

September 18, 2019

- Strategic Goals: (1) Ensure that Vermont's public education system operates within the framework of high expectations for every learner and ensure that there is equity in opportunity for all.*
- (2) Ensure that the public education system is stable, efficient, and responsive to changes and ever-changing population needs, economic and 21st century issues.*

## **Draft Minutes**

### **Present:**

**State Board of Education (SBE):** Jenna O'Farrell, Vice Chair; Kimberly Gleason; Kyle Courtois; Sabina Brochu, John O' Keefe, Peter Peltz, William Mathis; Oliver Olsen (arrived at about 9:00 a.m.); and John Carroll, Chair (arrived at about 10:00 a.m.).

**Agency of Education (AOE):** Emily Simmons, Ted Fisher, Wendy Geller, Kevin Viani, Maureen Gaidys

**Others:** Ray Stevens, I.N.S.P.i.R.E.; Mark Stevens, I.N.S.P.i.R.E.; Lola Duffort, VTDigger.

### **Item A: Call to Order, Roll Call and Introductions, Amendments to the Agenda**

#### **Item B: Consent Agenda and Board Announcements**

Vice Chair O'Farrell called the meeting to order at 8:55 a.m. and asked members to introduce themselves. Mathis asked to remove Long Trail and East Meadow School (he meant East Valley Academy) from the consent agenda and made a motion to approve the draft minutes and remainder of the consent agenda. O'Keefe asked for the rationale for moving these items; Mathis said he thought there was some discrepancy between the two and wanted to discuss further. O'Keefe seconded the motion. The vote passed unanimously.

#### **Item C: Chair's Report**

Vice Chair said that this item would be delayed until Chair Carroll arrived.

#### **Item D: Public to be Heard**

There were no members of the public to be heard.

#### **Item E: AOE Data Strategic Plan Briefing**

Vice Chair O'Farrell invited AOE staff to address the Board. Secretary French introduced Wendy Geller, Director, Data Management and Analysis, and Kevin Viani, Agency of Digital Services (ADS). Secretary French explained that this presentation was the last in a series of presentations of how we define education quality – there have been some foundational presentations, then measurement (Snapshot and Report Card) and this is the last piece and will explain the back end of how the AOE collects, arrange and visualize data.

Geller gave some background, explained that Viani and his division are deployed to AOE and they work together as partners, and noted that her division is new, almost one year old. She explained that their presentation, titled, “AOE Data Strategic Plan Briefing” would be an assessment of the legacy and current state of data and technical state of the organization and where they want to take it moving forward.

Geller started with the historical landscape and showed the discreet pieces and processes of the conditions of the legacy state and the future state. The legacy state has: a disjointed approach to modernization, many disparate points of data collection, many non-integrated data sets, no single unified data model, patchy non-standard process documentation and non-uniform application of governance, heavy reliance on non-scalable processes and on manual work to meet compliance reporting, and data stewards/analysts/specialist teams federated across the AOE. The future state will have: a shared approach to modernization, standard operating procedures for collecting data, moving toward master data management to facilitate data integration, adoption of the Common Education Data Standards – Normalized Data Schema (CEDS NDS, a single unified data model), centrally managed, enterprise-wide governance, scalable, portable, repeatable processes, automated production of compliance reporting, interactive dashboard, slack for value-added analysis, and centralized data teams.

Viani spoke about tackling this work as two components: IT infrastructure and data process. He spoke about replacing people with processes with the idea of leveraging the knowledge of program staff to build a partner process, build a data environment and tie it to programming needs. He spoke about building an integration platform to help manage inputs and outputs, be focused on the data itself and not the applications, that this will be resilient vs. resistant to change, and will free up program staff for that work and not data management. Viani shared a common data model, that will allow specification of a data standard and more plug and play with products. He said that U.S. Department of Education (US ED) has done a lot of work with products compatible with this model so this will open the AOE up to sharing at the federal level as well as with other states. Viani continued that there is a cost to managing this data and the importance of building an infrastructure that creates economies of scale but also one that can easily adapt to new reporting products and requirements. Viani summarized that the hope is that ADS will be able to provide a platform that Geller’s data team can operate from and continuously improve upon.

