

May 8, 2007  
6:30 PM

## Merger and Collaboration Workgroup

Present:  
Rob Ide, Jane Woodhouse

The group met briefly to report on contacts that have been made with other schools in the area to discuss possible mergers or collaborations.

Jane received information from Winton Goodrich, via Jo Anne Post regarding governance options for schools in Vermont. Those documents include:  
2005 Governance Options  
Vermont School Districts

A copy of both is attached to these minutes.

We also received some basic census information that was requested at the last meeting. These 2 documents, from Martha Evangelista are:  
07/08 Enrollment Numbers  
Expected Kindergarten Students

Again, a copy of both is attached to these minutes.

Jane reported on her conversation with Nancy Franks, then chair of the Barnet School Board. Nancy was interested in getting a copy of the Winton Goodrich documents to present to the Barnet School Board. She did not know to what extent Barnet would be interested in pursuing collaboration with Peacham but she personally felt it would be worth discussing. The requested materials were emailed to her in early May.

Rob reported on his conversation with Fred Kitchel that was very positive. Danville is willing to sit and talk with our group in the near future. Rob will contact Fred regarding the possibility of a more specific conversation at our next meeting, which is tentatively scheduled for June 12<sup>th</sup>.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jane Woodhouse  
592-3062

# Vermont School Districts



Vermont law grants governing authority to several types of entities. See the descriptions below for more details.

**Town, City and Incorporated School Districts (262)** Each town or city in Vermont constitutes a school district. The only exceptions are the handful of towns that contain "incorporated school districts."

Each of Vermont's 12 incorporated school districts operate under a charter granted by the legislature. These districts usually include just part of a town, with the section not included forming the town school

district.

**Joint Contract Boards (5)** Ten school districts have contracted to operate schools through the formation of joint contract boards. Each town maintains its own school board as well as sending voting representatives to the joint contract board (Jay-Westfield, Chittenden-Mendon, Athens-Grafton, Hancock-Granville, and Whitingham-Wilmington are examples).

**Union School Districts (39)** A union school district is established when two or more school districts agree jointly to own, construct, and operate schools (Harwood & Brattleboro Union Schools are examples).

**Unified Union School Districts (4)** A unified union school district is a union school district that serves grades Pk-12. When two or more towns form a unified union school district, each town elects representatives to form one school board (Blue Mountain Union and Twinfield Schools are examples).

**Interstate School Districts (2)** The two interstate school districts listed below serve students in New Hampshire and Vermont towns. Each district is driven by complex interstate funding and governance rules.

Dresden - Hanover, NH and Norwich, Vermont;

Rivendell - Orford, NH and Vershire, Fairlee and West Fairlee, Vermont

**Independent Technical Centers (2)** There are 16 regional technical centers, two of which are governed by an independent board of directors. Operations in the others are overseen by the local high school board of directors. Additionally, 6 high schools run their own comprehensive vocational programs.

**Supervisory Unions (48)** In Vermont, all school districts, except towns or cities employing 40 or more teachers, are members of supervisory unions. The public schools in each supervisory union are under the general supervision of a superintendent of schools. There are 49 supervisory unions and 12 supervisory districts in Vermont. Superintendents are selected, supervised and evaluated by supervisory union/district boards.

# Vermont School Governance

**Vermont Legislature** The body that has delegated much authority and responsibility for Vermont school governance to local school boards.

**State Board of Education** The State Board is composed of 10 members, two of whom are students (only one student may vote), appointed by the governor, with the advice and consent of the senate and with consideration for representing all geographic areas of the state. The board supervises and manages the Department of Education and oversees the state's educational system. It is given specific authority to make rules governing school accountability, educator licensing and other subjects within its control. Policies of the board are implemented through the commissioner of education, as are the direction and supervision of state programs.



**Commissioner of Education** The commissioner is appointed by the state board of education, subject to the approval of the governor. The commissioner is the chief executive officer and secretary of the state board. The commissioner is required to make reports to the board concerning the public educational system and to make recommendations to promote the educational interests of the state. The commissioner hires deputy commissioners, division directors and staff as necessary. Their duties are prescribed by the commissioner. The commissioner carries out regulations, rules and policies set by the state board. Superintendents must report annually to the commissioner concerning the needs, conditions and progress of their schools. (Supervisory union/district board chairs must report to the commissioner when a superintendent leaves or before a new one is hired.)

