



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 18, 2021

Minutes of Meeting

The Board of Visitors of the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind convened in a virtual meeting by webinar consistent with Chapter 1283 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly to carry out business statutorily required or necessary to continue operations of the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

Call to Order: Senator Bell called the meeting to order at 10:32am.

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

Senator Bell declared a quorum.

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

Members Absent: Delegate Kathleen Murphy, Delegate Sally Hudson and Judy Sorrell

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

Advisors to the BOV Absent: Susan Williams/OAG

Pat Trice shared with the Board that Delegate Murphy's Legislative Aide, Adrienne Tetreault, would be attending the meeting on Delegate Murphy's behalf until she was able to join the meeting.

Reading and approval of minutes: Melissa Charnes, Office of Attorney General, requested an amendment be made to the December 10, 2020 meeting minutes stating 'the Board of Visitors of the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind convened in a virtual meeting by webinar consistent with Chapter 1283 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly to carry out business statutorily required or necessary to continue operations of the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.' Senator Bell agreed with Ms. Charnes suggestion and requested that this amended verbiage be added to any future virtual Board of Visitors meetings.

JH Cline, Jr. moved to approve the amendment to the December 10, 2020 meeting minutes. Mike Asip seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted to approve the amendment to the meeting minutes as follows:

1.) Senator Bell: AYE

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| 2.) | Delegate Murphy | ABSENT |
| 3.) | Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 4.) | Delegate Hudson | ABSENT |
| 5.) | Mike Asip | AYE |
| 6.) | JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 7.) | Judy Sorrell | ABSENT |
| 8.) | Daphne Cox | AYE |

The motion passed.

JH Cline, Jr. moved to approve the December 10, 2020 meeting minutes. Mike Asip seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted to approve the December 10, 2020 meeting minutes as follows:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| 1.) | Senator Bell: | AYE |
| 2.) | Delegate Murphy | ABSENT |
| 3.) | Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 4.) | Delegate Hudson | ABSENT |
| 5.) | Mike Asip | AYE |
| 6.) | JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 7.) | Judy Sorrell | ABSENT |
| 8.) | Daphne Cox | AYE |

The motion passed.

Senator Bell shared with the Board that the General Assembly had recently convened and additional support would be forthcoming. Senator Bell requested Ms. Trice provide the Board with a list of items that may need financial assistance to help address the unique challenges that VSDB faces.

Reports

Superintendent's Report: Pat Trice, Superintendent, reported that residential students returned to campus on Sunday, March 14th, with in-person instruction on Monday, March 15th. Ms. Trice rode the charter bus to Williamsburg, Petersburg and Richmond on Sunday to pick up the residential students and talk with their families.

To celebrate the students return, a 'Welcome Back' sign was placed at the entryway of the Middle/High School with balloons decorating the buildings. On Monday morning, staff lined the sidewalks to cheer on the day students as they were dropped off. Ms. Trice stopped by each of the classrooms and shared that one student had stated that they did not care if the school needed to close down again, they would stay on campus to learn. An overwhelming feeling of excitement and sense of normalcy is apparent across the campus from staff and students.

Out of 185 staff, 130 signed up to receive the Covid-19 vaccine through VSDB. VSDB partnered with Staunton City Schools to receive vaccinations. The first round of the vaccine was administered February 8th with the second on March 8th. Concerns regarding staffing levels from potential sickness and/or side effects of the second vaccine were raised. On March 9th, the Tuesday after the second round of the vaccine, 40 staff members were absent due to illness. Many reported bad headaches, nausea and flu like

symptoms with some staff needing to be off campus a total of three days. Ms. Trice felt that the Administration made a wise decision in delaying the students return due to the large number of staff absences during the week of the second vaccine.

Eight students are currently scheduled to graduate from VSDB at the end of May. Ms. Trice is confident VSDB will be able to provide an in-person graduation ceremony for the graduates and their families. The Board will continue to be informed on further details as plans are finalized.

Delegate Sally Hudson joined the meeting at 10:49 a.m.

Current enrollment is 64 students. Before VSDB's closure due to the pandemic, there was an upward trend in the amount of inquiries that were being received. Over Thanksgiving and Winter Break, interest came to a halt. Some students chose to go back to their LEA's and other families decided to wait to bring their students back to campus due to medical reasons. The Admissions Office has received five applications, four inquiries and a few requests for tours over the last two weeks. Interest is beginning to pick up again. Ms. Trice noted that there may be a dip in overall enrollment numbers after graduation; however, enrollment is expected to grow once the pandemic ends.

The Administrative Team has reviewed the Mitigation Health and Instructional Plans. Minor changes were made to both of these plans and updated versions have been finalized and added to the website. A copy of these plans has been sent out for translation in Spanish and will be added to the website once it is received back.

Ms. Trice shared that review regarding Title I and Title III has been completed. This year was the first year that VSDB prepared a Title III grant. The VDOE has been very supportive in providing input on both of these grants.

