

Winooski School Board of Trustees
Special Meeting
Wednesday, November 18, 2020, 6:30pm
Virtual Only Meeting
Zoom Meeting information: <https://wsdvt.zoom.us/j/98954821893>
Join by Phone: Meeting ID - +1 301 715 8592

All students will graduate from the Winooski School District (WSD) college and career ready at a cost supported by a majority of the Winooski community. WSD students will lead healthy, productive and successful lives and engage with their local and global community.

Attendees: Sean McMannon, Mike Decarreau, Alex Yin, Tori Cleiland, Liz Edsell, Emily Hecker, Tula Kadariya, Allison Burlock, Steven Berbeco, Jean Szilva, Kayla Loving, Matt O'Neill

1. **Call to Order:** 6:37pm
2. **Agenda Review and Adjustments:**
3. **Public Comments:**
4. **Governance Processes (Policy Section IV):** (60 Minutes)
 - a. Policy Title: 4.1 Governing Style
 - i. Action: Interview and Appoint New Board Members (2)
 1. Effective Wednesday, December 2, 2020

Question 1: What do you believe the role of the school board is within the organization and in linkage with the community?

*Allison - I was thinking about the mission and vision of the school district and it mentions creating college and career ready students at a cost supported by the majority of Winooski and students who are healthy and productive, successful and engaged with the community. I am thinking of the role of the board as supporting those things and not managing the school but rather encouraging and enabling the school and the school employees on what to do and how to do it best. It is to represent the interest and voice of the community to work with the superintendent to achieve the mission and vision of the school district. To represent the school to outside groups and to make sure the school is given the accolades and recognition for the job it does for the students it has. Also, to align with the city agenda, the city and the school district have an agreement to promote the same sorts of things.

*Steven - I believe the role of the school board is to set policy for their schools (like the brain to the body) where the school board sets policy and the district carries out that policy. The responsibility of the school board is to reflect the community and those policy decisions. I believe that school board meetings should be boring, deadly boring, because they so much reflect the interest of the community that there are no surprises; that if there are any issues, those have been worked out before the school board comes together to make a decision, discuss and set policy.

*Jean - I agree with the two previous speakers, traditionally the school board is the link between the community and district. When I was on the school board, I tried to do policy governance, to set the policy and carry it out.

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They are responsible for the students to get the most bang for the taxpayer buck. As a past school board member, I was stunned by the increasing demands on schools to deal with societal ills, that are refused to be addressed in other ways, like our police department. All these things that get ignored get piled on the schools and the justice system. I think Winooski does a really good job of dealing with this. I think poverty interferes with learning. The stress of growing up in poverty is enormous and you try to deal with it. I also think in this extraordinary time, it's customary practices might need a change and maybe the school board ought to branch out and be an advocate for changing some of these ills that plague our students and interfere with their educational development. I would be in favor of the school board getting more active in influencing the state and school boards organizing and influencing the federal government. If the problem is poverty, let's eliminate poverty, or at least decrease it.

*Liz - I thought Allison spoke of a policy visionary role rather than micromanaging. I always think of the budget, they work on the budget and put that forth to the community. It's been in the last couple of years that I've been paying more and more attention to coalition of ethnic studies work, work on anti-racism, it raises some challenging questions about what the school board's role is, I don't know all the answers but sitting in the meetings this summer where students and alumni were sharing their stories, and what seems to be a short term role of the school board to facilitate work with the community and with students as well as collaborate with staff to evaluate policy and how we move forward in becoming anti-racist. There are a lot of causes the school doesn't have any control over, Jean's point of poverty and racism are just a couple of those. I am in favor of Steven's idea that school board meetings should be boring because everything's been prepared beforehand. I haven't seen what the prep beforehand, or at least the community engagement part of the prep has looked like, and I think developing whatever school board, faculty, community, and student work groups to figure out some of these policy questions and dig in on it. Then come back and have clear cut boring board meetings. Where I've seen things over the last months, it doesn't seem like that's where things are at. The short term seems like we're grappling with "how do we operate together and in partnership with all these different entities that have incredible diversity among us.

*Tula - This is new for me as I have never had a job in a school before. The role is supposed to be that the school board represents the community they are serving and to look after the members under the representative and understand the community. To represent the community and to look after the members and decisions of the community. To look after the social and economic disadvantages of the community.

Question 2: What do you see as the top two strengths and top two weaknesses of the school?

*Jean - The biggest strength is the community. It has become increasingly clear that it's a community that supports it's schools. I am proud of the vote on non resident voting. It seems like people are engaged and a lot of people are voting to move our city and everything in our city forward. The other strength I see is the diversity of the community and student population. Sometimes the person's strength is also their achilles heel. Which Winooski, unfortunately displayed this year with students and alumni coming through with their concerns of systemic racism. With a diverse community and as enthusiastically we are about supporting each other, there are voices not being heard or represented in our leadership. I think the Winooski community is ready to take on these challenges during this strange time. The other challenge I see is we need to show our children that people who act like them, talk like them, and look like them are people in positions of leadership. We need to do that, otherwise we have children thinking, "I can't do that." That's a weakness.

