

WAITSFIELD BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
Special Session Meeting Minutes
Friday, March 9, 2012, 7:30 am
Waitsfield Elementary School

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Rob Williams (chair) (until 8:03), Helen Kellogg, Todd White, Scott Kingsbury.

WWSU AND WES STAFF PRESENT: Kaiya Korb, Beth McGeorge.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS PRESENT: Adam Greshin, Jennifer Soucy, Brent Pearson, Jennifer Stella, Christine Sullivan, Anne Vlahos, Jessie McMillion, Amanda Kalichstein

CALL TO ORDER. Rob Williams called the meeting to order at 7:37 am.

DISCUSSIONS

The group met to discuss changes to VT Senate bill 199/House bill 527 that would revoke the philosophical exemption to State required immunizations and the potential impact of this bill upon our school(s).

Kaiya noted that currently 12 WES students have philosophical exemptions for immunization. WES numbers are fairly typical for the WWSU.

Rob noted that this statute revision is moving quickly through the legislative process at a time when few people are paying attention given school break and town meeting. Three out of five in the Senate Health and Welfare committee voted for the bill. One voted against and one was absent. Senate vote was 25/4 in favor. The House will hear this bill in two weeks.

Kaiya observed that the school board role may have questions, such as regarding the impact on the school enrollment as well as in terms of exploring if there is any evidence that Vermont children are at greater risk or unhealthier as a result of the current law, without needing to take a political stance on individual rights.

Adam Greshin spoke with VT Commissioner of Health Dr. Harry Chen and the immunization director Chris Finley asking if there is a higher incidence of disease in VT; the response was no.

Todd White spoke to the fact that VT is largely vaccinated (over 90% vaccination rate, or above the CDC goal, for all required vaccines except chicken pox, which is just below 90%), but when the statistics include vaccinations that are not required the numbers drop. He also points out that a child with most but not all shots may be included in the exemption. He cited that the risk of injury through vaccination is 1 in 2500; do we have enough evidence of danger to require exposing kids to this level

of risk?

Adam Greshin noted that all schools, private or public, would be required to comply with the law. The only way to be exempt from the vaccination law would be through home-schooling.

Beth McGeorge noted that kids with suppressed immune systems, of which there are increasing frequency, also need to be considered. These students have a right to be educated in an environment that is as healthy as possible. Would taking away the philosophical exemption increase the safety for these kids?

Anne Vlahos spoke to her own experience of developing antibodies in a communal setting without an immunization and advocated for options to prove immunization beyond vaccination.

Kaiya proposed that a letter, on behalf of the Board, be drafted to raise the key questions around impact on school enrollment and student health. The letter would be addressed to Vermont legislators/governing officials, and copied to the VSBA and VPA. Todd White will draft a letter for review prior to the next school board meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 am. The next meeting is scheduled for March 19th at 6:30.

Respectfully submitted,

Helen Kellogg
Secretary and Clerk