

Essex Caledonia Supervisory Union
NEK pK - 12 Act 46, 706 Study Committee Meeting

Location: Guildhall School

Wednesday, May 11th, 2016 6:00pm

Kami Burns (Bloomfield), Darcy Smart (Brunswick), Donna Loynd, Emily Switser (East Haven), Sonia Peters (Granby), Christina McGrath, George Blakeslee (Guildhall), Tim Thompson, Miles Etter, Sharon Baker (Kirby), Todd Nichols (Lemington), Judi Conant (Maidstone), Steve Thibault (Norton), Melanie Staats (Victory)
Supervisory Union Administrators: Martha Heath, Michael Clark, Chris Masson, Mary Ann Rigby
Community: Daniel Wade (Canaan), Richard Bund (Bloomfield)

Call to Order

1. Call to Order by Miles Etter at 6:09pm
2. Approve Minutes from April 14, 2016
 - Sonia Peters makes a motion to approve the Minutes from April 14th, 2016, Darcy Smart seconds, motion passes, 14-0
3. Revisit advisable vs. necessary district discussion
 - Martha Heath addresses the differences between advisable and necessary districts. One key component is the merger may only go forward if the districts that are identified as necessary vote in favor of the proposal.
 - There are districts that have made themselves all advisable, so the Board has time to decide on what direction they want to vote.
 - The Board discussed possible influences on their decision, one priority being the question of Town taxes lowering or raising depending on where the vote goes.
4. Name of new district
 - The idea of using the word “choice” in the new name was discussed around the table. The Board weighed the idea of advertising School Choice options and whether it would impact future town populations.
 - Miles Etter suggested “NEK p-K 12 SD” for “Northeast Kingdom Pre-Kindergarten to 12 Supervisory District.”
 - George Blakeslee suggested that if we use “NEK” in the name that we specify with “NEK East.”
 - The Board will discuss other name ideas at the next meeting.
5. Review draft responses to Act 46 Goals
 - Martha Heath wanted to address previous questions the Board had:
 - a. How will the proposed Union School district provide substantial equity in the quality and the variety of education opportunities?
 - All students choose the schools they will attend, and the ability to choose provides access to a variety of opportunities; ones that fit students’ needs.
 - Chris Masson suggests the new district continuously advocate to retain School Choice for its students, in which the Board agreed upon.
 - b. How will the proposed union school district lead students to achieve or exceed the State’s Education Quality Standards, adopted as rules by the State Board of Education at the direction of the General Assembly?
 - New district will provide information to parents and students regarding the status of Vermont public schools with regard to Education Quality Standards.
 - Independent schools in Vermont must be approved by the Agency of Education to receive tuition dollars.
 - Vermont has granted some of these districts statutory authority to attend schools in New Hampshire. In these cases, quality is overseen by the State of New Hampshire.
 - Emily Switser suggested independent schools outside of Vermont need the approval of use of tuition dollars. It should be noted, this does not limit Vermont students from going to schools outside of Vermont.
 - Tim Thompson suggested that perhaps objective measurements could be taken (progress reports, performance data, etc) to help show and display the success rate of students within their districts that live in Choice Towns.

- George Blakeslee suggested that with the first bullet ('new district...') be changed from "regarding the status of Vermont public schools" to something more broad, eg, "regarding the performance data on the schools of Choice within the district."
- Judi Conant brought up that with independent schools in Vermont, instead of writing "must be approved," the bullet item be changed to "seek the approval of."
- c. How will the proposed union school district maximize operational efficiencies through increased flexibility to manage, share and transfer resources with the goal of increasing the district-level ratio of student to full-time equivalent staff?
 - Does not apply since no schools will be operated by the new school district. To reiterate, this question is not applicable to the new proposed district.
- d. How will the new union district promote transparency and accountability?
 - One budget, one audit, and one supervisory union for all towns instead of each town operating with their own.
- e. How will the proposed union school district deliver education at a cost parents, voters, and taxpayers value?
 - Merger will protect individual towns from budget volatility due to in and out migration of students.
 - Some administrative savings will be achieved.
 - Through this and other proposed mergers in the area, one superintendent position will be eliminated.
- Steve Thibault suggested that bullet item 2 should say "possible savings" as opposed to "will be achieved."
- f. Regional effects:
 - Merging all the non-operating districts in these two counties allows the retention of school choice as guaranteed in Act 46.
 - Canaan School District, an operating Pre-K to 12 district, will be geographically isolated.
 - Possibility of a side-by-side with Norton joining Canaan to form a new district was explored by Norton, who chose to remain a non-operating district.

