

BERKSHIRE COUNTY EDUCATION TASK FORCE  
SATURDAY, JULY 15, 2017  
TIME: 9:00 A.M.  
NESSACUS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Present: John Hockridge, Chair, MASC Division VI, (member) North Adams School Committee  
Michael Case, Vice Chair, MASC Division VI  
Douglas McNally, (former) Principal, Taconic High School, (current) Berkshire Compact for Education  
Regina DiLego, Chair, Lanesborough School Committee  
Dr. Jake McCandless, Superintendent, Pittsfield Public Schools  
Robert Vaughan, Chair, Lenox Public Schools  
Carl Stewart, Chair, Southern Berkshire Regional School District  
Dr. William Cameron, (retired) Superintendent, Central Berkshire Regional School District  
Brian Fairbank, Chair, The Fairbank Group  
Andrea Wadsworth, Lee Public Schools Business Administrator, former School Committee Chair  
Stephen Bannon, Chair, Berkshire Hills Regional School District  
Dr. Cindy Brown, Vice President for Academic Affairs, MCLA  
Dr. Jake Eberwein, Dean, MCLA Division of Graduate and Continuing Education  
Ellen Kennedy, President, Berkshire Community College  
Dan Caplinger, Vice Chair, Williamstown Elementary School Committee  
Dr. Peter Dillon, Superintendent, Berkshire Hills Regional School District  
Edward Gibson, Town Administrator, Town of Becket  
Paul Butler, Chair, Adams-Cheshire Regional School Committee  
Glenn Koocher, Executive Director of Mass Association of School Committees  
Jake Oliveira, Past President, Mass Association of School Committees  
Liz Lafond, MASC Field Director and Recording Secretary  
Shawn Armacost, Chair, Central Berkshire Regional School District (11:07 a.m.)  
Robert Putnam, Superintendent, Adams Cheshire School District School District  
Jonathan Butler, President, 1Berkshire  
Michael Wise, Moderator, Town of Great Barrington  
Bronly Boyd, Bronly Boyd, Chairman of Boyd Technologies  
Michael Knapik, Director of Governor Baker's Western Mass Office  
Poppy Doyle, Mohawk Regional School Committee  
Karla Baehr, Senior Advisor, District Management Group

Task Force Chair John Hockridge called the meeting to order at 9:18 a.m.

Called to order at 9:18 a.m.

## **DISTRIBUTION OF AGENDA PACKET AND OTHER DOCUMENTS TO MEMBERS AND PUBLIC**

Agenda packet includes minutes, Berkshire County Task Force Phase II report and a proposal for Phase III work.

## **WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS**

The Phase II is a *draft* that will likely require edits/additions/deletions. The TF will work on the *draft* at this meeting with the final report being provided at a later date.

### **MINUTES OF MEETING 31: JUNE 24, 2017**

MOTION: Mike Case made a motion, seconded by Ellen Kennedy, to accept the minutes of meeting 31, June 24, 2017. The motion carried unanimously.

### **REVIEW AND DISCUSSION ON DMG PHASE II FINAL REPORT DRAFT**

Karla Baehr told members she and Nate Levenson want the TF to look at the *draft* and respond as to whether the terms, tone and general direction are an accurate reflection of the work to date.

Any reference to school board will be changed to school committee.

Any reference to teacher will be changed to educator, to be more inclusive and broader than classroom teachers.

Some pieces of the framing document will be included up front in the final report – to clarify the context.

Lessons learned will be listed in order of the most positive first.

Terminology – e.g. modeling – is not a term most folks use frequently.

Summary – 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> scenarios talk about a single county-wide regional school district – suggest the word *regional* be taken out so that it does not commit to a specific regional framework, especially given the talk about special legislation to help define reorganization for the Berkshires.

