

APPROVED Minutes
MARLBORO SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
Marlboro Principal and Act 46 Meeting
October 25th, 2016 at 7:00 PM Marlboro School

Present:

Board: Douglas Korb (Chair), Celena Romo (Vice Chair), Dan MacArthur, Carol Ann Johnson, Lauren Poster

Administration: Francie Marbury (Principal)

Members of the Public: Sixteen participated in the meeting.

Call meeting to order and introductions

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 PM.

Ms. Marbury explained that the first part of the meeting would be for everyone to share their views on the qualities and experience the community is seeking in a new Principal. She observed that the new person will be attracted by the community, and acknowledged the number of people attending.

Everyone introduced themselves.

Ms. Marbury introduced two questions and asked that everyone speak to the questions:

- What are we looking for in the next Principal, and the next 15 years?
- What qualities and experience do we need in that person?

She explained that the answers would go into creating the job description for approval by the Board, and she is looking for two parent committee members to be part of the hiring process. Responses included:

- Strong support of teachers and children especially in transition
- Listening
- Retention of teachers
- Making teachers feel heard and valuing their collaboration
- Working well with community, kids and staff
- Team player
- Facilitating communication between teachers and Supervisory Union
- Valuing the concerns of community
- Communication
- Community building
- Passion for working with students
- Both micro and macro perspective
- Awareness of today's students, inclusive, accessible, open to different learning styles and adaptive technologies, open to where the cutting edge is, attending conferences, supporting Professional Development and Special Education.
- Teaching the whole child, seeing the whole child; keeping up with and encouraging awareness of brain research and emerging technology
- Community involvement, having the community's back
- Family feeling at school: older helping younger, sing, outdoor recess
- Clone of Francie
- Focusing on kids more, reading group has been effective
- A Principal who has been a teacher

Ms. Marbury asked that any other form of input, written, email, etc. be sent to herself or Gail Chaine, and acknowledged the many contributions to the discussion. She invited anyone who had not spoken to do so, and added the question of what an incoming principal should know about the school.

- Somebody who can take in what is special about this community;
- Advocacy, knowing the channels, being able to find the answers when someone is in need.
- Appreciates how much the school is valued.
- People buy houses because of the school; value of the culture; parent involvement;
- Open and flexible
- Strong leader
- Embracing a community, they may not have been part of

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Ms. Marbury asked everyone to think about being willing to be on the Hiring Committee.

Ms. Turlow observed that Marlboro is known as a “good black sheep” that empowers teachers, independent thinking, every teacher is different, progressive education engenders the talent of each teacher, doesn’t try to homogenize education, and empowers children with open ended materials, project-based education; she urged holding onto these values.

Ms. Whitehouse ask Ms. Marbury to share stress areas.

Ms. Marbury observed that staying on the cutting edge has gotten harder; there can be a sense of isolation; she appreciates community members who bring things to her attention from outside; the educational landscape is changing a lot, also with Act 46. Research shows that when Principals stay a long time, this attracts teachers, builds a strong learning culture; budgets and money are not a strength; the new Principal probably will hire three or four teachers in the next five or six years, there is more turnover than there had been previously.

Ms. Turlow recalled that recently she was teaching a new skill, and later found a child trying to tie shoes, who looked up and said: “Learning makes learning.”

Ms. Marbury further observed that a new principal will be coming in a time of change.

Ms. Romo asked the meeting to discuss their hopes and dreams for the next years. Responses:

- An old graduate credits the school for success as artist, hopefully future graduates will as well
- Hope for authenticity in a changing world, an “innovation economy”, teaching the whole child, community, appreciation for art, environment and justice as the three pillars of our society
- Hope what is here now can continue, being, held and carried by community, supporting what students are interested in, helping them to become who they are, exposure to the arts, a small school down the street
- Hope to preserve the whole experience at Marlboro Elementary, keep energy up
- Hope for a higher turnout of parents at meetings, and more of a cross section of parents, reducing social isolation
- Hope to preserve brilliant traditions started by individuals (Costa Rica trip etc.)
- Support the individuality of the teachers, a continuously connected social climate, so kids know what to expect

Ms. Marbury thanked everyone and turned the meeting over to Mr. Korb, who suggested creating a box for more comments.

Act 46 Update

Mr. Korb explained that he wanted to provide a forum for questions and answers, and discussed the current state of the process of the Act 46 Elementary Study Committee. He noted that In August, with Wardsboro and Dover, the aim is to present the Recommendation of the Committee to the State Board for approval in January, so that there will be ample processing time before a vote at the March Town Meeting. The Committee is a separate legal entity from the School Board. He invited Mr. MacArthur to start the discussion.

