



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



MINUTES
Monday, September 28, 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	present 7:20	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 – August 24, 2020

Mr. Kurtyka MOVED to approve the minutes of August 24, 2020; SECONDED by Mr. Phipps. Motion carried unanimously.

Treasurer’s Report

Dr. Adamowski reported that he approved payment for minutes for the recording secretary. There are no new invoices to approve.

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

TRSSC CDE Progress Report

Mr. Gildea included a progress report that the Committee needs to send to the State Department of Education.

Dr. Adamowski thanked the Co-Chairs for their work on this item and MOVED to accept the report and send it on to the State; SECONDED by Ms. DeGennaro. Motion carried unanimously.

Program of Study with DMG – Discussion / Possible Action

Mr. Gildea noted that in May, the Committee signed off on a work plan. As part of that work plan there were meetings that DMG had agreed to participate in as part of the original contract, so this closes out the fourth meeting. Our hope today is to make sure that you have all your questions answered on the program of studies as well as equalization. In speaking with NVCOG, we do have flexibility for a meeting or two more after this, but please try to get answers to any questions you have; we can deliberate as a group after today.

Mr. Jaumann added, the idea is to have DMG go through the curriculum and all of that information tonight, and additionally discuss the equalization sheet that was presented to everybody with the understanding that it is going to be discussed over the next two meetings, starting with October 7th and going forward, as well as talking about equalization and our finance discussions.

Mr. Nate Levenson led the discussion on the programs of studies for the High School which was discussed in part at the last meeting, and then the Middle School and Elementary programs of studies.

DMG has updated the High School program of studies based on the most current course offerings. He reminded the Committee that this is non-binding. He also noted in the new program of studies two nice things happened – courses that one town had and the other didn't become available to more students, and this is an opportunity to provide a wider range of courses and offerings, and more connections to college and outside offerings.

Mr. Levenson explained how middle school programs of study differ from high school programs of studies. He again noted that this is a non-binding discussion, it is designed to be cost-neutral, and it is not DMG's vision and plan, but a plan that came out of conversation with the district leaders. He described the various benefits this program of studies could have for the middle school students, and highlighted career exploration. Ms. Hyder felt that the picture Mr. Levenson was painting was not deliverable by this Committee but would be the role of the Regional Board of Education to deliver. Mr. Levenson explained that it's a vision, but it's there because this Committee asked him to describe the benefits, it is DMG's professional belief that you shouldn't do a program of studies without some clarity as to what you're trying to accomplish, when schools come together it is the natural timing for this kind of reflection, and while there is no guarantee it's a realistic expectation that schools should improve as a result of regionalization.

Mr. Levenson continued, the core middle school subjects of English, Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies are currently what you have, and that would continue, with integration of some career-based themes. He then discussed rigor, allowing some students the opportunity to earn high school credits in their 8th grade year.

Ms. Hyder asked if this program of studies is a final document as she felt it is not specific enough. Mr. Levenson explained that this Committee will decide what to put into the final document. When DMG helps districts develop a program of studies, it is more than just a list; in this way DMG shares the rationale and the possibilities.

Mr. Levenson then discussed intervention for kids who struggle in general education, in special education, for English language learners. The idea was to continue with the SRBI programs that currently exist at both schools. There is the hope that if money was freed up through regionalization a bigger investment in SRBI could occur in not just the middle school but in K-12.

Student voice – students have input into which courses are offered; student choice says kids get to choose within what courses are offered. The goal of student choice and voice – something being adopted by more and more middle schools across the country – can really increase student engagement. The classic electives of art and music – today we’re seeing middle school offerings such as computer-based art courses and writing electronic music. Sports statistics is an incredibly popular course as an elective, in addition to 7th grade math or algebra I. He has also seen the number one choice in an elective course to understand the big bang – Stephen Hawkins’ theory on the birth of the universe, and number two was to read science fiction and be able to talk about it.

Teacher planning time – the goal is to provide teachers time to plan. The district leaders felt it was important for them to have time to plan both by grade level and by content.

Mr. Levenson concluded the middle school program of studies discussing socio-emotional learning – the theory of action is that SEL should be a school-wide focus on particular competencies and those should be woven into lessons and activities. There should be more of an effort to roll it into policies, practices and course materials.

