

Blue Mountain Union School Board meeting November 20, 2019

Board members in attendance: Kristen Murray, Kelsey Root-Winchester, Alison Schauer-Ingerson, Sara Dennis, Paul Hazel, Angeline Alley, Julie Oliver and Judy Murray

Others and attendance: Bruce Williams, Devonte Gilmore and Bob Hildebrandt of the Abbey Group

Members of the public were present

Meeting called to order at 6:02 p.m.

Angeline Alley requested adding an executive session after public participation section of the agenda

Presentation by Bob Hildebrandt re: The Abbey Group and Universal Free Meals under Provision 2

- Abby group serves several schools in the SU including Waits River, Oxbow and Newbury
- They are working on a Statewide proposal to go to the legislature regarding Universal Free Meals
- The company is based in Enosburg Falls Vermont, they serve around 100 schools in New England and some corporate groups like the Vermont Capital
- Abbey Group Works to tailor service to schools, the local manager handles the menus purchasing and special events
- The group provides the following services:
 - Menus in compliance with regulations
 - Procurement is also regulatory compliant
 - Audit support for USDA audits
 - Less administrative burden for staff
 - Grant writing
- The Abbey Groups has infrastructure in our area, so they can share staff if needed between schools
- They try to retain local staff whenever they come into a school
- They buy locally to support local businesses. For instance, hamburger from PT Farms, apples grown locally, Hood milk, bread produced locally, potatoes and real maple syrup that they get from a supplier in Newbury
- Bob shared two menus for breakfast and lunch. There is a possibility to have menus for K through 8 and 9 through 12 if scheduling allows
 - Menus include a fruit and veggie bar that students can go back to as many times as they like, soup and a harvest of the month sourced from local farmers. We would be able to also incorporate foods from our garden and greenhouse into their meal program

- Questions were asked on whether staff that are shared would stay within our district, the answer was yes. There was a discussion regarding wages and benefits
 - The local manager can be hired within, again they do try to retain local staff
 - We asked how much waste they see and if there are composting efforts. Bob said yes that they do have composting offerings and they also work with student groups in these efforts. They have also found a share table with a small refrigerator to be helpful in reducing waste
- The focus shifted to Universal Free Meals at BMU
 - Under Provision 2, subsidies are paid by the USDA based on the first year of use
 - Currently BMU has approximately 55% free and reduced lunch and 45% full cost
 - The participation rate in purchase of meals in the first year under universal free meals locks in the reimbursement rate from USDA under Provision 2 for 4 years. So, if we had 75% of student participate, eat at the school, BMU would be reimbursed for 75% of the costs for 4 years. After the 4 years, participation data will be gathered again, and the cycle starts over
 - The Abbey group would give us a fixed plate cost. Based on this fixed plate cost and an assumption of 75% participation rate, the community would need to subsidize the food program \$76k.
 - This is approximately \$25,000 more for the universal free meals program versus our current system. We already subsidize the lunch program \$53K- \$55K yearly.
 - There is flexibility in their menus and they are open to feedback, so if something is not working for our school they will change it. The goal is to have a large percentage of our student body participating in meals at BMU. There is documented evidence that students who have access for nutritious foods have fewer behavioral problems, increased test scores and educational achievement
 - Dena shared participation data from the last three year (Sept. and Oct) for the breakfast and lunch programs. There is room for growth in both meal offerings

Public participation

- Community members wanted to know what happens to BMU staff?
- Assuring that staff have good wages was a prime concern
 - Generally, 85% of people are kept on from the original staff
 - Benefits are not as good as through the school. Abbey Group uses Blue Cross Blue Shield and subsidize half of the employees cost for the plan
 - One benefit is that under the Abbey Group a staff member can collect unemployment during the summer, holidays or days off. This does not impact their annual wage, it's additional monies

- Pay is situational, the Abbey Group would work with the school to determine the pay scale
- They do pay competitive wages there are no jobs at minimum wage
- The Abbey group offers continuing educational and professional development
- Impact on the taxpayer was also discussed. BMU already subsidizes the food service, so any additional spending would have an impact depending upon the budget
- Other considerations are that the kitchen staff are union members, the need for more collaboration with the teachers and support for innovative ways to get kids to eat more during school hours
- Devonte shared the results of a short survey the Student Council conducted regarding the food service at BMU
 - 100 students participated
 - There is room for improvement in the number of kids that use the food service as well as the taste of the menu items
 - Devonte and the Student Council will work with the Community Relations Committee to develop a more comprehensive survey to provide student voice in this discussion

7:20 pm Motion by Paul, seconded by Judy to move into Executive Session under Contracts

7:50pm Motion by Paul, seconded by Kristen to exit Executive Session

8:15pm Motion by Paul, seconded by Julie to adjourn the meeting