

**REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
March 27, 2008**

Hugh Riordan, Superintendent of Schools for School Union 52 and a facilitator for the Regional Planning Committee (RPC), called the meeting of the RPC to order at 5:05 p.m. in the cafeteria at Winslow High School in Winslow.

Those in Attendance: Kelly Archer, Larry Brown, Doug Carville, Charley Clark, Robin Colby, Steve Dyer, Doug Eugley, Ralph Farnham, Jr., Lori Fowle, Jeffrey Frost, Monique Gilbert, Brad Grant, Michael Heavener, Dennis Keschl, Linda Laughlin, Mike McQuarrie, James C. Morse, Sr., Bob Moreau, Nora Murray, Wendy Nivison, Constance Packard, Shelley Phillips, Hugh Riordan, Debrajean Scheibel, Joel Selwood, Gary Smith, Jamie Soule, Gerald St. Amand, Phil St. Onge, Jack Sutton, Alison Thompson, Michael Thurston, Lauchlin Titus, and Michael Tracy

Mr. Riordan noted that there has been a request and support from the Vassalboro School Committee for Vassalboro to support the intention of conducting a study of what has been happening for several months. Winslow last week agreed to the plan. China meets next week to consider a similar request. Mr. Riordan stated he wanted everybody to be clear that the job is to study.

Dennis Keschl asked if the Waterville Public Schools has received any feedback from the State regarding the decision to withdraw from the consolidation discussions. Dr. Morse noted that as of this date, documents have not yet been submitted to the Commissioner regarding Waterville's intent.

Gerry St. Amand made a motion, and Dennis Keschl seconded the motion, to approve the minutes of the February 14, 2008 meeting as printed. Motion carried.

Hugh Riordan noted that there has been some concern expressed in the role of superintendents in the formulating of the agenda for the RPC meetings.

Phil St. Onge asked if the superintendents were chairmen or facilitators, noting that the facilitator role would be appropriate.

It was determined that the superintendents would serve as facilitators.

Mr. Riordan noted that the plan for the evening is to reaffirm decisions that have been made by the RPC up to this point.

Dr. Morse noted that in terms of Waterville not being at the table, it changes the governance structure. With a unified school system the minimum number of people on a board would be 15. Without Waterville, it would mean that Winslow and Oakland would have three members each and Belgrade, China, Vassalboro, and Sidney would each have two members, and Rome would have one, for a total of 15 Board members. Weights are permitted for equality. State law dictates this variance. Without Waterville, the Board for the new consolidated school system would be balanced, and a nice representation for all the towns.

Phil St. Onge asked if there is the opportunity of moving towns together.

Jim Morse said there is, but that the Committee's original decision was to have every town represented. This particular proposal is consistent with the decision this Committee made.

Phil St. Onge asked if this piece should be referred back to the Governance Subcommittee.

Gerry St. Amand asked who would gain what.

Jim Morse said that every single town except for Rome would pick up a member in this process. All other towns are relatively equal in structure, and Rome would have one representative.

Gerry St. Amand noted that from earlier meetings there was concern about Winslow.

Phil St. Onge said that at some point, the Committee discussed towns sharing members. He asked for a caucus.

Gerry St. Amand asked if there was a sense that everyone else is uncomfortable with the proposed structure.

Jim Morse noted that the way the agenda was structured was that the Committee would either reaffirm or table decisions that had previously been made by the RPC.

Phil St. Onge asked if Committee members could vote to deny.

Jim Morse noted that any RPC member may make a motion, get a second, and call for a vote.

Lori Fowle/Phil St. Onge      The issue of the proposed governance structure for the proposed RSU be tabled.

Motion failed 7-8.

For: Fowle, Frost, Heavener, Nivison, St. Onge, Thurston, Titus

Opposed: Brown, Dyer, Eugley, Farnham, Keschl, Smith, Sutton, Tracy

Gerry St. Amand/Mike Tracy      The allocation of the proposed governance structure for the proposed RSU be approved as presented.

Motion carried 11-2.

For: Brown, Dyer, Eugley, Farnham, Frost, Keschl, Moreau, Smith, St. Amand, Sutton,  
Tracy

Opposed: Nivison, St. Onge

Jim Morse reviewed the November 1, 2007 motion related to school choice. The motion read as follows.