**State Department of Education** The Department of Education is organized into divisions headed by directors who, with deputy commissioners, report directly to the commissioner. Thus, the commissioner, the deputies, the directors and their staffs comprise the state department of education. The personnel of this department provide services that assist school districts to plan, build, maintain, improve and operate their schools in accordance with state law.

**Legal Status of School Districts** All school districts in the state have been established as municipal corporations with all the powers of independent municipalities. They have been delegated powers and duties by state law to assist the state in supervising and managing public schools.

**Legal Status of School Boards** School board members are school district officers, not town officers. They are elected by the voters in each district. When the board convenes, its members function within parameters established by the legislature. Board members are representatives of the voters. They work to ensure the delivery of high quality public education.

# School District Collaboration Options and Time Line

Prepared for the Rutland Central Supervisory Union  
By John Nelson and Winton Goodrich,  
Vermont School Boards Association  
February 4, 2005

## I. Joint Agreements. 16 V.S.A. § 267

**What are they?** Supervisory unions “may provide authorized services through contracts with any person...school district within or without the S.U., any independent school within the S.U. area or with other S.U.’s.” Joint agreements may be entered into to provide joint services, programs, facilities and professional and other staff as may be necessary to carry out the desired programs and services.”

**How are they formed?** Joint agreements are entered into via contracts approved by S.U. boards and signed by S.U. chairs or their designees. Contracts may be for terms of up to four years, and may be renewed for one additional four year term.

**What are their advantages?** Joint agreements are relatively easy to enter into. They offer opportunities for efficiencies derived from consolidation of administrative functions.

**What are their disadvantages?** Joint agreements can only be formed by supervisory unions. School districts are not authorized to enter into joint agreements directly, without utilizing a supervisory union as the service provider.

**Where are they?** There are many examples of joint agreements. Most S.U.’s utilize one or more of these arrangements to provide transportation, compensatory education, alternative education programs or special education.

## II. Joint Contract Schools. 16 V.S.A. § 571 et seq.

**What are they?** Joint contract schools are schools that are operated by a board of directors made up of members of school district boards that have joined together to operate a school. Once formed, the joint contract board has “full authority to act on all matters pertaining to finance, location, construction, and operation of (joint) schools...including the selection and hiring of teachers.”

Joint board representation shall consist of members chosen annually from the duly elected school boards of the school districts...Unless the school districts ... have agreed upon a different method of allocating board members... the school district having the largest number of pupils attending the joint, contract or consolidated school shall have three members on the joint board. Each other school district shall have at least one member on the joint board, and its total membership shall be determined by dividing the number of pupils from the school district with the largest enrollment by three, rounding

off the quotient to the nearest whole number, which shall be called the “factor” and by then dividing the pupil enrollment of each of the other school districts by the “factor,”...

**How are they formed?** The electorate of a school district may authorize its board to enter into a joint contract with another school district or school districts. Upon authorization, the board may “enter into a contract or contracts with other towns and parties for the financing, construction, operation and maintenance of a competent school or schools...”

**What are their advantages?** Joint contract schools have the advantage of being easily formed.

**What are their disadvantages?** There are several potential disadvantages to a joint contract school. They result in the formation of a new school board, while maintaining the prior existing boards even though those boards may no longer operate a school. The new board can develop and adopt a budget without a vote of the electorates of the member districts. There are numerous ambiguities in the law related to the operation of joint contract schools. The financing and ownership of property by member districts is, for example, not clearly prescribed in the law.

**Where are they?** There are joint contract schools in Jay/Westfield, Barstow, Granville/Hancock, Wilmington/Whitingham, and Athens/Grafton.

### **III. Union School Districts.** 16 V.S.A. § 701et seq.

**What are they?** Union school districts are formed by agreement between participating school districts to operate a single school in certain grades for residents of the participating districts. A union school district has a school board comprised of representatives of the member district, elected on a one-person-one-vote basis from each district. A union school district has its own school district meeting to adopt an annual budget, and member districts pay assessments in accord with the union district’s articles of agreement.

**How are they formed?** There is a comprehensive statutory process for the formation of union school districts. Formation requires an extensive study process (preceded by vote of the electorate), approval by the State Board of Education and final approval by the electorate of each member district to create the new union.

