

# Green Mountain Unified School District Board

## Regular Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 15, 2021

Zoom (with chat content included as attachment)

6:00 p.m.

### I. ROLL CALL/CALL TO ORDER:

**Board:** Joe Fromberger, Michael Studin, Wayne Wheelock, Lois Perlah, Deb Brown, Dennis Reilly, Rick Alexander, Josh Schroeder, Jeannie Wade

**Staff:** Lauren Fierman, Katherine Fogg, Mike Ripley, Amber Wilson, Cheryl Hammond, Todd Parah, Robin Bebo-Long, Ellen Cameron, Sue Willis, Megan Haseltine, Brenda Sheere, Amanda Tyrrell, Jennifer Harper, Norm Merrill, Christa Valente, Heather Miele, Frank Kelley, Kathleen Karl, Amanda Gross, Patricia Rumrill, Angela Hurd, Mindy Munroe, Ben Boyington, Andrew Malaby, Scott Renfro, Angela Hutchins, Lauren Baker, Jason Rickles, Laurie Birmingham, Kristi Flack, Kelly Messer-English, Jim Bixby, Carolyn Hamilton, Courtney Slobodnjak, Michele Farrar, Brett Mastrangelo, Sharon Jonynas, Jennifer Parks, Becky Bushey, Allyson Oswald, Alan Garvin, Venissa White, Nicole Luz, Julie Parah, Mary Barton, Pam O'Neil, Anne Gardner, Karla Waite, Audrey Block

**Student Reps:** Marlayna King, Greta Bernier, Luna Berklund

**Public:** Shawn Cunningham, Eric Chatterjee, Abe Gross, Meghan Blauvelt, Tierney O'Brien, Meg Minehan, Jane Harrison, Alex P, Christine Anderson, Tracy Churchill, Ebon Mosher, Raymon Stearns, Deanna, Ange Wunderle, Tory, Everett Mosher, Wendy Svec, Linda Diak, Randi, Parent, Janice Stearns, Wes, Patrick Wheeler, Hannon Devereux, Tamasin Keck, Devin Brown, Rachel Guerra, Meghan Cenate, Cindy Amsden, Janelle Wilfong, Emily Tornquist, Jessica Kessler, Poston, Vanessa Heybyrne, Brodie Massey, Emily Berklund, Kim French, Peter Cherubini, Jen, Mary Pelkey, Kate Lamphere, Melissa Palmer, Ann Thompson, Mariah Lique, Linda, Nicholas Houghton, Patti Korzon, Arne Jonynas, Sharon Huntley, Shiloh Yake, Cynthia Prairie, Anna Martel, Pam Hamel, Chris Saylor, Jeff Hance, Brendan McNamara, Kelly Brendan, Janet VanAlstyne, Amy Mosher, Patrick Spurlock, Tuckerman Wunderle, Katie Murphy, Mary Putnam, Denise Reilly-Hughes, Abe Gross, Julia Gignoux, Marilyn Mahusky, Robin Learned, Peter Kelleher, Leigh Dakin, Jeannie Spafford, Paul Orzechowski, Jeanette Haight, Erin Lamson, Judy Verespy, Pam Heynel, Matt Wilson

Mr. Fromberger called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

### II. APPROVE AGENDA:

Ms. Brown **moved** to approve the agenda. Mr. Wheelock asked for the appointment of the new member to be moved to earlier in the meeting, after the approval of the minutes. Ms. Fierman noted that this board can approve the new member, but he is not an actual member until he takes the oath with the Town Clerk of Cavendish. Mr. Fromberger noted that the candidate is aware he cannot vote, but would like to participate in the conversation. Mr. Studin requested to have Board Member comments to come before the discussion item IV. The motion to approve the agenda with the changes in order of discussion carried without opposition.

### III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

**A. March 18, 2021 Regular Meeting**

Mr. Wheelock **moved** to approve the minutes of the March 18, 2021 regular meeting. The motion carried without opposition.

**B. April 6, 2021, Special Meeting**

Ms. Brown **moved** to approve the minutes of the April 6, 2021 special meeting. The header needs to be corrected to reflect “Special Meeting”, rather than “Regular Meeting”. The motion to approve the minutes as corrected carried without opposition.

**IV. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS:**

Mr. Studin read aloud a statement regarding his decision at the last meeting. He stated that he takes his role as a board member very seriously and has heard from many members of the community supporting his vote. He noted that he believes in making the right decision, not the easy decision, and this is a rule he lives by and that he teaches his children. He felt he made the right decision and wanted the community to be aware of how he came to this decision. He attended each principal hiring committee meeting and asked many questions of each candidate and listened to their answers. He has spoken with community members in favor and opposed to both candidates. He acknowledged that Mr. Hill is a good teacher, is well liked and is a well-respected member of the community. While those are admirable qualities, he lacks the supervisory and administrative experience to be a principal of the school. He felt that Mr. Hill had the least amount of supervisory and administrative experience of all the candidates, yet he was “pushed through” each round. Mr. Hill had given many theoretical answers to the questions he was asked, and talked about all the things he could and would do, but gave few, if any examples of things he actually had done. Mr. Studin indicated that Mr. Hill was asked what initiatives he would institute if he were principal, to which he responded having the students be more involved in community service. Mr. Studin noted that Mr. Hill was asked in the 13 years that he has been at this school what he has done to make that happen. Mr. Studin noted that this was an admirable goal, but Mr. Hill was unable to provide any examples and felt that this was a common theme throughout the interviews. Mr. Studin felt that it is important for a principal to have a vision of where to take the school, but also have a record of how they have been able to execute on that vision. He noted that Mr. Hill did not have the experience with building a budget or managing a large group of people. He noted that the world changes very quickly and the school needs a leader who has the experience to lead the school through many challenges. Mr. Studin felt that promoting Mr. Hill to principal would be a disservice to him, the students, the staff and the community. He understood that members of the community disagree with his assessment, some passionately. He felt that his reasoning for his vote is sound and hoped that Mr. Hill would work with the new principal and superintendent in the future in order to be more experienced for this application in the future.

