

**GILFORD SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
MONDAY NOVEMBER 4, 2019
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The Gilford School Board held a regular meeting on Monday November 4, 2019 at the Gilford High School Library. Present were Board members Chris McDonough, Gretchen Gandini, Jeanin Onos, Rae Mello-Andrews, and Karen Thurston. Administrators present were Kirk Beitler, Scott Isabelle, Anthony Sperazzo, Peter Sawyer, and Danielle Bolduc. Gilmanston Board members present were Frank Weeks, Michelle Heyman, and Malcolm MacLeod. Student Council Representative present was Alex Cheek was also.

Opening

School Board Chair Chris McDonough called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Superintendent Beitler confirmed posting of the meeting. Chris McDonough led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Gretchen Gandini made the motion that the Board approve the minutes of the September 3, 2019 meeting. Jeanin Onos seconded the motion. There was no discussion nor corrections. The motion passed unanimously in the affirmative, with Michelle Heyman abstaining.

Public Comment

Public comments were made by the following Gilford residents:

Julia Davis spoke in favor of the proposed policy on transgender students. She stated she first encountered hate speech and bullying, while at Gilford High School, because she is gay. She said she spent years wanting to be “normal” because peers taught her that being gay was bad. She addressed the data on suicide rates/thoughts by LGBTQ children and her own thoughts about committing suicide. She stated that she is standing up for what she believes in and fighting for the rights of the LGBTQ community. Concluding, she said we need to protect these kids at school so that they have a space where they are safe; please keep this in mind when moving forward.

Johnna Davis spoke that she greatly supports the policy to protect transgender students. She stated that middle school was brutal for her daughter because of the bullying, but with the support of her teachers, she made it through. She asked if it would be nicer to start teaching children acceptance at a younger age. Ms. Davis stated that we are a community, we all pay our taxes, and these children all deserve better.

Skip Murphy spoke against the policy. He asked when his Right to Know letters would be answered in full. Mr. Murphy stated that he believes that the Board is trying to assume a power they do not have and gave another set of letters to the Board. He requested the law that is giving them the power to implement the policy, including forcing others to use specific pronouns. He also asked where the Board has the power to do that and what is the authorizing legislation.

Jeanne Clark spoke in support of the transgender policy as she believes in creating a safe environment for the children. She commented on the experience she had had with a person in gender transition. She spoke in support of their right to be called by their chosen name and pronoun of choice. Mrs. Clark stated that she feels the proposed policy is a start, making all aware and informed.

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Lisa DiMartino spoke in favor of the proposed policy. She stated that inclusion for all students is what we should strive for. She commented that she feels many of the things she heard at the last meeting were based on fear and lack of knowledge. Teaching acceptance of our differences is what makes us a better community. She continued, stating that inclusion and acceptance of transgender students in our schools is more than just about policy, that it is the first step of inclusion for transgender students. She said we need to send the message that we value you, and we will create an environment of acceptance; inclusion is acceptance and embracing of all, not just a few.

Dorothy Piquado said she is in complete support of the transgender policy, including the use of the pronouns with which they identify. She stated the issue is about all people being able to determine who they are and not to be defined by us. By adopting the policy, she said we can make acceptance of transgender students come sooner rather than later.

Diane Tinkham spoke about the great reputation of the Gilford schools, saying she is proud to be from Gilford, but this is a challenging moment. She said that by not accepting the policy, we are targeting children, and therefore is very much in support of the policy. She stated that students have a right to be treated fairly, and we should be supportive of all parents and families in the district.

Michael Graham spoke as the pastor of the Gilford Community Church. He stated that he knows that good people struggle with this, for which he has empathy. He stated that we all want what is best for children in the district; he hopes the Board will lead and be proactive, not reactive, so that all students will feel safe and will be treated fairly. He announced that on December 10, 2019 there will be another forum at the Gilford Community Church to which he invited the Board and all those present to attend.

Diane Hanley spoke in favor of the transgender and transgender non-conforming policy, stating that Gov. Sununu signed the policy into law. She said that school is a place where children learn about and how to accept their differences. She stated that while others may not understand or support the issue, children cannot be bullied.

Kyle Sanborn spoke against the policy, saying he feels that it is against the rights of all others while in support of one. He stated that he feels his First Amendment Rights are being infringed upon. He said that he asked in a letter about the part where parents might not be informed, especially related to a student meeting with a counsellor. He questioned that it was a violation of a parent's rights. He wants to know **if** it is the policy of the district where the student/counsellor relationship is held above the student/parent relationship. He stated that he assumed the Board is in favor of the student/counselor relationship over the parent's rights, and that this is against the legal standing of the parents. Mr. Sanborn asked if it is the intent of the School Board that the policy also include the general public, asked about some of the words defined in the policy, and asked how to discern someone who is truly transgender versus someone who is pretending to be transgender.