Mr. MacArthur explained that Ms. Romo, Ms. Gratwick are on the study committee Ms. Johnson are on the Study Committee; the purpose is to come up with a plan through which these Towns could merge in a single District and operate these schools. They must develop the same structure; seventh and eighth grades will no longer be part of that district; the committee must find ways for this to work from both administrative and education perspectives.

Ms. Romo explained that after many meetings with potential “dance partners”, Choice emerged as the important issue; she described various structures that could be done, or could not be done, and the reasons; also discussed different philosophies, noting that all Towns feel very strongly for keeping their schools; seventh and eighth grade could be Choice; the Committee is trying to focus on how each school can

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maintain what is special and unique while also giving all three towns opportunities for the whole child to flourish.

Ms. Gratwick emphasized the importance of creating the best Articles of Agreement possible, in case consolidation does occur, although having to give up seventh and eighth grade is not something she can support.

Mr. MacArthur reiterated that the voters have the final say and will decide.

Ms. Gratwick explained Articles of Agreement.

Mr. Korb explained that the State Board of Education has shown that they are looking for Committee proposals based on expansion of educational opportunities, and not merely gaining the tax incentives; each school will be independent, with its same identity; Ms. Gratwick added that there would be only one Board for the three schools.

There was discussion of Board representation. Ms. Romo explained that it will be the same as the Committee; Ms. Gratwick noted one budget for all three schools.

Mr. Korb noted that the Committed has its own blog, and is having another meeting, going from town to town. It was noted that the BCTV and WCSU websites will have video of all the meetings.

Ms. Romo explained that these are open meetings that rotate between towns, and that a PR consultant is making all information widely available and accessible to the public.

Mr. Korb discussed legal vetting; Mr. MacArthur noted the Front Porch Forum also has Committee and Act 46 information.

Mr. Korb explained that there will be a vote up or down, by Town; if the vote is No, the Alternative Structure Committee will follow the rules (now published in draft) for and Alternative Proposal; Ms. Poster is on the Alternative Structure Committee.

Ms. Poster explained that the Committee is looking for what good can come of Act 46 in expanded opportunity for students, Middle School or Jr. High, access to programs. She noted that there are 34 pages of (draft) rules, and what schools are going through seems more daunting than for a K-6 with a Choice High School right next door to a "natural partner". With Jr, High focus, travel to Costa Rica, etc. might be attractive to other schools and could overlap, as an expanded opportunities component. She has invited two people from WSESU to begin a conversation on what kinds of programs might be shared.

If the town votes no, Ms. Poster pointed out that there is a lot to show what works at Marlboro and why, and how the community is open to improving; the administrative structure is going to change no matter what. The discussion with Readsboro did not bear fruit; many Marlboro graduates to BUHS, so it may make sense to go in that direction.

Mr. Korb discussed the time-line, a vote in March, the deadline of July 2017, then the State approves the plan, or not, by November 2017; and nothing is in effect until 2019.

Q & A

Mr. Korb invited questions.

Q. How large are Dover and Wardsboro?

A. Including High School, 140 at Dover and 122 at Wardsboro.

A. Regarding JR High, School Choice tends to ebb and flow; after the merger of Wilmington and

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Whitingham, Dover graduates went there; this changes every year. There was discussion of various schools chosen.

Q. Philosophically, can we continue to go beyond our present limitations with two other schools sharing the budget?

A. It will take keeping an open mind, seeing what's available, learning from that.

Q. Is act 46 going to change our direction?

A. The Committee is seriously looking at the workability of raising educational opportunities. At every meeting, all Towns are represented, and nobody wants to change their schools; if we work together, it will be to maintain what we have; one district won't try to change another's programs. We will work to expand opportunities, not decrease them. Also, Choice for elementary students is part of it. (they have choice to come here, whether or not anybody does); all the Towns like having choice.

Q. How does the voting work, do all towns have to vote yes?

A. No, they do have to be "Necessary" or "Advisable", Marlboro is an "Advisable", so could vote no, and not be part of the other district; Dover and Wardsboro have chosen "Advisable" already; if one votes against, the opportunity to consolidate is still there. The Committee Looking at the different combinations. Wardsbro and Dover are "natural partners" (same structure), Marlboro is unique in WCSU. The rest belong to L&G and contract to send their kids there for High School; this will be a MUD (Modified Unified Union District), a "Side-by-Side"; every structure has to have K-12 somehow (at least one "Side"). Even if an Alternative Structure, Choice or Jr. High cannot be taken away, but money can, and a consolidation with some other school can be forced; the State could say no and assign a "natural pairing".

Q. How can they force us?

A. As an "unmerged district".

A. The next legislature could change things a lot. The easy merges have been done; the difficult ones are beginning to surface; we're a difficult one; look at schools who have grappled with this; we don't need to worry too much until the legislature changes.

