

1 **Southwest Vermont Regional Technical School District (SWVRTSD)**
2 **Regional Governing Board Meeting Minutes: August 23, 2011**

3 Assembly Room, Career Development Center
4

5 Members Present: Gloria Alexander; Jim Boutin; Justin Corcoran; Rickey Harrington; Larry
6 Johnson; Fran Kinney; Frank Lamb; Jon Peaslee; Rick Pembroke.
7

8 Members Excused: Kevin Goodhue; Leon Johnson
9

10 Staff and Others Present: Barb Gorbaty, Instructor; Wendy Klein, Co-op; Bob Montgomery,
11 Interim Superintendent/ Director; Ann Mook, Bennington Representative; Sandra Redding,
12 Office Manager; Adrian Sebborn, Instructor; Keith Whitcomb, Banner reporter; others.
13

14 Videotaping: CAT-TV
15

16 Recorder: Barb Schlesinger
17

18 **Call to order**

19 Boutin called the meeting to order at 6:03 noting it was a Special meeting with a special
20 agenda, the purpose being to interview the Superintendent/ Director candidate.
21

22 **Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Candidate Introduction**

23 Boutin welcomed all in attendance and introduced board member Larry Johnson, Chair of
24 the Superintendent search committee. Johnson noted board members Gloria Alexander
25 and Kevin Goodhue also served on the committee. Johnson summarized how candidate
26 James Culkeen came to be here this evening: Originally there were twenty candidates, the
27 committee interviewed the four strongest first to facilitate moving the search along, two were
28 lost to other job offers, and, of the two remaining, it was clear that Jim was the candidate of
29 choice.
30

31 Boutin outlined the process/ agenda of tonight's meeting for the benefit of the candidate.
32

33 **Summary of Educational Experience and Background**

34 Culkeen thanked the board then gave a summation his experience/ background:
35 He always wanted to be a carpenter however, his parents wanted him to go to college. He
36 became a tech education teacher (18 years) and continues to be a licensed general
37 contractor (specializing in restoration carpentry). Culkeen made a conscience decision to
38 leave his small school to teach at the Vo-tech school (Fitchburg) where he became Director
39 of vocational education (3 years). He continued on and became Superintendent/ Director (8
40 years). Culkeen spoke of transforming the school from the 'school down the road' to a
41 'school of choice'. He noted he did not do it alone, he had a tremendous staff. They
42 improved the product and increased visibility.
43

44 Culkeen reported he resigned in December of last year. He spoke of the 'Perfect Storm'
45 that led to his resignation; personal problems with his adopted daughter, putting the new
46 principal on administrative leave and the resignation of the board chair. The matter is in the
47 personnel file; he was bought out of his contract. Culkeen noted the 'life expectancy' of a
48 superintendent is less than five years in Massachusetts. He felt the SWVRTSD board has a
49 right to know.

Questions from Board Members

Alexander asked Culkeen how he would go about promoting the CDC in our community.

Culkeen responded that he is unfamiliar at present with the community but believes that promotion is key: 'great things happen and people need to be made aware'. Culkeen noted it is important that the product being promoted is the product it should be. He gave the example of an auto restoration project at his former school where the students restored a vintage car that then was used in parades. The project was a source of pride for the students and a great recruiting tool. It was also a way for the students to give back to the community. Culkeen also spoke of distributing ancillary products with the school logo to staff to provide community talking points and identification.

Corcoran asked Culkeen for his thoughts on the role should the tech center play in educating and training for industry.

Culkeen responded that connections to industry are crucial. There is a fine line in so far as balancing your day student needs with your continuing ed's. What is important is the delivery of current knowledge; therefore your Advisory committees need to be instrumental.

Lamb passed at this time.

Harrington spoke of being on school boards off and on for two decades and his concern regarding 'pending' finger print background checks. He asked Culkeen for his experience with background checks.

Culkeen commented on Massachusetts background checks and noted they do not cover everything and to his knowledge there is no national background database. Culkeen noted that last minute hires are tricky and emphasized the use of a probationary period and due diligence. He feels his check was thorough. Culkeen admitted he does not have the perfect solution. He commented that experience has taught him to go back two places, not just the last, when doing checks.

Peaslee passed at this time.

Kinney asked Culkeen how he would handle evaluations, both program and staff.

Culkeen replied that as far as staff is concerned, you can't evaluate them often enough. What contract's call for is not often enough. The process should be ongoing with frequent classroom observations being crucial; more frequent with new hires than with seasoned, trusted staff.

With regard to programs, Advisory committees are critical in keeping programs current. Much goes into a program; purchased equipment, supplies, instructor training; it is necessary to evaluate carefully with all the components put together.

Pembroke expressed that if the candidate was serious he should have researched us and asked for Culkeen's thoughts on our community.

Culkeen feels our community is not aware as much as it could be in regards to the great things going on at the CDC; what the community perceives needs work. Culkeen noted that you can not stand still; there is always room for improvement. He expressed a concern that enrollment is heavily dependant on one high school for students and felt enrollment should be about 500 students.

1 Larry Johnson passed by commenting most of his questions have already been answered.

2
3 Boutin asked Culkeen to look back and comment on his greatest accomplishment.

4 Culkeen spoke of shepherding his last school from one where guidance councilors
5 decided who went to one that was a school of choice with a waiting list and increased
6 enrollment from 1,000 to 1,400.

