician, Bonnie Lenihan, Administrator of Special

Ed, and students are supported by several wonderful Instructional Assistants. At Fair Haven Grade School, Jamie Sherwood is the Special Educator, Karen Weatherwax is the School District Psychologist, Rebecca Armitage, is the Special Education Administrator. This program also supports individual students with Instructional Assistants.

Reopening of Schools: Brooke Farrell spoke about the fact that literally every system, structure, etc. within the district has changed. The staff has done a great job at facilitating all this change and we have had a very successful start. Casey O'Meara began with an overview of expectations. He shared that the number one goal upon reopening was to ensure the care and wellbeing of all of our students, especially the social emotional well-being. Next we had a goal to stay open for in person learning as long as we could. This reopening took a tremendous amount of planning on the part of the Administration who worked all summer as did many of our teaching staff. Every school system had to be overhauled given the Covid Pandemic and the criteria for operating schools safely. Casey reported on a recent survey sent out to families. The response rate was only about 24%, overwhelmingly parents were glad that schools had reopened for in-person learning and were pleased with how well orchestrated it has been and for the care we took to open so successfully. Our next focus is to determine where students are functioning exactly in the academic arena. Teachers were first charged with ensuring that all are ready socially and emotionally and then moving into the academic task demands. Teachers are beginning to assess students' skills. Casey shared the assessment plans in the Board Packets. Next the Principals were asked to present. The Principal provided an overview for each of their buildings on the challenges and the successes since schools reopened on September 8, 2020.

BVS-Amy Roy, Principal reported:

Successes Include:

- Mask wearing success - students readily accept this as part of the norm
- Students were easily able to follow all protocols
- Nature based learning happening in outdoor classrooms is a success
- We have noted less fall illness due to all precautions for Covid
- Kids are present, not absent or tardy as much as they have been in past years at same time
- We are noticing less behaviors, reduction in behavioral refusals
- We have noted an added benefit of bus aides, not placed for behavior monitoring but rather health screenings but it is helping with both.
- Students are happy, laughing and learning

Challenges include:

- Challenged by not being able to sing, especially in the primary grades
- Management of the screening forms, as kids have multiple ones going at a time.
- It is a challenge to help families understand the VT Dept. of Health criteria and why we are having to send students home if there are some symptoms

Deb Infurna from FHGS shared the following:

Successes include:

- 6 Weeks of school under our belts; 25 days in school
- FHGS placed emphasis on the following: Relationships before Rigor and Connections before Content
- Explicit and mindful teaching of new routines/expectations
- They also have noted a significant reduction in behaviors; down by 70% over the last two years at same time.
- Tremendous reduction in tardiness/absenteeism
- No conflict with sharing as everyone has to have their own, this has helped us to recognize the following:
 - We need to Teach kids with how to share and be respectful in communal spaces
 - Loves arrival and dismissal procedures and the ability to connect with families
 - Teachers are placing a huge emphasis on technology daily with students so they are prepared should we have to go remote again in the future.
- Deb recognized the outstanding work of the nursing staff and the custodial staff in working so hard to keep the building sterile and safe.
- Outdoor PE is going well
- Teachers are starting to collect formative data assessment information
- Kids math skills seem stable

Challenges noted at FHGS with reopening:

- We need to work with students to refresh writing skills and reading
- Teachers have had to develop new teaching strategies, for example, for reading groups and how guided reading was done in the past will not work given our new information.
- Intervention services are not happening presently
- We can't commingle students with like needs for intervention blocks
- Middle school pods are frustrated that they can't commingle
- AT FHGS, outside teaching space is limited.
- Finding substitutes is a challenge
- Worried about Staff Stamina
- Students are missing co-mingling with their friends

Patrick Walters- OVS Principal shared:

- Thrilled to be back in person with staff and students
- Love the outdoor classroom space
- Have noted less nursing visits; kids want to be in class and in outdoor classroom spaces

Challenges:

- Taking all the materials to the outside classroom provides a challenge
- Partner work has gone out the window
- For years we strived for collaborative work sessions and promoted creative problem solving among students
- Challenged with teaching young children the technology needed for remote learning
- Sending students home with some symptoms
- Can't see faces of children or staff under masks to see how people are really feeling.
- This makes building a learning community a challenge.

