

Report for Current School Configuration Workgroup September, 2007

Committee Members and Participants: Cathy Browne, Neal Gombas, Debra Vogini, JoAnne Post, Phoebe Courtot

Purpose – To examine sustainability of current school configuration.

Peacham student demographics - Currently K-6 – 43 students, PreK – 13 students

Financial Information

School budget figures for 2007 – 2008, as voted on at Town meeting in March 2007. Notes from JoAnn Post, School Board chairperson, on changes in budget made since March of 2007, with costs per student based on current figures.

School Governance

Role of Peacham School Board – remains the same as current practice.

Peacham voters elect local school board, which:

- Oversees education of all Peacham children
- Handles all hiring and staffing decisions
- Oversees curriculum
- Maintains local control over decisions affecting budget, staffing, and infrastructure
- Maintains town public school buildings and grounds

Role of CCSU – remains the same as current practice. 20% of costs are divided evenly between the 4 towns of Barnet, Danville, Walden, and Peacham, 40% is based on number of teachers, and 40% is based on number of students. CCSU provides:

- Administrative services
- Financial services
- Special Education Services
- Early Education services

Transportation

Remains the same as current practice. The Town of Peacham currently provides transportation to all students in grades K-6 attending the town public school.

Special Education

Remains the same as current practice. Services are provided to town public school students based on individual needs. Students not attending town public school, (including elementary, middle, and secondary students), are provided services based on individual needs and services available at attending schools. CCSU provides consultation and assistance to schools and families outside of town public school. Depending on circumstances and needs, town may provide special education transportation and tuition to receiving schools. The flexibility of current town school principal/special educator assures that services are available to elementary students on a daily basis.

Social and Educational Impact to Students

Advantages

- Individualized opportunities at small school with small class sizes; small student to teacher ratios in Vermont historically have demonstrated high educational performance
- Experienced and caring staff
- Public school professional standards promote accountability for teaching staff
- Equal opportunity for all students regardless of socioeconomic status or special needs
- Continuity and stability of staff and programs grades Pre-K to 6
- Curricular innovations available for small student population, such as current Personal Learning Plans
- Connection to community; community-based learning
- Socioeconomically diverse student community
- Local control over educational decisions and special education decisions, therefore more individualized for students
- Shorter school bus rides for students
- Flexibility of full-time teaching principal/ special educator allows for daily services for special needs students
- Early education services and programs available to all students on site

Disadvantages

- Fewer social circles in small classes; some children may have difficulty finding peers
- Personal conflicts with teachers may be more difficult with no choice of classrooms, as is possible in larger schools

- Need to adhere to state and federal mandates and testing schedules can lead to more rigid learning opportunities
- Some programs not financially viable due to small numbers of students, therefore more difficult to provide a range of experiences
- Higher costs in secondary school tuitions require cost-cutting measures at elementary level, impacting programs

Community Impact

Advantages

- Accountability to community via state-mandated school reporting
- More local control over K-6 and special education decisions
- No additional cost if student population rises moderately
- Funding from federal and state sources for school budget
- Volunteer opportunities for community members
- Town school draws young families to town to help town remain a vibrant, diverse community
- School available as a hub for community; buildings and grounds used for community events
- Town employer

Disadvantages

- Higher pay scale for experienced staff requires higher costs for town
- If student numbers drop, costs per student rises
- Additional costs for staffing if student numbers rise dramatically
- Town financial responsibility for building and grounds
- Town responsibility for overseeing staff, programs, and buildings and grounds

Transition and Implementation

None needed.

Other Considerations and Questions

Committee looked at ways to reduce costs and/or increase revenues for the school budget.

Ways to increase enrollment at Peacham School (thereby reducing costs per pupil)

- Exploring affordable housing in Peacham – this option has been discussed with George Mathias of the Gilman Housing Trust and Gib Parrish of the Peacham Planning Commission. A town informational

session will be held at an upcoming date. This option will not immediately impact the school budget, and is more of a general look at what Peacham residents want for their town.

- Creating a niche for Peacham School to attract young families. Two examples are: becoming a “laptop” school, where students are provided laptops by the school for their studies, and Personal Learning Plans, which are already in place in Peacham. This is an innovation for individualized learning which is not available in most schools.
- Reducing announced tuition for adjacent towns – this has been discussed at the school board level.

Other ways to reduce costs:

- Renting space for town offices – this was not considered a viable option at this time for several reasons: 1. Town would want only a short-term lease. 2. Having many adults in the building at all hours would create safety concerns for the school. 3. Actual cost savings would be minimal for the town, as it would be only a cost-shift for taxpayers.
- Teleconferencing teaching – this is a possibility to look into, although at the elementary level little can be done without staffing, so there would be little cost advantage. This could be an educational advantage for students to bring in programs currently unavailable in a small school, but not necessarily economic.
- Sharing costs within supervisory union for supplies, programs and/or teachers. This would require a CCSU-wide shift in financial accounting, and also added transportation costs, if students attended programs at other schools. This is a continuing possibility to be explored by the school board. Additionally, a district-wide contract could possibly save costs in the administrative budget.
- Encouraging more parents to volunteer in school. Friends Committee (see below) could assist parents in obtaining background checks and training in available volunteer opportunities

Possible sources of revenue

Creating a “Friends of the Peacham School” committee – School Board could appoint a committee to be in charge of:

1. Locating and obtaining grant funds for the school
2. Coordinating outside groups’ use of the school buildings and grounds, to include both community groups and for-profit organizations to supply income to the school.
3. Community members to help with PTF fundraising

Other questions raised to Superintendent John Bacon

Are there ways to reduce current costs of salaried employees?

- Offer early retirement packages – with the current staffing configuration, this option would not save the town money. There are too few teachers, whose levels of experience would not make this option viable at this time.
- Salary caps and / or non-renewing experienced teachers in favor of less-experienced and less expensive teachers – these are both negotiated items, which are not possible to implement at this time.
- Can teachers pay for their own substitutes? This is also a negotiated item and not possible to implement at this time.

Other questions raised to Special Services Coordinator Judy Eklund

Are Special Education costs lower in a small, town school due to small class sizes and other factors? Special Education needs and costs vary widely, and there is no evidence that small class sizes eliminate the need for special education. Students with disabilities will be identified and provided services for their needs whether they attend a small or large school. Costs for a small public school may be less because services will generally be provided on site and transportation is not needed to another facility.

Sources:

Caledonia Central Supervisory Union Business Manager Rob Billings - figures presented at school board meeting on 8-13-07.

Vermont Commissioner of Education Richard Cate's White Paper, May 2006, <http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/dept/governance.html>.

Caledonia Central Supervisory Union Superintendent John Bacon, August 2007.

Caledonia Central Supervisory Union Special Services Director Judy Eklund, August 2007.

See Table appended below.

Changes in School Budget Figures from March to August 2007

	Original Budget March 2007	Revised Budget Projections as of 8/13/07	Change
Expenditures	1,555,767	1,453,897	(101,870)
Local Revenue	172,334	178,633	6,299
Net Education spending	1,383,434	1,275,164	(108,270)
Tuition amount	744,484	740,131	(4,353)
Elementary Amount	638,950	535,033	(103,917)
Divided by 36 K-6	17,749	12,443	(5,306)