

**RSU 56 Board of Directors Minutes**  
**Board Meeting Agenda- June 28, 2022- 6:30pm**

**(This meeting will be held at Dirigo High School. The board meeting will also be available via zoom and livestream on the RSU 56 Facebook page.)**

School Board Members Present: Barbara Chow, Tim Kelly, Don Whittemore, Marianne Young, Larry Whittington, Angela Cushman, Bruce Ross, Carl Lueders (6:31)

New School Board Members (not yet voting members): Deanna Dolloff, Elizabeth Kelly

School Board Members Absent: Natalie Sneller, Angela Varnum, Konstantin Aslanidi, Vacancy (Peru)

Staff Attending: Pam Doyen, Mary Dailey, Cathy Arsenault, Brian Keene, Terri Cox, Gena Cloutier, Jared Hodgkins, Heidi Broomhall, Jay Nicholson, Earl Couture, Julie Couture, Trish Fletcher, Judy Horne, Michele Araujo, Beth Edwards, Stacey Gilbert

Also Attending: Jon Holmes, Leslie Jamison, Paula Holman, Sherman Bradeen, Vicki Swan, Linda Hebert, David Smith, Dick Pickett, Bonnie McKenna, Chris Araujo, Bruce Farrin, Michelle Larrivee, Kathleen Szostek, Sara Cole, Dani Tompkins, Jean Philbrick, Allen Smith, Ryan Smith, Crystal Smith, Sheila Well, Bruce Well, Matt Martin, Heather McDonald, Charlotte Collins, Royal Swan, Easton Gurney, Von Daley, Sharon Moore, Linda LaPlante, Jocelyn Wheeler, (a few other names that may have been missed)

**CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Barbara Chow, Board Chair, opened the meeting at 6:30pm with the Pledge of Allegiance. Audience introductions were made. Everyone on zoom and Facebook live were welcomed.

**ADJUSTMENTS TO THE AGENDA**

**1. Motion to add the following:**

**VI New Business, #1 Correction of book name, Gender Queer**

**#9 Overview of WMEC work**

**VII Reporting out of stipend positions**

Motion: A. Cushman

Seconded: D. Whittemore

Motion Carried

**CONSIDERATION OF THE MINUTES**

**1. Minutes of the June 14, 2022 Board Meeting**

Motion: L. Whittington

Seconded: A. Cushman

Motion Carried

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Paula Holman- Spoke on being opposed to the book “Gender Queer” being in the school. She stated that when her kids were in school back in 2000-2001 if they had taken a book to school with this content that she would have gotten a call and they would have been in big trouble. It’s not necessarily what it’s representing, it’s the pictures that are wrong.

Josselyn Wheeler- My main complaint on this is it is child pornography. Child pornography has no place in our schools.

Von Daley asked the question of how the book got in the library to begin with? Who put it on the shelf

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

Pam Doyen- The RSU 56 board received an additional complaint regarding the book Gender Queer. The complaint came in from Jean Philbrick. I did take the time this afternoon to email her the policy IJJ as well as the committee’s recommendation and that we were having the testimonies tonight and the board would be making a decision in August.

The board also received a letter from Judith Couture with her concern for the book. I did give the letter to all the board members.

The board also received two letters in support of the book, one from Rachel Buck and one from Karolyn Buotte. Those were also printed out and given to the board members.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

1. Appeal of Gender **Neutral Queer** Book, testimony presentations (board decision at next regularly scheduled board meeting August 23, 2022)

Pam explained the process of the appeal of the book and why it is still on the shelf in the library during the appeal process. It is policy IJJ- Instructional and library media material selection.

Under the challenge materials part it’s very clear that if a complaint comes in there is a process.

The first part is convening a five person committee to review the book. Pam explained how the committee was formed. The committee then met and reviewed the book and the decision was made to keep the book on the shelf. She then reached out to the three people who had put in complaints. They received three appeals and those appeals moved forward to the board. Next part of the policy states that no material shall be removed from use until the final decision. Pam explained that neither herself or Barbara Chow, Board Chair, do not have authority to come in and remove a book. This policy dictates how that process goes. The appeal now comes to the board. A time will be set aside and they can come forward with their testimony. Pam further went on to explain the appeal process and that the full board would make a decision at the next regularly scheduled board meeting.

L. Kelly asked if anyone could appeal or only the people that put in the challenge?

There was then some discussion regarding if the original challenge and appeal process.

B. Ross- went on to say that if anyone wanted to let the board know their feelings on the book & the appeal prior to the next meeting feel free to let them know. It would allow those comments to get to the board.

