

BARRE SUPERVISORY UNION #61 SCHOOL DISTRICT
ACT 46 - 706 STUDY COMMITTEE
Spaulding High School – Library
March 14, 2018 – 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Gina Akley – (BT Community Representative)
Marcia Biondolillo - (BT - Community Representative) – arrived at 5:08 p.m.
Jeff Blow - (BT – Community Representative)
Giuliano Cecchinelli - (BC Board / Community Representative)
Paul Cook (BC – Community Representative)
Sarah Costa - (BC – Community Representative)
Michael Deering - (BC Board / Community Representative)
Guy Isabelle – (SHS Board – BT Community Representative)
Rebecca Kerin-Hutchins - (BT – Board Representative)
Michaela Martin - (BT Community Representative)
Ed Rousse - (BC – SHS Board / BC Community Representative)
Tyler Smith - (BC Board / BC Community Representative)
Kim Whitcomb - (BT Community Representative)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jessica Vest - (BC – Community Representative)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

John Pandolfo, Superintendent

GUESTS PRESENT:

Video Vision Tech Dave Delcore – Times Argus Alice Farrell Paul Malone Sonya Spaulding

1. Call to Order

The Co-Chair, Mr. Smith, called the Wednesday, March 14, 2018, meeting to order at 6:02 p.m., which was held at the Spaulding High School Library.

1.1 Additions and/or Deletions to Agenda

Add 1.3 Approval of February 28, 2018 Act 46 – 706 Consolidation Study Committee Meeting Minutes

1.2 Introduction of Committee Members

A document (containing Committee Member contact information) titled ‘Barre 2018 Act 46 Merger Study Committee’ was distributed. Committee Members introduced themselves and provided a brief overview of their interest in serving on the Committee.

1.3 Approval of Minutes – February 28, 2018 Act 46 – 706 Consolidation Study Committee Meeting

On a motion by Mr. Cecchinelli, seconded by Mr. Blow, the Committee voted 10 to 0 to approve the Minutes of the February 28, 2018 Act 46 – 706 Study Committee Meeting. Mr. Isabelle and Mr. Rousse abstained.

2. Organization of the Committee

2.1 Norms for Committee Meetings and Work

Mr. Smith provided a brief overview of the ‘Meeting Norms’. Brief discussion was held. The Committee agreed to amend the first bullet item by pluralizing the word ‘school’.

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Mrs. Costa, the Committee unanimously voted to accept the amended version of the Meeting Norms document.

3. Act 46

3.1 Data on Previous Vote Results

A document titled ‘Results from Barre Act 46 Votes’ was distributed. Mr. Smith provided an overview of voting results, noting that fewer voters turned out for the revote. Brief discussion was held regarding ways to increase voter turnout, should a vote be held. Mr. Pandolfo advised that the Agency of Education cited no legal reason why a vote could not be held in November, but it was noted that the 30 days following vote certification (when community members can petition for a revote), would place any possible revote after the deadline of November 30, 2018, when the State-wide Plan must be finalized.

3.2 Estimated Cost of Voting

A document titled 'Estimated Cost of a Barre Act 46 Vote in 2018' was distributed. Costs associated with votes include; printing of ballots, programming of vote tabulation machines, rental of voting venues, and printing of early ballots (absentee ballots). It was noted that absentee ballots are required to be printed 45 days prior to a vote. This time requirement may be problematic, as it impacts the date on which the Committee's work must be completed and approved. The Committee should consider that a revote is a good possibility. Educating community members prior to a vote will be very important. The revote requirement will need to be considered when planning the timeline. The Committee was advised that the cost of holding a 'stand-alone' vote is very similar to the cost of holding a vote in conjunction with a State or National election. It was noted that the municipalities shoulder the cost of holding votes. It was reported that voter turnout is usually low in August. Voter turnout is usually the greatest during November. The Committee agreed to table 'vote date' discussion until a later time.