Dr. Reilly shared a statement regarding his decision. He noted that he is an educator of higher education, a doctor of leadership and teaches at two universities. He acknowledged that Mr. Hill is “a really likeable guy” and is well respected, and it is important to keep him in the school. He noted that he had looked at recent professional development, school fiscal experience, innovation in secondary education trends, educational leadership experience and school administration experience. He felt that Mr. Hill did not meet those requirements that he felt were important for a principal. He felt both candidates expressed themselves to the best of their ability, but at the end of the interviews, he did not support Mr. Hill’s candidacy. He appreciated the response from the community, both positive and negative. He wanted the community to understand his reasons for his vote and that he took this vote very seriously and hoped that the community can respect his opinions as well.

Mr. Alexander read his statement regarding his vote. He felt that he was looking for a candidate who fulfilled the following criteria: that they work well with all departments, including students,

superintendent, and staff; they have a good long-term vision for the school; that they cultivate leadership with others; manage people, data, money and processes well; have good vision, knowledge, skills and abilities; are a strong leader with a good background for leadership. Mr. Alexander indicated that Ms. Harbaugh had more experience in these areas. He noted that Ms. Harbaugh had 9 years as the Dean of Students and 23 years of teaching experience. She had experience managing budgets and gave more specific answers. Her answers were based on data, evidence, experience and collaboration, including being able to articulate a 5-year plan and an importance to teach STEM. He felt she would bring a fresh perspective to the school that will move the school forward. He noted that Mr. Hill has a tremendous amount of respect from the community as well as of the students. Mr. Alexander felt that many of Mr. Hill's answers were less specific than Ms. Harbaugh's. He felt that Mr. Hill had less leadership experience, and felt that Ms. Harbaugh's experience would be better for the school. He also noted that he felt that he made this decision in the best interest of the students and the community in his opinion.

Ms. Wade read aloud a statement regarding her decision. She noted that the board members volunteer their time for their community because they have a passion for education. They think carefully about their decisions. They put themselves "on the line and take the heat" so that the kids can have an excellent education. She noted that a great leader inspires truth, hope, and inspires movement. She felt that a great leader can see the cracks in the foundation and doesn't waiver on their convictions and they don't just tell you what you want to hear. They are goal-oriented, consistent and steadfast in their vision and their follow through. She noted that what they do and how they behave matters. She feels very reflective, and that she has a responsibility to answer questions. She noted that the ultimate goal is to find a candidate who is best to lead the school as the principal, and demonstrates those abilities. She felt that she did not feel confident in the candidates that were brought forward at the last meeting. She has thought about the community input. She did not feel comfortable putting Mr. Hill in the position that he is has applied for. She stated that she could not be on this board and responsible for making decisions like this and do something that she is not comfortable with. She felt that this community needs healing and the community needs to come together. She noted that Mr. Hill has a position in the high school. She wants to be mindful of the things she says and doesn't say in order to protect his professional life and personal life and some of the comments are based on assumptions not facts. She felt it necessary to respect neighbors and the board members are neighbors. The children in town are looking to the adults for guidance on what to do or not do. She advised that she will not say anything that is not founded. She understands that Mr. Hill is truly loved in this community but she felt that he is not the best candidate for the position.

Ms. Brown read her statement. She felt that the board members misunderstand their role on this board. They are a board of directors working on behalf of the tax payers. They hire a CEO—in their case, the superintendent—to manage and run the operations. If the board doesn't look the CEO's decisions, the board can find someone who is more in line with what they are looking for. She felt that the members need to support Ms. Fierman in her decisions and recommendations. She also wanted to know what qualifications the no-voters have that make them more qualified to make this decision than the superintendent. She felt that none of them had the background to do that. She felt that the assertion that Mr. Hill was only pushed through because he was a nice guy is insulting the hiring committee members' professional integrity. She felt that the board is not respecting Ms. Fierman's experience and skill set. Ms. Brown noted that Mr. Alexander indicated the reasons why he supported Ms. Harbaugh over Mr. Hill and she was going to explain the reasons why she did not support hiring Ms. Harbaugh, but that doesn't matter because she wasn't the candidate who was recommended by the superintendent. Ms. Brown noted that Mr. Hill has worked on budgets with Mr. Ferenc and is a department head. She read Mr. Spurlock's comment in the chat "I manage a budget [of] \$500k and had zero experience with budgeting before taking my job. For those of us with

advanced degrees you get your experience on the job. Your arguments about experience are falling flat.” She agreed with that.

Ms. Brown noted that Mr. Hill has experience with the school and the community as a student, teacher, tax payer, mentor, and as a leader. He’s invested in the school and the community and can “hit the ground running” which is important at this time. He knows the staff and they support him. She felt that Mr. Hill had clear vision about his plans for the future, including getting the students involved and giving back to their community. He has served as the department chair and has aided in the middle school redesign, and he is currently an assistant to the interim principal. He is getting and has that experience. He has overwhelming community support. She noted that it has been said that it is just the teachers that are supporting him, but upon review of the 71 comments on the Chester Telegraph article and Facebook post of the same and there were comments from 7 current and former students, 4 teachers and 60 parents and community members. She noted that he is student oriented and focused on academic improvement. She felt he has a good knowledge of the budget process and setting priorities for fiscal responsibility. She felt he has clear ideas of how to lead the faculty and has a strong connection with the students. She reminded the meeting that all new principals are on the job training—new policies, new building new students, etc.—but not for Mr. Hill, since he is already familiar with those in this school. She felt that they would never find someone who is as committed to Chester, Green Mountain or its students as Mr. Hill. She asked her fellow board members what they were afraid of and what harm could come from offering Mr. Hill a one-year contract.