Someone in the audience asked if all board members had read the book. It was answered that the first part of the policy states that the book needs to be reviewed objectively and in it’s full content.

Pam stated she didn't know how a board member could make the claim that they had reviewed it objectively and in its full content without reading it.

L. Kelly stated that she was listed as one of the people who put in the challenge, she said she did not. She originally came to the board and spoke about taking the book out of the school. She further stated that she put in another appeal and questioned what happened to her appeal and who read her appeal? There was then some discussion regarding the appeal Liz put in and whether her appeal was reviewed by the committee.

Bonnie McKenna was the first to speak on the appeal "Gender Queer". She went on to explain how she came to hear about the book being in the high school library. She said some people would call her a racist or a bigot or such but her issue is with the "sexual disgusting details" of the book. She further went on to say that she totally feels this is "child pornography". The book is a memoir of the author, who is a transgender and she is apparently about 25 years old but the pictures appear that it is children. Bonnie also brought in a copy of a Penthouse magazine and stated, this is pornography. Some of the same types of pictures were in the magazine as in the book. She read what the Student Handbook for the High School stated regarding prohibited activity and internet use. She further stated that according to the handbook it states that students may not access, submit, post, publish forward, download, scan or display defamatory, abusive, obscene, vulgar, sexuality, sexually explicit, sexually suggesting, threatening, discriminatory, harassing, bullying, cyber bullying or illegal materials, or images.

She totally feels that this book is pornography. She feels there is no place in the school for this book period. She feels this book will be so confusing for students, rather than help them.

Her statement was: Porn is porn, sexual explicit material is sexual explicit material...I don't care if they're straight, gay, bi, trans...Their sex, their fantasies don't belong in a school library, any school library.

Sarah Cole spoke: She has three children in elementary school. Her first thought when she saw the book was- How in the world is this book in our schools. She graduated 10 years ago and she could not have walked into school and seen any books with sexual explicit material in it. "Gender Queer" is the number one banded book in the US. I want the school board to take into consideration that us as parents have the right to teach our children, the children that we brought into this world, what we believe in, what we want to teach them at home, and I believe that pornographic and sexually explicit materials are not made for adolescents and they should not have any access to them, whether it's school, anything.

Another lady from the audience went up to speak, however B. Chow said that she wasn't part of the appeal hearing so she couldn't speak at that time. She gave the board something she had written for them to read.

There was some confusion on whether Liz Kelly had been part of the appeal hearing. The board chair allowed her to speak during the appeal hearing because of the confusion when she would have otherwise spoken during Public comments.

L. Kelly- Some of what she was going to say was already addressed. She read what she had written. According to the American Psychiatric Assoc under the diagnostic and statistical manual on mental disorders, called DMS, 5TI. Gender dysphoria is a diagnosis that is defined as a feeling of distress or discomfort in individuals who have gender identity confusion. She stated she had a hard time understanding why a school would try dealing with it on an educational level when it's considered a disorder, like bipolar or any other disorder that requires a psychiatric evaluation. Her

reason for taking the book out is due to the sexually explicit material in the book that was written for adults. There are 11 states that have pulled it from a lot of their schools. She went on to point out some parts of the book that she feels is inappropriate for young adolescents.

B. Chow stated that the board has heard the testimonies. The board has to figure out when they will make the decision. There also has to be a written decision. It will be before the August 23rd board meeting.

The audience then questioned how many of the board members have read the book. It was explained that not all of the board members had read the book at this time, it is being passed to all to be read. This meeting was the first that it came before the whole board. Prior it was the committee that had read it and made a decision.

L. Whittington then asked if he could ask some clarifying questions. B. Chow explained that it was not the correct time to do that. He was allowed to ask a couple of questions of the two people who had testified.

2. Motion to approve computation and declaration of budget votes from June 14, 2022

B. Ross read the motion: VOTED: That the Computation and Declaration of Votes dated June 28, 2022 and attached hereto be approved.

FURTHER VOTED: That the Computation and Declaration of Votes be entered upon the records of Regional School Unit No. 56

FURTHER VOTED: That a certified copy of the Computation and Declaration of Votes be sent to each of the Municipal Clerks of the member municipalities within Regional School Unit No. 56.