“This is an issue that is not required to be addressed by the state. The Governance Subcommittee recommends that this issue be left to the RSU Board yet to be formed.”

Gary Smith noted that assuming L.D. 1932, "An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding School Funding," passes and allows adjustments in cost sharing, the RPC might want to hold on this recommendation until L.D. 1932 is finalized.

Gary Smith/Lori Fowle      The Governance Subcommittee recommendation that this issue be left to the RSU Board yet to be formed be tabled.

A discussion ensued.

Jim Morse noted that L.D. 1932 had a successful vote in the Senate and House. It takes three votes of the Senate and three votes of the House. The Governor has stated he would veto the bill. Part of the reason for the delay is the uncertainty regarding passage of L.D. 1932.

Lori Fowle asked if the original components of L.D. 1932 are in the Governor's supplemental budget bill. If the Governor is successful in vetoing L.D. 1932, then it is possible that what we were waiting for in January will still become law.

Mike McQuarrie noted that this item referred to the choice within the RSU for public schools. This was whether to allow choice internally.

Phil St. Onge asked if Waterville returns to consolidation discussions if the Committee would start over again line by line.

Jim Morse noted that if Waterville asks to return to consolidation discussions, and the RPC gets down this path too far, the issue would be whether the respective school boards of the RPC would be collectively willing to invite Waterville back into the discussions.

Dennis Keschl noted that whether Waterville could actually leave is the real question. That is why he asked earlier what the status of Waterville is.

The motion was to allow the new consolidated school board to consider this issue with no recommendation from this body.

Dennis Keschl/Mike Thurston      The November 1, 2007 recommendation of the Governance Subcommittee related to school choice be reaffirmed.

"This is an issue that is not required to be addressed by the state. The Governance Subcommittee recommends that this issue be left to the RSU Board yet to be formed.

Motion carried unanimously.

Dennis Keschl/Jeff Frost      The November 1, 2007 recommendation of the Governance Subcommittee related to vocational technical education be reaffirmed.

"The Governance Subcommittee recommends that students from China and Vassalboro who are enrolled at Erskine and choose to participate in vocational technical education do so at Capital Area Technical Center. China and Vassalboro students who attend RSU high schools will attend Mid-Maine Technical Center."

Motion carried unanimously.

Charley Clark asked if this is an issue the Committee wants to defer related to cost sharing that Gary Smith mentioned earlier.

Dr. Morse noted that the tuition rates for the two schools were checked, and there was a nominal difference.

Lori Fowle/Gerry St. Amand            The November 1, 2007 recommendations of the Governance Subcommittee related to transportation and special education costs be tabled until the Committee receives word from the Legislature related to L.D. 1932.

“The Governance Subcommittee discussed transportation of students enrolled at Erskine. Currently those costs are embedded in the school budgets of China and Vassalboro. As per the consolidation law, it is understood that the RSU is responsible for the average high school tuition cost for each student attending a school of choice. The RSU would not be responsible for transportation of any student who has chosen to attend any school other than those public schools within the RSU.”

“The Governance Subcommittee discussed the additional costs being charged by Erskine for educating special needs students. Currently those costs are embedded in the school budgets of China and Vassalboro. As per the consolidation law, it is understood that the RSU is responsible for the average high school tuition cost for each student attending a school of choice. The RSU would not be responsible for additional costs of any student who has chosen to attend any school other than those public schools within the RSU, unless, through a P.E.T. process run by the RSU Special Education Director or his/her designee, it is determined that the student’s educational needs are best met at a location other than the RSU schools.”

Motion carried unanimously.

Phil St. Onge asked if the role of school boards may be discussed under L.D. 1932.

Jim Morse noted he doesn’t have that version that passed through the House and Senate. The recommendation would be to table this discussion.

Lauchlin Titus/Lori Fowle    The November 15, 2007 recommendation of the Governance Subcommittee related to the composition, powers and duties of any local school committees to be created be tabled until the Committee receives word from the Legislature related to L.D. 1932.

Motion carried unanimously.

Lauchlin Titus/Lori Fowle    The November 15, 2007 recommendation of the Governance Subcommittee that no local school committees be created be reaffirmed.

Motion carried unanimously.