Ms. Perlah noted that as a member of the board, it is not their job to make educational or academic decisions, but rather to support the people that they put in the positions to make the decisions. Therefore, she supports Ms. Fierman’s recommendation in offering Mr. Hill a contract. Mr. Schroeder noted that he appreciated the board members’ position for supporting their decisions. He felt that they have valid reasons for their vote. He noted that his decision to approve Ms. Fierman’s recommendation wasn’t easy, but he found that Mr. Hill was more qualified. He may not have had all the pieces of the puzzle that the board members were looking for, but his answers came from the heart—passion, belief, drive and ethics. He felt that Mr. Hill’s answers were appropriate and confident. He has the ability to work with others and understand challenging situations. He noted that one qualification was that he didn’t have to answer a difficult question immediately, but rather think about it, evaluate it from many angles and seek input. He acknowledged that Mr. Hill doesn’t have “all the cards”, but someone with the support of Ms. Fierman, an intelligent well-spoken leader, and the support from his peers and the community, will survive and do more than survive, he would grow, learn and apply what he’s learned.

## **V. GMUHS PRINCIPAL SEARCH**

### **A. Motion to Rescind Previous Action on Superintendent’s Recommendation for Appointment of GMUHS Principal**

Mr. Fromberger noted that if this motion is made and approved, it will void a previous action taken by this board regarding the decision to not accept the superintendent’s recommendation for GMUHS principal

Ms. Brown **moved** to rescind the previous action taken on April 6, 2021 on the Superintendent’s recommendation for appointment of Keith Hill as the next principal at GMUHS. Mr. Schroeder seconded, but with Roberts Rules of Small Boards, a second is not needed.

Mr. Studin read aloud a statement noting that he was surprised and disappointed by what was happening. He understood that there are strong feelings about what has happened, but to try to erase the will of the board is wrong. He noted that if the vote had gone the other way and the yays outweighed the nays he would have accepted it and moved on. He felt that this is the way a board operates and how grown-ups operate. He felt that they should not circumvent the will of the board because the vote was not popular. He noted that this is a case of “sour grapes” and it sets a bad precedent and undermines the process. Mr. Studin noted that he has been on the losing side of some board votes and accepted the board’s decision as the will of the board and worked to find compromise and build a path forward that united the members, not divided them. He feels that this motion divides the board and each member is independent and entitled to vote how they see fit. Mr. Studin felt that that vote mattered and should not be overturned or erased.

Mr. Fromberger explained what a yay vote meant versus a nay vote. He also discussed the public being able to discuss this motion, but will need to be polite and succinct. Ms. Brown noted that she took offense to her motion being deemed “sour grapes”. She noted that she has discussed this motion with a few former board members, including her father who was a select board member and school board member for a number of years and he has never not followed the advice of his appointed leader. She read aloud statement from Alison DesLauriers, a 25-year school board member serving on the Chester Andover board, the Green Mountain board, the RVTC board, and the TRSU board, acting as chair for each of them at one time or another. She asked the board members to listen with an open mind and carefully consider what she has to offer from her years of experience with the boards.

*“As a 25-year member of school boards representing the Town of Chester, I know that split decisions are always hard for a Board. Boards can unite after one, but only when the prevailing decision is based on that which is true and good. In this case 4 Board members feel that they know better than the highly respected Superintendent and diverse members of the Search Committee. It is not for Boards to judge whether a candidate is qualified – after all, we are just lay people in this endeavor. It is up to the Superintendent, who has the vast knowledge and expertise to offer, especially in the hiring of a principal. If a Board did not want inexperienced candidates, the original charge to the committee should have included that.*

*A third search, at this point in the hiring cycle, is not likely to produce better candidates – and to be blunt, the hiring pool is limited and they all share experiences. The idea that a board would go against a Superintendent’s recommendation is not a situation that will attract high quality principal candidates, and in fact, it is a great negative. You can be sure a candidate will research why GM would be in a position to open the position, again.*

*To unite the greater school community, I believe the Board should revisit their decision and accept the recommendation of the Superintendent and the Search Committee, because right now you have a highly qualified, well-respected candidate with more GM experience than you could ever find in a new search.*

Ms. Brown felt that the board had lost sight of the fact that the recommendation to the board was based on the superintendent’s and the search committee’s decision, and their decision was based on that recommendation. She noted that the search committee did the work and gave the recommendation.