SECRETARY'S CERTIFICATION

x conducted as a public meeting with no Board members participating remotely; or

conducted in accordance with Board policy through telephonic, video, electronic, or other similar means of remote participation, and that the Board's vote on this Resolution was taken by roll call as follows:

Board Member	PARTICIPATION			VOTE		
	Physically Present	Attending Remotely	Not Attending	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
Barbara Chow	X			X		
Bruce Ross	X			X		
Don Whittemore	X			X		
Larry Whittington	X			X		
Tim Kelly	X			X		
Angela Cushman	X			X		
Carl Lueders	X			X		
Marianne Young	X			X		
Natalie Sneller			X			
Angela Varnum			X			
Konstantin Aslanidi			X			

3. Motion to approve assessment warrants and installment schedules  
Motion: B. Ross                                      Seconded: D. Whittemore  
Motion Carried
4. Motion to approve the transfer of money between cost centers for 2021-2022  
Motion: B. Ross                                      Seconded: L. Whittington  
Motion Carried
5. First Reading of Policy JLCB Immunization of Students  
Motion: A. Cushman                                  Seconded: L. Whittington  
Motion Carried
6. First Reading of Policy JKAA Use of Physical Restraint and Seclusion  
Motion: A. Cushman                                  Seconded: D. Whittemore  
Motion Carried
7. First Reading of Policy JKAA-R Procedures on Physical Restraint and Seclusion  
Motion: A. Cushman                                  Seconded: T. Kelly  
Motion Carried
8. First Reading of Policy JJE Fundraising Activities  
Motion: A. Cushman                                  Seconded: D. Whittemore  
Motion Carried
9. Overview of WMEC work 2021-22 (Pam Doyen)

Pam is the President of the Western Maine Education Collaborative. She gave a recap of what the group has done this year.

## 2019-2024 WMEC STRATEGIC DESIGN

## Mission/Purpose

To build a sustainable regional collaborative in western Maine that meets the needs of the organization while also meeting the needs of the individual members.

In order to further the mission, the WMEC vision for the next five years is to:

**Improve instructional practices by working together to positively influence student performance through effective and efficient use of human, fiscal and technological resources.**

## Guiding Commitments

In order to ensure success, members of the WMEC commit to:

- Keeping the focus on students and educators, their needs and their performance while ensuring rigor

- Building a trusting and respectful climate of collegiality and collaboration
- Taking action toward our goals and celebrating accomplishments
- Being focused and purposeful while recognizing the need to be flexible and responsive
- Balancing the needs of individual members with the needs of clusters of districts and the entire WMEC organization, supporting mutual benefits
- Being accountable to ourselves, each other and our stakeholders
- Continuing to strengthen the WMEC through adaptation and collective problem-solving

## **2021-22 At-A-Glance**

17 districts

14,000+ students; 2000+ educators

61 hours of WMEC hosted Zoom sessions

4 Board of Directors Meetings

9 PD Committee Sessions

Completed Barr Foundation's Portrait of a Graduate grant, in partnership with

Battelle for Kids; supported development of 9 local Portraits across WMEC

Developed a collaborative WMEC Portrait of a Graduate

Hosted School Leaders Network: Principals Forum; CIA; High School

Counselors; Middle School Counselors; Elementary Counselors

Launched 2 new Communities of Practice: Clinicians & Social Workers;

Teacher-Leaders

Held 3rd WMEC Rendezvous as virtual event with national speaker  
Provided PEPG session  
Initiated ESSA Make & Take Workgroup  
Gained Maine sales tax exemption recognition  
Featured in Battelle for Kids Annual Report article, United by a Collective  
Vision  
Collaborated with VHS Learning for online course opportunities  
Selected recipient of Hannaford Community Bag & Bloomin' 4 Good Programs  
Member of national Rural Collaborative Network; participation in National Forum to Advance Rural Education  
Working together to positively influence student performance since 2005

B.Chow asked if the district buys items together with the other districts through the WMEC. Pam explained that we do buy some big ticket items together but it doesn't really pay to do that for some of the small things.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

None

### **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT AND CORRESPONDENCE**

*Superintendent's Report:* Pam Doyen

Pam returned today (June 28th) from the Annual Commissioners Conference. It's a three day conference in Bar Harbor over the weekend. The keynote speaker, Sean Achor, was outstanding. The takeaway for me was work harder and you have more happiness. He's done a lot of research that it's really actually work on your happiness, success follows. So it's like a whole new mindset. It was fascinating. I look forward to reading his books.

The end of the year reports for RSU 56 are being finished up through the Maine Department of Education. Pam gave a big Thank you to Brian Keene for staying on top of our reports and due dates and he gets all of our data imputed which is a huge undertaking.

