

**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
106 Hancock Road,
Peterborough, NH 03458**

CONTOOCOOK VALLEY SCHOOL BOARD

Strategic Organization Committee (SOC)

Thursday, February 15, 2024

7:00 PM

SAU – Board Room

Agenda

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Alan Edelkind
Elizabeth Swan
Richard Dunning
Thomas Burgess
Dan Harper

- 1. Call Meeting to Order**
- 2. Accept January 4, 2024 Minutes**
- 3. Non-Public Session (If needed)**
- 4. Strategic Organization Committee activities going forward**
- 5. Adjourn**

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Minutes

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

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Present: Alan Edelkind, Liz Swan, Dick Dunning, Dan Harper, Michael Hoyt, Tom Kirlin, Janine Lesser, Greg Kriebel, Dr. Kimberly Saunders, George Willard, Ken Caisse, John Wood, Emily LaCroix, Jessica Timmons, Tina Kriebel, Gail Cromwell, Bill Ezell, George Ravalico, Scot Heath, Charlie Pyle, Jamie Pike, Blake Anderson, Andrew Freeman, Chris Raymond, Susan Peters

1. Call Meeting to Order

Alan Edelkind called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Introductions – Town Administrators, Selectmen, School Board Members

Alan Edelkind thanked everyone for attending tonight's meeting to listen to the presentation and ask questions. He said that he loves a town school. His children attended Dublin Consolidated School. He respects the teachers and the history. There comes a time when needs have changed to the point where what is in place is no longer best for children. Spending funds wisely must be considered. We are convinced that the time is now to consider a phased plan and implementation. He said that he took the lead of this activity with an open mind and waited until he read the final Prismatic report and relied on information as a School Board Rep. He said that he did not agree with everything in the report, but not enough to cause him to position himself against the report. Handouts were referenced that will be discussed tonight.

Introductions from those in the room were shared.

3. Sequence of events

4. Presentation on important issues the School Board is dealing with as it relates to the topic of reconfiguration/consolidation – Alan Edelkind

Student population has been declining for years and is not unique to the area or the State. It is not related to Charter Schools taking our children. Children are not being born. Safety is of paramount importance. We have minimum staff requirements for each building. Consolidation of under-utilized schools will help but not eliminate the threat.

Educational equity, teacher backup or ability to share teaching ideas with others - for economic reasons we cannot provide the same level of education to our students as the larger population schools can. Teachers being able to share ideas about teaching methodologies, within curriculum, is very difficult as these under populated schools do not have multiple classes per grade.

Lack of Teachers or other staff - we are committed to no staff layoffs. We support managing staff by attrition and retirement and fully expect that attritions and retirements will happen as needed.

Handouts including various information were shared.

Lack of social opportunities for students - children, especially in elementary schools, have a great need for social interactions, including diversity, as they grow and mature, with a variety of classmates. We need to provide better opportunities to ALL students.

World Language Programs - we do not currently have K-12 programming.

Community impacts - this is multi-faceted area to address. There will be an impact on the individual community due to having no resident elementary school.

5. Discussion and input from attending town officials – Town Officials

George Ravalico, Frankestown, read a letter that has been drafted and sent to the ConVal School Board and the Superintendent of Schools.

George asked if there was a desired outcome provided to Prismatic in advance of the study.

Bill Ezell, Temple, said that Temple does not have an official position but he suspects that they will with Frankestown. People are upset and feel that the outcome was predetermined. Questions were not answered. Whether this is true or not, it is the perception.

It is clear that the ConVal School District has a problem and there will be a breaking point. There has been no consideration for other models.

Susan Peters, Dublin, shared comments that included that when the warrant article was proposed it was to study small classes and combined grades and if the schools were consolidated, would the savings be significant enough to justify. Reinvesting savings into other programs would not result in a tax savings. Alternative models have not been considered. People would be open to the idea of combining middle schools.

Tax contributions for Dublin were shared.

Residents ask if Dublin students would do better if they withdrew from the District.

Blake Anderson, Dublin, said that the outcome from the report was not fair-minded. From an economic viewpoint and proposing to close a school; if you are socializing the school you will get to the point where the donor town is unstable. \$39K for each Dublin student provides a broad number of options for those monies.

He asked what the original deeds of gifts from the towns are. It is likely, that the district will be in breach of the deeds of gifts to those towns. Precise legal work should be done. You cannot ignore the will of parents. It will not be a sustainable district.

