

**Stratford School Board
Board Meeting/Public Hearing
Public Minutes
September 14, 2016**

The Stratford School Board had a board meeting on Wednesday, September 14, 2016 at 5:30 pm, at the Stratford Public School in Stratford, NH. Present were: Mike Lynch, Wayne Hall and Bruce Blodgett. Also present were Superintendent Mike Kelley, Business Administrator Patty Brown, Special Education Director Michelle Mason and Principal Sandi Adams.

Wayne Hall called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

Wayne Hall thanked everyone for coming and he truly appreciates everyone coming to discuss the pros and cons of school choice. The purpose of this public hearing is to discuss school choice and what's best for the taxpayers and the students.

Mike Lynch discussed the option of school choice for Stratford high school students. He feels it will give the parents and students choices for their own reasons. He spoke to other schools that have choice and they mention this option could increase the current enrollment at Stratford Public School, if more options were given.

Mike Lynch also mentioned that maybe a couple kids would go to another school (not Groveton), but it wouldn't impact Groveton significantly. He feels there is enough interest in this option and we should put it on the warrant in March for the voters to decide on.

Wayne Hall asked if we have special education students going to Colebrook would we still be in charge or responsible for that student.

Michelle Mason answered that we are always responsible for our districts students regardless of where they attend school. She would work with the receiving schools staff to make sure our student's needs were being met.

Rob Maxwell (News & Sentinel) asked if having a warrant article deciding to give choice with or without a one-year tuition agreement with Groveton. If the choice article fails, you need a contingency plan.

Tim Brooks let the board know that what they are doing tonight is the board's responsibility to look into opportunities and he's glad the board is doing that.

Gini Routhier thinks parents would consider moving to Stratford if they had choice.

Jennifer Caron told the board that if she did not have choice for her kids, she would move to Vermont.

Tim Brooks thinks with the Balsam's opening there would be opportunities to entice people to move to Stratford with choice.

Dawn Hall mentioned that we have students here now that are Vermont students and they got choice and Stratford does not. That is not fair to them and they have established friendships through elementary school.

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Wayne Hall asked how many Stratford students are attending Groveton High School now. Lisa Perras, Groveton High School principal responded that twenty-three (23) are registered right now.

Mike Kelley spoke to other superintendents about this situation and their experiences. There is a current court case in New Hampshire that will determine and possibly change the way school choice is handled. There are risks with not having a tuition agreement. If there is no agreement, you cannot fix a tuition rate to another district, which would be illegal. The attorney was very nervous about school choice and that it needs to be legally/correctly. If the board gives him detailed guidelines of what they want to offer, he would look at it and give a legal opinion on that option and/or an alternative.

Mike Lynch has talked to Concord, Vermont and they have no problem with school choice.

Mike Lynch also brought up that they would consider offering the Groveton rate for school choice and the parents would have to pay the difference, if there was one. He also mentioned that Colebrook could have a program for “Little Johnny” that Groveton does not want.

Mike Kelley explained how the current court case came about. A district downstate sent their students to a private school for grades 5-8. The state board said state educational funding cannot be used for a private education. This does not sound like it directly relates to us, but it will in the long run. Laws will be changed/clarified on school choice and it might not benefit us with the option we are currently discussing.

Jamie Frizzle asked if the board had spoken to other schools about what they have to offer. Have any other schools said they would accept our price, take our students, etc... This could be a moot point, if not.

Bruce Blodgett asked the Colebrook representatives in the audience what they charge to tuition students.

The superintended responded that districts/towns with an agreement with Colebrook are charged the cost per pupil of \$19,800. If they do not have an agreement, they are charged an addition 2%, equaling \$20,260.

Bruce Blodgett then asked the Colebrook superintendent if Groveton doesn't take a student because of behavioral issues, would Colebrook?

The Colebrook Superintendent responded that there is a screening process for all students not in an agreement. The students records would be looked at and a determination would be made. Similar process to what Groveton would do and just like most schools do. If they were expelled from another school in NH, they would not be accepted.

Gini Routhier asked if the board was considering school choice for all the students in Stratford. She also mentioned that she thinks Groveton's tuition rate may be low now, but it could catch up with everyone else. The Groveton rate could be \$16,000 next year, we do not know that.

