



**TEMPORARY REGIONAL SCHOOL STUDY COMMITTEE
OF
THE CITY OF ANSONIA AND
THE CITY OF DERBY**



MINUTES
Monday, August 24, 2020 – 7 p.m.
ZOOM virtual conferencing platform via the Internet

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. by Co-Chair Jim Gildea. All those present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call:

Derby members:		Ansonia members:	
Jim Gildea, Co-Chair	present	Joe Jaumann, Co-Chair	present
Barbara DeGennaro	present	Dr. Steve Adamowski	present
Tara Hyder	present	Rich Bshara	present
George Kurtyka	present	Christopher Phipps	present
Ron Luneau	absent	Dr. Joshua Shuart	present

NVCOG Staff John DiCarlo was present.
Dr. Conway, Derby Public Schools and Dr. DiBacco, Ansonia Public Schools were present.

Public Session

Mr. Gildea asked three times if any member of the public wished to speak. There being none, he declared the public session closed.

Approval of Minutes – July 27, 2020

Mr. Kurtyka MOVED to approve the minutes of July 27, 2020; SECONDED by Dr. Shuart. Motion carried unanimously.

Treasurer’s Report

Dr. Adamowski reported that he approved two invoices for minutes for the recording secretary. There are no new invoices to approve at this time.

Jim Gildea, Co-Chair
Joe Jaumann, Co-Chair
Dr. Steven Adamowski,
George Kurtyka, Secretary

Rich Bshara
Barbara DeGennaro
Tara Hyder

Ronald Luneau,
Chris Phipps
Joshua Shuart

Program of Study with DMG – Discussion/Possible Action

Simone Carpenter and Nate Levenson of DMG discussed and answered questions regarding the proposed Program of Study.

Mr. Levenson explained that as part of the regionalization plan there is a requirement to submit a proposed course of studies. The proposed course of studies, starting at the high school first, there are four things to keep in mind.

1. This is not binding. Whatever the Committee decides and is approved, the leadership of the new district can change it. This is not the final word.
2. One of the guiding principles of putting this together - This was done with the senior leadership of both districts. This is not District Management Group's recommendations; this is the collective thinking of your leadership at both districts and at the high schools.
3. There is nothing that was lost. There are no courses that are currently being offered that wouldn't be offered in the future. There is very little downside to this. There is quite a nice upside – by having a larger student population, the ability to add some courses that were of great interest to one or both districts have been incorporated. There is also the addition simply that if one district had it and another didn't, that's a net gain for at least some of the students. There is a fair amount of expansion of what is possible, both by sharing what already existed but also being able to add some new courses.
4. If implemented thoughtfully, this is a cost-neutral plan. There is nothing in here that would cost a dollar more than what you're currently spending. "Implemented thoughtfully" means that you maintain across the entire high school the same average class size as you have now. That is actually what drives your cost. It means as you offer courses, as this clearly gives you the opportunity to do, you're going to want to do it in a thoughtful manner, maintaining average class size, which means if you have a course and almost nobody wants to take it, then kids have voted with their feet, and you might not offer it. If there are courses that have some interest but not a lot, it means you might offer it every other year. There are a number of strategies. If you want to offer an additional art course and just three or four kids want to take it, you might offer it at the same time and in the same room as an existing art course. There are a number of steps that can be taken that allow you to expand the offering as both leadership teams wanted to do, and to do it in a cost-neutral way.

Simone Carpenter displayed the document and reviewed each section with the Committee.

Mr. Gildea clarified "non-binding" with the following scenario. The referendum passes, and there's a high school in the mix. The Committee can follow the proposed program of study, or not. This program of study is our recommendation and what we think we need to do to satisfy the State Statutes.

Ms. Carpenter added, a new superintendent and/or principal could say, this is 2023 or 2024, I want to offer this different course instead of this other one. Everything about a program of study or educational plan should really be driven by the philosophy and vision for that high school. Both Dr. DiBacco and Dr. Conway share very similar philosophies for their high schools right now and for any future regional high school.

She explained that the data was gleaned from the 2017-18 school year program of study – the year the full data was pulled for both schools. Ms. Hyder and Ms. DeGennaro would like the data to be updated with the current offerings. Ms. Carpenter agreed to get a more recent pull of the course of studies and edit off of that. Mr. Levenson pointed out that this work was done in the midst of a pandemic. They worked with the data they had rather than having the leadership teams of both schools recollect it.

Ms. Carpenter described the high school course offerings, summarized department by department and answering questions as they arose.

Mr. Gildea asked, if when the savings models were calculated these programs were taken into account; and if not, would there be any recalculations to make sure the savings were still there.