Ms. Willis read aloud a statement. She noted that the community members and staff need to know that their voices matter. She felt that Ms. Fierman has been a leader who has brought the staff together. In the aftermath of the active shooter situation, she brought the staff together and made them feel safe, with her words and actions. She has kept them safe through the unprecedented time of a pandemic and has recognized what is best for the GM community. She has demonstrated all of the qualities that the board members indicated that they wanted in a leader and the board members should show the community that they were listening to the search committee and the community. She quoted Mr. Alexander's campaign statement during his campaign for school board director noting that he has served on many committees with the goal to help build teams to help facilitate the teams' goals and achieve success and keep costs low. She noted that the search committee has the expertise, knowledge and skills that are needed to facilitate the goals put forth by the school board. She asked when the last time Mr. Alexander had sat in a classroom and observed what happens there. She noted that he already knows the strengths and weaknesses of his students and peers. She noted that he will also work to keep costs low. He strives for excellence from his students and will not accept any less from his staff if given the opportunity to serve as principal. Ms. Willis noted that she believed that with Mr. Studin's work on the Vermont State Police, he has likely worked with a number of new recruits and has thought from time to time "this one is going to be great". She noted this feeling with someone with no experience is likely because they demonstrated the skills, temperament, and instinct of a great trooper. She hoped that someone would do that for his children in the future. She advised that Ms. Fierman and the staff recognize those items in Mr. Hill. She gave an example of some student interactions. She noted that when Ms. Fierman came to GM, she didn't have any administrator experience, but when she came, she brought honesty, dignity, transparency and leadership. Ms. Willis felt that Ms. Fierman can see what Mr. Hill will bring to the school and community. Ms. Willis quoted Dr. Reilly as saying that there was no perfect principal but he was looking for someone who was well rounded; and that he liked Ms. Fierman and trusted her judgement, but couldn't agree with her choice. Ms. Willis noted that Mr. Hill was the principal search committee's choice. She quoted his LinkedIn profile as someone who desires to help people meet and exceed their potential, and she felt that Mr. Hill will do that. He has worked tirelessly to take on leadership roles in the community. She noted that Mr. Wheelock was quoted to have abstained because he "saw it coming" and didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Ms. Willis noted that the community looks to the board members for leadership. She noted that she was brought up to stand for what she believed in or she stood for nothing. She was disappointed that he didn't take a stand either way. She noted that Dr. Reilly was quoted as saying that a one-year appointment wouldn't be fair to anyone. She felt that a one-year contract would be fair to everyone.

Mr. Fromberger asked that the public synthesize their comments. He noted that repetition of the same argument would not be conducive to anyone, but suggested that the public synthesize its comments to under three minutes per person if possible. Ms. Lamphere noted that she started on the search committee, first as a board member then as a parent. She noted that the committee was multi-disciplinary, qualified group. She noted that the members thought critically and brought difficult questions to the candidates. They sat on this committee through two rounds of searching for the right candidate. She didn't know Mr. Hill prior to the committee, so there was no emotionality when it came to her decision. She felt that Mr. Hill inspired her and would inspire all the children in his school. She noted that the people on the committee only want the best. While he doesn't have "on-paper" leadership experience, but he has actual leadership experience and the people who have been led by Mr. Hill have told the committee that. She encouraged the board to reconsider their vote.

Mr. Wunderle noted that he was a student at GM and is now a member of the community. When he was at GM, they had the same principal and assistant principal the entire time he was there, and building the relationship with the administrator was a very important quality. He also felt that it is important to have someone who is invested in the community and the students. He felt that Mr. Hill has the experience needed to manage the school, and only wants the best for the students and the school. He felt that it is a grown-up thing to do to reconsider one's decisions. Mr. Spurlock felt that his anger has risen during this meeting while watching some board members sit smugly while other board members are speaking from the heart. He noted he has an alumni child and another child who should be entering GM next year, however he is concerned about his child's future at GM. He noted that Mr. Hill is the faculty advisor for the Circle Group, the LGBTQ group. He felt that if Mr. Hill leaves the school as a result of the board's decision, his child will not have representation. He discussed GM's history with the LGBTQ+ community in the news. He wants the board to think about the decisions that they make and how they represent the underrepresented youth in the area. He suggested that the board give him a chance for the one-year commitment.

Mr. Kelliher questioned why Mr. Ripley has not been pushed forward if he does have the experience in the position. He also asked what the purpose is of rescinding the prior decision. Ms. Brown noted that rescinding the prior action means they can revisit the prior action. She noted that Mr. Ripley wasn't the committee's or the superintendent's recommendation. Ms. Martel noted that she was a gay student at GM, and in fact was the only "out" lesbian at GM. It was terribly lonely and she was met with "things will get better after high school". She noted that she contemplated killing herself because there was no safe place for her at GM. She noted that Mr. Hill stepped up and supported her when she had no where else to go. He connected with her and told her she wasn't alone. She felt that the principal that she connected with was very disconnected and Mr. Hill would show his students empathy and care. She noted that he has supported this group for over 10 years. She felt that mutual understanding of student safety can't be overlooked. She noted that the board members don't need to go to the school day in and day out like the students and the staff.

Mr. Mastrangelo noted that the search committee included a student representative who gave up a dance class to serve on the committee, only to have the recommendation ignored. He also noted that a third search committee would likely not be seated since this board will ignore the recommendation. He also noted that it is challenging for a superintendent to have her recommendation ignored. Ms. Verespy noted that it is important for the principal to be supported by the staff and students in order to be successful. If Mr. Hill were offered a one-year contract, the board would be able to see his value. She thanked the board for taking their job seriously, but wanted them to understand that their job is to represent their constituents, and it is ok to reconsider their vote after hearing from the constituents.

Ms. Reilly-Hughes felt that there have been a lot of personal feelings expressed, but she supports the decision of the board. She felt that the personal experiences are not what should drive a hiring, but rather their experience and qualifications. She noted that she has been involved in many searches and has supported some principals and not others. She noted that the hiring committee recommended two candidates to the board, and Ms. Fierman recommended only one of those candidates. She noted that Ms. Fierman is not from this community, but brought forth many of the qualifications that the board was looking for. She recommended that the board not take it personal.

Ms. Tornquist noted that her college essay was written on Mr. Hill's leadership. She discussed several of the experiences she had with Mr. Hill. He inspired her to become an educator. She

noted that the number one quality for an administrator is classroom experience. She also noted that the board should consider how many alumni are attending this meeting when they no longer have ties to the school should indicate his importance to the students. Ms. Jonynas noted that she was on Ms. Fierman's hiring committee. She didn't have principal experience, nor did she have superintendent experience. She's the best one that they have had. She felt that experience can not be earned without having a chance. She noted that this year he has also taken on associate principal experience. She noted that students are educated here and leave the state, but Mr. Hill came back and has given to the community. She wished that some of the board members who have voted no would reconsider after really listening to the comments of the community.

