



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



MINUTES

Wednesday, April 7, 2021 – 7:30 p.m.
ZOOM virtual conferencing platform via the Internet

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 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	Dr. Joshua Stuart	present

Others participating:

NVCOG Staff John DiCarlo, Derby Superintendent of Schools Dr. Conway, Ansonia Superintendent of Schools Dr. DiBacco.

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.

Meeting Dates and Times – Discussion/Possible Action

Mr. Bshara MOVED to change the meeting schedule to 7:30 p.m. the 1st Wednesday and 4th Tuesday of each month; SECONDED by Mr. Phipps. Motion carried unanimously.

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

Rich Bshara
Barbara DeGennaro
Tara Hyder

Ronald Luneau, Jr.
Chris Phipps
Joshua Stuart

Approval of Minutes – March 23, 2021

Mr. Kurtyka MOVED to approve the minutes of March 23, 2021; SECONDED by Dr. Shuart. Motion carried unanimously.

Treasurer’s Report – Discussion/Possible Action

Dr. Adamowski reported that there have been no expenditures since the last meeting. The clerical for the March 23 meeting will be paid this week.

Review and Discuss DMG Report “Summary of Savings Pre-K – 12 Regionalization” – Discussion/Possible Action

Mr. Gildea recapped that DMG has given us what they had recommended as a future staffing model and what a combined school system would look like. The Superintendents of the respective towns then worked collaboratively and gave us a model using, for the most part, that same staffing number, and they moved some positions around, and made some minor changes. Then we had the philosophical discussion of pay, to what degree are we going to bolster the programs or bolster the staffing models. Then we asked the Superintendents to work together to provide us what they would consider to be the optimal central office. That is where we find ourselves today.

We thought the Superintendents would give us a presentation of what that optimal central office would look like and then we would Segway into the financial overview of that. We’ll present the numbers tonight. We talked to John DiCarlo and Rick Dunne, and DMG is scheduled to tentatively come back on 5/5. On number 9, some of the numbers seem to be off, so we’ll also be asking DMG to take a harder look at that and discuss at our next meeting.

Dr. Conway and Dr. DiBacco met to discuss and walk through the previous two proposals, with a focus on what they found missing in their districts in terms of staffing and support for the staff.

The Superintendents proposed the following in their review, explanations by Dr. Conway:

A Chief Operating Officer or Chief of Staff to assist with a lot of the day-to-day tasks and activities in the Central Office. Setting up things, responding to things, and supporting other staff all around.

A STEM Consultant and a College and Career Specialist – knowing where we’re going in education now and a focus on career as much as college, and the additional programs we feel we’ll be adding to both Ansonia and Derby at this time which are dual-credit courses through HCC, through Griffin Hospital, with the Advanced Manufacturing, our Allied Health programs. We’ll be adding career-like programs and pathways for our students. To really do it right you need support and somebody overseeing that process.

With the 1-1 programs you’ll see we’ve both added in our district, we were 6-12, and Ansonia and Derby are both now Pre-K through 12. That needs additional staffing in terms of technology, and we envision physical technology and instructional technology support needs growing as we move forward.

What we clearly saw in looking at other districts, and we are both deficient in today, is administrative support in terms of our secretaries. We added three secretaries back in. Our three are in addition to the nine you see listed in Simone’s report.

Dr. DiBacco noted that this was a rare opportunity to sit with another Superintendent and imagine what a district could look like – the dialogue was great. It was actually to muse over what the future could hold in a district. One thing we cannot state enough is the support for our teachers.

For example, the data integration – we’ve only seen from COVID the amount of technology we’ve had thrown at our teachers. We have this mountain of technology, but how do you use it, how do you use it practically every day, how could you use that moving forward. We have a lot of people that could help fix infrastructure, servers, fix devices, but to really teach and how we could use the technology to enhance our instruction – we’re remiss. It’s something that needs to be supported.