A new Outreach Director has been hired; however, she will not be starting at VSDB until the end of June/ beginning of July. A formal announcement that the position had been filled has not been made. The new Director has experience in early childhood and holds credentials as an interpreter, is certified in deaf education and has taught both the Deaf and the Blind many years. VSDB is very excited to have her. Ms. Trice plans to have the new Director prepare a presentation for the Board in the Fall. In the meantime, VSDB's previous Outreach Director, Dr. Debbie Pfeiffer, has stepped back in to provide additional support for the Outreach program.

The Foundation helped fund a marketing video that could be used as a public service announcement (PSA). The goal of the PSA was to increase awareness of VSDB across the Commonwealth. In order for the announcement to air in prime time, the Foundation bought time with WRIC and its affiliates. The paid announcement targets specific households with children between the ages of 4-22 years old. After two months of airing, the marketing video has not received the results that were hoped for; however, the video is featured on VSDB's Facebook page. The Foundation will meet next month to determine next steps.

Due to the traveling restrictions of the pandemic, Ms. Trice has been unable to visit LEA's in person to continue to increase VSDB awareness. Informational folders were sent out at the beginning of January to all of the Special Education Directors in the state. One LEA, after receiving the packet, requested an additional 20 folders to share with others in her district.

Ms. Trice was asked to join the Governor's Summit for Equity, in February by Secretary Ring, the Virginia Secretary of Forestry and Agriculture. The former Office of Attorney General's liaison, Mona Siddiqui

also attended. Ms. Trice was able to share information with attendee's regarding VSDB and the daily accessibility challenges that the deaf and the blind face.

The Governor's new liaison for Board Appointments, Shawn Soares, has been in contact with Ms. Trice regarding the Board's vacancies. Two current members term positions are set to expire in June. Applications for potential reappointment of these positions has been shared with the expiring terms members. Current vacancies include two parent positions (one from the east and one from the west) as well as a Blind Alumni position. Mr. Soares has been informed that the Board is looking to fill the open positions.

VSDB continues to face many challenges with the internet and VITA. Senator Bell will be meeting with VSDB's IT Director, Doug Wright, and Pat Trice to discuss current challenges and will update the Board on next steps. Senator Bell shared that VSDB's internet situation was described to him as 'third world internet' from Verizon. Senator Bell has reached out to Senator Hanger, who is aware of VSDB's ongoing challenges with VITA and is supportive of providing assistance to help receive the funding VSDB needs to fix these issues.

Budget and Grants Report: Janice Rankin, Director of Operations, presented the budget. VSDB is currently on budget. Due to the pandemic and virtual learning, costs of many of the operating expenses (including transportation, food and utilities) have been down due to the students being off campus.

Delegate Murphy joined the meeting.

Ms. Rankin shared that there were currently two grants that needed to be voted on by the Board. The first being a State Operated Program Annual Plan/Plan B Grant Application. The Department of Education reviewed and approved this grant for the Board's approval. This grant funds IT-RT Teachers, wage teacher assistants, testing and assessment materials, orientation and mobility, the library license, JAWS software (program for Blind), etc.

JH Cline, Jr. moved to approve the State Operated Program Annual Plan/Plan B Grant Application. Daphne Cox seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted as follows:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| 1.) | Senator Bell: | AYE |
| 2.) | Delegate Murphy | AYE |
| 3.) | Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 4.) | Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 5.) | Mike Asip | AYE |
| 6.) | JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 7.) | Judy Sorrell | ABSENT |
| 8.) | Daphne Cox | AYE |

The motion passed.

The second grant that needed the Board's approval was the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) II Fund Application. This grant would support an additional week of summer school this year and two weeks next year, transportation costs, postage needed for parent mailings, linen services, PPE, cleaning sanitation type equipment and supplies, etc.

JH Cline, Jr. moved to approve the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) II Fund Application. Senator Hashmi seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted as follows:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| 1.) | Senator Bell: | AYE |
| 2.) | Delegate Murphy | AYE |
| 3.) | Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 4.) | Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 5.) | Mike Asip | AYE |
| 6.) | JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 7.) | Judy Sorrell | ABSENT |
| 8.) | Daphne Cox | AYE |

The motion passed.

Human Resources Report: Tessy Schlemmer, Human Resources Director, reiterated Ms. Trice's statement that the students were very happy to be back on campus. With a number of staff having received both rounds of the vaccine, the overall comfort level of staff with the students being back on campus has been very positive.

Ms. Schlemmer presented the proposed 2021-2022 VSDB School Calendar to the Board.

Mike Asip moved to approve the 2021-2022 VSDB School Calendar. Senator Hashmi seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted as follows:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| 1.) | Senator Bell: | AYE |
| 2.) | Delegate Murphy | AYE |
| 3.) | Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 4.) | Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 5.) | Mike Asip | AYE |
| 6.) | JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 7.) | Judy Sorrell | ABSENT |
| 8.) | Daphne Cox | AYE |

The motion passed.

