

BLUE MOUNTAIN UNION SCHOOL BOARD

BMU CAFETERIA

August 22, 2018

Present:

Board Members: Brent Abare; Angeline Alley, Chair; Sara Dennis; Paul Hazel; Judy Murray; Julie Oliver; Wade Parker; Kelsey Root-Winchester; Bruce Stevens

Administration: Asst. Supt. Bruce Williams

Members of the Public

- I. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Angeline Alley, Chair
- II. Approval of Minutes
 - A. Motion by Bruce Stevens, seconded by Sara Dennis to approve the Board minutes of August 8, 2018. Motion voted on and approved with one abstention (Angeline Alley)
 - B. Motion by Bruce Stevens, seconded by Paul Hazel to approve the Board minutes of August 13, 2018. Motion voted on and approved with two abstentions (Angeline Alley and Sara Dennis)
- III. Discussion of meeting with State Board of Ed.
 - A. Various Board members reported that folks who spoke and those who sent in testimony did a great job
 - B. The State Board of Ed had some hard questions for us, especially about the meaning of the non-binding vote
 - C. Several BMU Board members were very encouraged by the end of the day.
 1. Members of the State Board started to talk about how they are looking at the plan.
 2. Role of debt and distance was discussed.
 3. Another State Board member spoke about trying to alleviate uncertainty and meet October 2nd to give some certainty to some schools.
 4. Senators Jane Kitchell and Joe Benning wrote a strong letter, and Representative Chip Conquest spoke clearly on the intent of the legislation, and that BMU's AGS should be approved.
 - D. The BMU Board appreciated the good turnout of the community and roomful of yellow shirts
 - E. Questions asked by the State Board included "Why can't you assume the debt? What issue do you have with the property transfer?"
 - F. Brent Abare didn't walk away with a good feeling.
- IV. Public Participation
 - A. Michael Thomas—Concerned with property ownership at BMU. Supplies can be bought in bulk; administrative costs can be shared. Why can't the school remain independent? Can we form a buying group to buy supplies in bulk? School Choice? If you disband the high school, it will cost everyone a lot more money. Think about what

is good for the community as a whole. We're a small community and would like to stay that way.

1. Angeline Alley—We have a buying group now, as we share busing with Woodsville.

2. Judy Murray—We now have eliminated positions at the administrative level—Superintendent, Business Manager. Technology at the SU level will be using economies of scale. Purchase of fuel oil will be purchased in bulk, as well. However, the bulk of any savings has already been found.

3. Angeline Alley—If we are merge, we assume their debt and they assume ownership of property

B. Marie Winchester—It doesn't make sense to warn a binding vote before we've heard the State Board's decision. All the talk of closing the high school is putting a lot of pressure on our kids. 90% of high school students have it on their mind. The Community as a whole is being pressured to go school choice.

C. Richard Roderick—Went to the hearing. Praised the brilliant idea of all the gold shirts that were in the audience. We were the largest contingent there. If they listened to what Chip Conquest said, Sec. 9 should have been given due process and not just routinely dismissed. Not sure OESU is best for us. They use Abbey Food group for food service. That will take away from our food service. Bradford does not have a local fuel company, but we do, and it would be best to support a local company. Land and the debt are issues that have to be addressed. Need to push back extensively. Too early to have a binding vote on school choice. That would weaken our voice before the State Board.

D. Kristen Murray—What direction will the School Board take in the next 3 months? Timeline?

E. Prentice Pratt—What we are looking at is who gets to make the decisions? Advocating for a voice.

F. Brian Wohlleb—Question on timing of vote. What happens if we decide to have a revote?

V. Discuss whether to have a vote and if so, when?

A. J. Murray—doesn't believe BMU will ever have our own Superintendent again.

B. W. Parker—wants to keep PreK-12 as is at BMU. Strong peer groups. School choice is not an accurate term. We would be a tuition town.

