



BOARD OF VISITORS

THE VIRGINIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND THE BLIND
P.O. BOX 2069
STAUNTON, VA 24402-2069

Senator John J. Bell
Board Chairperson

March 24, 2022
Minutes of Meeting

Call to Order: Senator Bell called the meeting to order at 10:52 am.

Roll Call of Members: The roll call of members was conducted by introductions.

Senator Bell announced that this meeting would be Melissa Charnes', Assistant Attorney General, last as an Advisor to the Board. Senator Bell thanked Ms. Charnes for her service to the school and the Board.

Senator Bell declared a quorum.

Members Present: Senator John J. Bell, Senator Ghazala F. Hashmi, Delegate Sally Hudson, Mike Asip, Daphne Cox and JH Cline, Jr.

Members Absent: Delegate Kathleen Murphy and Judy Sorrell

Advisors to the BOV Present: Wanda Council/VDOE, Melissa Charnes/OAG, Pat Trice/Superintendent

Advisors to the BOV Absent: None

Reading and approval of minutes: There were no objections, additions or deletions noted for the minutes of the December 14th meeting.

Mike Asip proposed to accept the agenda and meeting minutes from the December 14th, 2021 meeting. JH Cline, Jr. seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Reports

General Assembly update: Senator John J. Bell, Chair, provided an update regarding the General Assembly. A Special Session will take place on April 4th to discuss pending outstanding budget and legislation issues. Three billion dollars will be split between the Senate and House of Delegates. The ongoing pandemic and trend revenues have positioned Virginia's economy in a good place. There is wide agreement that raises are needed for state employees and teachers. Retaining workers continues to be a widespread issue across the market.

A budget amendment was submitted for VSDB's Information Technology (IT) systems, requesting \$640,000 from the Senate and additional funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in the House. Senator Bell spoke with House Appropriations Committee Chairman Knight and Senator Howe. Both have shared their support in taking care of VSDB and improving its IT systems. Additionally, Senator Bell has brought the issue to the attention of Secretary Guidera, Virginia's Secretary of Education. Secretary

Guidera is also supportive of the school and has offered her assistance with the ongoing issues and staffing challenges that VSDB continues to face.

Senate Bill 723 was submitted by Senator Bell to change the school's alignment to be directly under the Governor rather than the Secretary of Education. The Bill passed in both the House and Senate with strong support. The passing of this Bill will be a significant change in elevating the school under the same ranking as higher institutions. Although VSDB is not a university, changing its position under higher education institutions seems to be the best alignment to assist with the VSDB's current IT infrastructure. VSDB will work with Senator Bell to prepare a plan for the Board's review on how to transition from Virginia's Information Technologies Agency (VITA) to independence. This plan must be approved by the Board by October 2022 to be sent to the Governor for his review and approval.

Senator Bell hopes that these changes will be long term and ongoing. Senator Bell thanked the House and Senate Appropriations Committees and Secretary Guidera for their support.

Ms. Trice thanked Senator Bell for his time and responsiveness in submitting this important legislation.

Senator Bell shared that the long-term vision of these actions is to make the school a premier resource. VSDB is unique, and everyone's hearts are in the right place to do good things here.

Superintendent's Report: Pat Trice, Superintendent, reported that it had been a busy year, different from the last, good in some ways and challenging in others. VSDB's students successfully continued in-person learning on campus until Winter Break. Inclement weather and a post-holiday surge of the virus delayed the students' return. Staff experienced a significant increase of off-campus COVID-19 exposures that greatly impacted VSDB's ability to provide direct services. Since the start of the pandemic, VSDB has only had two on-campus exposures.

With the surge in cases after the holidays, teachers shifted to at home/virtual instruction in combination with individualized paper packets per student needs. Distance learning is not the best learning tool for VSDB's population; however, it was the best option to meet the learning needs of the students with limited staffing options. All were happy to have the students return to campus in mid-February.