3.3 Feedback on Previous Vote Results - Why did people vote the way they did?

A copy of the voter survey and survey results were distributed. The Committee reviewed the data, noting that the number of respondents was very low. The small response does pose concern. Committee members shared comments and concerns including; community members advising that that don't have a true understanding of Act 46, whether or not tax incentive information was shared well, concern regarding a forced merger that lacks tax incentives, concern that the State may not fulfill tax incentive obligations, and short term (tax incentives) vs long term financial benefits. In response to a query, it was noted that Section 9 Plan districts are currently meeting with the Secretary of Education. The deadline for submission of Section 9 Plans has passed. It may still be possible to hold conversations with the Secretary of Education and/or the Agency of Education. If those conversations are necessary, they would involve the district boards, rather than the Committee. If the Committee decides to move forward with researching a possible merger, they can move ahead with that directive. If the Committee decides that it is not best to pursue a possible merger, the district boards will need to submit something to the State, and the fate of the school(s)' structure is in the hands of the State Board of Education. Mr. Pandolfo shared information regarding merger discussion/voting for Twinfield and Cabot. It was noted that districts that have merged, cannot be forced to merge with additional districts. Districts that have not merged, can be merged at the State's discretion. If the Committee desires, a representative from the Agency of Education can be invited to a future Committee meeting. The Committee would like to receive clarification regarding what happens after a positive merger vote, if another district wants to join the BSU, or if the State wants another district to join the BSU. It was noted that if the Committee or the voters agree not to merge, tax incentives will be lost. Tax incentives are not provided for districts that are forced to merge. Brief discussion was held regarding tax incentives 8¢, 6¢, 4¢, and 2¢ (over 4 years), and it was explained that there is a stipulation that with tax incentives, the tax rate is not allowed to increase or decrease by more than 5%. Mr. Isabelle favors the opportunity to restructure the districts and achieve tax incentives, rather than allowing the State to determine the structure and have no tax incentive. Ms. Whitcomb believes that in addition to tax incentives, a merger could provide additional opportunities for students. Mr. Isabelle advised that he has experience in both the City and Town schools and believes they are 'the same'.

Mrs. Biondolillo stressed that much merger activity has been already accomplished within the SU, citing the use of one Superintendent, and the formation of a single Policy Committee and a single Curriculum Committee for the district.

3.4 Critical Questions:

A document titled 'Act 46 2018 Merger Study Committee – March 14, 2018 – Reasons to Merge or Not Merge' was distributed. Mr. Smith provided an overview of the document. It was noted that the reasons outlined in the document were based on survey results, not on facts. Mr. Cook advised regarding his concern that a Teacher Union Spokesperson wants all merger savings used solely to reduce health insurance costs. Mr. Pandolfo advised that health insurance costs are a negotiated item and could not be tied to a merger. Mr. Blow advised that he has reviewed the 5 bullet items in Act 46 and believes that the BSU may already meet the requirements of the Act. Mr. Blow believes the tax incentive is a non-issue. Mr. Blow queried regarding improvement to education quality and provided data that suggests BCEMS students are not achieving at the same rate as BTMES students. Mr. Pandolfo cautioned that the data, if not disaggregated, is misleading. Results based on research performed under the previous Committee indicate that students are learning at basically the same level, when reported in a disaggregated manner (students who qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch vs students who do not qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch). Poverty has an impact on learning. There are more students living at or below the poverty level in Barre City, thus non-disaggregated data presents skewed results. Mr. Blow believes that a review of the Act 46 'bullets' will verify that the BSU, under the current structure, meets the requirements of Act 46 and that an argument could be made for keeping the current structure. It was noted that with the amount of consolidation that has already occurred, the State could argue that there is no reason not to finalize a complete merger. Mr. Blow advised regarding discussions with the Curriculum Director who has advised that there is some, but not much imbalance, of curriculum between the district schools. It was noted that consolidation of curriculum is occurring under the direction of the sole BSU Curriculum Director. Mr. Blow queried regarding areas of difference and what would be improved under consolidation. Ms. Martin believes that consolidation would allow for more opportunities for students. Mr. Blow voiced concern that a consolidated board would have to expend an unreasonable amount of time to accomplish the work necessary to oversee 3 schools. Mr. Isabelle believes that about 80% of district board agenda items are duplicates. Mr. Cook advised that there are much larger school districts in other states that run successfully with one Board and one Superintendent. Mr. Cook cautioned that not merging may provide a short term gain, with much to lose in the long term. Mr. Cook is of the belief that the future holds more centralization around the state. Mrs. Akley believes the Committee should stay more focused on presenting a merger, if a possible merger is to be presented. If the Committee decides against recommending a