C. P. Hazel—Keep as it is

D. J. Oliver—same

E. K. Root-Winchester—same

F. A. Alley and B. Stevens—keep as is, independent, under Orange East Supervisory Union

G. S. Dennis—Keep BMU PreK-12

H. B. Abare—What is it we realistically can do? Take all data and make the right decision. Backed up against this timeline. We have been provided much input by the advisory vote. The State will make a decision, and we can't help them. Feels the clear intent at OESU. Wants whatever the people want. Feels school choice is how we

protect ourselves. Doesn't matter to me one way or the other as long as voters in our community express their opinion

I. A. Alley shared response from Atty. Mark Oettinger regarding the wording of a vote. However, we need approval of the State Board to have the vote. We cannot warn a vote without their approval.

J. J. Murray—advisory vote showed 74% of those who voted wanted to stay as is. 60 +% wanted school choice. There was a record turnout. 10%-15% more voters turned out in each town than voted on our school budget last March.

K. P. Hazel—we should not have a vote until we hear from the State Board of Ed.

L. J. Murray—There is a precedence that the State Board is letting votes take place after the plan is finalized. To rescind a vote is extraordinarily difficult. Too much of a risk.

We should have a good sense in October as to what direction the State Board is going.

M. A. Alley—Feels we cannot warn a vote until we get a smoke signal of what the State Board is deciding.

N. J. Oliver—An “if”, “then” vote is not allowed. Asking people to vote in September is completely unfair. Asking them to vote in October is better.

O. K. R-W—How can we make an educated decision with these high stakes until we know how the State is leaning? Would be voting out of fear

P. W. Parker—I have a concern talking about school choice. I am not ready to find a place for my child to go in 60 days.

Q. A. Alley—Atty. Mark Oettinger is suggesting Section 706 n. If we have a vote and put an effective date of July 1, 2019, we can still override the vote.

R. Asst. Supt. Bruce Williams—legal authority to operate the school would end on the day of a successful choice vote. The State would assign us based on our status November 30th.

S. B. Abare—feels Section 724 doesn't require State approval. Community can just vote themselves out. Section 822 just changes grades in the school district.

T. B. Williams—described experience in Ludlow-Mt. Holly. Individual districts and boards were preserved. If State Board decides to approve our AGS, we would stay the same. In Section 724, individual communities have to vote themselves out.

VI. Public Participation

A. Dawn Lazarra—On the vote, I took it that I wanted option 1 first, then if that didn't work, I wanted Option 2, and if that didn't work, I wanted Option 3. The vote from Groton was huge supporting BMU staying as it.

B. Ron Phillips—Total obstructionism has been going on for nearly a year. It is time we let the Board do their job, because one individual wants to be an obstructionist. We voted on 3 articles, and they were all approved by a 3-1 vote. It is time to let the Board do what we elected them to do.

C. Amy Emerson—We cannot vote before we hear back from the state. “If we have to merge, the high school is gone” is a misconception. We need to wait.

D. Carrie Bogie—I am disgusted at what is going on in Groton. I 100% will not vote on something that the State has not yet decided on. Thank you to the Board members who are working so hard.

E. Michael Thomas—It is beyond our control that we have to ask the State Board permission for everything. I urge you to come in with one strong voice as to what this community wants. Stand your ground. If you do so, laws can get changed.

F. Hank Eaton—As an economist and someone who cares deeply about education, as a taxpayer, our priority should be student outcomes. I want to hear about what we are paying for. If we pay our taxes, what would choice get for our kids? What do we get for our tax dollars if we are able to stay independent and not be burdened with another person's debt?

G. Patty Pratt—How firm are we in the timeline of October 2nd?

1. A. Alley—The State Board meets then and again in November. The final timeline will come out November 24th.

2. P. Pratt—If we stay our own independent district, what else changes?

3. B. Williams—You would have the same political control as you do now. What I see is an entirely viable school, and I don't have any idea why anyone would want to close any part of it. I don't see that a merged district would fundamentally change your students' experience for a very long time.