Also, the use of confidential secretaries. There are some things that can be done if you had a secretary that was that true assistant – of the caliber that they could handle some of the reporting, some of the structures that you need to have. Right now, everything that we have in both offices falls on that individual that holds that office. You should really have a secretary there to handle some of that flow. It happens in many places and I bet there are secretaries in other districts.

The college and career readiness, I can’t state enough – if we’re looking where the job markets are and to get our kids ready for a global marketplace, if we just think post-secondary education is for everyone, that’s not a reality. To have someone that really has boots on the ground and can help us with that, those things that Dr. Conway particularly described, I think that’s scratching the surface. It’s great for us to have that conversation about what a district could look like. These are the additions that could make some things move a lot smoother and really bring something to the district.

Dr. Adamowski suggested putting the position in the high school budget, possibly through the repurposing of one of the guidance positions that might have been removed. It's an important function to have.

Dr. Adamowski stated, I will preface what I'm going to say by indicating how much this exercise illustrates how under-sourced and underfunded both districts have been in their separate operations as very small districts. Having said that, I think we have to be very careful that we don't skew the savings from regionalization toward the central office. It needs to be skewed toward the education program. I would have a difficult time supporting having a chief operating officer/chief of staff and an assistant superintendent. In a district of this size which is a little over 3,000 students the norm would be to have one or the other. Similarly, I would see the math consultant and the STEM consultant being combined into a single position which is a STEM consultant that would deal with both math and science. The career college specialist – my question was around that being a high school position. I agree with the support positions in terms of the secretaries and the technology enhancements.

Mr. Gildea stated, in the program of studies we added a number of classes that the students would be able to take advantage of – some were foreign languages, some were electives. There were a number of program enhancements or potential program enhancements.

Ms. Hyder stated, a STEM consultant has a whole different certification. If we're thinking about creating more robust programming and giving kids more opportunities, I think that one way to do that is by having someone with that specialization and certification. I know mathematics is intertwined in there, but so is science, technology and engineering. I agree with Dr. Adamowski that it's important to make sure that what we're doing is making programming better for kids. I would support keeping the STEM consultant.

Mr. Gildea stated, once we go through the financial aspects, we have to center in on a model similar to what we did with the program of studies. These are discussions we'll have to flesh out a little bit more.

Dr. Conway discussed the separation of the operations and the instruction side of things. Other agencies have that clear separation. We tend to have that assistant superintendent performing a combined teaching and learning, and operations support. Now we're back to a teaching and learning director, no assistant superintendent. If we have the opportunity to do both, and each one has their responsibilities and they are separate, I think you do justice to the teaching and learning by having that person solely supporting that area and not being relied on for everything else.

Dr. Conway stated, certainly any one of these positions that we added could be looked at as combined into one, as taking a teacher and giving them a period or two off to do, as we do today, coaching or other administrative roles. I thought the purpose of this exercise was, "don't think the way that we always think; think a little bit differently as if money wasn't the

object, how would you want that constructed.” Dr. Adamowski stated, absolutely, and I think the value in this is that you’ve identified some key functions that are not being addressed by either district now that do need to be addressed in the new district. The question now is, how do you do this as economically as possible?

Mr. Gildea stated, I think that this body will ultimately have to select a model, and it doesn’t have to be an all or nothing. It doesn’t have to be the first model or the second model or the third, it could be the third minus one. I think it’s an exercise we have to do.

Dr. Adamowski stated, I would be interested in knowing, given this as the starting point, what the priorities of the two Superintendents would be if we were to say, come back with a staffing plan for central office that is 20 percent over the DMG recommendation. What would it look like, what would the priorities be?

Review and Discuss DMG Report “Equalization Decision Making” – Discussion/Possible Action

Mr. Gildea stated, I would say I’m going to go over this big picture and if there are any questions, we could try to answer them here, but for the most part we’ll come back and DMG will be here.

Quick overview – we already walked through this one time and looked at, how we took the per pupil numbers, how they took the per pupil numbers – the overall per pupil, they factored in the enrollment and they came out with the contributions per town. This is a full big-picture look of the three models and what it would be like in savings.