Lynn Baron spoke in favor of the policy; that it is the law. She said it should not be based on our fears, children need our support, and they need to be true to themselves and are brave for doing that. She stated that we need to rally behind these families; they need our empathy and support. She commented that there are non-gender specific bathrooms at her children's college.

Anna Benevides spoke in favor of the policy. She added that there are nineteen schools in New Hampshire that have policies already in place, some since 2015, and with no incidences of injury to or by transgender students. She reiterated that the policy is what is best for all students.

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Bethany Clark spoke about an incident as a freshman where she felt threatened, based on a comment made to her. She stated that we can start moving forward by educating other students about transgender students, make the student who is transgender feel safe and comfortable here, and she is in support of the policy.

Mikayla Clark spoke in favor of the policy, quoting a panelist from a forum presented at the Gilford Community Church, "There is nothing worse than telling a child they cannot be who they are." She said that we need to go beyond the policy, it is a culture shift.

Jacob Maxwell spoke about the following facts: no transgender person has committed an assault in a transgender bathroom; 46% of transgender persons who are not affirmed by their family and community try to commit suicide; and when the community affirms the transgender child, the rate drops to 4%. Mr. Maxwell encouraged the Board to base their decision on fact not fear, as it is the law.

Amber Latorre spoke in favor of and asked the Board to support the policy. She said we must distinguish fact from fiction, and many schools have already adopted the policy without any issues. She asked the Board to choose love over fear and support the policy.

Abby Maxwell spoke to encourage the Board to adopt the policy supporting transgender and gender non-conforming students, encouraging the Board to continue to look at the research. She said research shows that if these students are supported by their families and communities, they have a chance at survival. Following additional comments, she encouraged the Board to pass the policy and continue to educate the staff and community.

Chris McDonough closed the Public Comment section at this time.

Student Report

Student Council Representative Alex Cheek read his report as written. He stated that all juniors took the PSAT on Wednesday October 9, 2019. The results will arrive in December. Chris McDonough asked if Alex felt he had had enough time to meet with the teachers he wanted to see during the lead block. Alex replied that he did, and felt very positive about the experience.

World Language Teachers

Janice Stowell and Louise Jagusch spoke about the organizing of the foreign trip as now being a two-year process. They thanked the Board for the trips being allowed and supported. They are asking for additional compensation for the time spent preparing for these trips, in addition to what they receive during the actual time of the trips. They are requesting consideration of compensation for the non-travel years, which is eighteen months. The additional compensation would cover their prep time.

Janice Stowell and Louise Jagusch presented the trip to France which is proposed for the spring of 2021. They shared their written report on the trip. Janice Stowell spoke about the time spent organizing fund raisers and meeting with students and parents. Chris McDonough stated that the Board would take this under consideration and Mr. Beitler will respond with the Board's decision.

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Business Administrator Report

Scott Isabelle reviewed his financial report as written. It is on the School District's website. The link is attached. <https://www.sau73.org/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=23001429>

Gretchen Gandini asked if we would get an update on the budget. Mr. Isabelle stated that they would. Mr. Isabelle asked if there will be a time allotted to review the default budget; the Budget Committee is meeting to discuss this on December 20, 2019. Chris McDonough said there will be no separate meeting. Gretchen Gandini stated that assuming nothing different comes to the table, she agrees with Mr. McDonough on not having a separate meeting. The Board will discuss the default budget at the December meeting. Mr. Isabelle said he will have the default budget to the board a week before the meeting.

Principals' Reports

Gilford Elementary School

Danielle Bolduc reviewed her report as written. She discussed learner's conferences and other topics from her report. November 21, 2019 will be the annual Thanksgiving dinner at the elementary school.

Gretchen Gandini asked if the question was ever asked about Gilford Elementary School redirecting traffic to the Community Church, and having people walk to the school for the dinner. Danielle Bolduc replied that she would do that.