Mr. Levenson replied, if you offered everything listed here it would not cost you a dollar more or a dollar less than you're currently spending. That was the assumption on the teaching side of our financial analysis. It is built into the financial model; it is cost neutral. The total number of staff, if you add up between the two schools now and compare it to the new school would be the same. There is no change in overall staffing levels. Through attrition you may find we need staff with some slightly different skill sets.

The group discussed potential class sizes, and strategies schools use in scheduling courses so that they all can be offered. Mr. Levenson advised careful management in course offerings.

Ms. Hyder was concerned that the teachers are already teaching a full capacity of courses, and wondered how they would fit 21 new courses in among the same staff using the same collective bargaining unit agreements.

Mr. Levenson suggested that the only classes that would be combined are those that make sense to combine. He also suggested offering some classes on an every other year basis. The group discussed potential course scheduling so that nobody would ever not be able to get a course that they wanted as long as there were enough students interested in that course. Ms. Carpenter added, if there are two existing small classes at each school now, they can be combined into one class of 15 students. That would free up one period for someone to teach one of those newer courses as well.

Dr. Adamowski asked if the number of guidance counselors at each school been looked at and what a regional district guidance staff might look like. Ms. Carpenter replied, we kept the support staffing levels stable - including guidance counselors, school psychologists, special education teachers, roles that are not general education core teachers. If there are currently 5 in Ansonia and 2 in Derby, in the regionalized school there would be 7 counselors.

Dr. Adamowski then asked, both districts offer 26 credits for graduation. That would be 25 plus the capstone requirement. Dr. Conway replied, right now Derby requires 24 credits for graduation. Starting with the graduation class of 2023 it will be 25. Dr. Adamowski continued, how is the capstone requirement built into this program of study, or is it? A student would be taking 3-5 related electives that would lead to their capstone requirement. Ms. Carpenter explained, with the current course offerings at both districts, no one is losing any courses that currently are offered. It would still be able to be met with this course of studies. There is potential for more types of capstones to be available with the addition of new classes.

Dr. Adamowski continued, both districts have relatively low accountability – somewhere in the 60s – regarding Connecticut’s Next Generation Accountability Plan. The plan is very sensitive to the kinds of courses that students take with additional points given for students taking CTE and certain arts courses. Has any thought been given to that, or is it possible to look at the combined program as proposed and see how that would affect the points in the accountability plan for CTE and arts participation? Mr. Levenson replied, it depends which students sign up and actually take the classes; it’s not based on the offering of such courses. This program of studies expands the number of offerings across all of those spectrums. It gives you all the opportunity to see improvement there.

Ms. Hyder discussed, in the academics, programming and educational plan section of the original report there is information about student health and well-being. The report talks about the implications of regionalization and how students are worried about safety and anxiety at the middle school and high school levels. The report suggests that staff will need to expand support services to support those needs, yet the report found, “no impact” under the status quo, that there is “some negative short-term impact under regionalization scenarios.” She asked, when kids are actually expressing those needs on the forefront, how would this impact staffing and what would that resource support look like? Ms. Carpenter replied, by keeping the same number of staff as current, but shifting the responsibilities of counselors, psychologists and others to ensure they are really able to maximize their time but in counseling and support for students. Counselors and psychologists have a lot of administrative duties, things that pull them away from being able to provide that direct student support. For those few years that the school is transitioning, really prioritizing student support there, and creating a school-wide system that creates that positive culture – keeping programs that offer that whole-child, whole-school support for mental health. The “short term” in definition is really about the first year or two of regionalizing. The students at both Ansonia and Derby High School that we spoke with noted that they could see there being some challenges in the first couple of months, but they also all said that they believe that they could create a more cohesive school environment or really have the chance to define culture for that school in a more cohesive way. While there could be an increase in challenges in the short-term, meaning in the first year or two, over time the regional high school would have a new culture and climate separate from the two pre-existing.

Ms. Carpenter stated, there is a little bit of data still missing that we're collecting on Derby Middle School. Mr. Levenson stated, the middle school is a little different than the high school in both approach and what would probably change. There would be less expansion of course offerings, and again, it's not binding. When you think of the non-core classes in the middle school, what you offer and how much choice you give students is very much a school-based decision. Middle school non-core classes have very typical and standard class size, there's no financial impact. However, it's a reasonably important philosophical decision as to how much choice students have at that middle school level.

Dr. Adamowski noted that Derby Middle School is in the Commissioner's Network. The Ansonia Middle School is really not a middle school, but a 7th and 8th grade junior high school model. As we look at both districts, this is the weakest area of program in each of the districts; neither district is offering an effective middle school program. Dr. Adamowski recommended taking the middle school as a separate issue on the agenda, discussing the redesign of the middle school and what it would look like. He feels that this is not a situation where we can take what's offered by each district and combine them.