*Administrator's Report:* Gena Cloutier

Summer school started June 21st. We have about 41 students currently. After July 4th the middle school will be added on. That will be about 34 more students. We are offering breakfast and lunch. It is open to the public. They can go in at 9:30 for breakfast and 11:30 for lunch. To answer the earlier question of a board member, we do belong to a buyers group. It's Capital area group out of Augusta. We belong as a

Co-op. We get better pricing. Next year all students will eat free. We will still be collecting free/reduced applications, even though everyone will eat free we still have to process them. The state will be paying the difference. The federal government will pay the full rate for a free student. The state pays part and the federal government pays the other part of what the parents' reduced fee was. The reason for collecting the applications is basically for grants. We need it so the state will put us in a category. It helps the district get grants. We have done the Seamless Summer for this year. We were reimbursed \$456 for lunch & \$260 for breakfast. The new freezer is slated to arrive in August.

#### *New Hires:*

1. Motion to hire Christopher Araujo, Alt Ed Teacher at DHS-

Pam gave a review of Chris's credentials. Chris has currently been working in RSU 10 as a PE teacher and an Ed Tech . She stated that he is currently conditionally Certified in K-12 in PE and working toward his full certification. The interview committee felt he was an exceptional candidate and we look forward to see how the Alt Ed program continues to grow under his influence.

A. Cushman made a motion to move to accept to hire Christopher Araujo as the Alt Ed Teacher at DHS

Seconded: D. Whittemore

Motion Carried

#### *Stipended and Coaching Positions:*

TWKDMS Civil Rights Advisor: Earl Couture

Drama Club Co-Advisor: Bethany Meehan-Poulin

8th Grade Class Advisor: Heather Gray

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

1. Student Representative Report- Joe Conron- There are some summer sports that the high schoolers are doing, such as basketball. Football, summer conditioning has started. I wanted to add a little of the students perspective to the book "Gender Queer". Joe reached out over a few days to some students and has some points. What he has is only in reference to the explicit content in the book. Everything he has will be anonymous, because he wanted the students to feel comfortable talking.  
Students for the book have argued: there are other books with explicit content in our library. People in all relationships should have representation in our library. One student who is trans said the book helped him be successful in the future for someone who has faced the same challenges as him. He emphasized the importance of this by stating that 82% of trans youth consider suicide. The representation can also help them grow an understanding of themselves and the world in a rural setting. Someone also said that in regards to claims that the author is attempting to convert people to their way of life, the existence of something is not the encouragement to also live it.  
Students against the book have argued: the book is explicit and it depicts sexual acts. One student said, if I had that, meaning the picture of oral sex, on my laptop I'd be suspended. Some have said that people viewing sexual content in public or in school would make them uncomfortable. One student did share a few ideas on how we could accommodate



both sides... We could send out content warning and permission slip to all parents at the high school level. The book itself would be kept behind the counter in the library with the dust cover in the library as normal and the only way for a student to check out the book would be if they had parent consent to take out the book. This person stated they felt it accommodates parents who don't want their students to see the book and also accommodates students who feel this book would help them.

None of those are my words or my opinions.

2. Policy Committee- 1 policy left to be reviewed regarding law change-working on that..the legislature is actually working on tweaking that with the meds.
3. Finance Committee- Not met- Signed warrants tonight- Passed the budget pretty smoothly.
4. Curriculum Committee- Not met
5. Buildings & Grounds Committee- Met a couple Fridays ago with Kenny Robbins, Don Whittemore & Marianne Young- Kenny went over everything that will be done over the summer. The buildings are in the best shape and standards that they've been in in all the years I've been here, over 30 years. Transportation-we have a lot of new transportation which is saving us money on repairs. We're getting where we are continuing to improve our fleet. We have put some money aside and working forward on trying to get more information to eventually get our own bus garage- We have locked in diesel fuel and heating oil for the next school year. We are paying more than we did in the past, however it is still substantial savings compared to what you're seeing at the pumps. The new boiler for the High school will come on line this fall. There is a small boiler being put in the high school so in the summer the big boilers can be shut down.
6. Negotiations Committee- Finished with contracts
7. Personnel Committee- N. Sneller (chairperson) was not present- Have done some interviews
8. Ad-hoc Committee (1st Thursday of each month)-Not met- At the last board meeting it was approved for the committee to move forward for SY 2022-23. Something will be set up to meet in the fall.

### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

A.Cushman- Spoke to Joe and Thanked him for reaching out to his cohorts and reporting back to us on what their feelings are and the differing ideas and things they think should occur. I really appreciate you doing that so we have their viewpoint as well.

