

BERKSHIRE COUNTY EDUCATION TAKS FORCE
SATURDAY, AUGUST 12, 2017
TIME: 9:00 A.M.
NESSACUS MIDDLE SCHOOL

BCETF Chair, John Hockridge called the meeting to order at 9:17 a.m.

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
Dr. Jake McCandless, Superintendent, Pittsfield Public Schools
Neil Clarke, MTA Senate District Coordinator
Carrie Greene, Vice Chair, Mt. Greylock Regional School Committee
Robert Vaughan, Chair, Lenox Public Schools
Dr. William Cameron, (retired) Superintendent, Central Berkshire Regional School District
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
Paul Butler, Chair, Adams-Cheshire Regional School Committee
Shawn Armacost, Chair, Central Berkshire Regional School District
Robert Putnam, Superintendent, Adams Cheshire School District School District
Dr. Barbara Malkas, Superintendent, North Adams Public Schools
Michael Wise, Moderator, Town of Great Barrington
Bronly Boyd, Bronly Boyd, Chairman of Boyd Technologies
Michael Buoniconti, Superintendent, Mohawk Trail Regional School District
Liz Lafond, MASC Field Consultant and Recording Secretary
Devin Sheehan, President-elect, MASC
Glenn Koocher, Executive Director, MASC

Distribution of Agenda Packet and Other Documents to Members & Public

Welcome/Introductions

Minutes of Meeting 32: July 25, 2017

MOTION: Mike Case made a motion, seconded by Rob Putnam, to approve the minutes of the July 25, 2017 meeting. The motion carried, with one abstention (C. Greene.)

Executive Session Minutes from July 25, 2017

MOTION: Ellen Kennedy made a motion, seconded by Michael Wise, to approve the minutes of the Executive Session meeting of July 25, 2017. The motion carried, with one abstention (C.Green.)

Update

John Hockridge met with the Berkshire legislative delegation on Friday, including Senator Hinds, Representative Farley-Bouvier, Representative Pignatelli, and two legislative aides from Representative Mark's office. All were in support of the TF recommendations on one county-wide regional district. They were brought up to date on Phase II and next step plans for work in Phase III.

Per Karla Baehr's recommendation, he went into the meeting with asks:

1. The expected need for special legislation for a pilot modified supervisory school union, specific for Berkshire County that could serve as a pilot for others. Draft language was created by Karla Baehr to use to create draft legislation; the language was included in the handout.

There was discussion around waiting to create the special legislation until there are some districts are ready to move in that direction, but DMG feels the work can begin on the special legislation so that it's in place when and if some districts are ready to move forward. The delegation agreed and the feeling was that it would be well received at the state level.

A meeting for September or October was suggested with Joint Education Leaders, DESE and some TF members.

Representative Pignatelli suggested that funding should be attached to the special legislation for early adopters, with possible consideration given to five-year funding with a review after three years, or some similar arrangement.

There was talk around funding needed for initiatives such as technology needs for sharing resources among school districts, special education, and transportation. The legislators asked for the TF to come back with recommendations for high priority funding needs related to the early adopter phase, as an incentive to encourage early adopters to move forward.

Legislators thought the legislation could be done fairly quickly, but noted the possibility that it could take until the end of the current fiscal year.

If there are financial incentives involved, it would need to be clear what the financial incentives are for and how it would make sense in terms of the vision of moving to a single county-wide district.

The idea of an innovation fund that would work through something similar to a mini-granting process where proposals would be vetted to determine if the proposed work is aligned with the broad goals of the aspirational recommendation.

Bill Cameron raised concern about discussion around special legislation for modified supervisory unions with the legislative delegation. Getting to a single district will be complicated, if it can be accomplished at all. The concern is that the proposal for modified supervisory unions could look like an end in itself, without changes that would have an educational affect, and he would not want the work towards a one region district halted by districts perceiving that supervisory unions achieve the goals because multiple LEAs are functioning under a single superintendent. He expressed concern that the legislative delegation now thinks this is the way to move things forward.

John Hockridge said that there has been significant discussion about the need for a phased in process to get to a county-wide school district. This would allow some flexibility to local school districts, without losing local control, while they move forward to the county-wide school district objective.

Carrie Greene asked if the proposed legislation could be expanded to include regions, or expansion of regions, rather than just supervisory unions.

Rob Putnam explained that North Adams and Adams/Cheshire Regional districts looked into combining districts, but given the current structure in place around regionals, the only way to do that would be for North Adams to join the Adams/Cheshire Regional School District. The idea behind this special legislation is not to change existing legislation for regional school districts, but to give a different option for districts in Berkshire County. The only option that would be immediately available to North Adams and Adams/Cheshire would be a shared services agreement, in which case the school committees of North Adams and Adams/Cheshire would have to agree that they did not need a full time superintendent so that a contract could be entered into for a shared superintendent. Neither district is willing to say the work is part time, and a shared services agreement does not get the districts further down the road towards aligning and merging systems and processes. The modified supervisory language option would allow the two districts to go further down the line than just looking at sharing a superintendent.

