

LAMOILLE NORTH SUPERVISORY UNION BOARD
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2008
CAMBRIDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STAFF ROOM

Board members present: Belvidere - none; Cambridge – Jan Sander; Eden – none; Hyde Park – Brian Marshall; Johnson – Tim Sullivan, Casey Romero, Terri O’Hear; Lamoille Union District #18 – Beth Bailey, Peter Ingvoldstad, David Whitcomb, Steve Reber; Waterville – none. Others: Sue Cano (Interim Superintendent), Gary Chicoine (Hum. Res. Mgr.), Judy Schultz (JES Bus. Mgr.),

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call to Order*

T. Sullivan called the meeting to order at 6:35.

2. *Review of Superintendent Hiring Process*

B. Marshall said he feels that if we’d had a year to do this, we would have done it differently, but there were circumstances imposed on us that required that we move quickly and, given that, we did well. He said T. Sullivan in particular did very well.

C. Romero said she feels differently, as does the rest of the Johnson board. She said we hired a qualified candidate. But she has a huge problem with how we arrived at the finalists. She believes the outcome of that process was so flawed that it needs to be addressed. We treated internal candidates unfairly, and did a great disservice to the 15-20 people who had input on local candidates that the board never saw.

G. Chicoine said he thinks anyone who feels this process was flawed needs to prove a flaw against the instructions the board gave. He sees nothing that went awry in the context of instructions from the board that were documented in the minutes. C. Romero agreed that nothing happened that was in contradiction to the directions the board gave the chair, but she feels the decision to suppress references was flawed. G. Chicoine asked, against what standard? C. Romero said against VSBA-recommended practice. She said, from what she knows, it is unusual to divide the information in a candidate’s packet. She believes the decision to take apart candidates’ packets handicapped the initial committees. T. Sullivan said the blame for that decision is his, and he accepts it. He had reasons for doing it, but he wouldn’t do it again if had it to do over. He asked if others felt we should put all letters of recommendation in the packets so the interview committees could see them all. P. Ingvoldstad said, except for ones from facilitators. G. Chicoine said we asked for 3 letters of reference, but some submitted 7, 8, or 9, and some submitted letters that were years old. What do we do in those circumstances?

T. Sullivan said P. Ingvoldstad’s comment is relevant to the design of the process. P. Ingvoldstad said he is sure the committee chairs led those meetings completely appropriately, but we don’t want it to look like they prefer one person over another when they are trying to be neutral facilitators. B. Marshall said in Hyde Park, some people thought the board should anoint the interim principal, but his response was that if an

internal candidate is weighed against a different standard than any other candidate, then the selection always has a cloud over it. C. Romero asked him to explain. B. Marshall said if the board says an internal candidate doesn't need to go through the full process, or looks at an internal candidate more rigorously, there will forever be a question about the process by which the person was selected.

T. Sullivan asked, how should we decide in the future who will be on the interview committees and who leads them? B. Bailey said she doesn't think central office members should be on the committees. They should not be choosing their own boss. G. Chicoine asked, should teachers be removed from the committees? B. Bailey said no, they are quite different from administrators in central office. P. Ingvaldstad, said in his business experience, there are always people on interview committees who are going to be supervised by the chosen candidate. B. Bailey said central office members should not lead the committees, but she thinks it is all right for them to be on a committee. Others agreed.

T. Sullivan asked, how should committee members be selected? P. Ingvaldstad said he liked the recommendation T. Sullivan had mailed to everyone, that each board should appoint two people. J. Sander said she thought each community should have someone on the committees in addition to board members. P. Ingvaldstad suggested each board should select a couple of people, who would not necessarily be board members. S. Cano asked, if just by chance no board picked a board member, would that meet the needs of the board? She remembered some people saying it would be helpful to have board members on the committees. P. Ingvaldstad she he doesn't think board members need to be on the committees. S. Reber asked for clarification on S. Cano's question. S. Cano said she was asking whether the board would want to specify that 1 or 2 board members must be on the committees. If board could choose anyone they wished, there could end up being no board members on the committees. B. Marshall said that, in the Hyde Park principal search, a VSBA rep told the board that it will very quickly become obvious to any screening committee who the leading 3-4 candidates are. That was true in the Hyde Park case. The committee's selections would not have been any different if a board member was or was not on the committee. C. Romero asked, did the material the Hyde Park committee reviewed include references? B. Marshall said yes. J. Sander said she would like to see a member of each board on the committee, and that should not be optional. P. Ingvaldstad said huge committees could make the interview process difficult for interviewees; he thinks smaller committees are better. B. Marshall said he has no objection to a general rule that one of the committee members each board chooses should be a board member, as long as each board has the ability to make an exception.