[It was noted for the record that Mr. Luneau is present.]

Dr. Adamowski commended Mr. Levenson and the two Superintendents on their work. He noted that he appreciates the inclusion of the gifted program, the socio-emotional emphasis and the aspect of choice – all things that appeal to the developmental needs of the trans-adolescents and create the potential for a much stronger school than may exist in either community. He asked, what is the anticipated enrollment in grades 6, 7 and 8? He wondered if there is any opportunity for organization into houses. Ms. Carpenter replied that for the 2021-22 school year it’s 840 students, and then it drops to 814, 812 and 801. Dr. Adamowski stated, that could lend itself to four houses of 200 students each with a team of teachers that would have those students over a three-year period and create a small school environment where the students knew their teachers and teachers were accountable for students over that period of time.

Ms. Hyder asked, would you recommend that our group highlight or italicize whatever might be new to the regionalized school district so that for those people who aren't involved in the school system but who are taxpayers and want to make decisions can see what is new versus what is already in place?

Mr. Levenson explained that this is a report to the State, not a marketing document – it is “here's what we're doing and here's why we're doing it.” When you go out to talk to people, you'll need to create the one, or three-page version of this with the things that are new and better.

Ms. Carpenter reviewed the Elementary program of studies. The elementary plan doesn't require the consolidation of schools; each school will continue to have its identity as it currently exists. The thing that should change is that there has to be some alignment across the four elementary schools in comparing those students for 6th, 7th, 8th grades and for high school as well. The recommendation in this document is to have administrators and teachers from across the four schools work together to identify and align upon a curriculum for pre-K through grade 5, and then implement that with fidelity, ensuring that students get to 6th grade at the same point in ELA and reading, the same point in math, and are ready to be successful at the middle school and beyond.

The current core classes, the current special classes, can be offered in a similar manner to the existing courses at Derby and Ansonia elementary schools. The strong socio-emotional support from staff that I heard when I spoke to both communities would continue to remain.

Ms. Hyder asked, in regard to the last paragraph of the elementary plan, in terms of staffing, it talks about the central office – the district level staff. There's only an ELA specialist and a math specialist in the recommendation for a curriculum department. We currently have more than that in Derby alone for our district-level curriculum. What human resources will have to change in this report to support the last paragraph? Mr. Levenson replied, that is a great question which we're not answering tonight because we actually have a session or two set up in the future to go through all of that very comprehensively.

Dr. Adamowski noted that he is very happy to see the inclusion of a gifted program and the STEM higher-level grouping. After Ms. Carpenter's explanation, Dr. Adamowski concluded, if we wanted to pursue this given the absence of this in Ansonia, we would need to create some provision for gifted and talented staffing, teachers of the gifted, at each elementary school, not only those in Derby, in terms of this regional plan.

Mr. Jaumann asked, what additional information would be necessary here if we did transition from 4 to 3 elementary schools. Ms. Carpenter replied, there would be a need for additional work to ensure that those three elementary schools have aligned curriculum as there would with the four elementary schools, but also that any schools that are being combined, there's a new identity that's formed at those schools rather than the existing identity and just pushing some kids in. Mr. Levenson added, whether you have three or four, the act of consolidating

means you have to think about school identity and culture just a little bit more than you would otherwise.

Dr. Adamowski asked what the status of preschool is in each community. Dr. DiBacco replied, we have over 100 kids in our pre-K program; one at Mead and one located in modulars outside of Ansonia Middle School. We have regular and special ed students included in our Pre-K programs.

Dr. Conway stated, we've removed them from the elementary schools some years back and moved it into a wing of the high school that was vacant. A renovated area now houses the Pre-K all in one location.

Dr. Adamowski asked, in either a 3 elementary or 4 elementary school model, will there be the enrollment capacity of elementary schools to have their own Preschools that would feed into their own Kindergartens. Mr. Levenson replied that he will double check and get back to the Committee on the question of there being enough space and funds for each elementary school to house its own associated preschool.

Ms. Hyder noted that it might be important to look at what is most financially efficient – is it most efficient to separate into the various schools or to be all in one location, especially if kids receive services.