Kim Prehoda - Principal reporting on CES:

Challenges:

- Masks
- Staff feel disconnected, we aren't able to come together for large staff meetings, must always meet remotely
- We lost some very talented IA's due to Covid and individual's worries about health needs; which means students have to build relationships with new folks.

Successes:

- Outdoor classrooms are some of our biggest successes, we plan to continue this after Covid.
- AT CES, our outdoor spaces are a gift
- Community Connections are strengthened (Casella's project with some teacher's)
- Kudos to staff and families; Kim thanks the parents for all of their support and the overwhelmingly positive responses we have received.

Ben Worthing - Assistant Principal of CVS reports the following:

Ben mentioned that over the weekend a CVS student sustained a significant injury and he was blown away by the staff at CVS, CES and from the whole SU offering support to our students. He was blown away by the cohesiveness of the school community.

Successes:

- Schools response to student's social emotional needs
- Opening of school sports last week (Soccer)
- Prospects of opening school clubs
- Drop off and Parent Pick Up Times has provided valuable time to connect with parents; Ben plans to continue this
- Increased communication with families of a positive nature

Challenges:

- Engaging students through technology
- Remote teaching is a challenge - always wondering how do we do this better?
- Shared with teachers Don't Agonize --- Organize
- Reducing the mixing of students is challenging and kids miss the opportunities

Phil Hall - FHUHS - Principal

Successes:

- Things have gone as well as expected
- Attitude and Effort have been the focus (positive attitude and recognizing student efforts)
- Praise flexibility and hard work

- Climate at school is outstanding and very positive
- Phil asks staff to reflect on how they would feel as a high school student experiencing these Covid limitations.
- Student compliance with health and safety protocols
- Behavioral referrals are way down
- Initially teacher's had to be coached to go outside, but are now accessing the outdoors more readily
- Morning Screening processes are going well; thankful to all the people involved in the screenings

Challenges:

- Remote learning every other day is a challenge - don't feel we do this nearly as well as in person learning; we are executing better than we did in the spring and have improved since the beginning of September, still have a ways to go.
- Moving to a block schedule was a challenge -- Pacing is an issue
- Personally Phil is struggling learning names when everyone is covered up by masks
- Virtual open house had a low turnout
- Not having all of our students here full time

Tim Smith thanks Principal's for their reports and wonders what is the trajectory for getting the high school students back all 5 days for in-person learning? He also wonders when can pods of students start co-mingling? Brooke shared that we are awaiting additional guidance from the Department of Health in the next few weeks that may provide more definitive answers. Brooke noted that the District Task Force is grappling with these very questions but wants to proceed cautiously as we are approaching flu season, the holiday season and more people coming together. We are hoping they retain the safety practices during the time to contain any additional spreading of the mandemic. If all goes well during this season, Brooke would like to think of bringing all High school students back at the end of January.

Board Retreat:

Brooke and Tim share that the VSBA is not willing to send a representative in person to the Board Retreat but can participate virtually. After some discussion it was decided that we would ask them to do a brief presentation on roles and responsibilities of Board members. It was also determined that Brooke would provide food for this retreat.

Central Office Report:

Superintendent's Report

Our school reopening continues to go well. We need to be vigilant so that we do not become victims of our own success. We will be reminding families and staff about limiting travel over the holidays and the quarantine rules. We know this will be difficult but it will be a necessary piece to ensure that schools can remain open to in-person instruction. Everyone in the community needs to do their part so we all can stay safe.

Our staff continues to do an amazing job despite all of the challenges. We are fortunate to have such dedicated professionals during this time.

We are planning on hiring an additional school nurse. We will be using funding through CRF and ESSR as it is an unbudgeted expense and directly related to the pandemic. Deb Hanson the school nurse at the high school is also our COVID Coordinator. Right now these are 2 full-time positions. The plan will have the new nurse assigned at the high school which will free Deb up to work alongside the other nurses in the district as the COVID Coordinator.

Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

The silver lining of this global pandemic is learning flexibly, individualized and personalized, with empathy, during naturally occurring moments in students' lives. We now have the opportunity to partner with students and families in a manner never before experienced.

Slate Valley educators have maintained focus on the following since March of 2020:

- **Focus on PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE before providing any summatives.** In fact, if a student is close to "meeting" your expectations through practice, consider that a summative.

- **Be UNDERSTANDING with your assessment of student work.** Students do not have the benefit of the support they might normally have in school. As well, your students might be caring for siblings, have chores, have to care for elderly relatives or neighbors, and do not have the “time” they are accustomed to during school to complete assignments.
- **Determine what is MOST ESSENTIAL at your grade level, or in your content area, to be worked on during the pandemic.** Reference any work that is located in these KUDs ([FHU Curriculum Document](#), [Middle School Curriculum Document](#), [Elementary School Curriculum Document](#)) and/or reach out to your grade level/content area partners, myself, or an instructional coach for support and assistance if you are unsure what is most essential.

In addition to what's above, the following has come into focus through Slate Valley's [Reopening Plan](#): *Slate Valley is designing in-person learning for more [long-lasting changes](#), some of which would remain if/when we go back to normal. Slate Valley's design to in-person learning has educators developing: **outdoor classrooms, greater cohesion across content areas (interdisciplinary focus), experiential and authentic learning in and outside of school, stronger advisory systems, a stronger focus on essential topics and skills, and the reintroduction of out of school work that reinforces, extends, or provides practice.***

Slate Valley's reopening success is a result of educator willingness to:

- Design learning flexibly, that's individualized and personalized, and with empathy
- Partner with students and families
- **Focus on PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE before providing any summatives**
- **Be UNDERSTANDING with your assessment of student work.**
- **Determine what is MOST ESSENTIAL at your grade level, or in your content area, to be worked on during the pandemic.**
- *develop: **outdoor classrooms, greater cohesion across content areas (interdisciplinary focus), experiential and authentic learning in and outside of school, stronger advisory systems, a stronger focus on essential topics and skills, and the reintroduction of out of school work that reinforces, extends, or provides practice.***

**In lieu of Open House, I held 4 informational meetings on [leveraging Title I Schoolwide Programs to Address Barriers to Academic Success](#) in September and October. The document, linked above, and slideshow capture the premise of the presentation ([Title I Parent Presentation Slides](#)).

Director of Operations

The operations department staff have continued to be busy implementing the cleaning schedules at each building developed to help support our district's return to in-person instruction. Grounds staff have also been working to prepare fields for district athletic events that have resumed recently now that we have moved to Stage III under the state's reopening plan. The Facebook Live streaming of these events has been met with positive feedback by the community thus far. The temporary part-time positions created to support the cleaning of high touch public areas during the school days have been filled. Now as the budget season gets underway we're working to identify high priority projects in order to support our district's five-year plan to address deferred maintenance and other needs. At the last buildings and grounds committee meeting, we discussed these needs in greater detail and this feedback has been incorporated into our budget planning.

Director of Special Services

The Special Education Programs of SVUUSD are currently serving 220 students in our schools and programs. We have 23 eligible students that are identified and served through Early Childhood Special Education. We serve 147 students on Individual Education Plans in kindergarten through grade eight, and an additional 50 students at the high school level. While the majority of students access their special education services and programming within the general classroom environment, we also offer several alternative classroom environments for students who need something different. While serving as an alternative to high cost out of district placements, these in-district alternatives allow us to provide a self-contained classroom option for students while also ensuring opportunities for inclusion with peers in the school setting. Our goal is to assist students in learning the skills necessary to allow them to be engaged learners and make progress on their educational goals and objectives. This month, I would like to highlight two of the alternative options in our district.

The [Elementary Alternative Program](#) serves students with average or above average intellectual abilities who experience social, emotional, and/or behavioral difficulties, and have been unable to make adequate academic and social/emotional progress in the general education setting. This program is currently

located at the Castleton Elementary School and is in its fourth year of operation. The [Middle Level Alternative Program](#) is designed to serve students in grades 5-8 and is in its first year of operation; it is hosted at Fair Haven Grade School. We have students participating in the programs that represent each of the communities of the Slate Valley Unified School District.