Ms. Farrar noted that she is a Cavendish resident, a parent, a teacher, a colleague and has written and re-written statements on behalf of colleagues. She indicated that she doesn't normally get involved in things like this, but this is too important. She read aloud a statement starting with a quote from Dr. Reilly in an August 27, 2017 article entitled the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leader. She noted that supporting Mr. Hill is not about promoting the "nice guy" but rather about supporting the best candidate given the work that needs to be done. She noted that the staff and community are not upset because they "didn't get their way", but rather because they felt that the board acted with blatant disregard for everyone invested in putting forth the best candidate. The board did not engage in public discourse or offer explanation as to what skills Mr. Hill was lacking against the job description. The board rejected the recommendation, but offered no solution. She felt that the community and the staff did not accept the board's lack of transparency in its reasoning or its unwillingness to listen to educators, administrators or the community they represent. She felt that the board's rejection of the superintendent's recommendation has far deeper implications than this one candidate and this one vote. It compromised the trust the community has in the board.

Ms. Farrar indicated that Ms. Fierman is the best person to make a recommendation about her successor, and has demonstrated exceptional leadership and decision-making skills in her service to the GM community. She felt that the boards disregard for her recommendation and that of the search committee which was comprised of teachers, staff, students, parents, administrators and community members was a flagrant abuse of power that sets a dangerous precedent regarding future hires and makes one question who the board represents and whose voice they listen to. She felt that the board's actions, during a time when unity is so important, have compromised the trust between the board and the superintendent and has jeopardized the morale of both GM staff and students. She felt that the one-sided decision making of the board make one question the integrity of the board and may cause excellent educators, staff and administrators to seek employment elsewhere. She felt that the board's rejection of a qualified candidate who is already invested in the school community without a plan to move forward was irresponsible. She felt that they can not afford a leadership void at a time when the school is facing the challenge of re-engaging students, remediating learning and rebuilding a community lost as a result of the pandemic.

Ms. Farrar noted that the board's suggestion that they "have the summer to hire" demonstrates an unrealistic understanding of current candidate pools, proper vetting processes, the school calendar and the amount of work the school is facing. She noted that it demonstrates a lack of understanding about how the school system works—the teachers, administrators and staff don't just start school on the first day of school. They plan, prepare, create goals and expectations throughout the entire summer (and even before). She felt that board members should hold themselves accountable to the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills they are requiring of the students: "informed, data-driven decision making, critical thinking, evidence-based justification of positions and civil discourse, as opposed to 'just because' and clandestine discussions held in executive session."



Ms. Slobodnjak noted that it is inappropriate to ask humans to be robotic about the way they make decisions while they are supporting someone. She would hope that they are passionate about their decision to support someone who is leading them. She noted that she works for the district, has students in the system and serves on a board, she understands that this is a difficult decision. She noted that if Mr. Hill gets the experience at another school, they might lose him. She also called to question what the board is saying to other teachers in the district who may be investing in their education to become administrators. She noted that there are many people who have spoken who have demonstrated the many ways that Mr. Hill has shown his qualifications for this position. Ms. Oswald noted that she is a school counselor, her husband is a teacher, and her children attend the school. There is urgency because of the recovery plan. She noted that currently there is no one thinking about the direction for the school for the next year. She thanked the committee for the work they put in to the process. She questioned who the board thought they would hire in June who would be qualified for the position. She noted that highly qualified educators and administrators are hired before June.

Ms. Fierman noted that she appreciates the positive things that the board members have said about her skills. She appreciated that this board thought she would do a good job as a principal and determine what the high school needs. She appreciated that they thought that she would do a good job in determining what the SU needs. She questioned how the board can say that she has the skills necessary to determine what the school needs, but how they cannot support her decision. She understands that Mr. Hill lacks the experience, but asked the board to consider that she has the skills to lead him and make him successful.

Ms. Diak noted that she has worked for the worst board in America according to the American Institute of Museums because the board sought to micro manage and not follow the recommendations of the leaders that they have entrusted to run the schools. Ms. Brown re-read her motion.

The motion failed with four votes in favor (Mr. Fromberger, Ms. Brown, Ms. Perlah and Mr. Schroeder) to four votes opposed (Mr. Studin, Mr. Alexander, Dr. Reilly, and Ms. Wade) and one abstention (Mr. Wheelock). There was discussion about the vote. The motion failed due to a tie vote and the prior action remains in force. Some community members felt that the board members had an obligation to vote. Ms. Fierman asked the board if they understood that this meant that they would lose their superintendent because the no vote means that the board doesn't have confidence in the superintendent. Ms. Bushey asked the board to understand what Ms. Fierman was saying—that she would be leaving and that they would have no principal. Ms. Brown indicated that this vote would mean that she would quit. Mr. Fromberger admonished the public about their feeling that people need to vote or exercise their vote, and noted that this vote is not subject to the public comment. The board can vote or not and does not need to justify its vote. He clarified that with 4 votes against and 4 votes in favor and one abstention means a tie and under Roberts' Rules of Order a tie means that the motion does not pass.

Ms. Willis noted that if Ms. Fierman leaves it will be challenging to staff the schools. She discussed the problems with the prior superintendents. There was discussion about the need to hold discussions in open session. Mr. Fromberger noted that he is disappointed that the board is unable to make a decision regarding the principal. Mr. Fromberger noted that Ms. Fierman is an excellent administrator and has no doubt that the recommendation of the superintendent should be approved in most cases. He noted that the motion was not supported by a majority of the board. He was unsure of where to move forward from here.