This is that original DMG Central Office Leadership – you all have this. Then the elementary school level, then the general education teachers. It’s going to be the same for all models. Salary changes – they talk about the benefits, that they had to make estimates, they had to use something as a base. I think they used the Derby salaries and Ansonia benefits. They factored in utilities, maintenance. Then we get down to the savings, the per pupil expenditures in each city. Here’s what we focus on today – the total savings by town projected for four years. The 2021 was projected budget, not the actual budget. But when they started, they added in again what each town had a history of spending. I think Derby was 1.7 over the last four years, and Ansonia was higher – 2.5.

DMG is going to go over the breakdown of the spending in much more detail. The breakdown of the spending by the four elementary schools shows the total spending of \$36 million; the per pupil spending, the total, and it shows what each school would spend if they factored the enrollment in every year. In the four elementary school model the savings would be \$2.2 million in the first year - again, this is the DMG staffing model - \$2.2 in the second year.

Then they do something very different in staying with the three schools – they talk about what the spending is, the fewer administrators, less utilities, so the spending is different. In this

scenario there's more savings for both towns – again, the DMG model - each year, about \$2.9 million. Ansonia's savings drops in this model; Derby's savings increases. Again, DMG will be here to go over each line item. We wanted to get this sheet out to everybody in the event you had questions.

Mr. Bshara asked, has your enrollment gone down over the last five years? Dr. Conway replied, yes, our enrollment has gone down over the past five years; I don't know the exact number off the top of my head. Mr. Bshara asked, did your budget go down over the last five years with the enrollment, as projected to do in a regional format? Dr. Conway replied, we've reduced the staffing by those same number of teachers. Mr. Bshara asked, in terms of the cost to the City, you didn't reduce your budget over the last five years. Dr. Conway stated no, it didn't go up as much as it otherwise would have. The increases were offset by the savings. If you watch news, we got a zero percent increase there for two years in a row. Mr. Bshara stated, my point is, this is projecting, if we do this in a split variety, that in fact there will be a reduction of cost to the town for education based on enrollment, when in reality as an individual group for both of us, numbers go down and really the overall expense doesn't go down from the prior year, it kind of holds itself. I don't know how that interplays with what we're talking about.

Number 2, what is the Derby Board of Education's budget? I thought it was closer to \$24 million. Mr. Gildea replied, we're asking for \$19.6 million this year. Mr. Bshara asked, does that include the medical? Mr. Gildea replied no, the town pays our medical. Mr. Bshara asked, would that not be included in these numbers? Apples-to-apples, our medical is in our budget; it should be in the Derby budget. What's going to happen if we merge? Is Derby going to pay your medical? Mr. Gildea replied, that is an excellent question for Simone. I don't know if she included that. Mr. Bshara stated, I'm getting confused as to, is that a real saving or is that just because they haven't included all of the pieces of the puzzle.

Mr. Gildea stated, another point, they actually show the Ansonia spending going up, and show the Derby savings going down. That is probably not realistic.

Mr. Gildea continued, then we go to the second model where they tried to match existing resources, I think they added a position or two in the first go-around. Again, they factor in utilities. In this model, they populated maintenance, transportation, systemwide costs, special education costs. Then they take the same \$36 million and the same \$37 million, do the same enrollment, they came up with the per pupil expenditure.

Then when they go to the four elementary school model, the savings in this scenario is not quite as dramatic but there was staff added here as well. In this model, in the four elementary school model the savings are pretty dramatic in the difference between the two school systems. The savings are very much skewed to Derby based upon the per pupil enrollment of where we ended up.

In the three-school model, it's a little better, a little more savings. The savings are more in Derby's favor, and part of that is the enrollment, for certain.