Students recently completed benchmark testing and will start SOL testing after Spring Break. VSDB's elementary students must be tested one-on-one. This will create a significant impact on staff resources so all staff resources so all will be trained in order to assist with test administration and proctoring. The students' individual needs are considered throughout the testing process and everyone works together to support the process.

In accordance with the Governor's Executive Order, at the end of January, a mask choice letter and form were sent to parents so that they could indicate their mask preference for their child. The forms were used to assist VSDB in supporting the parents' choice for their child's mask wearing. Once staff and students return to campus from Spring Break, mask wearing will be optional for all campus wide. VSDB has started looking at ways to gradually lessen the pandemic restrictions from the past two years. Field trips and off campus trips are being considered. During the last two years, visitors were prohibited on campus and students were unable to travel off campus. VSDB continues to work in collaboration with the local Virginia Department of Health (VDH) for guidance related to the safety and health of all students, employees and visitors, as it moves toward more normal operations.

Senator Bell requested information on how VSDB's transportation had changed with the pandemic. Ms. Trice shared that in the past, VSDB utilized three charter buses as well as VSDB's buses and state vehicles to transport the students. This year, to accommodate social distancing, VSDB used five charter buses. Students travel home on Friday at noon and return to school on Sunday evening. After Spring Break, one charter bus will be eliminated from the routes. With social distancing restrictions being lessened, transportation can be more flexible in merging the routes. Ms. Trice shared that without the assistance of additional funds from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER), VSDB would not be able to afford this level of contracted transportation.

Mr. Asip asked Ms. Trice if in lieu of summer school this year, would students be able to receive materials to take home to work on during the Summer Break. Ms. Trice shared that the school is considering sending paper packets home with the students for additional review at home. VSDB hopes to be able to provide a two-week session to students during the summer next year. Finding volunteers to work one session last year proved very challenging. The ongoing pandemic has added additional stress and there is great need for a full summer break.

As VSDB looks forward to the end of the school year, Staff have begun to plan events that have not been able to happen during the last two years. Prom will be held outside in the Frontier Culture Museum's Pavilion in May. VSDB will partner with the Cinderella Project, which collects formal wear for boys and girls, to assist the students in picking items free of charge to wear to the event.

Graduation invitations will be sent to the Board next month. Graduation will take place on Friday, May 20th in Healy Auditorium. The first year of the pandemic, students were not able to have a traditional graduation experience. A graduation box was sent to the graduates containing confetti, balloons, a tassel and their diploma. Last year, graduation was able to be held in the auditorium, with a limited number of people in attendance. Each student invited up to 10 guests. Graduation this year will be modeled similarly to last year's event. Graduates will also be planning their year-end off-campus trip. In the past, the students chose to travel to Baltimore Harbor and Kings Dominion. Graduate Night plans are also underway. The students will present skits, watch a video of pictures from their time at VSDB and enjoy an evening together.

Ten students will be graduating from VSDB this year. Each year, enrollment increases in the Fall and decreases in the Spring. Kim Dayhoff, Admissions Coordinator, continues to receive an increase in inquiries in Virginia and across the country regarding enrollment and the school's unique programs. VSDB recently implemented a waiting list for students interested in enrolling. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, residential space is limited to half capacity with students unable to share a room. In classrooms, students must maintain space for social distancing. Each student on the waiting list must be individually considered for space in the classrooms and residential halls. VSDB is positioning itself for growth next year, with hopes to start the year off normally with two students in a room in the residential halls and re-establishment of the 18+ floors.

The exterior renovation of Main Hall is due to be finished in October, with the Superintendent's House restoration close to completion. The Foundation funded furnishing for the Superintendent's House, which will be utilized for stays over 30 days. The Superintendent's House will also provide additional space for entertaining small gatherings on the first floor. Battle Hall's updates continue with furnishings set to arrive on April 5th.