Glenn Koocher explained that districts can now share superintendents, if they so choose. There might be special legislation that could address CBA's, look at revenue generations, contracts and purchasing. It's important when dealing with the legislature/legislation, to be sure that the local delegation protects the interests of Berkshire County from the interests of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, who will also likely have a keen interest in special legislation around a model that could be imposed on others.

Financial pages (page 29) reflects three different sets of financial savings that could combine. Perhaps there's a clearer way to present that information for the readers of the report.

Page 34 – graph – implementation and observation representations could be better represented – as sometimes the two compete but the numbers don't explain that.

Request for supporting spreadsheet(s) that led to assumptions to be included in final report so that folks who are interested can check to understand the basis for the numbers in the conclusions.

### **POSSIBLE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS DISCUSSION**

Three options that have come from the discussion and input of Task Force members were provided. The options were presented as *drafts* so that TF members could discuss and revise as they felt to be appropriate.

Option A: (Scenario #5) Given that the gains predicted for Scenario #5 are the best match for the educational and financial needs of Berkshire County, the BCETF recommends that Berkshire County pursue the ultimate goal of establishing a single countywide regional school district by 20XX to serve the needs of all 15,000 of our students (soon to be less than 14,000). As a starting point, we recommend that districts begin talks – by region – to choose either Scenario #2 or Scenario #4 (or some combination of the two) as their initial path forward.

Option B: (Scenario #4) Given the limited differences in likely educational and financial gains between three regional school districts (Scenario #4) and a single countywide regional district (Scenario #5), and the greater complexity of creating a single, countywide district, the BCETF recommends that Berkshire County pursue the ultimate goal of establishing three regional school districts by 20XX. As a starting point, we recommend that districts begin talks – by region – to decide whether or not implementing Scenario #2 is a necessary initial step for them, or whether efforts should focus on implementing Scenario #4 from the outset.

Option C: (Scenario @2) Given the potential Scenario #2 has for addressing some long-standing educational and financial needs of Berkshire County and the comparative ease of its implementation, the BCETF recommends that school districts in Berkshire County establish three regional supervisory unions by 20XX. Because there are additional educational and financial gains possible through the establishment of regional school districts, we recommend that interested districts simultaneously explore opportunities to convert existing supervisory unions into regional districts over time to create new regional districts which may add yet more districts in the future.

Scenario #1: Make no change

Scenario #2: Establish three (3) regional “modified supervisory unions”

Scenario #3: Establish a single Berkshire County modified supervisory union

Scenario #4: Establish three (3) regional school districts

Scenario #5: Establish a single Berkshire County regional school district.

Members broke out into 6 groups to discuss the *draft* recommendations. After coming back together, group representatives reported out the following:

Group 1 - generally supported Option A, including Scenario #3 (Establish a single Berkshire County modified supervisory union.) Among the reasons for support were that it best accommodates continuing change in the population; creates the greatest opportunities for improved educational programs and outcomes; and it is not significantly more difficult than an option involving three regions.

A suggestion was also made to stress that this is a goal that has to go through stages, with negotiations, and further information acquired about models related to governance and finances, for example.

Group 2 – Favored Option B because it was felt that there would be too much opposition to Option A, that might not be overcome. It would be easier to work with Option B, and at some point down the road, look back at Option A.

Group 3 – had proponents for both the one region model and for the three region model. The group discussed what the relative political difficulties would be for either of the regional approaches. The group discussed potentially combining some aspects of the proposals to create three regions with a modified supervisory union of the three new regions. If there is thought of three regions being a step towards one region down the road, having the modified supervisory union concept in use at the beginning would put in place a defined framework for the relationship among the three districts. This would serve as a model for the modified supervisory union in an environment that would likely be friendliest and easiest to use, i.e. three entities.

Group 4 leaned towards Option A, feeling there was a lot of redundancies or barriers that could exist. There was discussion about the value of countywide alignment and the notion of branding the school system as a concept. There was a question as to whether the last sentence in Option A was necessary. That is more of an aspirational statement for the committee right now. How to get there is not something that should be spelled out at this point.