Mr. Ripley noted that he has many mixed emotions about this discussion. He noted that he felt that the board's decision to hire Ms. Fierman 2 years ago over him was a mistake, but he has multiple times since then said to himself "Thank God they hired her". When she wanted to be superintendent, he was very much in favor of that decision. Then she suggested that he be the interim principal for the year and get the school through the Covid year. He felt that he had done a good job over the last year. He felt the hiring committee made another error in not accepting his application for the principal but that is a personal feeling. He advised that there are many staff members who would walk through fire to support Mr. Hill as their principal, including Ms. Fierman. He noted that he can't say this same thing about a lot of other principals that he has worked with at GM, Fall Mountain or Black River. He listened to everyone's explanations about the need for experience and he has been hearing this for the last 12 years as assistant principal, but experience needs to start somewhere. He also advised that if hired, Mr. Hill would have support from Ms. Fierman, Ms. O'Neil, himself, the dedicated veteran staff, and Mr. Parah and would do a fine job. He felt that the vote could have and should have been different.

Mr. Schroeder noted that Mr. Wheelock spoke his opinion in the Telegraph, that he didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. He felt that no one on either side wants to hurt feelings. Each noted that not one of the yes voters or no voters wanted to hurt anyone's feelings and each supports their own decisions. He asked Mr. Wheelock to vote either way. He made his decision and doesn't hold any hard feelings. He didn't know if Mr. Wheelock could vote now or if it would matter but he thought his opinion would be important. Mr. Studin felt that "calling people out" and belittling people is not effective. Mr. Wheelock questioned if he is allowed to vote now. Mr. Fromberger noted that there is no mechanism to vote, since the result of the vote was announced. He noted that if the board wants to revisit the vote, they could do so. Ms. Brown noted that she could remake a motion and the board could vote again. There was discussion about the vote not being closed. Mr. Fromberger noted that the vote was declared closed. Ms. Brown felt that Mr. Fromberger did not close the vote, but rather indicated that the vote was a tie and they didn't know where the vote was going to go from there. Mr. Fromberger noted that the tie was the result of the vote and as such the vote is not adopted.

Ms. Brown **moved** to rescind the previous action taken on April 6, 2021 on the Superintendent's recommendation for appointment of Keith Hill as the next principal at GMUHS. The motion carried with a vote of 5 in favor (Ms. Brown, Ms. Perlah, Mr. Schroeder, Mr. Fromberger, and Mr. Wheelock), and 4 votes opposed (Mr. Studin, Mr. Alexander, Dr. Reilly and Ms. Wade).

Ms. Brown **moved** to accept the enthusiastic recommendation of the superintendent to offer Keith Hill a probationary contract of one year for the position of principal at Green Mountain Union High School. Ms. Brown read aloud a statement noting that he met all of the qualifications laid out in the job description. As Ms. DesLauriers had pointed out in her statement, it's not up to the board to determine whether a candidate is qualified or not—that is the role of the search committee and the superintendent who did their jobs. Mr. Hill was the recommendation of all the members of the search committee except one. She noted that no one has offered any reasoning why Mr. Hill would be detrimental to the school and he has the enthusiastic support of the superintendent. She advised that Mr. Hill has a broad and deep institutional knowledge of the school that goes well beyond any external candidate with or without principal experience and can "hit the ground running" on July 1. She felt that he has the overwhelming support of the faculty, students and community at large (based on the comments taken at the public forum, as well as comments made after the board's April 6<sup>th</sup> decision. She noted that the best time for a principal search is between November and February, and the search committee reviewed over 30 applications. She felt that April and May are not good times to find a strong candidate pool. She also advised that if the board members believe that Ms. Fierman, as the superintendent, is the

right person to lead the SU and GMUSD forward, they should trust her recommendation for the next principal and not accepting her recommendation is tantamount to not trusting her judgement. She supported Ms. Fierman's recommendation and asked that her fellow board members look beyond their personal views and support the superintendent's recommendation. She asked the board that if they thought it was difficult to find a principal at this late stage it would be even more difficult to find a superintendent at this late stage.

Ms. Brown's motion carried with a vote of 5 in favor (Ms. Brown, Ms. Perlah, Mr. Schroeder, Mr. Fromberger and Mr. Wheelock) and 4 opposed (Mr. Studin, Mr. Alexander, Dr. Reilly and Ms. Wade)

## **VI. PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Ms. Parah acknowledged that this was a painful process for everyone, but felt that this is the best decision for the GM community. She had concern for a similar situation in the future. She beseeched the board to find a way to prevent this in the future. She suggested that the board review the school board member code of ethics and take the VSBA self-assessment. This assessment survey includes all the qualities that the VSBA feels make up a good school board, one that not just follows state statute, but one that has a good relationship with its superintendent, has effective and ethical operations, and has engagement of the community. She asked the board to use the tool with the support of the VSBA to make this process better for everyone.

## **VII. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT:**

The student reps are on school vacation this week.