*Tula - The two strengths I see are the diversity of the student population and the desire to improve system protocol. The two challenges I see are low graduation standards and graduation rate.

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*Allison - One of the things I was struck by and will move forward with is length, creativity, and dedication of the staff to meet students' needs. One thing that struck me was the dental clinic in the nurse's office. The second is the diversity of the students of Winooski, and diversity of options provided by the school district. I would prefer to call them opportunities but I think one is systemic racism, how we address those issues and how we respond to the issues that were brought up over the spring and summer. How do we strengthen the school district so we can continue to draw people to the Winooski school district. As we invest in our community and school district, we continue to draw people to the district which allows us to invest more.

*Steven - I feel like I am going to repeat information. It is clear that one strength is the diversity of the community and the community in general. The research is really clear that diversity improves student learning outcomes. Winooski is starting ahead of most of the rest of Vermont. This is a community that has made it very clear what it supports and put it's money where it's mouth is. And to push forward to support public education, that's definitely a strength, especially looking at public education across the nation today. It's one of the things that drew my family to Winooski, one of the things we were looking for when moving to VT. At the same time, those two can be challenges. When you have diverse languages and cultures, it can create opportunities for mis-interpretation and mis-communication, especially for the number of languages and cultures in the schools. It can be a challenge for the community to understand how the school is moving forward. Also, for the board to understand what the community priorities are.

*Liz - The capital project is huge, the school will finally have a physical plant and structure to better serve all students of Winooski. Another strength I would say is the staff and leadership for the commitment to being inclusive and meeting the varied needs of the students. Also, a level of humility of the work is ongoing and really challenging but the staff are great. Some challenges include not having the representation among the staff and school board that's reflective of the student body. It will help address the other challenge which is communicating with the many stakeholders of the community about what's going on in the school. The liaisons work with the charter change to include non resident voters was a game changer.

Question 3:What skills will you bring to the school?

*Steven - I was a superintendent before moving to Vermont and a licenced superintendent in Vermont so I come with that knowledge based experience about how the board functions and functions well. I also come with experience in education as a former public school teacher, a researcher and curriculum developer. I am someone who has focused on education since I was five years old. I have been passionate about education, especially public education. I started attending the school board meetings here in Winooski in December 2019, just after we moved here for personal interest and continue to follow the school board meetings. I am a bit of a policy nerd so I really enjoy school board meetings, watching them and learning about the school and community. I would bring practical experience to the board in effective school governance and recognition of things that haven't worked. Also, a passion for public education I have carried with me for decades.

*Allison - I am a systems thinker, I think about how things are interrelated and how a change can impact what we aren't changing. I am a detailed person at the same time as an analyst in healthcare, my role is to be a detailed thinker. Although I am in healthcare, I have a passion for education, my undergraduate degree is in policy and I had a decision to make about education versus health policy. I kind of held on to my education policy interests in college by working for a group of professors who wrote textbooks and had a very unique perspective on how math should be taught in high schools. I am also passionate about education, it's in my family as I have a few family members who are educators.

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*Tula - A communicator with good experience that can help share opinions and challenges with the school and community and help support the students and community.

*Liz - Last year I was the chair of the Winooski Charter Commission which was a group appointed to examine the options to present voters with a charter change, specifically on whether to expand local voting to include voting for non-residents. As part of that, I got a chance to work really closely with diverse commission volunteers, as well as Tori and Alex who were appointees from the school board and a couple of city counselors. It was a powerful experience, I learned a lot. It was my first time serving on a mission, so I got a chance to figure out how to run public meetings. I think I did a good job engaging everyone who was part of the commission. My professional background is in organizing non profit management, budgeting and finance. I am comfortable with presenting a budget as well. The real bread and butter is getting the budget passed, that's my day job.

*Jean - I come from a background in medicine, so I am comfortable with evidence based decisions. I was a school board member from 2002-2009 and a lot of the problems are the same. I also decided to run for the school board at the time because I didn't know how school taxation worked. Over that time, I got very familiar with it and was the one who did those budget presentations. We developed a tool on the school board website where people could plug in their numbers (income and house value) and figure out what their tax was going to be compared to the previous year. I have spent most of my professional career not being a practicing physician and being an educator. I know that educating college students and post graduate students is not as challenging as being a public school teacher. I was one of the chief developers of the new curriculum at the college, moving to a computer based curriculum. I think I know my way around people and I think that's what I bring to the table.