S. Reber asked how committee members would be screened, and how they were screened this time. T. Sullivan said if the individual boards select them, each board can screen them in whatever way they want. This time, there were limited screening criteria. Because we had a candidate who was announced, he did not feel it was in the best interest of the process or the SU to place people on the committees whose opinions on a candidate were known. He tried to pick people who were experienced.

Community members and students were solicited. Choosing principals was a challenge, as some were unavailable. The initial 2 people who were contacted were the committee leaders. They helped build the committees, along with T. Sullivan, G. Chicoine, and T. Bailey.

D. Whitcomb said P. Cray told him he did not know who the community member from Eden was until he read it in the paper. D. Whitcomb said it was a mistake that board members had to find out from the paper who was on the committees. It looked to him like there was a deliberate effort to prevent people from knowing who was on the committees. He also said G. Chicoine should not be involved in hiring his own boss, and an outgoing superintendent should never again endorse a candidate right from the start. G. Chicoine said committee selection was an accelerated process. He had 10 or 11 panel members identified about a week before interviews. He had names of 5 Eden residents given to him by P. Cray, and he called them all in one day, but got only one return phone call from someone who couldn't do it. He called another person who couldn't do it. Then T. Bailey suggested Bruce Bernor, and when G. Chicoine called him he agreed to be on the committee. After he agreed, G. Chicoine advised P. Cray by email before the News & Citizen came out. D. Whitcomb asked if he had told P. Cray about all the committee members, or just Bruce. G. Chicoine said just Bruce. T. Sullivan said he thinks everyone would have felt more comfortable with more regular updates and with more information about who was on committees. There was nothing secret about the process, but the lack of updates was a mistake. He admits that and takes responsibility. (*T. O'Hear arrived at 7:07.*)

B. Bailey said she had talked to one interview committee member who told her the committee was not allowed to reveal the names of the candidates until it was in the newspaper. She asked if that was true. T. Sullivan said the candidates who weren't chosen as finalists needed to be notified before the names of the finalists were made public. He agreed that board members should know who the finalists are before it is in the papers. J. Sander said she knew nothing about any of the process. G. Chicoine asked if it was appropriate for B. Bailey to approach a panel member and pump them for information. D. Whitcomb said, absolutely. B. Bailey also thought so.

T. Sullivan brought the discussion back to assignment of committee members. If two are to be chosen by each board, should one of the two be a board member? J. Sander said she will concede that if a board wants to give up board representation in its choices, it should have that right. T. Sullivan asked, who would lead the two committees? J. Sander said the chairs should not be in an employee position; they should be board members or community members. T. Sullivan asked, should each committee be allowed to pick its chair? There was agreement with that idea. S. Reber asked, what about other members in addition to those chosen by the boards? T. Sullivan thought some students could be added, but they could be chosen by administrators who were in contact with students.

S. Cano said establishing a communication process is important. She was told one process by which she could find out the names of the finalists, but T. Bailey changed

the process, and she got the information from the newspaper. A lot of the concerns that have been expressed would be resolved if the communication process were clear. Then people wouldn't have to approach committee members looking for information. S. Reber asked, what kinds of things the committee does should not be communicated in casual conversation to a board member? What should a committee member not ever communicate to others? P. Ingvaldstad said there has to be a lid on who is or is not going to be brought forward as a finalist until all candidates can be communicated with. S. Reber asked, is there anything confidential about the names of the people who were interviewed?

G. Chicoine said a contentious issue was the confidential deliberations of the committees. They sought to preserve the candidates' confidentiality, and also there was the fact that 5 panel members, as well as G. Chicoine, are board employees and were deliberating on two internal candidates who could have become their boss. There was fear expressed about the possibility of anything that was said getting out to the public. There were deliberative, responsible comments made about candidates that may have been negative. One individual expressed nervousness at several points during the meeting and had to be reassured that the deliberations would be confidential. G. Chicoine thinks people asking for information about the deliberations just didn't understand those dynamics. S. Reber asked, what's the right solution to that problem? It seems fundamental that board members be allowed to know on what basis committee members made their decisions. He said the board delegates jobs like this because it is not practical otherwise, but it is almost a responsibility for board members to inquire of the committees how they made their decisions. He doesn't think there is any reason why a board member would not ask why particular people were chosen. J. Sander said we should have faith that people will follow the proper procedure, and should not question them if we don't like the results. B. Marshall agreed. He said the committee should be left alone after it has done its task. C. Romero said she thought the problem was that the committees were not given all the information to begin with. S. Reber said his point is a different one from C. Romero's, and he did not bring it up because the decision surprised him. He thought questions about selection criteria and how they were applied would be reasonable, but he never thought there was any question of committee members acting inappropriately, and felt no lack of trust. He would like the board to be able to ask questions in executive session about the committee's deliberations. S. Cano asked, in a general sense, not specifics? He said yes. C. Romero said a committee that had confidential conversations should be able to report on them to the board in executive session. P. Ingvaldstad said he thought it would be fine for the committee to report on criteria used for selection, but not on how they were applied to a particular person. J. Sander agreed.