Kimberly Saunders said that the district set up, and donor piece, feels that at \$39K that a town is a donor town. At any time, any school could feel that way, especially in the area of special education. We have had a student who exceeded \$475K to educate. In that town,

they were the receiver town. One of the major reasons that the district came together. On any given day at any given time, you have all been donor or receiver towns.

Chris Raymond, Dublin, asked how can the school district think that \$39K per student is acceptable. If Dublin were to pull out of the district and decide to tuition into the school district it would be \$1.27M and we are currently at \$5.2M.

Susan Peters said that students who come outside of the school district pay a lot less than what the town is charged.

George Ravalico spoke about the issue of not maximizing efficiency. He hears that there is such a thing as too small. Francestown is the highest performing elementary school in the district. He shared ratings of the school district since 2015, which is on the decline. This is not about performance or savings.

Dick Dunning said that he has known Alan Edelkind for many years. Alan was given a task and has been open minded about the process since the very beginning. He understands the emotion involved. Dick said that he himself was a student in Dublin and then to Peterborough High School and returned to DCS as a teacher then teaching principal for 12 years. Enrollment went from 110 kids to 33 kids. Dick has seen the advantages and disadvantages of different models. From the beginning, we said that we wanted an outside source to conduct this work. There was no perceived outcome beforehand. We wanted this to be objective while looking at what is best for taxpayers and students. This recommendation was brought forward. We want to hear from the taxpayers. He hears that it is too expensive. He sees many opportunities and nothing has changed. At some point it is going to break and a default budget will result. We have had to take things away from the middle schools and high school to afford the elementary schools. Mr. Dunning said that he is not surprised that people are unhappy. We are trying to look at what is best for everyone. Not an individual community, but all communities. We want to have the people come to the polls and tell us what you want the district to do. Be honest and up front, give true information, and tell the board what you want to do. If the board comes back against consolidation, the district will do their best. Consolidating middle schools has been discussed and it was determined that it was not the best option. You can have one student who can change test scores in a small school dramatically. When you are the student that does not fit into a small school, it is a miserable five years. If you are the student who is not challenged or is struggling, it is a long five years. If you are a student who cannot have your needs met in a school, they are moved to another, impacting that school. A distributive student who is moved for resources is impacting that school potentially every day and not the small school. It is difficult for single grade teachers who cannot collaborate with peers to improve teaching. Dick said that he wished he knew the right answer. He believes in democracy and the vote. We'll do our best, now we ask the towns to do theirs; pass the budget. Some towns do not. A preconceived outcome was not in place. We appreciate your love for your community. Let the voters tell us what is right for the entire district.

George Ravalico, Francestown, apologized to Alan in that he was not questioning his integrity. It is not lost that the smaller towns have been targeted. Trying to get enough people to vote is difficult because of numbers. Why isn't the school district marketing? Go out and earn its customers. Other things could have been explored.

Blake Anderson, Dublin, said that a low teacher/student ratio is a metric that elite private schools go to. In terms of any notion that he imputed Alan Edelkind, that was not his intent. The economics of this are problematic.

Ken Caisse, Temple, said that a nice small town with a store and an elementary school is desired. He said that he read the report with an open approach. Looking at what is fair, and what is not is part of who he is. He spoke about conflicts as he read the report. He said that his impression of the RFP was that it was directed. He thinks that a result was asked for that Prismatic made happen.

Alan Edelkind said that is not what happened, a predisposed outcome was not requested.

Janine Lesser said that one of the bigger questions that has come up is that there was no consideration for other models. She suggested that the other models that were considered could be discussed. The model arrived at was the most consistent. Moving fifth and sixth grade to the elementary schools was looked at. Classes would still be small. Teachers would have to be hired for each of those schools teaching a small class of five or six children. When the surveys from the children were reviewed, middle school students report liking meeting new people and co-curricular activities that were now available. That would have to be taken away if they were sent back to the elementary school. It doesn't save money and is not best for students. She went to a K-8 school but that was fifty years ago. Things have changed. Kids are being asked to grow and change and perform in ways as never before. Another model was suggested to close the two middle schools and send them to the high school which would require the creation of a wing. It was not thought to be more palatable and would not bring the savings that is needed to the district because resources for the small schools would still be needed. When people say to the board that you didn't seek other alternatives; she asked that they come forward with other alternatives.

George Ravalico said that Janine makes his point that the report only considered consolidation and he would have liked to see other alternatives.

The Prismatic Study reflects towns supporting looking at other options. Was there a study? Was Prismatic given the study? The whole study was geared to the same result as has been wanted for many years.

Dan Harper said that there was a warrant article on the ballot about closing a middle school and it went down in flames. This requires a 2/3's vote to pass.

