

**Sebago School Department
Special School Committee Meeting
March 16, 2021**

There was a Special Meeting of the Sebago School Committee on Tuesday, March 16, 2021 on Zoom at 6:30 p.m.

Call to Order and Roll Call

Members joined the meeting by video link. Pursuant to subsection 403-A of 1 MRSA (Maine Revised Statutes Annotated), Chair Tina Vanasse confirmed that each member of the Committee could both hear and be heard. She did this by calling the roll and members present were asked to confirm by saying “Yay”. She asked that all members listen and report any audio difficulties when the roll call is complete.

The following School Committee members were present by video link – Tina Vanasse, Joseph McMahon, Wendy Newcomb, Audrey Schoolcraft, and Donelle Allen. All members responded in the affirmative that they could both hear and be heard. Also present by video link were Superintendent Marc Gendron, Principal Kirsten Goff, Secretary Allen Crabtree, Chris Balchunas, Randa Viitala, Ted Bridge-Koenigsberg, Jerry Holt, Mandee Dearborn, Jeremy Turon, Grover Newcomb, Cassie Winslow, Eileen Mains, Susan Harmon, Christine Bennett, Kate Sterling, Amy Sweetser, Elizabeth Connell, Lisa Graham, Jennifer Hill, Phil and Claudia Lowe, Leslie McConnell, Sara Hillery, Jason Schoolcraft, Krys Carriere, Brenda Merritt, Kelly and Kevin Hale, Mike Foye, Justin Fariel, and Tammy.

Pursuant to subsection 403-A of 1 MRSA, Item D. – “All votes taken during the public proceeding are taken by roll call vote”. To questions before the School Committee, Chair Vanasse will call the roll, those in favor of passage are asked to say “Yay”, those opposed “Nay”, and members wishing to abstain may do so by stating “Abstain.”

The meeting was called to order by Tina Vanasse, Chair, at 6:40 p.m.

Call to Order

Pledge of Allegiance

Agenda Adjustments

Donelle Allen said that three School Committee members must vote in order to schedule a special meeting. A motion was made by Wendy Newcomb, seconded by Donelle Allen, to schedule a special meeting of the School Committee for March 16, 2021. There was a roll call vote. Voting Yes: Joe McMahon, Donelle Allen, Wendy Newcomb, and Audrey Schoolcraft. Voting No: Tina Vanasse. Motion passed with a vote of 4-Yes and 1-No votes.

Donelle Allen said that any adjustments to the agenda must be voted on by the School Committee. A motion was made by Donelle Allen, seconded by Audrey Schoolcraft, to have a vote of the School Committee for any agenda adjustments. There was a roll call vote. Voting Yes: Tina Vanasse, Joe McMahon, Donelle Allen, Wendy Newcomb, and Audrey Schoolcraft. Motion passed with a vote of 5-Yes votes.

A motion was made by Donelle Allen, seconded by Audrey Schoolcraft, to add an Executive Session to the agenda per 1MRSA 405(6)(A), Duties of Officials, as agenda action item 5B. There was a roll call vote. Voting Yes: Tina Vanasse, Donelle Allen, Wendy Newcomb, and Audrey Schoolcraft. Joe McMahon abstained. Motion passed with a vote of 4-Yes votes and 1 Abstention.

A motion was made by Donelle Allen, seconded by Wendy Newcomb, to approve the draft agenda as amended. There was a roll call vote. Voting Yes: Tina Vanasse, Joe McMahon, Donelle Allen, Wendy Newcomb, and Audrey Schoolcraft. Motion passed with a vote of 5-Yes votes.

Public Comments on Agenda Items

Tina Vanasse said that comments on the agenda would be received first from members of the School Committee, then from teachers, and then from members of the general public. She laid out protocols for keeping order.

- **Comments by members of the School Committee**

Donelle Allen provided a chronology of events from the first discussions for Sebago to leave MSAD61 to the point of hiring a Superintendent.

Joe McMahon said that the focus should be on what will best ensure the school and our children succeeding. Superintendent Gendron asked to reduce his hours, not to quit in July. Option 3 provides more flexibility to deal with the challenges of the future, just as we have been successful in responding to the pandemic.

Audrey Schoolcraft said we support Principal Goff. The School Committee vote to terminate Superintendent Gendron at the end of the school year in July allows for finding a new Superintendent to carry on the advances that Superintendent Gendron has achieved.

Wendy Newcomb said that we need stability in our administrators. She didn't vote to fire Superintendent Gendron or question Principal Goff. Her research and calls emphasize that a separate Superintendent/Principal are the best way to proceed. Combining the two positions in one person would be a disaster. The parents she has spoken with all prefer two separate positions.

Tina Vanasse said that the entire School Committee is in favor of having two separate positions, and Option 3 does this. Reducing Superintendent Gendron's days/year from 108 to 50-60 respects his wishes and his judgement that this is sufficient to properly carry out the Superintendent's duties. She then went through the sequence of events since January 26. Superintendent Gendron does not want to resign and wants to stay on as Superintendent with reduced hours after July 2021. She reminded her request to School Committee members to call other school districts to see how they have handled their Superintendent/Principal relations.

Audrey Schoolcraft noted that we have received applications from five potential superintendent candidates.

- **Comments by Teachers**

Randa Viitala, President of the Sebago Elementary Teacher's Union, read a letter from the teachers. They were shocked at the action of the School Committee to fire Superintendent

Gendron. He has given leadership during critical times, has done a great job with vision and experience, and he wanted to stay on as Superintendent. The teachers want him to stay. The teachers voted on the three options – 1 for option #1, 1 for option #2, and 26 for option #3. She also said that clear job descriptions are needed.