Lauchlin Titus/Jeff Frost    The November 1, 2007 recommendations of the Educational Programming Subcommittee related to a common school calendar and the assignment of a subcommittee to review and align all school programming policies be reaffirmed.

“That the RSU adopt a common school calendar to allow high schools to better share courses and to better share professional development resources. This common school calendar should include common workshop days, as well as common student days.”

“That the RSU assign a subcommittee immediately upon reorganization that will align all school programming policies across the region.”

Motion carried unanimously.

Lauchlin Titus asked if the first recommendation aligns the calendar as a whole and the second recommendation establishes a committee to review aligning programming policies.

Linda Laughlin indicated that was, indeed, the case. Programming policies speak to policy issues surrounding graduation requirements.

Linda Laughlin noted that there were a couple recommendations regarding transportation that never arose for vote. At the next meeting she will be discussing those, as well as the vision statement that was shared with everyone in December. Ms. Laughlin also noted that discussion about the daily schedule arose when the bell schedule was discussed. The bell schedule was not a discussion about the schedule; it was bell, the start and end of the school day so that the schools may share students.

Phil St. Onge stated that it might make sense to stagger.

Linda Laughlin noted that the Transportation Department indicated they are able to transport the students and that staggering was not necessary.

Regarding the Finance Subcommittee recommendations, there was discussion as whether to reaffirm or table the motions made at previous meetings, as it is uncertain what will happen with L.D. 1932.

Wendy Nivison/Gerry St. Amand The Finance Subcommittee recommendations be tabled until L.D. 1932 is finalized.

September 20, 2007 – “That the RSU should include the assumption of local only debt and lease purchase obligations as part of consolidation planning. This would include the debt on record as of June 30, 2008, as some projects are currently underway but financing is not yet completed. If any future local only debt efforts were underway, that debt would need to be brought forth to the RPC as well.”

October 4, 2007 – “That all existing trust funds at the date of RSU consolidation be transferred to the RSU with existing trust fund conditions/restrictions remaining in place, to be administered by the RSU.”

October 18, 2007 – “That the Regional Planning Committee table action regarding the recommendation of the Finance Subcommittee that the RSU assume transfer and title of the collective school facilities/sites provided in the summary lists prepared for this meeting, until

such time as representatives of the Subcommittee have had an opportunity to discuss with town leaders the definition of school property and provide them the opportunity for discussion prior to a vote by the RPC.”

November 15, 2007 – “That all the grants, upon formation of the RSU, become part of the RSU.”  
Motion carried unanimously.

Dr. Morse noted that this is where the Committee is in terms of review of actions to date.

Mr. Riordan asked if there were any other discussion items or issues that needed to be brought to the floor.

Gary Smith noted that there is a progress report that is due to the Department of Education tomorrow. How will the RPC be dealing with that?

Jim Morse noted that with the Committee’s permission a progress report may be submitted. He said that there are ten districts waiting to go to vote in June. They are waiting for LD 1932 to be finalized.

The next meeting of the Regional Planning Committee is scheduled for Thursday, May 1, 2008 at 5:00 p.m. at Messalonskee High School.

Dr. Morse asked for agenda items for the next meeting.

Jack Sutton noted that with all the progress and discussions, he still sees the need from this group for some future vision as to where the real potential benefits are, particularly on the financial side. He assumes on the education side it well taken care of. On the financial side he would like to see a matrix of the functions the unit would undertake compared to now. He asked if this matrix could be put together so that the RPC can see there is some light at the end of the tunnel, for the purpose to save real money. Where is the real money? Each one of the major areas of expense needs to be reviewed individually and as a group and whether it is worth the effort to complete it.

Jim Morse asked if he would like to see a proposal of what a combined Central Office, combined transportation department, and combined special education office would look like.

Jack Sutton indicated yes, to highlight where the potential savings are.

Gerry St. Amand asked if a ten-year projection could be provided, something that could be taken to the public to see where the proposed RSU will be for example, three, five, six years down the road.

Jack Sutton stated he would be looking at where the real potential lies. Where will the attention be focused?

Dennis Keschl noted that this process started because of the sense that administrative costs in Maine were higher than they should be. So, if districts are moving from the current structures to the new proposed structure, what is the administrative structure and what is the approximation of the cost? There are areas that the RPC may be able to estimate. What would it look like, for example, with four secretaries, one superintendent, one assistant superintendent? What are the elements of the administrative structure?