Group 5 were more in favor of Option A, and were not in favor of Option C, which would be tedious and very cumbersome for the communities. The group liked Option B, but thought Option A should be the ultimate goal.

Group 6 did not reach consensus. There was discussion that Option A, through Scenario #3, would overcome political resistance by creating a common entity for all.

Karla Baehr indicated that the discussion, in essence, takes Option C off the table as a stand-alone option. Supervisory unions are intended to be a tool in both Options A and B. There was consensus.

There was discussion about possibilities related to three districts as part of a single supervisory union and the long term advantages of a single county-wide school district.

There was a majority of support for Option A, and recognition related to the challenges of implementation.

Agreement to edit Option A, as an aspiration statement, as follows:

Option A: (Scenario #5) Given that the gains predicted for Scenario #5 are the best match for the educational and financial needs of Berkshire County, the BCETF recommends that Berkshire County pursue the ultimate goal of establishing a single

countywide *regional* school district by 20XX to serve the needs of all 15,000 of our students (soon to be less than 14,000). *As a starting point, we recommend that districts begin talks—by region—to choose either Scenario #2 or Scenario #4 (or some combination of the two) as their initial path forward*

There was acknowledgement of the difficulties/intricacies around implementation of one county-wide district, including negotiating collective bargaining agreements, complete and clear messaging to public/stakeholders.

MOTION: Jake Eberwein made a motion, seconded by Dan Caplinger, that, based on the Phase II DMG study, the BCETF adopt the aspirational statement outlined in Option A. (Option A: (Scenario #5) Given that the gains predicted for Scenario #5 are the best match for the educational and financial needs of Berkshire County, the BCETF recommends that Berkshire County pursue the ultimate goal of establishing a single countywide school district by 20XX to serve the needs of all 15,000 of our students [soon to be less than 14,000].)

AMENDMENT: Dan Caplinger offered an amendment, to use 2027 (in place of 20XX.) Jake Eberwein was agreeable to the amendment.

AMENDMENTED MOTION: Jake Eberwein made a motion, seconded by Dan Caplinger, that, based on the Phase II DMG study, the BCETF adopt the aspirational statement outlined in Option A. (Option A: (Scenario #5) Given that the gains predicted for Scenario #5 are the best match for the educational and financial needs of Berkshire County, the BCETF recommends that Berkshire County pursue the ultimate goal of establishing a single countywide school district by 2027 to serve the needs of all 15,000 of our students [soon to be less than 14,000].) The motion carried, as amended.

There are some changes to be made in the final report, and that will be provided as quickly as possible.

The early part of Phase III will include going out to communities to talk again with elected officials about the aspiration statement.

### **PHASE III DMG PROPOSAL FOR SERVICES SUPPORT – QUESTIONS/CONCERNS**

Brian Fairbank asked if the vote on the aspiration statement would change the scope of the proposal, significantly in terms of the timetable.

Karla Baehr said she did not anticipate significant changes.

Dan Caplinger asked if DMG would consider an extended timeframe to do the work, and be available beyond the 12 week timeframe outlined

Karla Baehr said she was not sure that would be possible.

Private finances are being raised; a motion to approve would include wording that would make it subject to full funding.

### **CONSIDERATION OF DMG PROPOSAL AND CONTRACT**

The Task Force went into a brief executive session to discuss contracting with DMG for Phase III work. All non-Task Force members left the room. The TF entered executive session at 12:16 p.m. and returned to open session at 12:37 p.m.

### **NEXT STEPS**

John Hockridge reported out that the TF voted unanimously to contract with DMG for Phase III, subject to financing.

### **NEXT MEETING DATE**

August 12<sup>th</sup>

**MOTION:** Carl Stewart made a motion, seconded by Jake McCandless, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.

The July 15, 2017 meeting of the Berkshire County Education Task Force adjourned at 12:40 p.m.