

Act 46 2018 Plans Released by State Board of Education

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — An email from principal assistant to the secretary of education Debra Russo-Sprague was received by Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union (OSSU) Superintendent Joanne LeBlanc at an OSSU board meeting this month, outlining the timeline for implementation of alternative district merger proposals.

Also known as Section 9 proposals, an alternative district is intended to allow a supervisory union to keep the current governance structure of its school districts, opt out of a merger according to the preferred structure of Act 46, and OSSU is well ahead of schedule.

The first key date is in December 2018, when the state will issue the final state plan. The deadline. This is when each district not planning to be a unified pre-12 option must have its alternative proposal delivered to the state.

From January to May, the Agency of Education (AeE) will review the proposals and all other relevant data, including details on merger proposals and all other relevant information before setting on the alternative model.

Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe will engage in conversations with the school boards and the boards will continue to update their proposals.

The next checkpoint is June 1, 2018. Holcombe will issue a proposed state plan that may or may not accept the alternative district proposals. Alternatively, parts of the proposed plan may be accepted or the AeE may propose an entirely different approach.

From June to October, the state board will review the secretary's state plan, including the alternative proposals. School boards and the state will continue to have dialogue during this time.

By November 30, 2018, the state will issue the final state plan that will reconfigure supervisory union and district boundaries so that all districts will, in some shape or form, ultimately meet the financial and educational goals of Act 46.

The final plan might incorporate some of the alternative proposals, or might require some merging of proposals.

LeBlanc commented on the message which she had received during the change minutes of the December OSSU board meeting.

"That's all we've got," she said. "It's basically an outline. We will probably not know [the final decision] until next fall."

"[Secretary of Education] Rebecca Holcombe is asking do you want to be in a unified pre-12 board? Or do you want to be in a district or split up?"

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photo by Doug MacDunn

A 30-year-old brick fire destroyed a 177-year-old home in Albany off Route 14 on Monday, December 18. A fire in a north-town fire department responded, including Albany, Craftsbury, Reading, Orleans, Newport Center, Lowell, Glover, and Berlin. As well as six Albany firefighters. Owner Mike Gordin of Albany says no one was home at the time, for which he is grateful. "We're just thankful we weren't in there when it went on. You can rebuild a building, but you can't replace history." The site, an old town, is a history, the building served as the Albany post office.

Exploratory Craftsbury Elementary School Committee To Be Formed

by JANE PICHOL COOK

CRAFTSBURY — The Craftsbury School Board agreed to form an exploratory sub-committee at its meeting last week to consider options to expand the Craftsbury Elementary School. A burgeoning school population, the elementary school building reaching capacity, parking, safety, and the board's transparency are the impetus for the sub-committee to explore building a new school.

The sub-committee would include parents, teachers, childcare representatives, and community members. Board Chair Harry Miller said he would chair the sub-committee. Vice Chair Marilyn Rylands offered to serve as secretary.

Miller noted that the community meeting held earlier in November drew about thirty people. Discussions centered on the current 4th and 5th grade and combined with 6th grade, with two teachers. Some re-configuration would be done to eliminate classrooms including a new building, parking and safety, collaborating with Greensboro or Albany, and renovating the current school into two schools.

The board has no decision. Miller said that three or four people had spoken to him about the meeting and were positive, despite the expected budget increases. Rylands cited parking and safety concerns at the school, as well as the school's condition. She also felt it was good to break up peer groups.

Referring to the school and

keeping Craftsbury children in Craftsbury, Rylands noted, "We should keep them (children) here. We want them to stay here."

Having two sessions of preschoolers and sharing space with childcare facility were suggested as potential solutions. Parents are enthusiastic about keeping children

on-site, according to Rylands. "Community-wise," she said, "we're hoping there will be support."

Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union Superintendent Joanne LeBlanc reminded the board of its history with Albany. "In the past, we've been a part of the same district."

See COMMITTEE, 4

Hardwick Rescue Celebrates 50 Years

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — This year, the Hardwick Emergency Rescue Squad is celebrating a half-century of service for the town and region. Its members and the community are celebrating its history and acknowledging its significance.