Wayne Hall responded that the school choice is only for high school students, grade 9-12.

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Bruce Blodgett feels we have a great deal with Groveton and we should not change that. He does not support school choice, they have all the opportunities they need down in Groveton. What does Colebrook have for opportunities that Groveton doesn't already offer?

Robin Scott wanted to say that Vermont is a different state, and we can't compare Concord, VT to our situation. If the board presents school choice with the stipulation that a parent has to pay the difference, then it really isn't school choice.

Rob Maxwell also mentioned that Vermont has choice, if it's above the set state rate; he believes the parents pay the difference. But each town could be different and set their own rules.

Mike Kelley wanted to clarify that as of right now, if you have an agreement, an agreement with any school and in that agreement it states there is choice (not exclusive), you could set a cap on tuition to another school. If you have not agreement at all, you cannot set a cap, you have to pay whatever the cost is to wherever that student decides to go to. You cannot restrict the school choice or the amount for tuition, if you have no agreement with anyone.

Tim Brooks sees school choice as an opportunity.

Gini Routhier clarified that Vermont can send their kids anywhere, but the town does not have to provide transportation.

Rob Maxwell also mentioned that Vermont typically pays for the travel and/or reimburses the parents that travel/transport.

Lorraine Harding asked if the local schools would even consider going into an agreement with the option of choice to somewhere else. Has the board even asked other districts how they feel about that type of agreement?

The Colebrook Superintendent told the group that if you don't have an agreement, you will pay the set price set by the receiving school.

Charlie Goulet asked how the bussing would go for students that decided to go to Colebrook. He feels we are part of an SAU with Groveton, why would we go elsewhere? Is it better opportunities, does Colebrook offer more than Groveton?

Mike Lynch thought there was a bus from Colebrook that comes down close to Stratford and that could be part of future discussions with options.

The board then moved into regular session at 6:10 pm.

A motion was made by Mike Lynch and seconded by Bruce Blodgett to approve the public minutes of August 10, 2016 as presented. A vote was then taken and all were in favor.

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Sandi Adams presented her report and highlighted fundraising that goes into the student activity account. There are two teachers continuing the NISL program, the program should be done in January. She has hired one special education paraprofessional, but we may need to hire more. Michelle Mason can speak to that, but a decision has not been made yet. The inventory list is all the equipment in the shop that we will not be using.

Michelle Mason presented her report and added that new families have moved to town and there will be services needed. This building will need three special education paraprofessionals and there is a split paraprofessional at Groveton High School.

Karen Conroy's technology director's report was presented in the board packet. Mike Kelley mentioned that Aric Moody's position has not been filled yet, but there is an applicant. We have contracted more hours with SDB (Steve Bouchard) to help service the schools with this vacancy.

Patty Brown presented her report with nothing to add.

Mike Lynch let Patty know that the bill for the supplies for the school sign will be coming and it's only for the supplies, no labor or equipment.

Mike Kelley presented his reported and had nothing to add. He did mention to the board that there is an action item with Stark; they need to purchase our extra Charter Academy seat. Stratford has three seats, but currently only needs two.

A motion was made by Mike Lynch and seconded by Bruce Blodgett to approve the surplus list of shop equipment as presented and dispose of them. Groveton High School will be given first option and whatever they do not want, we will advertise to sell as one lot. A vote was then taken and all were in favor.

Mike Lynch suggested that the surplus be donated to Groveton and what's left can be sold by bid.

Charlie Goulet asked how much the installation of the sign cost, roughly. He asked if the CAT6 cable work was done and is the electrical done also? Are the circuits all mapped out throughout the school?

Mike Lynch responded that the school sign installation is roughly \$300.

Sandi Adams responded that we are now transferring the switches, but are on hold with the resignation of Aric and absence of Karen. Yes, all the circuits are mapped out and there is a master plan.

A motion was made by Mike Lynch and seconded by Bruce Blodgett to adjourn the meeting at 6:25 pm. A vote was then taken and all were in favor.

These minutes were respectfully submitted by Patricia Brown