Geller spoke about how to get to this future state. She discussed the 3-5-year breakthrough objectives: modernize collection, management, storage; move from reactive to proactive; adopt a posture of innovation and continuous improvement (CI), effectively coordinate across teams; strengthen security and privacy posture, and empowering staff and stakeholders. She spoke about going from 4 teams to one work family; being together matters and they are better together and working collaboratively with ADS. She spoke about adopting “lean thinking” (from Toyota, a CI cycle), that is a methodology and culture dedicated to CI, requires active engagement in reviewing processes to learn where it can be improved, and is an environment of feedback loops that drives improvements to yield more value. She spoke about Kanban, a process that works to identify work, define the work in standard ways, visualize the work, visualize the process of doing the work, identify waste in the process, address the waste, find better ways, repeat. Geller shared the standard operating procedure (SOP) that her team uses to

help to visualize the work, identify bottlenecks and barriers, identify resources, and examine data so that strategic decisions can be made across the division. She said her division has moved from a siloed, ad-hoc, reactive space to a place of being able to leverage data on workflows that in the past were not documented, that can now be strategically deployed and used to pay down substantial technical debt. Geller spoke about the lack of scalability on Kanban, and that her team has moved on to Azure DevOps, which has the principles but is much more sophisticated and robust toolset, and this will allow for integrated functioning on a daily basis with all the work of ADS.

Viani summarized with the three main focus areas: 1) adopt standardization in data processes and infrastructure and move to leveraging publicly available/shared tools; 2) establish a framework that we continually improve upon and move organizational knowledge into a community of people; and, 3) scale those processed so that they are not reliant on individual staff.

There were questions and discussion on the number of data sources at the AOE, Vermont being a compliance state (doesn't collect any data that is not required), historical ad hoc approach and need to scale infrastructure, data governance resourcing and support, CEDS-NDS adoption, how much of AOE data is on servers vs. cloud, planning models, capacity and budgeting, creation of ADS with centralized functions, interagency work and coordination, timeline for full implementation, support of Secretary for the division's strategic plan, vacancies and staff turnover, orienting the organization to be more resilient, output leading to stronger practices in the field, recruitment for these positions is incredibly difficult as pay is not comparable/competitive, predictive analytics, paying down technical debt, impact on reporting from the field, engagement/support with the field, leadership needed in charting a course, and simplifying data collection.

Vice Chair O'Farrell recessed for break at 10:05 a.m. Chair Carroll called the meeting back to order at 10:18 a.m. and invited Rebecca Gile to address the Board.

#### **Item F: Teacher of the Year (TOY) Presentations**

Chair Carroll invited Rebecca Gile, AOE TOY Coordinator, to introduce herself and explained the process for the Teacher of the Year. The selection process described is one that Vermont uses to determine the 2020 Vermont Teacher of the Year; Vermont then has an entrant into the 2020 National Teacher of the Year, which is hosted by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The candidates have competed an application provided by CCSSO, participated in an interview with the TOY committee, and the final piece, this presentation to the State Board. Chair Carroll introduced the two student members and commented that it might be good to have the tables turned and the students score the teachers. Chair Carroll asked Board members to introduce themselves and where they are from. He then asked the TOY candidates to state their name clearly and to speak loudly in their address to the Board.

**Elisabeth Kahn** introduced herself. She is a French/Spanish teacher at Main Street Middle School in Montpelier, a school that she attended 30 years ago. She spoke about her fierce belief that all children can learn and the responsibility of educators to ensure that they do, her work with Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) and transforming school culture, a gap year that she

took when 18 and volunteered as a teacher in Accra, Ghana, and that her first exposure in teaching was to address inequities in these schools. She recruited students and met with families, showing them that they are valued, was powerful. She spoke about the need to expand training efforts on trauma sensitive classroom management and equity literacy, support needed for more school social workers/counselors, the geographic and language barriers in publicly-funded PreK and how relationships foster engagement. As TOY, she said removing barriers and engaging students would be her mission.

**Emily Therrien** introduced herself and thanked the Board. She is an English and Social Studies teacher at Randolph Union High School, with Vermont roots. Her most formative experience has been working alongside students in racial justice project-based learning class. She spoke about a statewide racial justice activism conference that they organized, the joy and purpose in transforming students who felt alienated and unseen, daunting challenges, moral imperatives. Her message if honored as TOY would be that if we fail to lead with courage or move with clear moral integrity in order to speak out against the injustices pervasive in our society, we are in effect, condoning those injustices. She spoke about the immense power and influence of teachers, the need for support and training in examining their own experiences and biases, examining curriculum and how we teach, enabling critical thinking, leading compassionate dialogs and righting the injustices of society. She concluded that our children need teachers to confront systemic oppression and act with bold moral integrity to speak out against injustice in order to work alongside students in building a better future.