It was said that the small towns are being driven away. People often do not know how to vote.

Discussion took place about how much of a savings is enough. Is \$2.5M enough? \$4M?

The tax issue is the elephant in the room. How come enrollment is going down but the budget goes up? The savings will be gone through inflation or other expenditures. When it is explained to people.....the cost savings is not there.

Liz Swan said that the primary goal of reorganizing is to allocate the resources that we have more wisely. We are not allocating resources effectively at the middle school because of the costs of the elementary school. She spoke about her experience as a parent and her attempts not to see the disparities but she can no longer because they are there. This is about the quality of education that we are able to offer with limitations. We have to think about how we make progress. We cannot stay the same forever. Why should we sacrifice our children's education at the middle school for the sake of elementary schools? Why can't we think about use for the schools as day care, or senior centers, or other creative options. The school closing and the town dying is not the only option. You are in this room because

you are the influencers. It costs money to market. She said that she has heard from many that are in favor of reorganization.

Kimberly Saunders said that the unexpended fund balance that was returned to the towns is a goal every year to return at least a million dollars. Most of the time, it is because we were unable to hire people. We don't get to a million dollars because we negotiated pencil costs. We have not been able to hire people. We have become significantly less competitive in our teacher's contract. The savings comes at a cost. Students did not have opportunities that resulted in the savings.

Blake Anderson said that the danger is that the continued participation of some of the towns that have over allocated are the most at risk by this proposal.

John Wood, Dublin, said that it was mentioned that the combining of middle schools was noted. A vote is not needed to close and combine middle schools. If we have duplicate effort between the middle schools the power is present to combine them now. Rather, the board is choosing to take the smallest schools and close them. Dublin was waiting to have a preschool.

Janine Lesser said that the decision to place preschools was due to allocation and resources. Janine spoke about the staffing makeup required for a preschool. The students are not there.

Kimberly Saunders spoke about the insufficiency of state funding. In addition, the state does not fund public schools at the same rate as charter schools. If a student attends a charter school and requires services, the school or district or residence is responsible for those services. The State stripped funding away from public schools and are not providing money to the local district but require funding for students who are receiving almost zero dollars.

Greg Kriebel said that the warrant article does not give the board any more power.

Mike Hoyt said that this is a step in the process in attempts to get information out. Forums are scheduled to encourage people to attend and learn more. The board is interested in hearing from communities.

Discussion ensued. Some felt that the process and study was flawed.

Sue Shute, Peterborough, commented that the savings would be between \$2.3 and \$4M and was a conservative estimate. Ms. Shute shared appreciation for Liz Swan's points about the reality of coming on the board with ideas and learning more as a result of serving on the board. She said that she is still gathering information. She has friends in many towns and some are upset while others are not. This was a good effort to learn more from communities. There is creative thought that needs to go into what happens. There are no elder community centers or living situations. She said that she hoped that people who are not thrilled about the plan on how they might contribute in a positive way regardless of the outcome. She asked that everyone not just think about themselves but rather the entire district.

Mike Hoyt said that we talk about money but there is so much more....we have five nurses for eight schools, we have people traveling to cover three schools. It is a waste of time and energy and is unproductive in getting the students the services that they need. He looks at the areas educationally that suffer.

Janine Lesser said that if the board came back with an explanation of other possibilities considered e.g. what it would mean to bring grades 5% to the elementary schools and other possibilities, would it help?

Bill Ezell said that it would. Discussion continued.

George Ravalico said that another study is in order.

Aside from the money, what is the incentive to teach in the ConVal School District? The area is desirable.

Kimberly Saunders said that you have the monetary piece. We offer a comprehensive benefit package. We are considered a higher-level educational system in the region. We are a leader in the State educationally in terms of how we educate our students and what we represent. This belongs to the community; they embrace public education, pay for it, and defend it. ConVal provides a comprehensive professional development program. We bring teachers in for ten additional days to help teachers develop and become master teachers. Teachers feel fortunate. Teachers come from other districts and share the differences in favor of ConVal. Teachers, especially new teachers, cannot afford to live in the district.

It was suggested that the March deadline is putting enormous pressure on everyone. So much more could be done. Everyone is going to lose if the timeline cannot be walked back.

6. Plans for further written communications and meetings – School Board Members

Two meetings coming up; January 18th and February 8th in public forum mode. A written communication will be coming out next week.

It was stated that the March deadline for voting day is fixed. The vote could be postponed a year; unsure if it would be meaningful.

7. Non-Public Session (If needed)

None.

8. Adjourn

Alan Edelkind adjourned the meeting at 9:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Marschok