

September 5, 2019
Session Notes

Video Conference with Dresden Representatives

- Neil Odell and Jay Badams, Board Chair and Superintendent, provided an overview of the Dresden Interstate Agreement (Norwich, Vermont and Hanover, New Hampshire).
- The Compact was formed in 1963. Currently, there are 150-200 students per grade. This recent radio story provides useful context about the Dresden approach from the New England News Collaborative radio segment on the Dresden School District (<https://nenc.news/podcast/episode-159-holy-sites-harvards-vocarium/>). The Dresden segment begins at about 25:12 into the broadcast.
- The combined effort focuses on grades 7-12; primary schools remain part of their original districts. Sixth grade is tuition-based. Other grades are not.
- Governance:
 - Each of the three schools has its own school board and there is a SAU board. The SAU has five representatives from Norwich and seven from Hanover. Size of the towns determines proportional representation. One Norwich representative is non-voting and is designated as such to avoid an even number of voting members.
 - Board representatives are selected from among the board members serving the other schools – they have a dual role.
 - Budget votes all happen on the same day. Dresden votes are combined before being counted to reduce a town-by-town interpretation of the votes. Even though Hanover is a larger community, Norwich has more active votes, so the size of the community is not informing outcomes.
 - There are many gray areas about which existing policies and laws are silent. The school has developed a pattern of interpreting them in ways that best support the interests of the school; so far, there have been no negative ramifications from this process.
- Funding formula:

- Norwich and Hanover each individually fund their elementary schools.
- Dresden is the combined school and the budget is based/apportioned on the % of students in the October enrollment numbers and the tax rate of each community.
- There are separate maintenance budgets for the four schools.
- The Board Chair expressed a personal preference for a single budget for all schools – it would streamline the decision making regarding resource allocation. Currently, if one community/board votes down a budget, all others must realign/remain open to changes and it complicates and makes less effective the overall allocation process.
- Some additional towns tuition into the schools via negotiated agreements. They have no voice at the board level.
- Property/Assets
 - Dresden owns property in Vermont that can be used for expansion, even though it is located in New Hampshire.
 - The approach was to use existing buildings.
 - The Board Chair expressed a wish for a capital reserve fund, which is not currently in place and may be legally prohibited.
- Scholarships:
 - Students are eligible for scholarships across state lines.
- Faculty/Staff:
 - The Compact allows Dresden teachers to opt into either state retirement system. If they switch jobs and locations they can become vested in both systems.
 - All entities are part of one SAU.
 - There are separate bargaining units for each school.
- Legal Support:
 - Paul Guliani is their current attorney. David Bradley was the attorney of record at the time of the Compact creation.
- Wish List:
 - That the “why”/rationale for each decision at the time of formation was outlined – it would help inform potential changes in current-day matters.
 - One unified system pre-k-12th grade with one budget.
 - Clarified description of who board members are representing because they are wearing multiple hats and there are redundancies.

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Regular Meeting Notes:

Updates Pertinent to Our Work

- Don Tase joined the Committee and is a Colebrook representative.
- The SAU 2018-19 enrollment numbers by grade were distributed (see separate handout sent via e-mail today by Kyle). Karen will follow suit.
- The Colebrook Academy AHEAD program discussions are ongoing. The third visit to discuss repurposing of the structure occurred and are promising.
- All boards but Stewartstown have voted to have Connecticut River Collaborative Exploratory Committee members serve on the Interstate Agreement Committee. Stewartstown is voting soon.
- The building merger in Colebrook is going well. Kim Wheelock, the principal, is doing a very good job.
- The newly arriving teachers are assimilating well and are actively embracing their roles.

Curriculum Sub-Group Update

- The Collaborative Team (a combination of faculty and administrators from the two SAUs) is meeting on September 23rd to offer their insights into the sub-group’s templates and models for future staffing needs. They

will also recommend a process for seeking input from all faculty, staff and students. These outcomes will be brought to our October Committee meeting for approval.

- Known retirements/departures of faculty and staff will be factored into our modeling efforts.
- One important possibility: If there is a consolidation, the agreement can be to only hire fully licensed teachers and not those with provisional licenses. This could help enhance the quality of education.
- We are clear that cost savings for a consolidated effort will most likely come from staff and buildings.

Governance and Financials Sup-Group Update

- The Interstate meeting on August 15th with the two commissioners provided useful insights. It is evident that both commissioners are committed to being supportive while honoring the need for their role to be one of approval and oversight (and compliance).
 - They made it clear that the choices and direction setting belong at the community level and they will not guide this.
 - The downward trending of student enrollment over the years is alarming and predictions are that this will continue.
- Next steps – once Stewartstown board votes to approve its designated members for the Interstate Agreement Committee, Bruce and Karen will send a letter to the Commissioners seeking their formal approval. The outcome of this launches all future steps. In the meantime, the sub-group will meet and make provisions for drafting the various components of the Interstate Agreement. The work plan will be established, including timeline, and shared at the October Committee meeting.

Interstate Agreement sub-group members are:

Frankie, Sally, Brian, Mike, Sandra, Kyle, Laurent, Don and David

- Canaan Building Assessment – Black River Design went through the entire building and are forming their recommendations, including costs. For an additional \$ 5,000, they will do class flow modeling. If affordable, Committee members recommend investing in this. Their initial report will likely not be ready for our October meeting.

Other

- Bruce and Karen are attending (by invitation) the Tillotson Fund advisors meeting in a couple of weeks to provide an update on our work and to prepare to ask for additional financial support for legal expenses, in particular, and the creation of the Articles of Agreement.