Gilford Middle School

Peter Sawyer reviewed his report as written. He gave a special kudos to Sean Walsh for getting Scarlett Lewis, creator of the Choose Love program, here to speak on November 5, 2019. Mr. Sawyer reminded all that the Lego Robotics Tournament will be held on November 16, 2019 at Gilford Middle School. Rae Mello-Andrews asked how many people are expected for the tournament. Mr. Sawyer said that there were 13-14 teams last year, and they would anticipate the same for this year. Gretchen Gandini asked if the upcoming Choose Love program was for parents or families. Mr. Sawyer stated that it is for community members; Danielle Bolduc said babysitting would be available.

Gilford High School

Anthony Sperazzo reviewed his report as written. He is seeking approval for the 2019 date of graduation. He reviewed the feedback from the graduation survey: 66 senior parents reported; of those, 72% would prefer holding graduation at the Bank of NH Pavilion if they will have us. Mr. Sperazzo stated that we have to wait until sixty days out to discuss that with them, which would put graduation on June 21, 2019. All seniors who responded prefer the pavilion venue. Mr. Sperazzo noted the proposed finish date of June 17, 2019, with senior finals taking place five days prior to that. Given the survey results, Mr. Sperazzo said that he will come to the Board in March to set the date for this year's graduation.

Karen Thurston asked what would happen if the Pavilion has performances that weekend. Mr. Sperazzo replied that we would have to look at other alternatives, and he would also ask the Pavilion for an earlier date that might be open. Rae Mello-Andrews made the motion that we go with Bank of NH Pavilion, pending the dates and availability. Karen Thurston seconded. The vote was unanimous, motion carried.

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Mr. Sperazzo asked for the Board's approval for Dan Caron's grant writing. Gretchen Gandini made the motion to approve the application for the Honda Foundation Grant. Karen Thurston seconded the motion. Motion passed with a unanimous vote.

Mr. Sperazzo asked for the Board's approval for the senior class trip, noting the change from staying two nights to staying one night. Rae Mello-Andrews made the motion to approve the senior class trip from May 29, 2019 to May 30, 2019; Jeanin Onos seconded. Gretchen Gandini asked if students in need would get funding, to which Mr. Sperazzo replied that they would. She also asked why the senior class does not have enough money to go for two nights this year. Mr. Sperazzo replied that they did not do as much fund raising as in the past. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Sperazzo asked the Board for approval for the World Language trip to France. Gretchen Gandini asked if this was similar to trips taken in the past. Mr. Sperazzo replied that it is, except for the addition of the high speed train portion of the trip. Gretchen Gandini made a motion to allow a maximum of thirty-five students to attend the French class trip to Paris, Normandy, Brittany, and the Cote d'Azur in the spring of 2021. Karen Thurston seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Report

Reaffirm vote on budget.

Rae Mello-Andrews made the motion to reaffirm the amount of \$26,683,487.00 for the School's portion of the budget. Jeanin Onos seconded the motion. Voting was unanimous; motion passed.

Policy – Second Reading

GCG – Part-time and Substitute Professional Staff Employment – current GSD policy for review; no changes or feedback from GEA.

GCGAA – Per Diem Rates for Substitute Teacher – Current GSD policy for review.

JLF – Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect- Current GSD policy for review. There is no NHSBA sample policy.

As there was no discussion, Gretchen Gandini made a motion to approve all three policies; Jeanin Onos seconded the motion. All three policies were approved unanimously. Motion carried.

Public Comment

Skip Murphy stated that he was pleased that Mr. McDonough will curate the questions he submitted and that responses will be given. Mr. Murphy stated that if answers, on a regular basis, are not given on a truthful basis, that the matter will go to the Superior Court to determine if the Right to know Law has been violated or abused. Mr. Murphy stated that he feels 20% of the responses apply to this, and that he was close to filing a claim. Mr. Murphy stated that he knows that Mr. McDonough will vet the questions and answers, but reiterated that there is a remedy he and others might take if they do not get what Mr. Murphy feels are truthful answers.

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Mr. Murphy continued by stating that he feels his Freedom of Religion is not being addressed by the (transgender) policy nor anywhere in the handbook. Mr. Murphy stated that he would like the Board to address that issue.

Non Public Session

Non-Public – RSA 91-A:3II (a) *The dismissal, promotion, or compensation of any public employee or the disciplining of such employee, or the investigation of any charges against him or her, unless the employee affected (1) has a right to a public meeting, and (2) requests that the meeting be open, in which case the request shall be granted.*

At 7:33 p.m., Rae Mello-Andrews made the motion to go into non-public session; Gretchen Gandini seconded. Voting was unanimous; motion passed.

Adjournment

Motion was made at 8:15 p.m. by Karen Thurston to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Gretchen Gandini. Motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Jeanin Onos
School Board Secretary**