

BLUM SHAPIRO- Transition to MUNIS

An urgent priority for the new school leadership team is to restore the community's trust. This has taken many forms. Small steps like improving controls by reorganizing the monthly financial reporting and requiring two signatures on checks from the Student Activity funds are a beginning. Addressing the issues that have caused "material weaknesses" to be reported in the annual audit report, year after year, require a deeper understanding of the issues. It also requires improved cooperation with the town.

With the support of the Board of Education and the Town Finance Committee, Board and Town staff collaborated to conduct an RFQ process to find the best firm to do this work. Blum Shapiro, a CPA and consulting firm, was selected to review existing policies, procedures and controls in both organizations, to update the chart of accounts to meet the state's reporting requirements and to transition the BOE accounting system to MUNIS – the software the town uses. Blum Shapiro was chosen based on their independence, experience completing similar projects and their familiarity with the state's Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA) and reporting requirements.

Additional project goals are elimination of the "material weaknesses" in the annual audit, standardization and documentation of policies, procedures and controls in each group, increased transparency and building staff capacity. This includes the ability of TSO staff to "back-up" one another in the event of sickness or an emergency.

The project with Blum Shapiro is structured in three phases and is expected to take nearly two years to complete.

The first phase is a policy, procedure and controls review. This will include understanding and documenting existing policies, procedures and controls and recommending "best practice" policies, procedures and controls to replace them. Working with staff, Blum Shapiro will develop a policy and accounting procedure manual for adoption by the Boards. This phase began in October, 2015. Blum Shapiro reviewed all of the Board's documentation and interviewed twenty eight employees, including principals, their staff, TSO staff and others. They learned and documented "current practice" and identified "best practices" in the various operating areas. They completed a gap analysis, i.e. what will it take to bring Brookfield up to "exemplary" in each of the areas, and are in the process of finalizing their findings and recommendations. When the recommendations are made, additional action(s) will be required. Blum Shapiro will assist with staff training to insure faithful implementation of the recommendations.

At the start of the project two areas were of immediate concern to management - purchasing and benefits administration. Blum Shapiro has confirmed those areas as "high risk" and recommended adding staffing to each area; a full time benefits specialist at the BOE and a purchasing agent to be shared by the town and BOE. Blum Shapiro also recommended restoration of the district's Technology Director position. Those staffing recommendations are included in the Board of Education's adopted budget estimate.

The next phase is the development of a new chart of accounts for the Town and the BOE. The "Chart of Accounts" is the collection of accounting number strings that allow data to be captured at a very detailed level. The state is moving to standardize the definition of these strings (UCOA) for Towns and Boards of Education. The town is using MUNIS software now; however, for both entities to use MUNIS a new chart of accounts will need to be created for each entity. Blum Shapiro has the UCOA contract with the State Office of Policy and Management; they are well positioned to help Brookfield develop their new chart.

The third phase is transitioning the Board of Education from New World Systems software to MUNIS. This will happen in two steps. First is General Ledger, Purchasing and Accounts Payable. Next will be Payroll and Human Resources. The Town and BOE are working closely together to develop the most effective implementation plan.

Our goal is that when the Blum Shapiro project is complete "material weaknesses" in the audit will be a distant memory and Brookfield's financial operations, in the Town and the BOE, will be "state of the art" - a model for other communities to follow.