

RPC – RSU # 18 Meeting Notes
November 19, 2007
SeDoMoCha

The meeting started at 6:35 p.m. Sue Madkey Andrews introduced herself and had everyone in the room introduce themselves. Sue reviewed the history of the RSU since its inception. At the current time Union 60, Greenville and surrounding towns, and MSAD 68, Dover Foxcroft, Sebec, Monson, and Charleston, are currently at the table. MSAD 4, Guilford and surrounding towns, and MSAD 46, Dexter and surrounding towns, are planning submitting a letter of intent for an RSU. MSAD 41, Milo and surrounding towns, and MSAD 64, East Corinth and surrounding towns, are discussing submitting a letter of intent. Sue reviewed the Agenda and solicited any additions.

Norm Higgins is a local resident and also a contractor of the Maine Department of Education (MDOE), working with Ray Poulin to guide the school consolidation process for the MDOE. Norm reviewed the issuance of approval from the Commissioner of the letters of intent. He explained the timeline for submitting plans and referendums. He emphasized the unit size of 2,500 students. The units need to submit a plan even if it is not a thoroughly developed plan.

Norm reviewed the checklist and plan that needs to be submitted by December 1st. The first page is identification of the units joining in the new RSU; the second page is a checklist of the parts of completed; and on the third page, units may identify barriers to their plans and reasons for exceptions for plans with a unit size under 2,500.

The citizens' petition on the referendum was discussed. Norm suggested that the legislature would not repeal the law nor would the governor if the verified 55,000 signatures are presented. He speculated that the legislature would not place the referendum on the ballot in June for several reasons. The issue would probably be placed on the ballot next November.

Sue checked to ensure that all the committees had a chair and invited Greenville to provide a chair to share the leadership with Sue and Rick Johnston. The committees will work on identifying where they are in the process and the questions that they have for Norm and/or the DOE. Rick suggested that the group might want to meet at a half-way point between Greenville and Dover Foxcroft on the 28th, the next whole group meeting. Monson was suggested.

At 7:30 the committees provided a brief report of their work as developed so

far, and the questions they identified for Norm to respond to.

Governance Group

Each town would be represented on the board with a weighted vote. Concern was expressed the locals have as much voice as possible.

1. One of the questions was how would the tuition for a student who opts to go to FA be paid for a community that has school choice? Would the tuition difference be the sole responsibility of the sending town rather than shared with parents as it is now?
2. Would FA, being a 60/40 school still be a private school?

Finance Group

- What will the role of the local school committee in the RSU?
- How we would deal with the retirement of existing debt? Could the SAU existing debt remain with the SAU?
- What happens to undesignated funds? Designated funds should remain as designated. Capital needs would need to be addressed by the RSU.
- The Finance Committee suggests that school choice be part of the RSU.
- What is the appropriate role of the local school committee?
- Would the RSU be able to lease school facilities from the towns and let the towns be responsible for the facilities?
- What is exit strategy for a town from an RSU if things aren't going well?
- How does one reconcile the differences in the law that allows a town to maintain a school and does not allow a town to raise money for a school?
- How will the RSU allocate debt across the communities?

Transportation Group

- How will the RSU contract transportation out?

Personnel Group

- Needed for central office
 - Superintendent
 - Business manager
 - Director of Curriculum and Instruction
 - Director of Special Services
 - Secretaries for all above
 - An accounts payable clerk
- Teaching salaries for Greenville are better; insurance benefits are better in 68.
- The ed tech structures are different between the two SAUs.
- What happens when an RSU is approved and the populations decline?
- How would the 68 teacher contract that expires in August the same year the RSU starts be handled?

Curriculum Group

- The Curriculum Committee still would like to see a variety of options for high school students, including vocational, college prep, and commercial training.
- Will the student and/or the town be allowed a choice?

Facilities Group

- If the town owns the facilities, how will that work?
- Will Monson have school choice?

Other questions from the floor

- The same question re: school choice has been asked for Shirley?
- Can you get school choice back if you give it up?
- What would happen to the surplus that a town has in its school account?

The first question Norm addressed was school choice. If you currently have school choice, it is protected and it is essentially protected forever. Prior to the operational date of the RSU, an SAU can institute school choice. He suggested that Shirley place school choice in their plan prior to joining the RSU. The RSU may renegotiate school contracts and offer school choice. There is no provision in the law that allow municipalities diminish school choice for students. Both Union 60 and MSAD # 68 currently have school choice. MSAD # 68 currently has an exclusive contract with Foxcroft Academy which expires in 2009.

The municipalities are only required to pay up to the state maximum allowable tuition. A 60/40 school is approved a private school approved for public services.

State allowed tuition is part of the RSU assessment. Added tuition would be directly assessed to the towns sending their students to a school more expensive school.

Can RSU lease a school to save costs? The commissioner must be assured that actual property or facilities exist to have K-12 facilities. A lease would have to be practical and reasonable to be approved.

There are no provisions in the law that states that the RSU would have to address a declining population and reorganizing yet again.

Contracts go into the RSU. The suggestion was contract ready to expire at the start of RSU should be extended for a year.

The RSU board will have the powers established by the RPC. Local school

committees may still exist. The RSU needs the requisite power to exist as an RSU. The boundary lines have not been established between the RSU and the local boards. Norm suggested that was considerable flexibility in locally defining the roles and responsibilities of local school committees and the RSU board.

Are there any regional systems that have local boards? Norm knows of none in Maine.

Balance forward can be targeted to reduce the assessments. A lot of money can be allocated over a series of two or three years to have minimal impact on assessments.

These questions will be discussed at the meetings of the chairs tomorrow night as they draft the Dec 1 plan submission. The next meeting will be on November 28, 2007 in Monson. The purpose of this meeting is for RPC members to review the draft plan prior to sending this to Union 60 and MSAD # 68 for board approval for submission.

8:30 p.m. Adjourn

Respectfully submitted,

Michele Janes