Equalization amongst towns with DMG – Discussion / Possible Action

Mr. Levenson recapped, we tried to get it down to a handful of questions, if you answered them, you've then answered how you want to handle equalization. DMG has summarized its sense of the Committee's thoughtful decisions. Ms. Carpenter updated the numbers that the Committee requested. The Co-Chairmen shared worksheets with Ansonia and Derby Schools. While in the first equalization document the last column represented only the code violations, it now represents whatever combination of columns 1, 2 and 3 that each town chose. Ms. Carpenter explained that the cost estimates are based on what Silver-Petrucci provided as the estimate of work for each of the items.

She continued, the table shows the cost of the renovations and the expansions together in each regional scenario. Mr. Gildea discussed the zeroing out of Derby High School, yet 1/3 of that building is occupied with Raise, Little Raider University, and Advanced Manufacturing. He asked where those 200 kids are going. He was intrigued by Dr. Adamowski's suggestion of filtering the preschool kids into their respective kindergartens. So, if Little Raider University is pulled out of the high school, there would still have to be some cost.

He discussed the Advanced Manufacturing program with all its equipment – none of the renovations or scenarios took into account the physical space required for the equipment. He felt it is unfair to zero that out without providing an alternative location. There also is an alternative high school that has a body of students to consider as well.

Mr. Levenson stated, maybe as a next step, DMG can provide in this plan where they're going and if there are any costs of either them going, or staying, that haven't already been captured in this chart.

Mr. Kurtyka expressed his concern about the grants and donations that were received for the manufacturing program and the equipment and asked if the city would have to return the money they received. He noted that he is not in favor of closing the high school, and his preference is to leave the programs there.

Mr. Phipps asked if the manufacturing equipment could be moved if an expansion was done at Ansonia High School to house it. Mr. Levenson stated, we have fresh numbers of the costs to move it, renovating space with that equipment in mind, inclusive of the electrical, heating and ventilation, moving it, and installing it the way it is today. Mr. Gildea noted that the cost associated with housing those kids has to be in there. Mr. Jaumann agreed that the Committee has to have that information in front of them.

Ms. Hyder explained, Raise Academy, which some people refer to as “the alternative high school,” doesn’t function in isolation. The students who receive support in Raise Academy eat lunch in the cafeteria with their peers of Derby High School, they are at times in classes in Derby High School; it’s not completely separated from the High School. On the contrary, the goal is to eventually, completely release them back into mainstream and function and perform to their best in the regular school. Raise Academy wouldn’t reach its goal if it were to remain in the Derby High School building on its own. And kids aren’t in the manufacturing room all day long, they’re kids who take some classes there who go to Derby High School. Mr. Phipps compared Raise Academy to the Pace Program at Ansonia High School. They need a little extra attention, but they can also work with the mainstream students; it’s basically the same program. He would think that any high school program of that type will be located where the regional high school is located.

Ms. Carpenter explained, those 180 students are accounted for, however DMG will follow up and look into whether the renovation includes space for the manufacturing program at Ansonia High School.

She reviewed the table again, explaining that the numbers at the top reflect the code violations, the work that was selected, and the expansions for any of the regional scenarios. The table outlines how the costs would be distributed between the two cities if the buildings were contributed to the regional school district, in which there would have to be some equalized cost sharing, or if the buildings were leased, in which the only costs that are split between the two cities are the costs of renovations and expansion at the schools that are utilized by the regional district. Whether or not that is the agreement is dependent upon that lease. The lease may include that renovations are split by the two towns based on enrollment, but the lease might also say that the renovations are the responsibility of the owning district. The nonregional costs are the costs associated with the renovations and then in a few instances, the small expansions at the buildings that would not be used by the regional district. Those renovations include, for example, in a 9-12 regional scenario would include all of the elementary school renovations and code violations that were selected. Whether or not those would be done is up to the city who owns that building and the agreement with the State. There are the small expansions which are transferring those Pre-K programs from Ansonia

Middle School to the elementary and from Derby High School to the elementary, which are also outlined in the table.