A. But we have to act under the present law, put together the proposal.

A. Nobody has talked about how our testing scores are not the highest; we're going to send this to the State, being realistic about where we might improve; small classes are not ideal for everybody; put it in a five-year plan, and what other than test scores make for successful students, and whether we can back that up with data; will look at both ideas (structures).

Q. Explain the acronyms, terms?

There was discussion of the difficulties navigating all the acronyms.

Q. Saving money is the impetus?

A. The State has denied a merger for lack of educational opportunities expansion, so it's not the only consideration.

A. Before the [Act 46 Elementary Study Committee, Marlboro-Dover-Wardsboro], there was a graph about how much cost would be saved, but if you are in the minority, and their budget goes up to pay for our programming it looks doubtful; however, it is unlikely that this would actually happen.

A. Budget is shared. What we pay today would go down, what they pay would go up.

A. Tax incentives, Small School Grant (now Merger Grant), tax rate down a couple of years, but we don't

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know cost-per-pupil.

A. Under a separate law, Special Education costs are shared across the SU so it is not the burden of one school. The Special Education teacher is a SU employee. This alleviates spikes when one child moves. Shared budget increases purchasing power, costs come down. Lots of pennies in the long run, but adds up.

A. We have the highest pp cost of the three, it's unrealistic to expect them to raise their tax rate; more realistic that voters will say not to spend as much as Marlboro has been.

Q. Shared infrastructure budget, what about "economy of philosophies"?

A. There is specific language, "the Dan amendment", in the Articles to addresses this; we need to learn from the other towns what they are doing that works.

There was discussion: other Towns developing teachers to bring up test scores; with such a different philosophy, sharing Professional Development in this area is troubling; it is not the climate in this building.

A. Secretary Holcomb showed it really is about programs; there is a lot of cost savings, bulk propane at half the price, important to tax payers; but long term not that big a saving; it really comes down to a leader and who they hire, implementing their philosophy in the programs.

A. A new Principal understanding the philosophy.

A. 80% of the budget is staff; longer service means lower budget; 3-5 years ahead it might change; most budgets really are pretty set in stone.

A. Know what you're losing if you vote no or yes; the law states we lose Small School Grants, \$112,000.00, under some scenarios; don't know if programs will continue if we can't afford to operate them.

A. Small Schools Grant becomes Merger Grant; if any are unmerged by 2018 they lose the grant.

There was discussion of the impact of the grant. Ms. Romo asked that the meeting resume Q&A.

Q. Do we know anything about Dover's and Wardsboro's philosophies? Would they keep them?

A. There was a program meeting, (Principals' presentations to both Study Committees) and Mr. Everitt (Act 46 Consultant to both) interviewed and wrote up all their philosophies; this is available on the blog site, the Front Porch Forum; there was a link in Dan's recent email.

Q. What are the choices for seventh and eighth grades?

A. Twin Valley, L&G, BUHS, Dummerston, Putney, Burr & Burton (partially public), School Without Walls, Hilltop, Compass; private schools give state average from the Towns, plus what can be arranged with the school.

Ms. Marbury noted that a concern about Choice is that private schools don't necessarily have the Special Education programs all students would need; would public money be going there? There is more energy around this issue now; there was discussion.

Ms. Turlow observed that it is a difficult political and social community issue, commodifying education.

Mr. Korb asked for final questions.

Q. Town Survey?

A. A write-up was posted in early summer, we talked about it, nobody wanted to lose High School Choice, all want to keep Town Meeting intact, and control the local budget; the school website will have this.

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Q & A. Two people from WSESU have been invited to meet and begin a conversation about where we might find opportunities to share programming; this is not about closing our Jr. High or keeping it and giving up High School choice, because of the response to the survey; and not about joining their SU; just sharing programs with seventh and eighth grades with a view to proving what we're doing now is as good or better than any other structure that can be made.

Q. Must it be a consensus recommendation on a yes or no vote, or is there a way for members to make an argument, or what if all members are not aligned?

A. The committee is not required to vote to recommend the conclusions; they converse with each of the three towns and make them aware of the recommendation in January.

Q. How many are Board members, vs Study Committee Non-Board members?

A. (show of hands in each category). There was discussion.

Q. Is there already a consensus in the committee?

A. before we decided to join the study group a large community group looked at what to do; we decided to join it to strengthen whatever case we make to the state, documenting that we have done all we could do to find the best direction. The Committee is not going to recommend yes or no, just inform citizens as fully as possible.

There was applause for the Committee.

Q. How accessible is the State?

A. We don't call them, we go to meetings where they will be, the SU did not all show up for one of these recently.

The meeting broke up into small conversations and adjourned by unanimous consent **at 8:55 PM.**

Respectfully submitted, Peter Barus, Recorder, October 25th, 2016