Each classroom is supported by a special education teacher, a clinician/consulting psychologist, and behavioral support staff. An essential part of the program is the collaborative relationship that we have with Rutland Mental Health, specifically accessing the Vermont Outdoor Adventure Program and their staff. Each week, the students and program staff spend one full day participating in VOAP. VOAP is a specialized program that utilizes experiential and adventure-based activities in a wilderness setting as a means of assisting individuals in achieving their emotional and behavioral goals. The program strives to improve participants' levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-control, and assists them in learning how to manage emotions, communicate effectively, trust others, take responsibility, work with others as a team, and make positive choices for their life. This year, due to the COVID restrictions, we are accessing the abundance of opportunities available in our own community including the Bomoseen State Park, Glen Lake, the D and H Rail Trail, Mt. Independence Historical Site, Taconic Ramble, Half Moon and the rivers and woods that surround our schools.

I look forward to sharing some highlights of this programming at the board meeting.

Director of Finance

I would like to take the opportunity of this report over the next few months to review various components of Vermont's education funding system as we begin our budget cycle for fiscal year 2022. Much of the information that I will share is available on the Agency of Education's website and the Vermont Department of Taxes website.

The State of Vermont provides total state funding to school districts from the education fund to support the district's locally adopted budget. The state funded portion is called "**education spending**" and equals the voter approved expenditure budget less local revenues such as tuition, athletic gate receipts, and interest, as well as state categorical grant programs which are primarily related to special education aid.

Education spending is then divided by equalized pupil count to determine education spending per equalized pupil. By statute the amount of education spending per equalized pupil and the percent increase from the previous year must appear in the article for the budget vote.

Equalized pupils is based on a formula that is intended to create an "average" student in terms of cost. Various types of students are presumed to have a higher cost than others. The intent is that the cost of an equalized pupil from our district is the same as that for any other Vermont school district. Equalized pupils are based on two years of average daily membership (ADM) data which is basically our enrollment. The two year average is used to smooth out population fluctuations.

This year the legislature enacted a provision to hold districts harmless from a decrease in ADM due to families choosing to homeschool their children for the 2020-2021 school year. The provision says that a school district's ADM for 2020-2021 will not be less than the district's 2019-2020 school year ADM.

The following are the weighting factors that are used to determine equalized pupils:

1. Pre-kindergarten students,
2. Secondary students,
3. Students that are economically disadvantaged,
4. Students for whom English is not their primary language, and
5. Two year average ADM.

Finally an equalization ratio is applied to the weighted number of students in the state so that the total equalized pupil count for the state is equal to the original two year average ADM. Districts with more weighted students will end up with an equalized pupil count that is greater than its two year average ADM. For FY21 Slate Valley's equalized pupil count was 38.23 "students" higher than our two year average ADM.

Next month I will cover the "yield".

Other Business: Tim Smith read a letter from Sheri Loomis who had been a regular substitute at Castleton Elementary and she expressed how much she enjoyed this school community. She wanted to make a \$1,500.00 donation to CES. Tim and the Board thanked Ms. Loomis and Peter Stone made a motion to accept the donation for CES, this was seconded by Glen Cousineau; motion was carried by the full Board.

Kris Benway mentioned that there was a student that had developed a community project called Care Package and she was hoping to collect food for the communities in which she lives. Kris Benway and Nicole Rice, our Home School Liaison are supporting this student project.

Contracts: Julie Finnegan made a recommendation to approve the following contracts and pro-rated salary amounts: Nurse at FHUHS - Sara Trombley at a prorated amount of \$36,603.00. Elementary Teacher at OVS - Lisa Valley at prorated salary of \$39,165.00. Roxanne Greene - Special Educator at FHGS at a prorated salary of \$54,121.00 These hires were seconded by Peter Stone.

Executive Session - If Needed: None Needed

Agenda Building:

1. Agenda for the Board Retreat

Adjournment: Patti Beaumont made a motion to adjourn at 8:30 p.m.; this was seconded by Glen Cousineau; Motion was carried by the full Board.

SVUUSD Board Retreat - October 26, 2020 - 5:30 p.m. - FHUHS