Mr. Gildea discussed Mr. Bshara's point on equalization from a few weeks ago. He explained, if you just looked at this solely a 9-12 high school, Ansonia High School, if the building is contributed, would be owed \$7.7 million and Derby would have to pay in \$14 million. But if the buildings are leased, Ansonia would go to owing \$4.4 million and Derby would go to owing \$2.3 million. So in that scenario, the Ansonia taxpayer, by us leasing it, in essence, is losing \$11 million. They're going from being owed \$7 million to having to pay \$4 million. That's an \$11 million swing. If you go to a 6-12 regionalized school district, very similar. If the buildings were contributed, Ansonia would owe \$9.5 million, Derby would owe \$492,000. If they're leased, Ansonia would now drop down from \$9.5 million owed to \$6.2 million, and Derby would go up to \$3.8 million. That would be a \$3.3 million swing to the Derby taxpayer. We'd be saying listen, because we're leasing the building, the Derby taxpayer now has to pay \$3.3 million more in a 6-12, conversely in a 9-12 if we lease it, Ansonia would have to have an almost \$12 million swing. He concluded that the Committee has to figure out as a body how to take that into account and see these numbers become much more equalized.

Mr. Levenson pointed out, when the buildings are contributed, the towns no longer own the buildings. When they're leased, you still own the buildings.

Mr. Gildea stated, if you look at Region 15, that really doesn't matter how long they've been a regionalized school system. Whether they own it or lease it is not that important. So if I'm an Ansonia taxpayer and somebody from Ansonia says to me, listen, if we contributed it we would have gotten a \$7.7 million check, but since we're leasing it, now we're writing a \$4.4 million check. If I'm an Ansonia taxpayer I want there to be some recognition of that, some equalization, some offset of that. Conversely, if you regionalize 6-12, same thing. If you're a Derby taxpayer we're saying, if we contribute the buildings, we're only writing a \$493,000 check. But the benefit you get for leasing, which could be a 15-20 year lease, is now we have to write a \$3.8 million check. It's something not for today, but something we're going to have to take into account and resolve.

Mr. Levenson added that if the cities are going to use the lease route, they can put any terms in the lease they want. If there's a \$3 million disadvantage to one town or the other, you could address that through the lease. There's a lot of flexibility there, if you could all agree to what you wanted to do, the lease lets you do it. Contributed buildings does not give you nearly that flexibility.

Ms. DeGennaro asked, aren't these numbers here based on the proportionate number of students in each district with Ansonia having 64 percent and Derby having 36 percent. How do those numbers get to be equalized at some point based on the share of students that are in each district?

Mr. Jaumann stated, I think where Rich was going in his original comment is that under the lease situation you can include different terms. You can require certain upgrades, or if the code violations need to be remedied before the lease takes place, the individual community

can take care of certain things like that in order to equalize the value of the split being contributed. We're not just dealing with contributed versus leased, but you also have the ability to require the home districts to perform certain amounts of work, up to a certain dollar value, before the building is leased at that point in time, to equalize those numbers out.

Mr. Gildea agreed, stating, that will be a future conversation. Today the important thing is to understand the numbers.

Mr. Gildea asked the Committee if they had any questions of DMG, recognizing that they owe the Committee a little bit more work on the program of studies, on calculating the space associated with some of the utilizations at the high school.

Mr. Bshara asked if the Committee was provided a breakout on the Derby Middle School/Derby High School evaluation between the two buildings? Mr. Gildea replied that the value is \$25 million for both buildings. Ms. Carpenter explained that the only valuation DMG had, which came from the City of Derby, has the two campuses together on that single property. Because they share a property we were not able to split the two buildings apart from one another.

Mr. Gildea thanked Mr. Levenson and Ms. Carpenter, and noted that there will be another meeting for the finance piece at some future date. Mr. Jaumann thanked them for their hard work.

TRSSC Next Steps – Discussion / Possible Action

There will be two meetings in October where the Committee will dig into equalization, have honest discussions and work on narrowing the scope. The Committee will start some financial discussion, and at some point, will begin discussing the governance. Mr. Gildea and Mr. Jaumann will continue to talk and will put together an agenda for the next meeting.

Point of Good Order

None presented.

Public Session

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

Adjournment

At 8:38 p.m., Mr. Kurtyka MOVED to adjourn; SECONDED by Ms. DeGennaro. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Trish Bruder

Patricia M. Bruder
Secretary