

January 5, 2010
Keene Board of Education
Special Meeting, Board Retreat
5:00 p.m. Stonewall Farm

In attendance: Kathleen O'Donnell, School Board Chair
Amy Speas, School Board Member
Neil Donegan, School Board Member
Carl Panza, School Board Member
Kristin Blais, School Board Member
Carol Brown, School Board Member
Carter Chamberlin, School Board Member
Don Parker, School Board Member
Chris Coates, School Board Member, arrived @ 6:05
Wayne Woolridge, Co-Superintendent of Schools
William Gurney, Co-Superintendent of Schools
Paul Cooper, Director of Human Resources

Also in attendance for all or a portion of the meeting: William Harris,
Principal of Franklin School, Kathleen Selvidio, Stenographer.

Call to order: Mrs. O'Donnell called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

1. Public Input: None

2. Planning Related to Administrative Structure Review Task Force

Report: Mrs. Speas commented on how she found the presentation with the data and facts informative and helpful. She would like to see our school district more efficient.

Mr. Panza felt that we lacked the information needed before going into budget season and this was the purpose of this report. The information from this report states we are out of sync with the rest of the state. He is disappointed in the student: tutor ratios. Would like to see some adjustments made at the budget level.

Mr. Parker asked for the board to refresh his memory on previous discussion around this report. Discussion ensued regarding this report and whether the findings are a hint or directive to administration.

Mrs. O'Donnell stated that there was a vote to accept this report. Tonight she would like to have the board discuss and make recommendations.

Mr. Donegan felt the recommendations made were not very good. To him it seems logical that a committee is the logical way to go and to implement suggestions

- Hiring freeze
- Reduce administration at the high school level
- Review supervisors responsibility
- Implement class size
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Mr. Donegan recommended we should delay formation of committees until we are finished with the budget process. Need some serious changes in the structure.

Mrs. Blais felt a bit concerned about waiting and losing momentum. Why do they need to wait on a budget decision?

Mrs. O'Donnell feels that they can have a general idea on the make-up of the committee. It is a long process, having a mechanism in place would be a good plan. Mrs. O'Donnell asked the board what they were hearing from the public.

Board Members shared a variety of thoughts from the public.

Mrs. O'Donnell felt that the comparison to other districts was very informative. It was her feeling that Mr. Gurney and Mr. Woolridge should now, at this point, be deciding which direction to go.

Mr. Gurney, on recommendation #1. Would like to organize a committee with board members/teachers/administrators and parents to identify tasks that need to be accomplished and to visit other schools. Put a three-year strategic plan in place to reach targets and to be on a par with the identified schools. In the budget year 2011-2012 funds will need to be set-aside in the budget to do this.

Mr. Donegan felt strongly that this committee should have a very strong board presence. There is a lot that this committee should accomplish that would have many budget implications. His thought was that this should be a board committee and not an administrators committee.

Mr. Gurney stated that the action plan would be for everyone to work together and that everyone would know the goal they are working towards.

Discussion ensued on the desire to look at Exeter. How they achieve a high level of excellence at a lower expense. Discussion ensued on a plan that could help them do this.

Mrs. Speas wanted to be sure that the board listened to what the kids had to say; they do have some smart ideas.

Mr. Parker felt we should find out from Exeter how they laid their groundwork? Find out the cause and effect of their process.

Mrs. O'Donnell liked the idea of sending a few over to Exeter and other districts to start. Two or three board members in short order to head over should be the first step.

Kathleen O'Donnell made a motion to establish a working group of board members and administrators to review how Exeter achieved their final results and to report back to the board in one months time. Don Parker seconded the motion. Vote taken, 8 – 0, motion passes.

Mr. Gurney began discussion on the elementary facilities. He recommended formation of a community task force to envision elementary services in Keene for the next 20 years.

Mr. Woolridge said that people need to consider whether we can afford 5 elementary schools. Should we look at different models, i.e. K – 2, 3 – 5? Brenda Finn has agreed to facilitate meetings on this if desired.

Mr. Gurney would like to see this discussed at the next board meeting and appoint a small group to begin this process. Mr. Gurney handed out a year-to-year comparison on budget funds and tutors.

Mr. Coates noted that we have a higher ratio of identified than most of the state. Do we know why? (6 % higher than the state average).

Mr. Gurney felt that once we apply the new tutor guidelines we should see a more comparable number over the next couple of years.

Discussion ensued on the process of special education identification and the development of Individual Education Plans.

3. Administration Roles and Responsibilities Review:

Mr. Panza shared that his public feels we continue to have too many staff.

Mr. Donegan questioned why our board has a high turn over rate. He feels that this causes problems for the administration. Sets a tone and communication suffers.

Mr. Parker shared that he feels that there is no defined substantiated plan in the works. Need to have more balance back. Let the administration manage the schools. Roles need to be adhered to. The school board should not be in the business of running the schools.

Mr. Panza also feels that turn over is an issue. New board members come on with new agendas.

Discussion ensued on why board members don't run again and why they do.

Mrs. Blais feels that new board members could get up and running much quicker than they do, feels that they could certainly become engaged more.

Mr. Coates likes the idea of having a chair and a vice chair on committees, creates succession and transition.

Mr. Gurney will schedule an immediate retreat to occur right after elections. He will invite outgoing and incoming board members to have an open discussion.

Mr. Coates feels the board needs to support the administration 100% with the tough decisions. Also would like to see the appropriate personnel at meetings as needed i.e., special education if special education issues will be discussed.

Mrs. O'Donnell asked the board if they had any other concerns.

Mrs. Speas would like to see a more rigorous curriculum. More homework, reading, writing. We need to set the bar higher, need more of a quality education.

Mr. Gurney responded that this can be addressed with recommendation #1. We change our curriculum to match up with other state standards. Need to meet our own state standards.

Mrs. O'Donnell asked how do we get to a better place?

Mr. Gurney said with curriculum revisions and professional development in differentiated curriculum.

Mr. Parker wanted to note that there are many, many teachers doing a wonderful jobs and that they shouldn't be sapped by stories of ineffective teachers.

Mr. Panza asked Mr. Harris to speak a bit about being a good principal and identifying needs in his school. How he puts together an action plan and organizing the work that needs to be done.

Discussion ensued on achieving AYP and teachers feeling defeated. Feels that it has a negative effect on morale. Asked administration to acknowledge the great work being done at Symonds.

Meeting adjourned @ 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathleen Selvidio
Recording Secretary

William B. Gurney
Co-Superintendent of Schools
WBG: md

**Approved by the
Keene Board of Education
Date: February 9, 2010**