Mr. Jaumann stated, in the central office, Rich had asked the difference between the document that Dr. Conway and Dr. DiBacco were presenting, and the savings here on this model presented by DMG. The difference was \$286,242 in the Superintendent slides, and \$325,127. It's a difference of about \$39,000. We'll have to ask Simone. There's also a discrepancy in the number of positions whereby this one indicates 38, and the one in the slideshow earlier was 32. In the middle model, the difference is about \$500,000. I don't know what the head count is specifically; I'm assuming the optimal, every position filled under the after, I think 38 is probably closer to an accurate count, which is four more positions than what we currently have.

Mr. Gildea stated, here's the difference though, the very first model they presented was 19. That was the \$1.6 million. I don't think any of us think that the 19 is realistic. Now whether 32 or 38 are realistic – that's something we have to come up with for certain. It is helpful to understand the dynamics of the number of employees we're going to have.

Mr. Bshara asked, do you see the total spending for Derby? \$23 million versus this \$18 million. I don't know if this is skewing numbers or not. Ansonia's 37 number includes about 32 of operating, and about 5 million of supplemental educational grants like Alliance, Priority School, IDEA. I would assume that's what the number in Derby should be equal to. But because of the variations or some of the pieces where if the city is paying or has the medical in their budget, are there other things? I believe, even with ours, it should be included as part of in-kind services, should be flowing into these numbers, and I'm not totally sure it is. I think we should at least verify what numbers are in these totals that they're utilizing for both towns to be sure we're all in sync here. This total on current total spending is almost \$59 million. Yet on the graph we saw a little while ago, it was only \$56 million. I don't know if the savings are skewed because of that or not when they start talking about millions of dollars in savings.

Mr. Gildea stated, I think your point is fair. Simone will come back to it. I know our base operating budget is \$19 million and that doesn't count the medical. I know that our Alliance Grant and Priority School District Grant is in the neighborhood of probably \$3-4 million. That 23 could very well be the grants plus our operating budget and not our medical, which is an excellent point. We wanted people to have this so when she comes back, we have all these questions locked and loaded and ready to go.

Projections for this set of tables is based on the annual growth of the operating budget for Ansonia and Derby, respectively. DMG assumed that each district would increase its rate [inaudible] for the past five years, regardless of enrollment. Another point is, Ansonia has increased their budget to a greater degree than Derby. That may be a variable that we have to explore. I believe they took Ansonia's per pupil and went by 2.5 because Ansonia has been

more successful in getting funding from their town than Derby, and they may have used the lower figure for Derby.

Some of our questions are program-based, about whether we speak combining positions. I know Simone and Nate will be here and we'll delve into what goes into each number, what the spending doesn't include. Is it apples-to-apples, are you including grants in both towns, are you including medical in each town, are you including in-kind. We'll try to get exactly what's in each bucket.

Mr. Bshara stated, with this, we're looking at the expenditure side of the ledger with this, whether it includes the grants or not. This is for the regional section. When it's all said and done, there's going to be money that flows back to the individual cities. That is the question I've been asking for a number of weeks here. What will happen to the revenue stream to the cities to help fund what needs to go to the region?

Dr. Conway replied, is this regarding the ECS funding and grant funding? Mr. Bshara replied, ECS, Alliance, when we merge are they going to reduce the overall between the two cities because we're now merged? Those are important things on the City side. The ECS piece is one of the bigger pieces – will the cities have to add additional taxpayer-based funding in order to equal the total revenue or expenditures that we're currently doing?

Dr. Conway explained, we met with Kathy Dempsey twice on this now; they do not have an answer for us on that. The only thing she was able to share is, at least in the first two years, as you transition to this, there would be no impact. But beyond that it would be difficult to even project, according to them, because of all the different numbers and formulas, according to her, that the different grants as well as the ECS funding are based on. As you know, the ECS funding is in a transition period right now so they were not able to predict whether that was going to change our funding moving forward. The only thing she could share, in the first two years it would probably be status quo.