D. Whitcomb said the board does have the right to ask questions in executive session. He brought up T. Sullivan's reference in his process critique to "candidates who have been misleading with their hiring information" and asked, did we have that situation and not know about it as board members? T. Sullivan said there was a question about the prescreening issues, but he wasn't privy to specifics. (*J. Schultz left at 7:30.*) He suggested returning to this subject later.

S. Cano said maybe we should consider establishing expectations at the beginning of the process about what the committee report back to the board needs to include, so the committees will know from the start, and the board will know what they should be expecting to get. Anyone who wasn't comfortable with those expectations could decline to be on a committee. Others agreed. T. Sullivan asked what the board would want besides the names of the finalists. J. Sander said in this case, we had big list of what we were looking for. If someone asked why a specific candidate was not picked, the committee could tell which criteria that person did not meet. P. Ingvaldstad said then they would have to start talking about negatives of that candidate; he would never go there. C. Romero said committee members never speak for themselves – the outcome is a committee decision. The committee should be able to explain the criteria used. G. Chicoine said we're dancing around the issue. The criteria used was the list developed with R. Proulx. When the board interviewed the 3 finalists, they did talk about those 3 people and why they were there. Some want to know why certain people were disqualified, and that's where he would draw the line.

T. Sullivan asked, do we really want interview committees? G. Chicoine said the board told the panels to deliberate, but instead committee members could just have been asked to give score sheets, with no deliberation. The board forced deliberation with its instructions. S. Reber asked what G. Chicoine's recommendation would be now. He said he argued for use of score sheets. B. Marshall said when the committee chair reported to the facilitator, the facilitator might have asked the committee chair, "Is there anything else I need to know about the process used?" The chair might say "No, we used the specified criteria." T. Sullivan said maybe the board should interview all candidates if we want more information. He thinks getting the 3 finalist names is enough. We have faith in the committees. B. Bailey said she thinks we probably came up with the very best candidate under the most flawed conditions. She thinks communication was an issue. The committees did their jobs and the board had a chance to ask their questions.

T. Sullivan asked, in the future, should we stay with two interview committees and accept not much more information than finalist names? Do we want score sheets, or names (requiring a deliberative process)? S. Reber asked, which is easier on the committees? G. Chicoine said scoresheets. P. Ingvaldstad agreed. He said most people will largely ignore the criteria and simply make the scores align with who they want to select; he would do that himself. J. Sander said a score sheet can turn against you. She gave the example of a car that would win in a car showed based on a score sheet, but that should not win because of one serious flaw. B. Marshall said he would prefer names, and nothing else, unless he needs to know it. J. Sander said she would prefer names. C. Romero would prefer names as long as there is an opportunity for the board and committees to talk afterwards in executive session. S. Reber asked, could there be a separate score for each criterion, so the board could make a decision based on which criteria they feel are most important? He would prefer scores.

T. Sullivan asked, should the board receive just names, or more information? P. Ingvaldstad said he would not be comfortable with the kind of questions people would be asked and how that would make people feel about being on an interview committee. He'd rather go with a scoresheet than have the committees interviewed. J. Sander said she might go along with asking questions of the committee only if someone had a compelling reason to do so, for instance if a board member knew something the committee might not know. S. Cano wondered if the question would be resolved if each board selected one board member to be on an interview committee, and there was enough time to have local board meetings where those members could discuss the interviews in executive session. A board member is allowed to discuss in executive session confidential discussions from other meetings. P. Ingvaldstad asked, could that happen in 2 weeks? S. Cano said in the future we might want to extend the process a few extra weeks if necessary to allow time for extra pieces like this. G. Chicoine said, if we have a year's notice, that's great, but with 4-5 weeks notice, if the board doesn't want an interim for a full year, we don't have that luxury. We need to define the process with context in mind. He thought S. Cano's suggestion wouldn't have worked in this case. P. Ingvaldstad said he thought waiting two weeks later to hire would have been okay. Most people would wait another two weeks. T. Sullivan recapped the idea: Committees would make their recommendations, and then there would be time for members from each board to report back to the boards in executive session. There was agreement that would be a good idea. P. Ingvaldstad said communication should not go through board chairs; every communication should go to every member. *(T. O'Hear left at 7:55.)*

