

**Lamoille South Supervisory Union
Optional Educational Structures Committee**

Meeting Minutes – June 9, 2010

Committee members present: Penny Bishop, Emily Bradbury, Jeff Dacales, Olivia DeRienzo, Abby Fitzgerald, David Jaqua, Reeves Larson, JB McKinley, Kate Osborne, Susan Titterton

Committee members absent: Max Cohen, Paul Griswold, Sharron Scott

Approval of minutes of May 26, 2010 – Amended, Moved, Seconded, Passed

Election of Chairperson – Ray opened the floor for nominations or interest. Several stated they did not have the time. David Jaqua said he would agree to do it if no one else came forward. There being no other expressed interest by anyone present, the committee members present unanimously elected David Jaqua as chair person.

Values

Abby Fitzgerald suggested that the committee could poll the students regarding the values the committee has established. It was impractical to do this so late in the year, so it could be done at the beginning of the next term. Reeves suggested that an online poll could be used to engage the community at large.

Optional Structures

The committee commenced with a discussion of the various options. The following options were identified:

1. Status quo
2. Voluntary collaboration with no structural change (subject to current law)
3. Formation of one or more union schools
4. Unified union
5. Joint contract

The committee discussed each structure.

1. Status quo

One option is to do nothing. Currently there is some degree of school choice that could address some of the equity issues.

2. Volunteer collaboration

The LSSU school districts could establish voluntary mechanisms to further collaborate in curriculum and potentially some resources. Currently this is how the Technical Center works. Legal issues restrict what separate districts can practically do together. – Example is how ADM is calculated. Each pupil represents money to the district and affects the tax rate, so

moving students between districts is problematic. The districts already collaborate in a number of significant ways, so further collaboration would not be all new. Montpelier and U32 is an example of two districts that have a successfully collaboration program.

3. Formation of one or more union schools

The districts could agree to form a union high school and a union middle school. People's Academy has sufficient space to be the union high school, and Stowe middle/high school has sufficient space to be the union middle school. It is impractical to do one without the other due to space constraints, assuming no new construction. The elementary schools would not be changed. Under this scenario, there would be a board for the elementary school, a board for the union middle school and a board for the union high school, plus an LSSU board. Each school would have a separate budget and would be approved individually by voters within the respective districts. Elmore could choose not to participate and retain choice.

4. Unified union school district (UUSD)

The three school districts would join to become a single consolidate school district known as a Unified Union School District. There would be a single board. There would be a single district wide school budget from which the individual schools would be funded. There would be a single district wide vote to approve the budget. The likely consolidation of the middle and high school would be similar to the union schools described above. The elementary schools could be preserved as is. The process is either a 12-step approach that has historically been the case, or a new streamlined approach based upon legislation recently approved by the legislature (Peltz bill). The streamlined approach includes financial incentives to schools / taxpayers in districts that consolidate.

5. Joint contract

Joint contract school district is based upon a corporate contract model. It could be considered a honey moon period prior to consolidation via a unified union or union schools. Currently there are seven joint contracts in the state, though all are relatively small school districts. The greatest benefit is flexibility.

The committee then discussed how to evaluate the various options.

Programs: How are educational programs affected by each of the options?

Money: How would tax rates be affected by each of the options?

Equity: How would equity be affected by each of the options?

Negatives for a UUSD or union schools: People could be put off by a single non-local school board. Headmaster rules would negatively impact current extra-curricular sports programs. Community interest and involvement could be compromised by non-local schools.

Could the UUSD board shut down a school? Yes, but if the Peltz bill path is utilized, a local vote is required.

What is the problem we are trying to avoid? The current thinking is that a combination of fewer students, taxpayer pressures, and higher demands means status quo is not sustainable. So consolidation could lead to greater efficiencies and program offerings.

Could Elmore elect to opt out of the UUSD to preserve choice? Yes.

Why is Stowe interested in this? The current trend is downhill with respect to programs. Budgetary pressures are intense. If collaboration can improve program offerings, the community may be willing to lose local the local schools. The community has already lost control over funding.

Ray asked the group to narrow down the options for further analysis.

The committee decided to eliminate status quo.

The committee decided to eliminate collaboration without structural change.

Options for further study:

- a. Unified Union School District
- b. Union Schools
- c. Joint Contract

Process going forward

- a. Identify options – completed
- b. Establish pros and cons – in process
- c. Select option(s) for presentation to community
- d. Establish talking points and communications plan
- e. Hold community forums
- f. Write report
- g. Present report to LSSU board