

**TOWN OF SHEFFIELD
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
WORKING SESSION
AUGUST 20, 2014
SBRSD LIBRARY
7:00 PM**

Board Members Present: David A. Smith, Jr., Chairman
Nadine A. Hawver, Clerk
Rene C. Wood

Others Present: David Hastings, SBRSD Superintendent
Rhonda LaBombard, Town Administrator
Charles Ketchen, Board of Selectmen from Alford
Tara White, Board of Selectmen member from New Marlborough
Dennis Sears, SBRSD Committee member from Sheffield
Vito Valentini, SBRSD Committee member from Sheffield
Bonnie Silvers, SBRSD Committee member from Sheffield
Jennifer Sahn, SBRSD Committee member from Egremont

Members of the Public

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Superintendent Hastings stated that the purpose of this meeting was informational regarding the three community schools in Monterey, Egremont and New Marlborough. He stated that letters had been received from three towns in the District asking that an evaluation be conducted regarding the use of resources to fund two of the schools and the possibility of closing one or more of these schools. Superintendent Hastings stated that closing these schools would be a long and difficult procedure and that meetings will be held for each of the five town's Board of Selectmen to look at the future of the three community schools.

Chairman Smith discussed his concerns with keeping the community schools open for 3 or 4 children and his concerns that by having outlying schools it does not create a unified campus at the main campus. The other concern that he expressed is that statements have been made that students in the outlying school receive a special education and he is concerned that the same education is not duplicated at the main campus.

Selectman Wood agreed with Chairman Smith's comments. She stated that the letter from Sheffield only requested that the Monterey school be evaluated and that she would like to remove any conversation regarding the New Marlborough school from this meeting. One of her main concerns is the long bus ride that some students would have to endure if all three outlying schools were closed.

Selectman Hawver discussed her concerns with the rising cost of the school budget and asked what the potential savings would be if the schools were closed. Superintendent Hastings replied that the closing of the Monterey school would save the District approximately \$160,000 and that this would be a maximum savings during the first year. He also stated that he did not have any estimate on the cost savings of closing the Egremont school. He assured the Board that he will continue to work with

the School Committee to find ways to reduce costs but that the consensus is that if the outlying schools are closed students would not be able to experience the unique education that only small schools can provide. He further stated that students at the main campus also receive a great education. Selectman Wood inquired about the school within a school concept of repeating the small school atmosphere at the main campus. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Valentini clarified the procedure for closing a community school. The School Committee must pass, by a super majority, a vote to hold a public hearing in the town where the proposed closure will take place, then take another vote to close the school after the public hearing. At this point all five towns must put this question on an Annual Town Meeting Warrant and it must pass in 4 out of 5 towns.

The Board asked Superintendent Hasting what commitments have been made or are expected to be made regarding the Egremont and Monterey schools. Discussion ensued regarding Monterey's request that a moratorium be placed on this discussion and the individual towns financially maintaining these buildings. Egremont has applied for grant funds to maintain their building and Monterey hopes to do the same. The expenditures that the District is incurring for these schools are salary, electric, heat and telephone and these figures are included in the stated \$160,000 savings.

Enrollment for this school year is 6 students in Monterey and 15 in Egremont. Superintendent Hasting will forward information on how many are choice students.

Alford Board of Selectmen member Charles Ketchen requested that the School Committee ask Monterey and Egremont to ask their residents how they feel about closing the school with a ballot question at their Annual Town Meeting. He also stated that Alford did close their community school when enrollment got so low that it was not in the best interest of the District to keep it open.

School Committee member Dennis Sears discussed the Committee's concern that Monterey will leave the District, if Monterey were forced to close their school, which would mean that the remaining 4 towns would have to split Monterey's share of the budget. Discussion ensued regarding the District Agreement. Jennifer Sahn, Egremont School Committee member, shared her concerns with the vitality of the one room school houses and feels that the community schools should be advertised to draw in more students and parents who are looking for this type of experience.

New Marlborough Board of Selectmen member Tara White stated that New Marlborough has opened the door to Monterey students.

It was the consensus of all involved that a facilitator was needed to help discuss of the above issues.

Mr. Ketchen indicated that Alford was not interested in attending this same meeting. He had attended the meeting held for the Town of Monterey and the same issues were discussed as was discussed here tonight without resolution. He stated that he felt it better to meet with a facilitator. Ms. White agreed.

Superintendent Hastings will research a facilitator and get back to the towns.

Selectman Wood moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Selectman Hawver. The motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Smith adjourned the meeting at 8:35 PM

Respectfully submitted:

Rhonda LaBombard
Town Administrator