B. Bailey said she wanted to respond to G. Chicoine's suggestion that she had "pumped" a committee member. She said she never got any names; she only asked if someone had been chosen.

T. Sullivan returned to D. Whitcomb's question on prescreening. S. Reber asked, if someone applied and their references were forged, why would we find out about it? T. Sullivan said his understanding was that there was a case where someone put something down on their application which proved not to be entirely true. G. Chicoine said there were 9 candidates initially. One withdrew because the process was taking too much time. Another withdrew because he had made a misrepresenting statement on the School Spring form. He revealed this to G. Chicoine in a phone conversation, and G. Chicoine then told him he couldn't go further with his application. T. Sullivan said that his comment was not referring to a specific instance. He was just talking about the process. We didn't define prescreening. If someone did falsify something, with the prescreening process we used, we wouldn't learn that until after the interviews, when more thorough reference checks were done. G. Chicoine said he didn't pre-screen anyone out. On paper, everyone was qualified. When we talked about prescreening, the board authorized him to prescreen those not qualified. T. Sullivan asked, what level of prescreening effort do we expect so that before candidates get to the interview committees we're sure they deserve to be there? G. Chicoine asked, what if a member of the public brought to him, a day or so before the interviews, a piece of disparaging information about a candidate from a newspaper – something he

hadn't previously known? What should he do? D. Whitcomb said, check it out. C. Romero thought that was too heavy a burden to put on G. Chicoine. T. Sullivan asked, what if we haven't screened all other candidates to the same level? S. Reber felt it would not be a big deal to interview someone and have the interview turn out to be a waste of time. P. Ingvaldstad and others agreed. S. Reber asked, would there be time for criminal checks? G. Chicoine said no.

S. Reber brought up one of G. Chicoine's questions that had been mailed out: Should we accept applications not submitted through School Spring? He asked about the pros and cons. G. Chicoine said a candidate presented an application package to him personally instead of going through School Spring. That applicant never went through the screens on School Spring where applicants check things off, and sign a statement saying that if anything on the application is found to be untrue the person can be fired. Board members agreed that a hard copy application would be all right as long as the person signed the same agreement they would sign on School Spring.

T. Sullivan asked, should 3 letters of recommendation be considered a minimum, or should people only submit 3? D. Whitcomb said getting letters of recommendation ahead of time is worthless. G. Chicoine said another issue is how current the letters should be. B. Marshall said there could be a situation where there was an incident in a previous job and the applicant knew it would probably come up and wanted an opportunity for a former employer to write and explain about that incident. That would be important information to share. P. Ingvaldstad and C. Romero asked, why not accept more than 3 letters? C. Romero said you learn by what people give you. An old letter could have something very relevant, and the person who wrote it may be dead or otherwise unable to write a more recent one. It was agreed that we should accept more than 3 letters, and ask for current ones, but accept old ones.

There was discussion about whether letters of reference should be included in the information given to the interview committees. C. Romero thought they should. S. Reber asked, why would we not want to give them? T. Sullivan said we're looking forward in this discussion, and we've eliminated the conditions under which the decision not to include letters was made. S. Reber asked, what is the preferred practice regarding letters of recommendation? G. Chicoine said he would prefer not to ask for them. He does not think they are of much value. But asking for them is pretty standard practice. In most situations, he would give them to the interview panels. There was general agreement that in the future it would be okay give them to the committees. C. Romero said she thought the fact that they were not given to the committees this time needed to be addressed. She said the process was shaped by the pool of candidates. T. Sull agreed – the process was shaped by B. Scheffert being announced at the beginning as a candidate. The process was shaped in order to be as fair as possible, and not give a perceived advantage to an already announced candidate. C. Romero said there are 2 issues. One is that the process was shaped by the pool of candidates. The other is that 2 qualified internal candidates never came before the board. She said we treated internal candidates badly, and never saw what people supporting them had to say. She said a fair and open discussion allows all questions to be asked and ans-

wered. D. Whitcomb noted that people in the audience at the board meeting where B. Scheffert's candidacy was announced spoke favorably about her, but he was cut off as soon as he said something negative, which he feels was not right.