7
8 Peaslee asked if the last school granted diplomas.

9 Culkeen replied it did.

10
11 Lamb noted Vermont schools are hemorrhaging secondary students and asked how Adult
12 education fits in.

13 Culkeen responded to never abandon any segment and spoke of the issue of sharing
14 facilities.

15
16 He spoke of a three-prong approach

17 1) Getting students to the center

18 Spending on staff and recruitment

19 2) Helping students succeed while there

20 Doing everything you can ie free tutoring by certified subject teachers

21 3) Being a career center for graduates post graduation.

22
23 Pembroke inquired as to Culkeen's biggest disappointment.

24 Culkeen responded by mentioning his most humbling experience was losing his last
25 job. His biggest failure was that his school could not expand large enough to enroll all
26 who wanted to come. He spoke of their VIP program; brining in students and a year
27 later they couldn't come – 'that was a failure'.

28
29 Lamb asked why Culkeen would want to come here, ie Bennington County.

30 Culkeen replied he is looking for a new start, a new beginning. He is very portable, his
31 children are adults and he will move here if hired.

32
33 **Questions from Faculty/ Staff**

34 Sebborn spoke of 1st) the demand for people in networking yet the difficulty with recruiting
35 students into this program and asked Culkeen what he would do to recruit students and 2nd)
36 Sebborn noted he did two accreditation reviews systems this year which were very different
37 from each other; and asked Culkeen what he saw as the strengths and weaknesses of the
38 two different programs (MA and VT)

39 Culkeen asked Sebborn what he as an instructor was doing to recruit students and how
40 could he (Culkeen) help. Educators need to be sales people for their programs and
41 identify and create 'wows' to use as recruitment tools.

42
43 Culkeen spoke of the Massachusetts model where students alternate weeks in which
44 they are fully immersed in their program and noted this has drawbacks also. He granted
45 that Vermont is not an easy model and has its own built in deficiencies. Each has their
46 strengths.

47
48 Wendy Klein acknowledged she did her research on 'Monte' and noted all students have an
49 individual career plan. She asked regarding the components and process.

1 Culkeen responded that every student had a career plan. Career Cruising was the
2 software used; it's not perfect but has great value.

3
4 Klein asked Culkeen what he felt the key components were to leading a diverse faculty, staff
5 and board.

6 Culkeen stated he believes in an open door policy with visibility (on his part),
7 accessibility and adhering to the tenet of praise in public/ reprimand in private. He
8 believes a superintendent needs to have, and listen to, input from all sides. Culkeen
9 noted he has had three different perspectives; being a superintendent, sitting on
10 school boards for 10 years and also being involved with a Union for 7 years.

11
12 Gorbaty commented that Massachusetts is a big state with structure in the Department of
13 Education, Vermont, not so and asked Culkeen how he saw a transition?

14 Culkeen noted that he was accused of being too 'hands-on' at his last school. He
15 does not like being confined in an office and feels he would adjust fine.

16
17 Gorbaty spoke of the imposed terms of employment in the teacher contract (additional 60
18 minutes per day) and asked Culkeen how he saw those minutes in light of a 'wish list'.

19 Culkeen 'wishing', suggested looking for creative ways to use the time and suggested
20 working on career planning and working on initiatives.

21
22 Gorbaty commented that what was once vocational education is now transitioning to
23 technical education and asked Culkeen for his thoughts on this.

24 Culkeen replied that Votech is not dead in the public's eyes. He noted that in
25 Massachusetts it is different owing to the different types of schools/ centers. He
26 himself is more concerned with what is being done rather than the 'label' but also does
27 not want to lose historic roots.

28
29 Sebborn commented that over the years there have been many administrators and asked
30 how Culkeen would handle decisions he made that did not turn out well.

31 Culkeen replied that he can admit mistakes and back down if he has to; if the evidence
32 proves otherwise he will change his mind.

33
34 Mook introduced herself and asked about instructional leadership.

35 Culkeen sees the role of curriculum as key; if the right curriculum is in place,
36 professional development is in place. The key is to look at other models; you don't
37 have to reinvent the wheel.

38
39 Gorbaty commented the search process was different this time and asked for Culkeen's
40 feedback.

41 Culkeen replied that the process was very thorough, especially the backgrounds
42 check. He also commented he had never had questions from the audience before but
43 found it to be a good part of the process. There were no weaknesses from his
44 perspective.

45
46 **Executive Session**

47
48 **At 7:25pm, Harrington moved and Corcoran seconded a motion to enter Executive**
49 **Session for personnel. All in attendance voted in favor.**

1 **At 8:11pm, Lamb moved and Harrington seconded a motion to return to open**
2 **session. All in attendance voted in favor.**

3
4 **Pembroke moved and Corcoran seconded a motion to extend the offer of employment**
5 **to James R Culkeen subject to satisfactory contract terms and conditions to be**
6 **negotiated as well as subject to necessary state approval. Hand vote was taken with**
7 **all in attendance voting in favor excepting Harrington who voted against. The motion**
8 **carried.**

9
10 **Adjourn**

11 **At 8:13pm Kinney moved and Corcoran seconded a motion to adjourn. All in**
12 **attendance voted in favor.**

13
14 Respectively submitted,

15
16 Barb Schlesinger
17 August 28, 2011
18