Dr. Conway explained the Commissioner's Network – a grant that provides funding to improve underperforming schools. It gives the middle school \$550,000 in the first year of a three-year grant to put together improvements within that school. It allows us to bring in additional resources to help support the learning, improve the learning, and over a three-year period of time a gradual release of funding from the State and hopefully improvement by the district.

Mr. Gildea stated, we've concluded the overview/presentation phase of the high school. It would be appropriate as a next step to allow DMG the time to work with the Superintendents on what that 6-7-8 model looks like – it could be the end of September.

Ms. Hyder discussed the amount of additional work that may be put on the Superintendents, asking them to completely revamp two middle schools. Mr. Jaumann expressed that we're not talking about in-depth curriculum, we're talking about going from the 7-8 model in Ansonia and the model that Derby is currently utilizing and talking about offering a model that works well for both systems to advance into the high school system that we're envisioning.

Dr. Adamowski stated, talking about a model would be choosing a grade configuration – deciding that this would be 6-7-8. Then a school of 300 might be divided into three houses of 100 each that would have a team of teachers that would work with them over a period of three years. There is a curricular aspect – if you're offering something at the high school level in terms of languages, what do you offer at the middle school? Do you start those languages in grade 6, 7? How many languages do you offer as a choice? Same in terms of arts – the band – these kinds of things. We have a lot of great examples of successful middle schools and higher performing middle schools in our state to look at. Whether or not this would require a consultant or someone to do some of the legwork in working with the two Superintendents, that is a question we should leave to them. For a relatively small amount of money we could provide that kind of assistance.

Mr. Gildea stated, I did not look at it that we would have to totally lay out, organize and change the makeup of the two schools. That is not our charge. Our charge is to show what a program could conceivably look like. I also think, this is all not binding. If we get to referendum, if this passes, if there is a Board of Education, if there is a Superintendent, that will be their future job. We're in the Commissioner's Network because we were not doing well academically. I think that in and of itself, the Commissioner's Network really is that model of what the middle school of the future wants to look like. The bulk of the work has been done for us. I don't think we have to dig in here with 18 months to go and totally reinvent the wheel. I think DMG should get together with Dr. Conway, Dr. DiBacco, maybe look at the Commissioner's Network as a model, see if that's a model that could work. I do not see us blowing up the model, taking 3-6 months when there's 18 months to go. I think the basis for our charge is there. Mr. Levenson agreed, stating, we have to let the Superintendents open up school. It should not be a huge lift for them to, in the same way that we had a discussion or two around the high school, for us to be able to get what's in their minds, to understand what's in the Commissioner model, and be able to put together a document that gives you a sense of direction and vision that would let people know, if we merged, this is a general non-binding direction we're thinking we'd want to go in. It acknowledges there'd be some changes, suggestions to where they're going. Again, it doesn't bind future boards or principals to it. We can do this without a big lift on their part.

Mr. Bshara noted that grants, as they run out, could create a financial impact on the district.

Ms. Hyder feels that the recommendation to eliminate the Curriculum Department at the Central Office level is devastating to successful implementation of existing and new curriculum. It would eliminate support to teachers, professional development, and make instruction less effective. How would this model be supported and effective given the elimination of a curriculum department? Mr. Levenson explained that there is another document coming that would give a view of what the Central Office would look like – roles, responsibilities, how things would be done He asked that this question be put off to a later meeting where it can be fully explained and addressed.

TRSSC Next Steps – Discussion/Possible action

Mr. Gildea stated, we will be picking up the middle school program of studies, probably not before late September. Both Ansonia and Derby have provided DMG the facilities recommendations – the work they feel they would do to their schools. They will be putting that in the model and having discussion on the equalization model at a future meeting. The next big items appear to be finalizing the equalization and finalizing the program of studies. Once we finalize the program of studies and equalization, that will be the lead into finance. Joe and I are working with John DiCarlo on a timeframe that will be shared with the group.

Point of Good Order

None presented.

Public Session

Mr. Gildea asked if any member of the public wished to speak.

Karen Kemmesies stated, you're doing a fine job.

Laura Harris stated, I want to thank the Committee for their commitment and all the meetings you've gone to. I appreciate all the time you've put in.

Mr. Gildea asked three times if any member of the public wished to speak. There being none, he declared the public session closed.

Adjournment

Mr. Kurtyka MOVED to adjourn; SECONDED by Ms. DeGennaro. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Trish Bruder

Patricia M. Bruder
Secretary