T. Sullivan asked for thoughts about how we want to deal with future internal candidates. B. Marshall said, as hard as you try, an internal candidate will not be judged by the same criteria. Internal candidates probably will be judged more rigorously, and they should know that, and should know that if they are not selected it may be hard to return to their jobs. He suggested that any internal candidate should be given a courtesy interview, and advised to withdraw if it is not very likely they will be a final candidate. B. Bailey, J. Sander, and D. Whitcomb disagreed. D. Whitcomb said someone could always advise a candidate about the chances of being a finalist personally, not acting as a board member. D. Whitcomb said the outgoing superintendent should have nothing to do with the hiring of a new superintendent, and neither should G. Chicoine. He thinks T. Sullivan's suggestion to use a consultant should be discussed with the full board. It was agreed that internal candidates should go through the process the same as anyone else. S. Cano asked, should an internal candidate get an automatic interview or not? S. Reber said B. Marshall's idea is interesting. What is the cost of giving an internal candidate the right to that interview? B. Marshall clarified that he was talking about a preliminary interview. S. Reber said he he misunderstood. He said the internal candidates are people we still live with. He'll never know why the decision not to pass them forward as finalists was made, and he thinks that is slightly unfortunate. B. Marshall clarified that the process he was thinking of was a different one, where a large number of candidates were prescreened out and never interviewed. He felt an internal candidate should never be in that group. T. Sullivan asked, should we do nothing different for internal candidates? S. Reber said there might be a positive benefit to nurturing homegrown candidates. It is a morale issue. C. Romero said the committees would take that into consideration. She added that just because all references were suppressed, that does not make suppressing references fair. D. Whitcomb said if we give special privileges to internal candidates, we need to let the other candidates know that, and then they won't show up. It was agreed that there should be no special treatment for internal candidates. S. Cano said she doesn't see that we have a philosophy or strategies in place to help LNSU employees develop higher level leadership skills. Maybe the board could talk to the incoming superintendent about creating those opportunities. S. Reber said that was what he was getting at.

T. Sullivan said he will put together a summary of the suggestions on a future process and circulate it. He suggested postponing the discussion of the chair's role for another time.

3. Future Agenda Items

S. Cano said the LNSU policy that needs to come before the board on October 8 needs some changes. (*G. Chicoine left at 8:36.*) T. Sullivan said we warned the whole policy manual, and will edit different sections. S. Cano said we can't make substantive changes. T. Sullivan said if we make any changes we will just re-warn the changed sections and adopt the sections that were not changed. S. Cano said the description of the role of the chairperson may not be what the board wants. And the section on the

executive committee doesn't indicate who has authority to convene the executive committee. She suggested the chair, the superintendent, or the whole board. P. Ingvoldstad said any two members should be able to ask that the executive committee meet. D. Whitcomb said Section 264 states that the full board will come up with a policy on what the executive committee will do, but they have never done that. T. Sullivan suggested that the roles of the chair and the executive committee be discussed at a future meeting. J. Sander noted a typo.

D. Whitcomb asked to agenda a discussion of outside transportation companies driving LNSU children. C. Romero said she didn't think that was an LNSU issue. P. Ingvoldstad said the LNSU board could come up with recommended policies other boards could adopt. T. Sullivan asked if D. Whitcomb could come up with a recommended policy. D. Whitcomb said he thought the issue needed discussion first. S. Cano said some procedures for all schools to follow have been instituted through Ad-Co, and some language that will be in contracts has been developed. D. Whitcomb asked if she could email that to all board members. S. Cano said no independent transportation company will transport LNSU children unless a criminal background check has been done on the drivers.

B. Bailey said she has had a difficult time in the past getting information from the superintendent's office on salaries and benefits of all LNSU employees, which is public information. She asked if that could be on a future agenda. P. Ingvoldstad said he could put that on the high school board agenda in November. This involves all boards, but the issue can be clarified by the HS board. S. Cano noted that the agenda for the October LNSU meeting is very long. T. Sullivan said he didn't think the whole board would have to meet to discuss B. Bailey's issue; he thought it could be dealt with without that.

P. Ingvoldstad said that acceptance of the agenda needs to be on the agenda for LNSU board meetings.

4. *Adjourn*

ACTION: It was moved and seconded to adjourn at 8:47, and the motion was passed.

Respectfully submitted by,
Donna E. Griffiths