## **VIII. NEW BUSINESS:**

### **A. Approval of New board member**

Mr. Fromberger noted that there was a letter of interest from Mr. Gross to serve as representative from Cavendish. Ms. Brown **moved** to appoint Mr. Gross as a representative to the board from Cavendish subject to review from the select board from Cavendish. This board will have the ability to appoint the board member, but he will need to be sworn in before he can be a voting member. There was discussion about the school board having to consult with the select board in Cavendish. Ms. Fierman noted that the Cavendish board members are aware of his interest, but the select board would like to discuss the appointment with him. Mr. Studin suggested that the select board should have their input before this board decides. Ms. Fierman noted that if the board supports the appointment now, he can be a board member as soon as the select board approves, rather than waiting until the May meeting to appoint him. Mr. Schroeder questioned how long Mr. Gross has been a Cavendish resident. Mr. Gross noted that he came to town in August 2002. Mr. Schroeder questioned how many times has he been on the ballot. Mr. Gross noted that he wasn't on the ballot because it isn't a role he wanted—it is a thankless job, but he was concerned that there were two empty slots on the ballot so he felt that Cavendish needed representation. His wife is a teacher so there is a conflict of interest in a few things. Mr. Schroeder noted his concern that Mr. Gross doesn't want the job and wasn't interested in the 20 years that he's been in town. He noted that he has 6 children and more than a full-time job, but his town needs someone to fill the role. He noted that this is a challenging position, but he's been a resident of Chester for less than a year and he saw there was a need and put his name on a ballot and

let the voters speak. He questioned why Mr. Gross waited until now. Mr. Gross noted that for several years Dr. Bont and Mr. Marin served the community and most recently Ms. Lamphere. He was worried that if the school board is seen as a rubber stamp for the decisions of the superintendent. The motion carried without opposition.

Ms. Fogg noted that as a resident of Cavendish and the principal of CTES, she appreciated Mr. Gross for volunteering.

## **B. New Hire:**

### **1. Assistant Principal CAES/CTES**

Ms. Fierman noted that there is a recommendation for Assistant Principal at CTES/CAES. She reminded the board the Mr. Fay has resigned. She described the search committee work, with the principal leading the search, because the primary consideration after making sure that the candidate is qualified, is making sure that the candidate will work well with the principal. She noted that the recommendation is Nicole Luz who is an employee currently. She also advised that she interviewed Ms. Lutz and feels that she's do a great job for the school.

Ms. Fogg reported that the search committee was made up of teachers, 2 special educators and a board member, Ms. Perlah. There were 21 applicants and the committee narrowed down the applicants to three. She began as a para-professional while working to be a special educator and is currently a special educator at CAES. She has been engaged in the culture of CAES. She has been creating systems with teams and committees. She is highly organized and well respected by teachers, parents and students. She felt that they will be a dynamic team and felt that she will "hit the ground running" since she is familiar with the school, the students, and the systems. She noted that it was a unanimous decision by the committee to recommend Ms. Luz to the superintendent. Ms. Luz noted that she felt that it takes a village to raise a child and today is a good example of how strong this community is and she will be excited to take on this role.

Ms. Wade noted that she also supports Ms. Luz for this position and felt that she will be excellent in this role. Ms. Brown **moved** to accept the superintendent's recommendation to hire Nicole Luz as the Assistant Principal for CTES and CAES. The motion carried without opposition.

### **2. 0.8 FTE Guidance Counselor CTES**

Ms. Fierman reminded the board about the guidance counselor who left at the end of last year and the position was filled by a long-term sub—Andrew McPhillips. They reopened that position when the person decided to not return. A search was conducted. Ms. Fogg noted that there were 6 applicants, 3 were interviewed. Mr. McPhillips has done student teaching and substitute teaching before filling the long-term substitute position for the past year. She felt that he has developed relationships and is very helpful. He has a BS in Developmental Psychology and a Masters in School Counseling. Ms. Brown **moved** to accept the superintendent's recommendation to hire Andrew McPhillips as the guidance counselor for CTES.

Ms. Fogg noted that all contracts are a one-year contract. Ms. Fierman noted that there is an expectation that they will be offered additional years unless an item comes up that is actionable. There was discussion about the position being a probationary teacher and mentored for two years. The motion carried without opposition.

**IX. OLD BUSINESS:**

**A. E12: Electronic Signature Policy (second read, possible approval)**

Mr. Fromberger noted that the board reviewed the policy at the last meeting and it is a recognition that the district will accept electronic signatures as valid. Ms. Brown **moved** to adopt the policy as written. There was discussion about the policy not indicating a specific platform for such electronic signature. The motion carried without opposition.

**X. ADMINISTRATORS REPORTS:**

**A. Superintendent's Report**

Ms. Fierman noted that there has been a new report from the state: Strong and Healthy Year. The links to the document are on the website. There is a new plan for Vermont: Vermont Forward and links for that are on the website. She noted that the big change is students K-12 distance is now 3' (6' when eating). The teachers are still recommended to remain 6' distant except when working on 1:1 instruction. There is now a change in the cohort/pod mixing, but the school will try to keep the cohorts separate as they can since it makes contact tracing easier. She also noted that temperature checks are no longer required at the school. Instead, families are recommended to do them at home. The travel guidance has changed in that people can travel into VT with a negative Covid test within 3 days of arrival into the state. This applies for people traveling out of the state coming back in. She also noted that any household with at least 1 person not vaccinated are considered unvaccinated and one unvaccinated family can gather with one other unvaccinated family at a time. While this is permissible, it is not recommended.

Ms. Fierman reported that the needs assessment for the recovery plan will be submitted tomorrow. There were some technology issues that prevented it from being uploaded today. The assessment looks at attendance, mental health and academic performance. She discussed the summer programming and the survey that was sent out to families. The results will help drive their decisions regarding the programming.

Ms. Fierman reported that Mr. Parah was appointed as the TRSU Director of Building Grounds and Security. He has now resigned as the transportation director for GMUHS. Mr. Parah, Ms. Hammond and Ms. Fierman will be conducting interviews for that position next week. She also reported that interviews for the super registrar will begin next week. Ms. Fierman reported that the Smarter Balance testing has begun and the remote students are testing on Wednesdays. They are looking at returning to 5 days, but will have to wait until after the SBAC testing is complete.