VSDB continues to be a leader in the nation for blind soccer. Currently, there are only two schools with a blind soccer team, Maryland School for the Blind and VSDB. VSDB has partnered with Clemson University

and the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) to host the first Blind Soccer Educational Summit for coaches from schools for the Blind to learn about Blind Soccer and develop a team at their school. The Summit will run June 21st-24th and will be open to one participant from each school in the nation. After the Summit finishes, 10-12 coaches will stay with the National Blind Soccer Team and practice on VSDB's fields. The Foundation has been instrumental in starting the program at VSDB, hosting the summit and providing \$30,000 in equipment.

VSDB hosted its first Virtual Job Fair event for Teachers on March 3rd. The event was scheduled for morning and evening sessions from 9am-11am and 6pm-8pm. Participants registered for a 20-minute meet and greet with the Superintendent, Principal, Director of Instruction and the Director of Student Life. Each session provided an opportunity for participants to ask questions about VSDB and its programs. The first event proved successful, with the schedule filling with strong candidates. A second Virtual Job Fair for Teachers has been scheduled April 5th. A third Virtual Job Fair event will be scheduled on April 13th for Teaching Assistants and Residential Staff. Ms. Trice shared that one of VSDB's largest struggles is competing with compensation available in the private sector. Staffing shortages across departments continue to be a monumental issue. VSDB's staff have a high level of specialized skills that are not able to be easily replicated. Senator Bell requested that Ms. Trice follow up with the Board on the outcome of the Virtual Job Fairs. Senator Bell has spoken with Secretary Guidera regarding the challenges that VSDB faces hiring and retaining staff with the salaries that are available in the private sector.

A handout was provided to the Board highlighting various Outreach events. Robin Bliven, VSDB's Director of Outreach, and Julie Saum, Family Engagement Specialist, have been doing a phenomenal job working together and providing services across the state to families and professionals. Ms. Saum has implemented a weekly story time, signed for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and read aloud with descriptions for the Blind and Visually Impaired. CONNECT, a bi-monthly event, features a roundtable discussion with four experts from VSDB and around the state. Parents are able to participate in breakout rooms to discuss a range of topics. Ms. Trice applauded Ms. Bliven and Ms. Saum for their efforts.

There are three open appointments currently on the Board. These openings include two parent vacancies and one alumni vacancy from the Deaf or Blind. Senator Bell requested that candidates be considered for diversity, including regional diversity. Ms. Trice shared the parent positions had to be appointed from the east side and the west side of the state. Senator Bell requested that Ms. Trice keep him informed of any potential Board candidates. Senator Bell has been working with the Governor's office on reinstating the current board members that need to be reappointed and has been assured that those appointments will be approved.

Mr. Asip requested information on how many TEMPS were currently lined up for Admissions. Ms. Trice shared that admissions interviews and enrollment had previously been put on hold due to high numbers of local infection rates with the pandemic but were starting to be scheduled again. There is currently one student awaiting to complete their TEMP program; however, more are anticipated. Last year, dates were extended to allow for more students to complete their TEMP weeks in April and May and enroll in the Fall.

Budget and Grants Report: Janice Rankin, Director of Operations, presented the budget. VSDB should be at 67% in general funds and is currently at 66%. In total funds, VSDB is at 62%. 80% of ESSER II funds have been spent, with the remaining funding expected to be disbursed by the end of the year. ESSER III funds have not been spent. VSDB received an additional \$8,000 from the USDA Emergency Food Funds, which has been spent.

The ESSER funds have assisted in transportation costs for the extra charter buses. Next year, VSDB may face financial difficulties due to bus costs. The buses run strictly on a contract with no fuel surcharge. Ms. Rankin shared that with rising fueling costs, there was potential the bus contract may need to be put back out for bid.

ESSER III funds must be spent by September 2024. Funds from this grant have been set aside for summer school, replacing the air handler in two buildings and transportation costs for extra buses if needed.

A spreadsheet of the 2022-2023 State Operated Annual Plan Flow Through Grant, in the amount of \$315,642 was provided as a handout to the Board. Funds utilized for this grant would benefit the preschool program, bus assistance, wages for teacher assistants and one-to-one interveners. IT & RT teachers, repair brailers, and fees for the Valley Technical Center and Annual Licensing.

