
The REPOR

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UVUU School Board approves equity policy

BY KATHERINE LAZARUS

BRANDON — After a tense meeting last month, the school board came together June 2 to continue their discussion of the 2.9 Equity policy, ultimately approving the measure 9-2 to ensure that the superintendent “shall not fail to interrupt systemic inequities and institutional bias, and shall not fail to take all reasonable action.”

School board member Kevin Thornton raised a motion to amend the professional devel-

opment section within 2.9 so that teachers should read Martin Luther King Jr.’s books. This raised tension among the group.

“Was that a friendly amendment?” asked Superintendent Jeanne Collins.

“I don’t think so,” responded board chairperson Laurie Bertrand.

One board member, Mike Lufkin, seemed to agree with Thornton and seconded the amendment, but that also was

met with resistance.

“I don’t think we need to do that,” board member Angela Ouellette said.

“I agree with Angela. It’s a good sentiment, but it’s too specific,” member Greg Bernhardt added.

Considering the board impasse at the last meeting, in which Thornton refused to relinquish the floor over Bertrand’s objections (prompting a board adjournment), the board

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Equity

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the following: "board members are expected to act with proper decorum and civility as befits the finest democratic governance and as models for the student body and citizenry."

The board also approved wording further defining the chair's role to include: "the chair is empowered and expected to assure that public and board behavior be limited

to properly addressing policy issues in a mutually respectful and civil fashion."

As the board ending the meeting, and won't be scheduled to meet until August, Thornton raised concerns about allowing "healthy debate."

"I would contend that a lot of the objections I've been raising have been germane to the policy discussion," Thornton said. "We have a tradition in Vermont of open democratic discussion and I think we have to be very jealous about preserving that."

MATHIS MOVES MOTION

Brandon resident Bill Mathis, who served on the state board of education for the previous ten years and is a former long-time superintendent of RNeSU, took the floor at this week's meeting to express his doubts that the Vermont School Board Association's equity resolution was valid. The resolution in question, he said, calls for schools "receiving public funds adopt and exercise, equal and equitable opportunities in admissions, programs and practices."

That's plain enough for public schools, but when private schools are added to the mix, Mathis said, there is difficulty.

Mathis, who acknowledges that his opinions on public funding in private schools in

Vermont has gotten him into "a lot of trouble with the private schools," said he hopes to take this resolution to the VSBA Convention and get it adopted as the official position.

"There's some questions about special education, whether they're accepting over there," explained Mathis. RNeSU has already approved the resolution, which allows the OVUU board to carry this to VSBA for full membership action.

Barstow Memorial School recognized that they already violate the resolution because of private school tuition and since private schools do not monitor discrimination.

"I am having trouble with the private schools receiving money and think it should be modified for proper accountability," Mathis said, reflecting on the tuition that private schools, the same ones who take state funding, charge. "Angela Arsenal (chair of Champlain Valley Union School Board) wants to sponsor it," Bertrand added and asked for a motion to move the resolution forward. Mathis moved and Bernhardt seconded it.

SUMMER PROGRAMMING

This is the first summer of a three-year program to rectify the negative effects of the pandemic's forced remote learning on students. More than 50% of students at Neshobe and Ot-

ter Valley Union schools are struggling in core areas, according to school officials.

To combat that deficit in learning, RNeSU will be hosting summer camps from July 5 to Aug. 6 for all ages. Summer offerings will include academic, social-emotional, credit recovery, and tutoring.

Teachers have reached out to specific parents of children who would particularly benefit, but "everyone is encouraged to participate because it is an opportunity post-Covid to come together and get outside as much as possible," Supt. Collins said.

Registration has closed, but administrators are going to reflect on capacity and could, perhaps, create a second opportunity for enrollment if there is additional capacity.

GRADUATION AS EXPECTED

The school's graduation ceremonies will be outside and in person as anticipated, a welcome development that the board confirmed at last Wednesday's meeting. The ceremony is June 12 at 12 (noon) at the high school's Markowski Field. It is mandatory that everyone wear masks, board members noted, but there is basically no limit for the number of people who can be there, as the current Vermont guidance is 900 people and the school is expecting less.

STUDENT JOINS BOARD

Chairperson Bertrand welcomed Otter Valley Union High School sophomore Pajua Gamba as the student representative on the board for the upcoming school year.

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— Kevin Thornton,
School board member

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