**What are their advantages?** Union school districts are municipal entities, as are all school districts. As such, union school districts have powers to build, finance, own and operate schools. They are therefore stable entities. The level of public participation in union school districts is on a par with the level of public participation in “town” school districts.

**What are their disadvantages?** Union school districts are difficult to form and difficult to alter once formed. On occasion, a member district may want to leave a union district,

or a new district may wish to join an existing union district. While there are statutory processes to allow these things to happen, a single district will be unable to enter or leave a union without the assent of other members.

**Where are they?** There are approximately 36 union school districts. Most are high school or middle school unions. Union districts for elementary schools have recently been formed in Waterbury/Duxbury and Metawee Valley (Rupert and Pawlett).

#### **IV. Unified Union School Districts.** 16 V.S.A. § 722 et seq.

**What are they?** Unified union districts are union districts that educate students in grades K-12.

**How are they formed?** The same process for forming a union district is used to form a unified union district.

**What are their advantages?** Unified union districts enjoy several advantages over union districts. When a unified union is formed, the forming school districts cease to exist, leaving one district (the unified union) with one school board, one district meeting, one equalized pupil count, one grand list and one administration. The unified union board is comprised of representatives from the member towns, apportioned on a one-person-one-vote basis. Curriculum articulation and related education and administrative services are more effectively delivered within a unified union district structure.

**What are their disadvantages?** Unified union districts result in the perception of diminished "local control." Once formed, the unified union board and the district electorate determine where schools will be located, what curriculum will be offered, and all other matters related to school management and governance.

**Where are they?** Unified Unions are in Twinfield (Marshfield and Plainfield) and Blue Mountain (Groton, Ryegate and Wells River). The voters in Addison Northwest are scheduled to vote on the formation of a unified union district in March, 2005.

#### Sources of support for further investigation of options.

**1. State grants for consolidation studies.** Act 68 § 31a as amended. \$4,000 upon application by two school boards to initiate study of possible consolidation through formation of joint contract school, union school district, or unified union school district. \$1,000 for each additional school district, up to \$7,000.

**2. State Implementation Grants** to new joint contract schools, union or unified union districts in first year of operation, prior to 2008. Act 122 of 2004, § 168a. \$150,000 or 5% of base education payment amount, whichever is less. Paid in three equal installments.

**3. SAELP Grants.** Funded by the Wallace Foundation. Awarded to the Legislative Council on Education Governance. First round of grants to school districts awarded \$70,000 to 8 S.U.'s for various governance reform initiatives. A second round of "SAELP II" grant awards is anticipated in the summer of 2005.

**4. Teacher Negotiations at S.U. Level.** Act 122 of 2004, § 47. \$5,000 to a S.U. for "work with member districts to enter into an agreement to negotiate a single S.U. contract, or \$5,000 to each S.U. working toward negotiating a regional bargaining initiative.

### **RCSU Governance Initiative Time Line & Costs**

<b><i>Phase</i></b>	<b><i>Activity</i></b>	<b><i>Time</i></b>	<b><i>Cost</i></b>
Phase I	Conduct informal research to identify potential governance efficiency of operations, improved learning opportunities, and cost-containment options prior to electorate vote.	3 Months	\$3000
Phase II	Inform public through print, television, and radio media. Vote to convene governance study and allocate funds to pay for it in each community. Complete study and identify findings and options.	3 Months	\$5000
Phase III	Submit final governance study report to the Commissioner and State Board of Education for approval.	1 Month	NA
Phase IV	Inform public through print, television, and radio media, as well as community forums. Second electorate vote, authorizing the creation of a new governance structure. Finalize implementation strategies.	3 Months	\$2000
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$10,000</b>

## SCOPE OF PROPOSAL

This proposal has been developed based on interest expressed by the RCSU Board to study governance options throughout the supervisory union, and possibly other districts located within the region. The four-phase study is predicated on a three-part mission to:

1. Research cost-containment strategies;
2. Improve learning opportunities for students; and
3. Increase efficiency of operation

The scope of the proposal includes working with a RCSU Study Committee to conduct advance governance analysis research (Phase I) and, following a successful vote in each community (Phase II), to facilitate the completion of steps proscribed by law in 16 VSA, section 706b (Phase III). The report shall specify:

- (1) the school districts the committee considers necessary to the establishment of the proposed union;
- (2) the additional school districts the committee considers advisable to be included in the proposed union;
- (3) the class of schools to be operated;
- (4) the cost and general location of any proposed new schools to be constructed;
- (5) the transportation, teaching staff, and curriculum to be provided;
- (6) the indebtedness of proposed member districts which the union shall assume;
- (7) the specific properties of proposed member districts which the union is to acquire, their valuation, and how the union shall pay for them;
- (8) the allocation of capital and operating expenses of the union among member districts;
- (9) the method of apportioning the representation which each proposed member district shall have on the union school board. The union school board shall have no more than eighteen members, and each member district shall be entitled to at least one representative;
- (10) the term of office of directors initially elected shall be arranged so that one-third expire on the day of the second annual meeting of the respective districts, one-third on the day of the third annual meeting of the respective districts and one-third on the day of the fourth annual meeting of the respective districts, or as near to that proportion as possible;
- (11) the date on which the union proposal will be submitted to the voters; and
- (12) any other matters which the committee considers pertinent.

VSBA consultants will research internal school operations, review school district and supervisory union policy, administrative procedures, budgets, contracts, and current governance structures.

In addition, VSBA consultants will analyze enrollment trends in each community and utilize the data in formulating possible governance options.

Consultants will perform cost-benefit analyses and make governance recommendations that focus on the three-part mission above.

The proposal outlines a public engagement strategy (Phase II & IV) designed to communicate the benefits and challenges for studying and creating a new governance model. This process will create a system to inform staff and citizens about the effective and efficient delivery of high quality and cost-effective education services and to solicit recommendations on a future vision for governance in the supervisory union.

The proposal is estimated to take ten months to accomplish, and assumes that meetings will take place on at least a monthly basis, with considerable use of electronic communications to expedite the study process.

The Vermont School Boards Association's (VSBA) role will be to contract with the supervisory union, coordinate, and assist with governance research, data analysis, and recommendations. VSBA will assist the supervisory union to move through the legal process outlined in 16 VSA 706b... which may enable the supervisory union to receive up to a \$5,000 (if Proctor, West Rutland, and Rutland Town all agree to participate in the governance study) Act 68 governance study grant enacted by the 2003 legislature.

VSBA will also provide quality control and oversight throughout the governance study process.

### **Supervisory Union Governance Analysis – Dr. Ray Proulx & VSBA Staff**

Dr. Ray Proulx will perform the role of lead consultant, organizing and synthesizing the governance work. Ray has a great deal of experience leading school governance analyses and strategic planning processes in Vermont and nationally. Ray was formerly a Vermont superintendent in two districts, currently is a professor at the University of Vermont, and the state director for the Regional Lab at Brown University.

Ray's governance analysis work will focus on studying existing school board and administrative structures, reviewing current Vermont statutes and gathering pertinent student performance data. An extensive review of all school and supervisory union operations, policy, administrative procedures, budgets, and contracts will be undertaken.

A thorough analysis and identification of benefits, challenges, and advantages of the various governance options will be presented to the Study Committee and/or the RCSU Board in the form of prioritized recommendations.

Guidance and group facilitation will be provided to complete the 12-step study process outlined in 16 VSA, section 706 above. This eventually may lead to application from the

State Board of Education to undertake a governance change, pending voter approval in each community. Final authorization by the State Board of Education and eventual permission by the Secretary of State to reconfigure the municipal funding systems are additional steps that Ray will guide, if necessary.

## **Public Engagement and Communication of Information – VSBA Staff**

With some of the proposed governance changes being studied, a community vote must be convened within each participating school district. It will be important for voters to be involved in the governance study process from the onset, to remain well informed, and to trust the recommended outcome. VSBA staff will organize a public engagement and proactive communications process in each community and throughout the supervisory union prior to any community vote, if recommended by the Study Committee. The goal will be to help citizens adequately understand the benefits, challenges, and advantages for creating a new governance structure.

VSBA staff will assist in developing strategies that target appropriate information to a diverse variety of stakeholder groups and key opinion leaders.

### **Expected Kindergarten Students**

2007-2008 – 6

2008-2009 – 6

2009 – 2010 – 8

2010 – 2011 – 6

2011 – 2012 – 3

2012 – 2013 – 2

2013 – 2014 – 3

2014 – 2015 - 4

As of 10/17/07