JH Cline, Jr. moved to approve the 2022-2023 State Operated Annual Plan Flow Through Grant. Senator Hashmi seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

A copy of the Internal Control Questionnaire Review Results was included in the Board's Meeting Materials. Last Spring, the school had three audits, an Internal Control Review, a Capital Review and an IT review. A verbal response was received on the IT review that there were no issues. Ms. Rankin is awaiting a copy of the Capital Review's results. The Internal Control Review found issues with procedures, certification of payroll and the processes after certification as well end of year reporting for Department of Accounts. All three of these issues will be resolved by June.

Human Resources Report: Tessy Schlemmer, Human Resources Director, was unable to attend the Board's meeting. Susan Cupp, Training and Policy Manager, shared the Human Resources report in her absence.

A new Director of Facilities and Engineering, Erich Roscher, was hired on March 10th. Two housekeeping positions and a grounds worker have also been hired. 12-month positions, including positions that have been opened due to resignations and retirements, are now listed on the website.

One of the biggest challenges that VSDB continues to face is remaining competitive with the private sector for salaries of lower paid positions. Most applicants have shared that they would be taking a pay cut to accept a position at VSDB. Minimum wage will be raised to \$12 on January 1, 2023.

Sign-on bonuses have been enacted for certain positions. These bonuses range between \$2,000-\$3,500 depending on the pay grade. Current state employees are ineligible to receive the bonus. Once an employee has been employed at VSDB for three months, they receive half of the bonus. After six months, they are eligible to receive the remainder of the bonus. Last week, VSDB's employee referral bonus program was rolled out. Ms. Trice shared that she was hopeful that this program would encourage current employees in referring people to work here.

Senator Bell asked if VSDB had ever considered contracting out for positions that were harder to fill. Ms. Rankin shared that it had been looked at in the past; however, the cost was much higher to contract outside than to hire our own employees. Senator Bell shared that it may be an important factor to consider, until VSDB is able to have more flexibility in pay for lower paid positions. Ms. Trice shared that housekeeping has been working for the last two years at 50%. Staff try to help and support the housekeeping department the best that they can but it is a challenge. Part of the challenge is that those that apply and are selected for interviews do not attend or come to the interview and leave after a short

period of time. VSDB's most hard-hit areas include bus drivers, housekeeping and the school contracts. Senator Bell suggested that risk should be built into a bid if contracting out for services. The school could face a breaking point if there is a greater reduction in staff.

Delegate Hudson asked if VSDB's salary schedule was to scale. Ms. Trice shared that staff in the Residential Halls have specialized skills and must be fluent in ASL. There is a national shortage for Teachers of the Blind and Teachers of the Deaf. The school must be able to operate with the expertise of those in the field. VSDB's teachers are among the most skilled in the state. VSDB would like to be able to pay them more than what they would be making in public school. Currently, VSDB's teachers do not receive any additional payment for their specialized skills. A Residential Advisor, also holds a very different skill set. The Teachers and Residential Advisors are both critical positions at VSDB. VSDB has partnered with Radford University, Kent State University and Gallaudet University to train teaching interns each spring. The COVID-19 pandemic also pushed many teachers to retire early. Senator Bell asked if there was a model in place for another state with a similar pay differential. Ms. Trice will reach out and talk to other schools that were similar to VSDB for comparison. Ms. Trice shared that Ms. Schlemmer works to keep the pay as competitive as possible. VSDB pays \$100 more than teachers in Waynesboro, Augusta, and Staunton's School Districts. Senator Bell requested that the Board continue to work on this issue as it is vitally important to the overall success of the school.

VSDB has been working on improving the website, using social media, and the creation of a Linked-In account to post open positions. There are three current potential candidates for housekeeping and grounds. The RHW field print office in Staunton, utilized under the DSS contract for fingerprints and background checks, have cancelled appointments several times on VSDB's potential candidates with no reason given. It may take several weeks before the Human Resources office is able to proceed with a potential candidate. Senator Bell and Senator Hashmi shared that they would look into this issue further.