merger, it will be the district boards, not the Committee, who will have to present arguments to the State. Ms. Whitcomb shared her concern that City voters sometimes vote down budgets. Mr. Isabelle stressed the importance of promoting budgets. Mrs. Biondolillo feels that the communities should be proud of how much consolidation has already been achieved, and believes these types of discussions should be occurring without the presence of Act 46. Mrs. Biondolillo believes most of the merger work has already been accomplished and that discussion should focus on how to make additional improvements and finalize the merger. Mr. Blow reiterated that he feels it is important to review the 5 Act 46 bullets and identify if the BSU is already meeting the Act's goals. Mr. Smith does not believe that meeting the goals is a reason not to merge, but rather believes a merger provides for opportunities for improvement. It was noted that it may be beneficial to understand possible benefits of not merging. It would be beneficial to learn how tax payers are responsible collectively. Mrs. Akley does not believe that the district boards could submit a compelling argument to stay 'as is'. Ms. Whitcomb believes some voted against Act 46 to send a 'no' message to Montpelier. In response to concern regarding losing local control, it was noted that the SHS Board has run smoothly for years under a joint (City/Town) Board. Mr. Blow queried regarding how often improvement is discussed at Board meetings. It was noted that improvements to safety/security and transportation efficiencies have been recent topics of discussion. Ms. Martin suggested that it may be beneficial to have a board chair from a merged district, attend one of the Committee meetings. It was noted that in a merged district, there is more flexibility with budget issues. Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins asked if educational models had to be exactly the same under consolidation. Mr. Pandolfo advised that regardless of consolidation, delivery models are mostly the same. When models differ, there may be some review and comparisons made which may result in selection of one common delivery model. Mr. Deering is concerned that learning will decrease if all teachers teach exactly the same. Mr. Smith believes that consolidation would have prevented the Spanish Program issues that occurred at BCEMS a few years ago. Mrs. Akley queried regarding what information was necessary for the Committee to make a decision. Mr. Pandolfo advised he would provide updated information on numbers in the Final Report. Deferred Maintenance issues should be identified. Costs and benefits of going to a vote should be determined. Discussion should be held regarding the 5 year restriction on moving students. It was noted that consolidation does not preclude grant eligibility.

3.4.1 Why Should We Merge?

Discussion of Agenda Items 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 was held under Agenda Item 3.4.

3.4.2 Why Should We Not Merge?

Discussion of Agenda Items 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 was held under Agenda Item 3.4.

3.5 Review of Previous Report. What should be kept?

The Committee agreed to table, until the next meeting, the Committee's review of the previous report.

3.6 Committee Work Plan & Timeline

The Committee agreed to table, until the next meeting, creation of a Work Plan and Timeline.

The next meeting is Wednesday, March 28, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. in the SHS Library.

4. Communication Plan

The Committee agreed to table, until the next meeting, creation of a Communication Plan.

5. Public Comment

Mr. Malone advised regarding consolidation that has already occurred, advised that the BSU Board is working very productively, and expressed his belief that the BSU cannot circumvent the law (Act 46). Mrs. Farrell advised that she was on the previous Study Committee and stressed that the Final Report was not created in isolation. Mrs. Farrell advised that since the vote, she has spoken with many individuals who advise that they do not understand Act 46 legislation. Mrs. Spaulding advised that BCEMS is run in a very fiscally responsible manner and would like to see a merger that produces long term savings that allows for more educational benefits.

6. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Mr. Rousse, the Committee unanimously voted to adjourn at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Poulin