6. Start date for new district

- The last time this topic was discussed two dates were suggested: July 1st 2017 and July 1st 2018.
- Martha Heath worked diligently to provide the Board two different Timelines, each representing the suggested start dates, of what would be required of the Board to submit to the State in regards to forms, payroll accounts, when to report to the Vermont Agency of Education, town voting dates, etc. She also provided more information regarding of when the Board would need to submit a petition for more time before voting on a new district.
- Chris Masson spoke of how a 2017 start date is plausible, but mentions with sorting out health care plans this makes it very difficult. A grant is available (the "706 Grant") that would help the new proposed district actually start up, but is only available once the new district is certified.
- Martha mentions that when it comes to determining what the actual Board will look like (ie. number of members) it would be very helpful to seek legal advice in regards to discussing variants and outcomes of this new district grant start-up process.
- Michael Clark shares his thoughts on the two proposed start dates. He feels with the 2017 proposed date, towns may possibly feel that the process of Act 46 is being forced upon them.
- George Blakeslee posed the question of theorizing if a town held onto their Reserve Account independently for a year, if that would affect the town's opportunity to utilize the 5% throttle that will affect each school's budget.
- Martha did stress the time restriction on providing a proposed budget if a start date of 2017 was taken on, noting voting in November could possibly bring about a petition to reconsider the new district.
- The Board discussed the options of pulling certain information from certain town budgets that could represent proposed districts, noting it is very difficult to go forward considering a district needs to be created and certified before a budget proposal is made. George has pointed out this in itself is difficult as it's not as easy to see what a new district will look like without knowing which schools and their budgets will be included in it. Martha assured the Board she will take the Board's concerns and questions to a lawyer to better ascertain how the Board can proceed with this issue.
- Mary Ann Rigby shares her concerns with article drafting and publishing, and having the proper amount of time to construct them.

7. Transportation requirements and options

- Martha provided a copy of the State Statute on Transportation. Her goal is to get an early understanding of what avenues the proposed district may suggest. She provided a detailed list of each school and their current transportation plans (ie. who does and doesn't provide transportation, and where).

- Chris Masson mentions that by law, transportation is managed at the Supervisory Union level. This does not mean all plans will be the same for all towns; each town will aim to keep up with current transportation plans.
- Martha thinks it's important to question whether a stipend could be provided for all the communities that don't provide transportation. It should be noted that it is required to warn a transportation article for any district.
- The biggest issue in determining new transportation plans is not leaving out towns that do not provide transportation, in the event the future written articles change the way schools operate their routes and schedules.

8. Review necessary articles of agreement subjects

- Martha went over a long list of questions that the Board will have to answer in regards to forming a new district. The Board discussed several of these questions during this meeting, but also will need to address how indebtedness and surpluses will be handled, how property owned by the merging districts be acquired by the new district, having appropriate board representation, when the proposal will be presented to the towns, and more.
- The Board also went over the need to discuss how schools will maintain their Reserve Accounts within a new district.

9. Roundtable discussion of questions and concerns from each district

- The Board will have more questions at next meeting, as well as information individual Board members could bring that they feel would help ascertain school budget and transportation proposals.
- The Board decided to meet on May 31st at 6pm to allow time for Martha to receive feedback on legal and financial questions presented to legal and financial consultants. The Board agreed it would also try to limit focus to one or two items, to allow for best use of time to best address issues.

Closure

10. Future meeting dates

- May 31st, 6:00pm

11. Adjourn at 9:08pm

Note: Executive Session: If discussion warrants, and the Board so votes, some items may be discussed in Executive Session pursuant to VSA, 16§ 3 13(a)

Act 46 706 Study Committee Board Meeting Minutes, May 11th, 2016, prepared by Sabra Snyder