Jim Morse said that it is an important piece of work that needs to get done. How do we make assumptions as to what units are better and more efficient?

Jack Sutton asked if it were possible to do this work within the group or if an outside entity needs to review it. That is a challenge for the group.

Phil St. Onge noted that a lot of the savings may be made whether Districts are in the RSU or not. There is no reason Districts can't work together. He said that every analysis so far indicates there are no savings; there are costs. Every single RSU has said there are no savings. They are not there. We need people who have the ability and talents to complete that analysis.

Dennis Keschl noted that the Department of Education and Governor came up with one number for potential savings. It comes to about \$30 per person. It should be about \$900,000 in savings. The DOE came up with a number. Let's test it.

Jim Morse noted that an analysis of these two systems has not been completed and referred to employee contracts.

Mike Thurston noted that those contracts have to be bargained. Those contracts are being bargained now. He indicated that the voters should be told that this bill was put in place to save money on administrative costs, not teachers.

Phil St. Onge noted that all the other RSUs are factoring in a rise in teachers' salaries in their calculations.

Lauchlin Titus said he agrees with Jack Sutton's recommendation. He understands that there are a certain group of things that you can get to within 5 to 10%. Then there are other things that you cannot get to within 30%. For example, provide a margin of transportation of savings of \$100,000 to \$200,000; that is good. Provide known savings.

Lori Fowle said she thinks for this group to move forward, it needs to make a decision. If the two systems merged into one, with one superintendent's office, what would that look like? What types of bodies do you have and where are the savings? If the two systems are combined, what are the numbers?

Charley Clark said that the original intent was to merge the Central Office through attrition and asked if this is still realistic. He suggested that the Governance Subcommittee determine what it would actually take to run an RSU of this size and bring return findings to this group. Find out what you need to make it work.

Jim Morse noted that the Governance Subcommittee could do the formatting, and the Finance Subcommittee could do the finances.

Jeff Frost noted that an organization chart needs to be prepared for each department. It needs to be determined, for example, how many people are in transportation and technology. Then provide a vision for the future. If an RSU is formed, more people may have to be brought in initially and then pared down.

Dennis Keschl noted that the analysis would give the RPC a sense of what it needs. Now the RPC is waiting for those numbers to come from the Legislature.

Gerry St. Amand noted that Commissioner Gendron made a statement that if any developing RSU needed outside help, the state would be happy to provide it.

Jim Morse indicated that every school unit has a \$2,500 legal fund waiting to be tapped. Facilitation services available, as that is something this RPC would need. We would need the services of Dick Spencer of Drummond Woodsum, who is a finance attorney. Mr. Spencer worked out the arrangements in SAD 51. He understands the entire intricacy of school finance. When the RPC gets to that type of discussion, it will need that type of firepower. This group would still have to affirm details.

Lori Fowle said that she would think the Governance Subcommittee would get together to try to figure out what this body looks like as a superintendent's office.

Dr. Morse noted that in terms of where the RPC is right now, he is comfortable with what Jack Sutton is saying. We move this agenda forward. He certainly will want to make sure there is no question that we are talking about a reduction in the size of administration. It is not just Central Office; it is administration of transportation, special education, and maintenance. It is all those issues that service students but are not educational components. The savings will be in all the support services, not just Central Office.

Nora Murray indicated that the Educational Programming Subcommittee did meet, and they have invited Mark Powers, Director of Mid-Maine Technical Center, to join that Subcommittee.

Joel Selwood noted that the RPC seems to have gotten hung up in the possible savings and the number of other positions. It has to be about where it needs to be. There must be some places where positions will be displaced. That is a separate piece as to what the organization chart will look like. For those people who will be displaced, there should be a timeline for their contracts.

Jim Morse said that what he sees as the group's charge is to begin development of what it sees the structure looking like. When the Committee meets on May 1, the subcommittee work to date will be presented. The results of L.D. 1932 will be known by then. There will be some recommendations as to the consolidated functions in the new district.

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Lori Fowle said it is her understanding of the law that the only person who is protected under contract is the superintendent. The only people under contract in the office are superintendents.

Jim Morse noted that that is correct.

Gerry St. Amand made a motion, and Jeff Frost seconded, to adjourn the meeting. Time: 6:29 p.m.