4. P. Pratt—I would like our community to have the option to vote as to whether we would like our students to go to Oxbow or if we would like school choice. I didn't feel like my kids being in other schools fractured my sense of community.

H. Kristen Murray—There was a discussion at the State Board meeting that we could write into Articles of Association that our structure wouldn't be changed for two years. The consequences of an immediate closing of Grades 9-12 would be that we would have to find placement for high school students in 60 days.

I. Richard Roderick—The sentiment of the community was pretty clear in the non-binding vote. We only want School Choice if we're forced to merge. Right now, we are paying for the Superintendent and Business Manager. If we merge, we'll be paying for a whole lot more.

1. B. Williams—Nothing would necessitate you would all go to the Abbey Group. It would be left to the Board, but nothing requires that to happen. The bulk of savings is due to administrative savings.

J. Hank Eaton—If the Board at the State Level wants to respond to Act 46, we lost our independence a long time ago as far as our tax dollars. My concern is our control over education. What do we get from a merger for our kids? What do we get from remaining independent?

1. Kelsey Root-Winchester—We hired a curriculum coordinator a couple years ago. The full curriculum will be implemented this school year, along with an expanded health and foreign language program. We have J-Term. We already share River Bend.

2. B. Williams—when you start tuitioning students, you lose control over their education.

3. B. Abare—Under 706 (b) there were not advantages for students.

4. H. Eaton—I want to know educational opportunity advantages for both choices.

5. M. Thomas—Technology allows students to share an instructor via computer.

6. J. Murray—We have dual enrollment, personal learning plans, proficiency-based standards, portfolios to prove students are career or college ready. BMU is a designated health center with mental health counselors in the building 2-3 days a week at no cost to students. We are flexible, responsible, and local. We have Opioid crisis supports. We have Arts, forensics, robotics. Robotics is a real gem. BMU is a great STEM school. Can we improve? Of course, but we're on the right path.

K. Mike Morrisette—My family came back here for a reason. We wanted our kids here. Bigger schools have more problems with drugs and alcohol. We moved to Wells River so our kids could go here. Does the school make a difference? Absolutely! Whatever you have around a person, that is what they will pick up. If you get into a big school, you're just a number. From the beginning of time, small schools have done a better job of educating. Take care of them when they're younger so you don't have to when they're older.

1. A. Alley—If we hear yes, we'll move forward. If we hear no, we'll attack that then. Polling the Board earlier, we all voted we all didn't want school choice.

L. Andrea Dennis—My daughter has the opportunity this year to take two college courses and 2 honors courses. Another of my children has had courses designed for him, as he has learning difficulties. BMU is meeting the needs of both my high school children.

M. Marie Winchester—If the vote goes that far, be sure to word the ballot clearly so people understand and know the timeline.

VII. Action

A. J. Oliver—The advisory vote showed us we have until September 24th to warn for October 24th. Don't throw out the choice vote, but wait.

B. J. Murray—I am very certain we asked Mark Oettinger about the two articles when we hired him. I think we have to wait until at least October 24th (warn in September)

C. B. Abare—We have to go with what sets you up for success.

D. Motion by Judy Murray, seconded by Bruce Stevens to table the warning of the specific article and the date of the vote on school choice until the September 19th BMU Board meeting. Motion voted on and carried with 8 in favor and one opposed (Brent

Abare)

VIII. Correspondence

A. Angeline Alley will forward all correspondence to Board members in their next packet

IX. Other Business

A. Sick Bank representative—Angeline Alley volunteered to serve as Sick Bank representative

X. Next Agenda—September 5th —regular Board meeting

A. Board members were reminded to sign up to help with the barbecue on August 27th

B. The Board will meet on September 5th and September 19th for their regular meetings

C. Atty. Mark Oettinger will be invited to a meeting

D. Angeline Alley asked the CRC to put together a synopsis of Board meetings to put out right away on social media

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 PM

Respectfully submitted:

Nancy Perkins, Minutes Clerk

The minutes are in draft format and are unofficial until formally approved by the Board at a subsequent meeting.