

West Bath School Administrative Unit

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

September 20, 2021 at 4:30 PM

Members Present: Keith Hinds, Joanne Powers, Ashleigh Randall, and Casandra Whorff

Members Absent: Alexandra Jungbluth

Others Present: Patrick Bowdish, Aggie, Demers, Emily Thompson, Hannah Whitney

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 4:33 PM by Keith Hinds. Attendance was taken. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Discussion and Review of the Office Manager Position

Mr. Hinds thanked the board for the flexibility in regards to setting up a special meeting with a quick turn-around time. He stated that there was a resignation of the office manager position, which had prompted some public comment. He said that he would like the board to discuss whether or not this position should be maintained. He provided background information about how and why the position was created, and asked the board if this was a position that they wished to continue to have in the school. He summarized responsibilities of section 1055 of title 20 as well as the conversations that have been held with MSMA, the auditors, school attorneys, and the Department of Education over the years on this topic.

Ms. Powers thanked Mr. Hinds for organizing the meeting. She said that she was not thinking about a shift in the position in terms of removing financial management, but rather sharing employees and potentially having town staff come to the school to complete financial work. She said she wondered if that could be a practical and cost-saving solution as long as the staff was willing to work at the school.

Mrs. Randall stated that fiscal responsibility is a huge part of the the job of the board, but it can't be the only decision maker in regards to what the board is legally obligated to do, and she cautions the board to not go against advice that has been provided from experts on the matter. Mr. Hinds commented that at this time there's no formal offer for shared staff to be considered, and there would likely be legal challenges in regards to skipping over an application and recruitment process. Ms. Powers responded that the town treasurer is well versed in accounting, and if the school could just hire a secretary, and utilize that position for accounting it may make the superintendent's job easier, as she would not have to train a new person. She said that she did not know if it was feasible, but that may there could be a compromise.

Mrs. Whorff asked for further background information regarding the position, and asked if there was a percentage of time that could be allocated to finances within the position. Mr. Hinds said

that there was approximately 10-12,000 allocated to the business manager portion of the job, and how much could be saved by not hiring someone with a management skillset is difficult to answer because the labor market has changed so dramatically. He said that if the board chooses to hire someone for this position, then they should also commit to making the process work better, and that he firmly believed that hiring a new person is a new beginning and a new opportunity.

Mrs. Thompson commented that the school system has changed dramatically since 2015, and while this position was initially a building secretary in a school office, it now needs to be someone who is able to help to support her with the many hats that she has to wear during the day. She said that the responsibilities of the position are diverse and the office manager is no longer what a traditional secretarial role has looked like in the past. She said she'd like to go forward with the process, see what the candidate pool looks like, what skills they bring to the table, and find the right person for the school, and then streamline the system where there are opportunities to do so. She said she really felt that there would be the opportunity, but that she was hesitant to make significant changes without having opportunity to go through the process. She said that through the pandemic, the school system had some opportunities to try to have some portions of the position be remote, and it was incredibly challenging for the school to not have someone on site, and therefore her first priority would be to have a position that stays in the building.

Mr. Hinds said that it's one thing to talk about collaboration and process improvement, and another to talk about transfer of control, and the answer is in the middle. He said that at the end of the day, the process is really daily operations and falls under the responsibility of hired administrators. Ms. Powers said that she was concerned that the board of selectmen were feeling that efforts were being duplicated, and that if the treasurer could come to work at the school under the supervision of the superintendent then it might eliminate a duplication of efforts and perhaps would allow for the school system to use funding in another way.

Mrs. Thompson said that she felt it was important to look at where there might be a duplication of efforts and streamline processes, but that she also thinks it's important for there to be a system of checks and balances in place. She said that one of the positive things about how things are set up now is that a mistake can be caught that might not be seen otherwise.

Mr. Hinds opened the meeting up for public comment. He invited Mrs. Jungbluth to speak as a member of the public, as she was attending the meeting remotely. Mrs. Jungbluth asked if it would be a possibility to look at the position to find out where there is a duplication of efforts and see where things could be reduced on the town side? She said that maybe having both the school and the town combing through things to the same degree is not necessary.

Mrs. Demers said that from a community member's perspective, it's been a great discussion. She said that this is a good opportunity to look at efficiencies, but from a financial perspective the two organizations are different entities, have different budgets, and can not combine fiduciary responsibilities.

Mr. Hinds read an email from Mr. Hennessey that said that he believes the whole process should be simpler and the school and town would be better served if the position at the school was only secretarial and accounting be transferred to the town.

Mrs. Thompson said that it's not as simple as just going back to a traditional secretary because when there was only a secretary, West Bath had only a school and not a school district. She said that this position essentially supports the work of the school system and superintendent, in addition to the traditional roles of a school secretary. She said that even given that, there's still room to work with the town to make things run as efficiently as possible. She reiterated that she hoped the board would continue with the hiring process and then allow her to work with the town to discuss efficiencies.

Ms. Powers said that she's glad the discussion was held as she believes there are some ways to improve things for both sides.

Mr. Hinds made a motion to have the office manager position remain a school department position and to continue to collaborate with the town, town administrator, and superintendent in hopes that the financial process can be made more efficient. Mrs. Randall seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. Vote (4-0).

Set Next Meeting Dates and Locations

1. October 20th at 6 PM - School Board of Directors Meeting at the West Bath School.

Adjourn

Mrs. Randall made a motion to adjourn at 6:00 PM. Ms. Powers seconded the motion. Roll Call Vote (4-0).

Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emily Thompson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Emily Thompson