**B. Principals' Report**

The principals' reports were included in the board packet. Ms. Fogg and Mr. Ripley asked the board if there were any questions about their reports. Mr. Ripley reported on the SBAC testing process. Ms. Brown thanked Mr. Ripley and Ms. Fogg for attending even though it is their vacation week. Ms. Fogg thanked the community for attending the meeting.

**XI. FINANCIAL UPDATE:**

Ms. Hammond reported that the financial reports are in the folder on the website. There hasn't been much change since December. They have spent about 61% of the budget and are about 75% of the way through the year. She gave an example of the savings in the substitute line, the non-

bargaining savings, the lack of field trips and sports trips. She noted that there are still unknowns in special education, but there was still a lot of remote learning so there may be savings in special education transportation. There was an overage in the snow removal on the CAES/CTES roof. She noted that there are 2 positions open in the 4-person office. They did hire an HR person—Allison Sexton—who begins next week. She has a second interview for next week with a payroll person.

There was discussion about the Farm to School grant. Ms. Hammond will talk with Ms. White and the grant writer about that.

## **XII. COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

### **A. RVTC**

Ms. Perlah noted that they are short a health sciences teacher. The candidate was interviewed about a week and a half ago. There is a budget deficit due to declining enrollment since there is no visitation to the school, and online recruitment hasn't been as successful as they would have hoped.

## **XIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Mr. Studin reported that he is happy for Mr. Hill and he will support him as the principal so he can be successful. However, he felt disgusted with this process. He witnessed bullying tonight and that is unacceptable, something they would never allow in any other setting, especially the school. The superintendent threatened to quit in a public meeting which he felt was unprofessional. The same with the vice chair. He felt that tonight was a circus and it was embarrassing. He reiterated that he was happy for Mr. Hill and that he would support him as principal so he could be successful.

Ms. Wade noted that the board members are providing their time at board meetings and committee meetings and they take time away from their families and their professional work. She wanted the board to leave the meeting in respect and treat others with respect. She recounted some of the threats and harassment made to her and to her family based on her decision. She felt that mentioning someone's children in the meeting was not ok. She appreciated the community involvement and support of Mr. Hill. She will support Mr. Hill and is glad he's still in the school. She felt that everyone needed to be respected and people shouldn't be approached on a personal level. She felt that anyone could be listening to this meeting and they should keep that in mind and not discuss people's families. Dr. Reilly noted that he will support Mr. Hill. He came to the board because he thought he could make a difference. He noted that he comes with a lot of corporate experience and has been a president and executive vice president and has served on many boards. He has taught at the university level for the last 6 years. He teaches leadership courses, including having taught teachers who want to be principals and principals who want to be superintendents. He appreciates the community support, but felt that the nasty emails and the name-calling were disheartening. He felt that the leadership of this board was disappointing. He felt that Ms. Fierman was a great leader, but her threatening to quit during the meeting was unprofessional. He noted some anecdotal information about his own experience, and indicated that Ms. Fierman noted that it is high risk to bring a new principal into a high school.

Ms. Fierman asked to be able to respond to the comments noted that she was trying to be very careful with her words. She noted that she had concerns with her effectiveness if the board didn't support her in this decision. She felt that this was a particular instance that she felt strongly that if the majority of the board doesn't support her judgement and recommendation in this particular situation that she couldn't be an effective leader. She understands that the board will not agree with her on other topics. She noted that this wasn't intended to be a threat, but rather a statement of fact, and she didn't want the board to come out of this particular situation without knowing this. She felt that if she

hadn't been the principal of GM for 2 years, she might feel differently about her ability to make this decision. She felt it is an enormous risk to hire a new principal but because she has been the GM principal in the past, she felt that she could support the principal and it would be her reputation on the line. She was determined that she was not going to make a statement about whether or not she would continue to serve this board if they didn't trust her judgement, but she felt that she had to let the board know where she stood. She wanted the board to move forward together, without name calling and each person needs to feel comfortable with taking the positions that they are in. She apologized for disappointing the board and she didn't intend to do that, as she was sure that the board did not intend to disappoint her.

Mr. Fromberger noted that he was disappointed with this meeting and apologized for how he handled the meeting. He felt that he handled the meeting as equitably and harmoniously as he could. He noted that going forward he will do what he can to be sure that everyone was heard. He noted that he didn't feel threatened by the emails he received. He noted that he can make decisions that are not agreeable to everyone. He will do a better job to do the best for the children and the tax payers. Mr. King noted his embarrassment as a community member and felt that they have come to a good spot and hoped that Mr. Hill accepts the position. He noted that if it were him, he would be pondering his decision. He noted that his children have gone through the school system here and he hoped with high points and low points and hoped that they would make their way to the next high point.

Ms. Tyrrell noted that the board and the community needs some work and tonight's meeting was embarrassing. She felt bad that the children were seeing this. She felt that it's important to listen to the students' voices, the teachers' voices and the community members' voices. She noted that it is the board members' job to listen to those voices. She asked how the board was going to do that going forward. She also noted that she fully supported Ms. Fierman in this district.

Ms. Martel thanked Mr. Fromberger for allowing a board member to vote late. She also noted that she didn't condone threats to the board members, but the job is to listen to the constituents even if they don't agree with what they are hearing. Mr. King noted that the most moving speaker tonight were from Mr. Ripley, given his position.

**XIV. NEXT MEETING AND AGENDA ITEMS:**

The next regular meeting will be Thursday, May 20, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom. The annual meeting will be May 27, 2021. He hoped it would be outside at the high school since it does need to be in-person.

**XV. ADJOURNMENT:**

Ms. Brown **moved** to adjourn at 9:15 p.m. The motion carried without opposition.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amber Wilson  
Board Recording Secretary