Questions to the board:

***Steven - What are you looking for in the board going forward? (Alex or Matt)**

*Alex - For me, it's the sub-committee work and the sharing of it. We are a relatively small board of 5 people and that means there's often a lot of work, I think I've counted that I'm on 5 subcommittees. We talk about the work we are doing in terms of advocating for more funding for poverty and special education, now we are on a waiting coalition with Burlington and it would be nice if there was support on that. I'm on the capital project committee and the finance committee. I am looking for someone to dig into the ground on that level too. Do the communication but also be willing to build those coalitions and do that work so we can spread some of this out and some of us don't burn out.

*Matt - We are looking for someone who will help bring forward our racism work and bring it to a point where we can all feel we've accomplished something. We need someone who can self-examine and do the work involved and help bring that to fruition.

***Steven - How do you know when progress has been made?**

*Alex - There are many ways and it is a deeper conversation we shouldn't be diving into. It's making sure we are looking at behavioral data to make sure there is equitable and not certain groups that are being more targeted. I appreciated the fact that Sean mentioned in the last meeting that teachers were doing reflection pieces on whether there is bias in their work and how they call attention to certain students. There are also the traditional outcomes, the things I'm really proud of when looking at the numbers is not necessarily whether we are hitting proficiency levels, but hitting the in between. Some of the students who actually stay in the district actually perform quite well. One of my biggest worries right now is we have top notch students but how is that filtering down to all students?

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*Mike - with regards to a cultural change, the measurement is glacial but it has to be positive and forward moving. You have to notice it and I think it becomes someone new to the district. Someone who has been here may not notice it based on very gradual and consistent changes that we make over time. That's where we end up seeing progress is someone from the outside looking in saying "hey, this is unique or different." It seems to be working well.

*Jean - I don't understand why we have to accept that cultural changes around racial issues have to be glacially slow. Speaking as someone who came to Winooski and running for the legislature, the people who were running against me were actively used to voting, it changed quite fast for the gay community. When I walk hand in hand with my partner, people used to look at us like we were kind of gross, now it's quite amusing. This happened fast, I'm not accepting that it has to be slow.

*Mike - my only response to that Jean would be that when you're digging into culture change, you can try to force fast change but you have to make sure it sticks. It has to be all the way to the bone when you make the change, it can't be superficial and usually superficial is the fast way through. To your point about the gay acceptance, I certainly understand that but that wasn't really quick either. That's been coming over years. That's not a quick change.

*Jean - I think I have a better perspective on this. Gay people have been fighting for their rights not so long ago. There were small movements, but there weren't big movements that started with a stone wall riot when people got motivated and then when people got AIDS. For the civil unions in Vermont, I cannot tell you how many doors were slammed in my face. When I went around for gay marriage, people were like "okay." That's fast.

***Liz - How are decisions around COVID being made and how are teachers in particular being supported in addition to the student population?**

*Tori - Decisions about a pandemic inside the school building are rooted in the means which is under Sean's supervision.

*Sean - We started this summer with the building level reopening teams and then we have a district reopening team and that's how decisions were made from June through August leading up to the start of school. Since then, we have gone back to our regular model, our leadership structure of a district leadership team and then we have building leadership teams that are not necessarily the same people on the reopening teams. Staff are so engaged, so busy, and so exhausted from the day to day, moment to moment. I would say particularly our elementary teachers who now have students four days a week. Our decision making is now falling on our leadership team. I am also part of a regional superintendent group of 16 and we have tried to move together throughout the pandemic with a shared understanding of how we are making decisions. We have local contacts that are a bit different such as ours being a Pre-K-12 single building campus which is different from anyone else's, and create different opportunities and challenges.

5. Executive Session

a. Appointment of Board Members (2)

i. Effective Wednesday, December 2, 2020

*Tori - I will accept a motion to appoint an applicant to Margaret Bass's seat.

*Mike - I will move to appoint Tula Kadariya to Margaret Bass's vacant seat

*Approved by all

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*Tori - I will make a motion to appoint an applicant to Matthew O'Neil's seat

*Alex - I will move to appoint Liz Edsell to the vacant position from Matthew O'Neil

*Approved by all

*Alex - Before we adjourn this meeting, I want to acknowledge that this is Matt's last meeting. I want to acknowledge the years of great service he has done in Winooski. I'm going to miss you, and I know it's past the two hour mark here but I can't not let us end without saying thank you for your years of service to the Winooski School Board.

*Tori - Yes, Matt you have kept Mike steady for years in negotiations.

*Mike - Matt, thank you, you knew when to listen, you didn't talk a lot but when you did, I made sure I dropped the pencil and listened because it was to the point and dead on. I do thank you for the steadying force in the negotiations environment and I thank you for your time.

6. **Adjourn:** 8:25pm