While the department unofficially began in 1966, it got its official license on March 1, 1967, with a full aging ceremony downstairs in the Memorial Building.

"We didn't have much stuff to work with," Art Chase, the only re-

maining active member of the original group, told the Gazette. "Our wives were involved; they were just as important as we were."

Chase was also the first president of the organization. Some of the other original staff include vice president Peter Clark, secretary Arthur Sturtevant, and treasurer Robert Smith, Jr.

In the beginning, members had to learn the basics, like how to put on an ankle bandage and learn how to care for small babies and children. Their first

See RESCUE, 6

School Labor Appeal Heard By Supreme Court

by Will Walters

MONTPELIER — The Supreme Court heard oral arguments last week in the labor dispute between Washington, Northcutt, Supervisory Union (WNUSU) and the Cabot Teachers' Association and Twinedale Education Association. The case is an appeal from the state labor relations board, which held that negotiations were not subject to the Open Meeting Law. The teachers' unions were represented by the Vermont-National Education Association.

The teachers and support staff bargaining units insisted that negotiations be held in executive session and not in open session. They cited a Governor history of conducting negotiations in that manner. The WNUSU negotiating council held that the open meeting law applied and negotiations must be public. Cabot's National Supervisory Union faced a similar situation, in which support staff wanted to meet at the negotiation table un-

less the meetings were held in public.

Not all labor units have insisted on this practice. Some bargaining units for teachers and staff in Central Vermont have been conducting negotiations in open session and have done so in previous years. WNUSU filed an unenforceable complaint against the teacher and support staff negotiators for refusing to meet and negotiate. The labor units filed a counter-complaint of unfair labor practices, both based their arguments on the question of the applicability of the open meeting law.

The labor board ruled that the Open Meeting law was only one law that needed to be considered and not the sole basis for determining relations law. Its ruling held that negotiations were not subject to the Open Meeting law, but also found that the law did not prohibit unfair labor practices. The labor board held further that the supervisory union was a public body and subject to the Open Meeting law; meetings between the labor board and the union negotiators councils were not subject to the Open Meeting law.

In the appeal, attorneys for the

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photo by Vanessa Fournier
Among the many students, Emily and community members carrying lanterns in the River of Light walk down Main Street in Hardwick, December 14 and 15. From left to right: Thomas Patrick, Eric Patrick and Andrea Patrick. Art is in the back in last year's photo. The temperature was around 20 degrees.

Student Activities Keep School Board's Attention

by Will Walters

MARSHFIELD — The recent winter, which caused much damage through Plainfield, hit the town of Marshfield. The former superintendent's office on Route 2 still owned by the school. Superintendent Mark Tucker said repairs to the roof and covers is expected to cost about \$800.

Tucker said there were problems with the boiler at the school over the Thanksgiving holiday, but they have been satisfactorily repaired. He said there have been issues in starting up the new website and the projected launch date is February. The new driver and custodian, Mike Gibbs, started last week but his Duali may still be seen around the building because he was hired back by Washington Northcutt Supervisory Union to do the shared driver and custodian.

Tucker gave the principal's report to Mark Moore's attention. He said high school students participated in a "Mock Senate Simulation" at the Edward Kennedy Center in Boston, Massachusetts. The Vermont Student Assistance Corporation assistance steering committee in Boston, Massachusetts. Twinedale in January.

An alumni panel will meet with high school students to discuss with high school students. The panel will be composed of graduates who have taken different paths after graduation. Also in January, the school will have a trip to Clarkson University, west of Rutland, where students will attend a basketball game, have a guided campus tour and spend some time with Carleton College students to discuss college life.

Board member Jim Goveanman will meet with the school's elected government program at Twinedale. Student council will offer and elected executive officers. They addressed current world affairs and shared a day at the state house in



photo by Vanessa Fournier

The SD Ireland Holiday Mix, driven by Adam Pask, led the Hardwick Elementary School Year of Light Lantern Walk through Main Street on December 14.

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