B. Chow commented that the board needed to get together and make some decisions.

P.Doyen made a recommendation that Barbara, her as the secretary, write up , the board decided to remove the book from the shelf and the second one... The board decided to keep the book on the shelf. She feels the board comes back together after everyone has read the book, they have now heard all the testimony and they would go around and each person can say where they stand. When that decision falls out the way it does that the written piece will be ready. You could have it at the next meeting or you can have a special board meeting.

B. Chow stated there are no board meetings in July and not one until August 23rd.

A. Cushman stated she would be leary about waiting until the last minute to make a decision. I think maybe we should have a special meeting before then so we aren't waiting till the day before school starts.

B. Ross- asked a question/comment. After listening to the student rep..are we able to do such a thing as put that book in a special place that would only be accessed by certain conditions? We're hearing both sides of the story, listening to the students. We had people here tonight that were all pretty much appealing to have this book removed. I will be straightforward, I have not read this yet. I did not want to read it until we went through this meeting. I will be reading it now to see what it really depicts. In education we educate our students with every type of tool there is, my concern is what type of tool this is. I will read it to find out what type of tool this is. I have googled and found that you can buy it online, there are other places you can buy it. My biggest concern is we have made this a major topic for RSU 56. That is going to make students who didn't even know this book existed now go purchase it or start reading it. I'm not sure what we've done yet. I'm really confused as a board member, as a parent and as a citizen of what we have in our library and what has now been brought forward to us, to our townspeople what we have in here. Is this now an open sense that people are going to come in and censor everything in our library? You've opened up a pretty good can of worms that I'm not sure how we're going to get it through.

L. Whittington- To go off from what Bruce said I think maybe we should have a special meeting to discuss it before a vote. Everyone should read the book, I've read the book, I don't feel there's anything there but I feel we need to have the discussion to have a good solid vote and have that discussion as an open school board.

M. Young- I have not yet read the book. Is there a copy available? I don't feel it's fair for me to make a decision until I have read it.

Pam stated that it is checked out. She has the book, it just came back when she was away. If someone wants to take it tonight they can and when they are done, they can bring it back and I can let people know when it's available and someone else can come get it.

D. Whittemore- Today someone sent me some pictures. I didn't realize tonight we were going to get into all we did. I have to say the pictures were a little grainy but I was really appalled that it was in our school. I haven't read the book. I will have to read the book. I don't look forward to reading it. I think we might have a big problem on our hands. We thought we had fighting last year over the masks.

A.Cushman- I have reached out members of the community because I was added to the group that Bonnie spoke about. I was reached out to by alot of people and there were some that wanted to come out to the meeting tonight but didn't want any judgment on them, just like there was judgment on those people that wanted to wear a mask rather than people who didn't want to wear a mask. We've got students and community members that are very supportive of the book. I have people that I know that no longer live in the community that have come out as either trans, gay or lebian. They are very proud of the community and that they graduated from Dirigo but they still don't feel that they have been accepted 100 % and that was why none of them came here tonight. They don't think that their voice is going to be heard. I'm in the process of reading the book again and going over it but that's one of the things is maybe if that had been there when I was in HS I would have understood something more about myself and maybe not attempted committing suicide. I think we've got to think of the bigger issues when we do read the book.

J. Conron- From a student perspective, I've seen the same thing. I've had a few students reach out to me against the book, others just not vocal at all but there's still a general attitude against it, but also a very soft spoken group, that is a strong supporter of the book and how it can help our students. They also feel that insecurity in fear of being public with those statements. I hope my neutral stance and equal representation is helpful.

D. Whittemore- Is there a way we can keep the book in school and maybe take out some of the pictures?

B. Chow- commented on whether there can be any restrictions. She said it would have to be looked at as far as policy and maybe talk to legal.

L. Whittington- Wanted to make a motion to have a special meeting prior to August 23rd to have a discussion regarding the book. Barbara said no motion was necessary, just a consensus.

Pam said if we stayed on the regular schedule the special meeting could be August 9th. Then any written decision could go out by the 23rd.

C. Leuders- spoke on some things he read about chromosomes and if that plays any part of what happens in people. He stated he has a transgender relative. He feels maybe it could have parental permissions to get the book.

B. Chow- Please let us know if you can't make the meeting August 9th. We need to have a quorum.

B. Ross- asked if there would be a zoom link for that meeting.

B. Chow said there would be a zoom.

Pam said she would be in Alaska for most of July so Mary would be the book person, also the office is closed on Fridays.

B. Ross- Commented that he wanted people still at the meeting or still listening that if they have any feelings about the book to please write in and express them.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

1. Motion to adjourn

Motion: B. Ross

Seconded: D. Whittemore

Motion Carried

Meeting adjourned at 8:36 pm