

SAU #20 Board Meeting with NH Listens
Wednesday, January 29, 2025
Meeting Minutes
Medallion Opera House, Gorham

Board Members Present: Dennis Wade, Gina Saladino, Timothy Buxton, Jo Carpenter, Richard Umiker, Benjamin Mayerson, Andrew Mullins, Michael Waddell, and Tammi Dube

Administration: David Backler, Superintendent SAU 20; Cassandra Micucci, Business Administrator SAU20; and Tina Binette, Special Services Director; Amy Huter, Principal Milan Village School

Others: Ann Nolin, Mark Evans, Rep. Lori Korzen, Rep. Michael Murphy, Rep. Mike Ouellet, Rep. James Tierney, Rep. Arnold Davis, Debbie Davis, Jamie Welch, Tammy Fauteux, Rob Scott, Michelle Mason, Rep. David Paige, Paul Bousquet, Denise Vallee, Sen. David Rochefort, Heather Forbes, Rep. Sean Durkin, Tara Giles, Michael Cronin, Marion Anastasia, Patricia Brown, Heather McMann, Steve Nilhas, and others

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

David Backler welcomed those in attendance and thanked them for coming. Backler noted that this was an opportunity to solve issues with the goal of providing the best education to our students while being fiscally responsible.

2. Agreement for the Evening's Gathering

Michele from NH Listens reviewed the group agreement for this evening, encouraging participants to listen to others, share airtime, be fully present, and to respect each other and the time together.

3. Introductions and Connections 1-2-4- All

Lou from NH Listens had the participants pair up with someone they did not know and talk about what brought them here tonight, and what they wish decision makers in Concord understood about the North Country.

The pairs were then encouraged to merge into a group of four to discuss how we can help people see the complexities and differences in education in North Country communities.

The groups were then asked to share the topics that were discussed.

Michelle Mason from SAU58 advised that they discussed homeschool and charter school impacts on students, the lack of resources in the North Country, and the costs of special education, including the requirement for districts to provide services to private or charter schools.

Rob Scott of SAU36 noted that they discussed the uniqueness of the North Country and the fact that each community has different needs.

David Paige, Representative from Conway, shared that issues are magnified in the North Country, noting the teacher shortage and lack of mental health clinicians.

Michael Waddell of SAU20 shared that years ago there were 30-40 students in a classroom with one teacher, and now there may be 10 students and five educators in a classroom. Mr. Waddell advised that the general public cannot conflate the differences, which are enormously expensive and difficult.

4. Stations and Small Group Conversations – Focus on Schools and School Funding

Carrie from NH Listens explained the four tables available for discussions. Participants were encouraged to visit each station.

Table 1 discussed how we reconcile what it costs to run a school and serve students with our concerns about property taxes, focusing on what we can work on together.

Table 2 discussed the specific obstacles that need to be addressed, focusing on how we remain lean, creative, and fulfill student needs.

Table 3 discussed what the most important things are that we need to keep, the value of public education, and what makes public education important for students in our communities.

Table 4 discussed what they would be proud of that this group could accomplish.

5. Gallery Walk and Back to Tables for Small Groups – Naming Our Tension Points

Participants were re-grouped according to their nametags and asked to revisit each table to review the topics discussed and ideas shared.

Groups were then asked to focus on what people are facing locally in schools and on boards and how this is not always consistent with what is coming out of Concord. Groups were asked how we find shared work by naming three tension points.

Tension points shared by the group included a shift of community support, the cost of special education services, educating the public to trust public education, the growing divide between residents who have children in school and those who do not, difficulty recruiting and keeping teachers, charter schools, unfunded state mandates, parental rights, the change of climate in high schools, and trust between the community and the school board.

6. Large Group Discussion – Next Steps for Shared Work

David Backler commended the honest conversation during the session, and pointed out that there are so many things that we agree on. The question is still how we pay for it. Backler noted that education is critical, and needs to be promoted while being fiscally responsible.

Backler advised that NH Listens will collect the work done and provide a summary which will be shared on the SAU20 website.

7. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 pm.