**Bethany Morrissey** introduced herself. She is a 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Salisbury Community School. She thanked the Board and said she works with amazing teachers, who could very well be here. She said there is something special about Vermont - small schools, close communities, open mindedness and drive. She spoke about Vermont being on the forefront on many initiatives the disrupted injustice. She spoke about the vast inequity that is widening, over 50% of students qualifying for free and reduced-priced lunch (FRL), disparity of hopes, dreams and worries, the tough upward climb to financial mobility, that America's education system is often blamed for this and should not be. She noted two areas that need advocacy - affordable high-quality childcare and extended learning opportunities for students and families. She concluded that investing in schools inspires hope and pride and has an immeasurable effect on the community at large, the benefits are far-reaching and lead to upward economic mobility. These changes would disrupt the cycles of injustice, which Vermont is already known for.

Chair Carroll thanked the TOYs candidates for their service, for their ambition and for sharing their message with the Board. Gile shared that the winner will be announced at the Outstanding Teacher Day at UVM. (*The date for this celebration was given, but it has since been learned that it will be rescheduled.*) There was a question about what happened to the winner. She explained that they move on to the National Teacher of the Year, where each state makes one nomination, and then they travel as a national cohort participating in professional development throughout the year.

Ted Fisher, AOE Director of Communications and Legislative Affairs, introduced himself and shared that the decision for TOY will be embargoed until the Outstanding Teacher Day at UVM.

**Item G: Secretary's Report**

Secretary French expressed appreciation for the Board's interest in data collection and management. He spoke about capacity meaning more than staff, that it is also about coherence and simplicity. He said that Vermont's data compliance reporting requirements are the same as any other state, and not dependent on the number of students. He spoke to the need to make sure our infrastructure can handle this and inform decision making, and that as we get more clarity on the back-end function, this drives decisions on the front end. He spoke about the Report Card as a project that was initiated without broad consideration of the demands on infrastructure or a real plan for cost, complexity and capacity.

There were questions/discussion on small schools and small n issues, data suppression compared to other states, supervisory unions as the structure for accountability, conflicting areas in statute, theory of action on improving schools, the role of the State Board and the trajectory of the AOE's work, support to the field and VSBA.

Secretary French announced that most of the AOE will be moving to National Life campus over the weekend of October 4 and the remainder of AOE in mid-November. There were questions on Act 11 (bargaining of teachers' health insurance) and Vermont Education Health Initiative's (VEHI) 12% increase in health insurance rates.

**Item H: The I.N.S.P.i.R.E School for Autism**

Carroll invited Mark Anderson, Chair of the I.N.S.P.i.R.E. board, Ray Stevens, Executive Director, and Michael Bandler, CFO, to address the Board. Carroll read a letter that was sent from Legal Counsel to the I.N.S.P.i.R.E. board and explained that there were findings that I.N.S.P.i.R.E. did not have financial capacity and he further explained that financial capacity goes beyond balance sheets and cash on hand and can be due to weaknesses in governance and leadership. He said their responsibility was to convince the Board that financial capacity exists to its satisfaction.

Anderson introduced himself and read a statement to the Board that addressed continuing to renew appreciation for the Board's inquiry, that this has been a difficult time for the board, employees and children, the goal is to provide excellent education to autistic children, that this gets in the way and is a problem, and that over the last 12 months this has been a top priority. He continued that this school is the victim of a crime, that he is a police officer by trade, that the I.N.S.P.i.R.E. board requested investigation earlier this year, that as a board they trusted but didn't verify. He discussed recent contact with the police for initial documentation, that this will take time and he spoke of lessons learned: reorganized board, elected a chair that is a local resident, and oversight via email does not work well. They are still working on next steps and re-establishing the financial processes so that sound operations are ensured. New treasurer has been elected, Craig White, who lives nearby and is a small business owner. Since last meeting and at the advice of CFO Bandler, they have developed an oversight/audit committee to serve as a formal independent committee, not under the board of directors to ensure that there is a fair, impartial independent review of the financial capacity of the school. The board has submitted draft policies and are also accessing consultants to provide training on board organization and responsibilities. Also working on a conflict of interest policy and financial



control policies. With gratitude, the board of directors accepts the questions of the Board. He thanked the Board for their time and offered to take questions.