COVID-19 activity has lessened for the Human Resources Director, Director of Operations and Director of Nursing. The new rollout of the Cardinal system has been delayed for VSDB until October 2022, with training set to pick-up in August 2022.

Classified staff recruitment will be posted in early April. Ms. Schlemmer is working on an updated salary teacher scale. Year-end calendar training will commence the last week of school. The Annual Employee Service Award Luncheon is planned for May 24th. Ms. Trice invited the Board to attend the luncheon to recognize staff for their work and dedication.

Continuing Business

Policy Updates: Susan Cupp, Training and Policy Manager, shared that there were no policies to approve; however, there were two policies currently 'in the hopper.' Policy G040 - Use of Security Metal Detectors, Policy G042 - Civil Protest and Demonstrations.

Mr. Asip requested clarification when the security detectors may be used. Ms. Trice shared that the devices would be utilized for sporting events and possibly when students return to campus on Sundays.

2022/2023 School Calendar: Susan Cupp presented the 2022/2023 School Calendar to the Board. Ms. Trice shared that the calendar met the criteria by the Department of Education for hours and school days and that it satisfied the DHRM requirements.

JH Cline, Jr. motioned to approve the 2022/2023 School Calendar. Mike Asip seconded the motion.

Strategic Plan: Pat Trice, Superintendent, provided a printout of the Strategic Plan, including SOL information and measures of academic progress (MAP) and addressed each goal and objective on the plan. Updates to the goals were shared in red. Ms. Trice shared that there have not been many updates made to the plan due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Senator Hashmi asked Ms. Trice how assessment was made that VSDB was meeting the goals and objectives outlined in the plan. Ms. Trice shared that with the goals, outcomes were able to be measured. In the past, Ms. Trice has not included a specific number or data; however, the plans can be adjusted to reflect the data that the Board would be interested in reviewing. PMG initially developed the plan and held stakeholder meetings to receive input on what the plans should contain. Many of the goals are ongoing, with some goals needing to be combined while others have been met. Mr. Asip asked what the outcome was that the Board would want to target. It would be helpful to include data in the report. During the last meeting, Ms. Trice discussed working with PMG on the procurement process. The Strategic Plan should be restarted post the COVID-19 pandemic. Senator Hashmi recommended that a column of measurable outcomes be added to the plan, goals should be established and met to start into a new strategic plan for the next five years.

Other Business

Pat Trice, Superintendent, shared two documents from the VSDB Foundation with the Board. There is an Operating Agreement that exists between the Foundation and VSDB that has lapsed in use. The document is used by the Foundation to approve the transfer of items to VSDB. VSDB is unable to take donations; however, the Foundation is able to. The Operating Agreement is renewable every five years. Senator Bell shared that this document was very similar to those utilized with agencies across the Commonwealth. Ms. Trice requested that the Board vote to amend the Agreement to make it current, with a restart date commencing at the Foundations April 14th meeting.

Ms. Charnes, Office of the Attorney General, requested that a motion be made to request the creation of a Memorandum of Agreement by the Foundation Chair between the Foundation and VSDB. The Foundation Chair should work with the Attorney General's office to prepare a resolution to support the intent of the document and allow the transfer of items between the Foundation to the school.

Senator Hashmi moved to approve the creation of a Memorandum of Agreement by the Foundation Chair between the Foundation and VSDB. JH Cline, Jr. seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Trice introduced the second document, a letter from Warren McKeen, Foundation Chair, requesting the Foundation's Board of Directors be appointed by the Board of Visitors, per the Bylaws that govern the VSDB Foundation.

JH Cline, Jr. moved to approve the appointment of the 2022 Foundation Board of Directors. Senator Hashmi seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Faye Pleasants thanked Ms. Trice for her dedication to VSDB and assistance over the years.

Senator Bell thanked Ms. Pleasants for her comments and thanked VSDB's staff for their hard work

Adjourn

Senator Bell called the meeting to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 1:56pm.

The next Board of Visitors meeting will be held on Thursday, June 2nd from 10:30am - 2:00pm.

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