Discussion regarding additional learning opportunities for students due to the in-person instruction that was lost this year was shared. Ms. Trice relayed to the Board that should a need arise for additional learning opportunities to occur, professional development days could be dismissed for an extra week of instruction. Additionally, planned educational residential activities as well as the summer program will provide additional support to students and their families.

In terms of recruitment, staffing remains stable. Several faculty that have been with VSDB a number of years plan to retire at the end of this school year. Ms. Schlemmer has been in contact with a number of schools with Special Education programs for potential recruitment. Recently, a new music teacher, interpreter and Director of Outreach Services were hired.

The current average time for job vacancy to be filled from the date of the position being posted to the date of the background check is 101 days. Ms. Schlemmer shared that it has been difficult to find qualified individuals for certain positions. Recruitment efforts continue to be ongoing with a higher applicant response; however, a large number of applications have not met qualifications.

Recent activities in Human Resources have included preparing the 2021-2022 school calendar, contracts, preparing service awards for staff, planning for the service award luncheon as a virtual or smaller in-person event, learning new software to update online training options and preparing the Annual Workforce Planning Report (which will be due to DHRM on June 30th). Covid-19 activity has dramatically reduced on campus since the holidays.

Ms. Trice recognized Tessy Schlemmer, Human Resources Director, Amy Huffer, Director of Student Health, Janice Rankin, Director of Operations and all departments for the many hours that they had spent over the past year managing pandemic issues between staff and students.

In the coming weeks, Ms. Schlemmer will look into the competitive rates for the compensation of classified staff. Senator Bell and Mike Asip agreed that all staff should be able to earn living wages as professionals.

Delegate Hudson acknowledged the importance of fair wages and discussed teaming up with Senator Hashmi to meet the current need in the budget associated with the compensation of staff. Senator Bell appointed Delegate Hudson to take the lead on this project with Senator Hashmi.

Continuing Business

Policy Updates: Ms. Schlemmer opened RAID Policy G-041 for discussion. This policy was introduced during the Board's December meeting.

JH Cline, Jr. moved to approve RAID Policy G-041. Delegate Hudson seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted as follows:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| 1.) | Senator Bell: | AYE |
| 2.) | Delegate Murphy | AYE |
| 3.) | Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 4.) | Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 5.) | Mike Asip | AYE |
| 6.) | JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 7.) | Judy Sorrell | ABSENT |
| 8.) | Daphne Cox | AYE |

The motion passed.

Ms. Trice introduced a second policy, Employment References - HR015 (Title 1). This policy ensures that if an employee is requesting a reference, a reference cannot be given directly from an employee of the school system.

Mike Asip moved to approve Employment References - HR015. JH Cline, Jr. seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted as follows:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| 1.) | Senator Bell: | AYE |
| 2.) | Delegate Murphy | AYE |
| 3.) | Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 4.) | Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 5.) | Mike Asip | AYE |
| 6.) | JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 7.) | Judy Sorrell | ABSENT |
| 8.) | Daphne Cox | AYE |

The motion passed.

Strategic Plan Update and Discussion: Ms. Trice provided a printout of the Strategic Plan, including SOL information and measures of academic progress (MAP). Each goal and objective on the plan were addressed. Progress on some of the objectives has halted due to the pandemic and with current restrictions involved, there have been very few updates. In preparing for the next school year, Superintendent Trice will review the Strategic Plan with the Administrative Team and consider additional new goals.

Mike Asip recognized Ms. Trice in doing a great job of keeping the Board updated on the goals of the Strategic Plan. Part of the requirements of the plan is to keep members informed and continue to move forward on the action items. Mr. Asip shared that the current high priority actions are to address enrollment, staff compensation and maintain high quality staff, while continuing to encourage staff throughout the process.

New Business

There were no new business items to discuss.

Public Comment

Daphne Cox shared that she also serves as a current board member on the Virginia School for the Deaf Alumni Association (VSDAA). During the group's most recent meeting, members requested that the deaf community be able to have a larger representation on the Board of Visitors. Delegate Hudson shared that she would love for this to be a part of the conversation on changing the board's code and diversifying the members. Senator Bell discussed making this be an action item to change the legislation. Senator Hashmi, Senator Bell and Delegate Hudson discussed preparing a joint filing to expand the composition of the board.

Adjourn

JH Cline, Jr. called the meeting to adjourn. Delegate Hudson seconded the motion to adjourn.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted as follows:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| 1.) | Senator Bell: | AYE |
| 2.) | Delegate Murphy | AYE |
| 3.) | Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 4.) | Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 5.) | Mike Asip | AYE |
| 6.) | JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 7.) | Judy Sorrell | ABSENT |

8.) Daphne Cox AYE

The motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 12:34pm.

The next Board of Visitors meeting will determined at a later date. Senator Bell's Chief of Staff, Aaron Palmer, will contact Board members with a poll regarding potential dates for the next meeting.

DRAFT