Sara Hillery submitted a letter to the School Committee. She was disheartened over the School Committee's decision to fire the Superintendent. He is unique and will be very difficult to replace. Principal Goff is a hard working Principal and is under paid. The action by the School Committee was an insult to her.

Lisa Graham submitted a letter to the School Committee. The Gendron/Goff team is outstanding and should be maintained for the future of Sebago Elementary. She is 100% behind option #3. It is a huge mistake to replace the Superintendent at this point and also not allow the Principal to advance.

Chris Bennett endorses the comments of the Teacher's Union. Removing the Superintendent at this stage is the worst thing that could be done. Why didn't the School Committee ask the teachers before making this decision? This has a devastating impact on staff morale and creates a divide between the school and the school committee. Sebago Elementary is still very young and needs more time to put down roots.

Leslie McConnell said that SES is special because of the Superintendent/Principal team. She asks the School Committee to please reconsider their decision.

Chris Balchunas pointed out that Kirsten Goff does much more than the usual duties that a Principal does, and has to fill in when the superintendent is not there. A new superintendent may be inclined to more consolidation, which is what SES moved against in leaving MSAD61.

• **Comments by Members of the Public**

Mandee Dearborn and Jeremy Turin said that the P/S is a good team, but understands if the superintendent steps down for personal reasons. The principal wears many hats and her pay may be too low. We need to make a plan – where are we going, what is our vision, what changes need to be made in the budget. All this drama is unnecessary.

Mike Foye said that a dual P/S doesn't work – there is too much work for one person. Need two positions.

Krys Carriere said that one person cannot be both the P and S at the same time. What are the long term goals of SES?

Jerry Holt was upset that Superintendent Gendron spoke with the teachers about his plans before telling the School Committee, which undermined the authority of the School Committee and created an atmosphere of distrust. This is a good opportunity for the School Committee to look forward and build on the foundation of the vote.

Claudia Lowe alluded to the background in building a new SES. There is much more to do, and it is normal if the superintendent wants to reduce his hours.

Phil Lowe said that the part-time superintendent and full-time principal have worked well. It is a better structure to have two positions. He faulted the discussions between the superintendent, principal, and chair of the School Committee before going to the School Committee.

Grosvenor Newcomb want two positions – superintendent and principal – to provide checks and balances. The School Committee didn't fire the superintendent. Option #1 keeps two people.

- **Other Comments**

Superintendent Gendron thanked everyone for their positive comments and reflected that 3 ½ years he has been superintendent have gone well. He now wants to dial back his hours and continue as part-time superintendent. He reminded the School Committee that his contracts are done on December 1 and allowing him to remain as superintendent would allow more time for an orderly transition to a new superintendent. We should always focus on what is best for our students.

Tina Vanasse commented that the superintendent's resignation is official only when the School Committee votes to approve it. If there is no superintendent, there is no one to make superintendent decisions that may need making.

Wendy Newcomb and Audrey Schoolcraft both thanked Superintendent Gendron for his work. There was no Option #4 raised which would have allowed for the continuation of Mark as part-time superintendent and Kirsten as full-time principal. Wendy Newcomb said she would have voted for it. She didn't intend to fire the superintendent, but wants to keep two positions.

Joe McMahon said we have a good team doing a good job, the pandemic is still with us, and we shouldn't "change horses in mid-stream."

Tina Vanasse said that the staff is devastated after the option #1 vote. There was no suggestion for an option #4 vote. Kirsten Goff needs the title of Assistant Superintendent to do necessary Superintendent work. Audrey Schoolcraft said she doesn't – she can do it as she has been doing it in the past. Joe McMahon said if she has not title then she has no authority to act. Jerry Holt said that only certification is needed – if certified then she can act without the title. Chris Balchunas said that the DOE only talks to the superintendent.

Jason Schoolcraft said that many parents are opposed to one position, and are afraid of retaliation from the principal. Justin Fariel said that many parents are opposed to the principal and are afraid of retaliation against their kids.

Grover Newcomb told the School Committee to accept the vote. Tina Vanasse asked the School Committee to look carefully at what they have done for the future of the school. There was further discussion on ethics.

Action Items

- **Vote to rescind the February 23 action of the Sebago School Committee**

A motion was made by Joe McMahon, seconded by Tina Vanasse, to rescind the action of the Sebago School Committee of February 23 to approve Option 1 regarding the Sebago Superintendent of Schools' position. There was a roll call vote. Voting Yes: Tina Vanasse and

Joe McMahon. Voting No: Donelle Allen, Wendy Newcomb, and Audrey Schoolcraft. Motion failed with 2-Yes votes and 3-No votes.

- **Executive Session per MRSA 405(6)(A)**

A motion was made by Donelle Allen, seconded by Audrey Schoolcraft, to go into Executive Session. There was a roll call vote. Voting Yes: Donelle Allen, Wendy Newcomb, Audrey Schoolcraft, and Tina Vanasse. Voting No: Joe McMahon. Motion carried with 4-Yes votes and 1-No vote.

The School Committee went into Executive Session at 9:00 p.m.

The School Committee came out of Executive Session at 9:49 p.m.

No actions were taken during Executive Session.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Audrey Schoolcraft, seconded by Wendy Newcomb, to adjourn. There was a roll call vote. Voting Yes: Donelle Allen, Wendy Newcomb, Audrey Schoolcraft, and Tina Vanasse. Abstaining Joe McMahon. Motion carried with 4-Yes votes and one Abstention.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Secretary