Carroll asked Dr. Stevens to address the board. Stevens stated he didn't know what was wanted from him and gave some of his background. Carroll asked Stevens to address the role of the executive director in the fiduciary responsibility of the school. Stevens said having Bandler as a CFO is a huge asset. He said as Executive Director, he would not order any expenditures without consulting with the CFO. He also said that he is not interested in the details of the financials; his role is to support and develop staff and increase enrollment. He spoke about enrollment and projections. There were questions on the prior chair of the board and treasurer being related, that they were husband and wife with autistic children who founded this school, if this is addressed through policy, who the CFO reports to, flow of billing and disbursements, and disconnect between theory and practice. Carroll acknowledged the board members and the generosity of the Vranos. He commented on the quality of the board, the lack of diversity, that there is more work to be done to strengthen the board of directors and that skeptics/people with different backgrounds are needed. Carroll addressed the appearance of a conflict of interest and suggested considering that a board chair (of a school that might routinely involve restraints and possible legal involvement) with a background in law enforcement might create some cause for concern and needs consideration. Anderson responded that he had given this serious thought, is held to a higher standard, and is a mandated reporter. He is actively involved in pursuing additional board membership and this has proven difficult. There was discussion on Act 173 having impact on these independent schools, board governance of non-profits, and turnover of board leadership. Carroll gave options to 1) continue this dialog for another month, 2) determine that there is not financial capacity and create a review team, or 3) conclude that financial capacity exists. There was discussion on financial statements, debt of \$150K, payback agreements, accelerated schedule, intention to build a reserve, income based on student count, signed contracts for twenty students next year, much work has been done to right the ship, still much work to be done, review team visit at this time would be premature, approval period for this school, requiring an update in six months, when enrollment is determined, and that solidification of policies/procedures is more important than growing the board.

O'Keefe moved to table any further action on this item until April Board meeting, provided that I.N.S.P.i.R.E. supply the Board, prior to the January Board meeting, with update on financial circumstances, governance and oversight. Olsen seconded. There were no questions. Chair Carroll called the vote. The vote passed unanimously. Carroll asked representative to be in touch in December and for Bandler to provide information in a different, higher quality format next time. Carroll thanked the I.N.S.P.i.R.E. representatives for attending.

#### **Item K: Renewal of General Education and Special Education Independent School Approval**

Chair Carroll introduced this item and said that East Valley and Long Trail would also be discussed. Carroll invited Simmons to address the Board. Simmons introduced Rachel Smith, newly hired assistant Attorney General, who would not be addressing the Board.

#### Compass School

Peltz asked about compliance with documentation. There was discussion about the broader issue of compliance, possibly being mitigated by Act 173, and clarification on interpretation.

Carroll asked for a motion. O'Keefe moved to approve the renewal of Compass School as recommended by the Secretary. Courtois seconded the motion. Chair called the vote. The vote passed unanimously.

#### East Meadow School

Chair Carroll said this renewal didn't have anything out of the ordinary, other than as shorter approval period. O'Keefe moved to adopt the Secretary's recommendation for approval. Peltz seconded the motion. Carroll asked for clarification on why this approval is for two years and not five years. Simmons referenced page 8 and some slightly more serious findings and the likely need to stimulate corrective action. There was discussion on reconciling the IEPs and the responsibility of the LEAs, technical team recommended a shorter approval period, shorter recommendations giving confidence in the due diligence, and what these findings inform. Chair Carroll called the vote. The vote passed; Mathis voted nay.

Olsen offered that he attended Long Trail School and would recuse himself if anyone had issue. O'Keefe offered that he has some professional, not personal dealings with Long Trail (rented facilities on occasion) and would recuse himself if any Board members had an issue with this. There were no issues voiced.

#### Long Trail School

O'Keefe moved to accept the Secretary's recommendation for approval; Gleason seconded. Mathis asked to understand why there were different approval periods for East Valley, East Meadow and Long Trail since they were listed for the same deficiencies. Secretary French said that from his perspective, the deficiencies were not of the same magnitude, and thus, not treated the same. There was discussion on treating like situations the same, that different approval periods were not an accident, subtle differences in review. Chair Carroll called the question of accepting the Secretary's approval. Mathis asked that going forward the recommendation be more explicit with the approval periods. Secretary French said that the school concurred with the two-year approval. Chair Carroll called the vote. The vote passed unanimously.

#### East Valley Academy

O'Keefe moved to accept the Secretary's recommendation; Peltz seconded. There was no discussion. Chair Carroll called the vote. The vote passed unanimously.

Chair Carroll announced at 12:09 p.m. that the Board would recess until 1:30 p.m.

Minutes recorded and prepared by Maureen Gaidys.

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