Mr. Gildea stated, I know we'll talk about the Equalization document and the 85 percent versus the 95 percent. For all the talk the State's done about wanting to encourage regionalization, they're really not doing much to provide us incentive to do so. It's really a point where at some point when you reach the State leaders and you read people like the Senate Pro Tem or the Majority Leader, they espouse the benefits of regionalization, but they have yet to put their money where their mouth is. Here you have two cities doing the best that they can, boots on the ground, trying to find a path forward. You look at some of these savings numbers and with the staffing model we may want, and they're not great. I think if these people really want to wax philosophical about the benefits of regionalization, I would suggest they come off their soapbox a little bit more and look at two cities that are actually trying to do this, and put their money where their mouth is now. That's been one of the disheartening things for me, truthfully.

Mr. Bshara stated, their game is the same as ours, just on a bigger scale. They're trying to save money and find ways to help their process just like we're doing here. I understand it – I don't always agree with it – but I've been here long enough to understand it.

Mr. Jaumann stated, but in addition to that, it's simply being able to get some sense of security that the revenue side, if we're going to do this, being able to be secure that we're not going to see a mass influx on the city side of a need for revenue, because the revenue sources that are traditionally coming from the State and the grants are not there. Beyond the two years, and what's written in the Statute, it sounds to me like due to the complexities of everything we can't get any reasonable assurances that we're going to be okay on a five-year projected. We can project our expenses, but when it comes to the revenue side and making sure we can meet those expenses, we can't get any sense of security. That's very concerning.

Mr. Gildea stated, to Joe's point, even to try to get a simple answer about the revenue and ECS grant and what that looks like in a regionalized school system, to be told, "yeah, for two years you'll be okay." Oh, okay, let's go sell that "for two years we'll be okay" out on the street. It's crazy stuff. They've got to do better.

He continued, I appreciate all the questions that have come out. Joe and I did talk and we always knew that DMG would come back. They will go over this with a fine-toothed comb. You will be able to ask anything you want. We're trying to maximize their time and get as many questions out front as we could.

Mr. Jaumann stated, in addition to that, I would strongly encourage anyone that has any additional questions, please email us so we can get that information to them.

Dr. Shuart asked about the proposed additions – have we ever received the Superintendents' drafts or did those go directly to DMG? Mr. Gildea explained, the first DMG recommendation we've seen. The second one with the 32, the Superintendents made a presentation to us on that. Simone did not get the savings back to us. Their presentation was the springboard for "what is the optimum central office," which is the 38 today. Today was the first time we've every seen the 38. We saw the 32 previously. I don't think we saw the financial numbers – today was the first for that.

Review and Discuss DMG Report "Equalization Decision Making" – Discussion / Possible Action

And TRSSC Next Steps – Discussion / Possible Action

Mr. Gildea explained, on item 9, there was a mistake in that document. Joe and I communicated with Simone and she's aware that there's a mistake in the document that they have to correct. We also had a few other questions on it. I would not spend a whole lot of time looking at the Equalization Report because it's wrong. I talked to Simone today; they will

have that to us in time for our 4/27 meeting. We will be able to review the Equalization document. 4/27 will be the Equalization document and any other financial questions.

He continued, 5/5 is really going to be an impactful meeting. I would be prepared to probably put some time in that night. There is a financial cost for DMG being here so we're going to want to make the most of that meeting. After that meeting, we'll really start to hone in on what our future staffing levels look like.

Point of Good Order

Ms. Hyder acknowledged and thanked Dr. Conway and Dr. DiBacco once again for putting in all of that additional time, work and research. This is all additional and not what they necessarily signed up to do. We do appreciate all the time they're putting into this. Whenever there's a charge or an ask, you do that, and we really appreciate that.

Dr. Conway stated, I look at the 26 other people in this call. You, yourself and everybody on this Committee is putting in countless hours. This is the least we can do. We actually enjoy this. This stuff, as Dr. Adamowski could probably attest to, this is, whenever you're doing it, it's kind of fun. Thank you.

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.

Adjournment

Dr. Shuart MOVED to adjourn; SECONDED by Mr. Kurtyka. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Trish Bruder

Patricia M. Bruder
Secretary