Steve Bannon said the TF had not yet seen the proposed language, and he would have preferred to have the TF see the language first, so that when it went to the legislature, it would have the endorsement of the TF. If it came to the TF first, there would have been the opportunity to make suggestions, edits, etc.

Glenn Koocher said that the BC Legislative Delegation is very accessible. They know that the drafting of any legislation to accommodate the TF's goals should start with stakeholders in the county, with legislators at the table. This is all new and the legislators

know that the work the TF has been doing is trying to determine the best way create positive change for the county, and that nothing is agreed to until everything is agreed to. All concerns could be brought to the table with a working group that might involve the legislators. When that does happen, there are some important pieces missing from the proposed legislation, including:

- how to deal with the issue of choice;
- how to ensure restrictions on the creation of charter schools in BC as an alternative to the one county region;
- taxation language (concern about regional tax rate);
- collective bargaining issues;
- accountability and assessment system issues.

Bill Cameron said he felt it important to ensure that the best interests of the people in BC are assured by being at the table during all discussions related to development of special legislation. This could be presented and discussed with all the constituencies the TF met with last fall to get an understanding of what the problems are long term that would have to be solved. Working groups could be created to identify what those problems are, and work on them.

Dan Caplinger said he felt that the recommendation of the TF requires seeking incremental steps on both paths so that the end can be achieved.

Doug McNally felt the special legislation would allow a way for districts that want to start talking to have a structure to do that. He agreed that it would be important to have a structure for working groups to go out to get information on concerns and problems that need to be solved as part of this work.

John Hockridge told members that Rep. Pignatelli suggested that the TF draft the legislation. This can be used as a starting point. The TF can begin to look at the suggested language in more depth to make edits, additions and/or corrections. Getting to one county-wide district will require incremental steps.

State Auditor's Office – Regional Study

The State Auditor's office has been doing a regionalization study focused on Western Mass. Their work is more focused on state funding issues for rural communities. The State Auditor and her office could be a great help to the work of the TF going forward.

Peter Dillon said Berkshire Hills is part of the study the Auditor's Office is doing. Much of the conversation with that office was related to the work going on with the TF.

Media Coverage

There was significant media coverage on the TF recommendation. The TF will spend time sharing feedback members have received. Feedback will be documented so DMG can refine the action plan proposal and preparation for the next meeting (August 26th.)

DMG Contract – Phase III

At the last meeting a new Phase III contract was approved, contingent upon full funding. There are now commitments for full funding; recognition and thanks to all contributors:

Berkshire Bank - \$5,000
Berkshire Business Roundtable - \$10,000
Fairbank Family Foundation - \$5,000
Greylock Credit Union - \$5,000
Robin and Elizabeth McGraw - \$5,000
Tim Crane - \$5,000
MASC - \$5,000
Williams College - \$10,000

The Phase III contract has been signed. Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's Fee for the contract work and overseeing funds is \$1,000, which will be paid from the remaining Phase I funding. Thanks to Brian Fairbank for raising much of the funding.

Mike Buoniconti, Mohawk Regional School District

Mike Buoniconti came at the request of Poppy Doyle. He has been working with a group of about twenty superintendents from Berkshire and Franklin counties around rural schools issues. The focus is on how to share services to save money so money can be pushed back into classrooms. He distributed a white paper describing a shared services pilot that would involve creating a website where superintendents/districts would load services they are interested in sharing with other districts; this would be a shared services authority that focuses on back office type functions. It would be a state run authority. In the case of shared positions, the OPEB costs would be borne by the state.

Last year the Rural Schools Coalition put together a proposal to create rural school aide. That led to a legislation requiring a study of rural school aide feasibility. The study will look at fixed costs of rural school districts and how they compare to towns, suburban and urban districts. That will provide quantitative data that validates why rural districts are different and where they are more expensive.

Sharing and Documenting of the Reactions TF Members Have Heard So Far

DMG will work with the feedback as they develop an action plan proposal and to prepare outreach plans for the fall.

Feedback TF members have heard/received about the recommendation:

Positive

- The headline grabbed attention and has people talking/recommendation is resetting the conversation and inviting county-wide dialog.
 - People who have read the Phase II report are talking about the work/recommendation.
 - That has helped to generate a positive perspective on the difficulty of the work
 - There is a new set of folks learning about and talking about the work.
 - People appreciate that there is a group looking at the issues/possible solutions.
- There is a lot of support from the business community – educationally and financially.
 - It's about time.
 - Increasing vocational/technical education
 - Centralizing of business functions.
- Excitement about branding education that would cause folks to want to move to BC that would have a positive impact on economic development.
- Educators thinking that collaborating could enhance curriculum and offerings for kids.
 - Calendar is critical for sharing programming – unified calendar would be “remarkable” for county

Questions Going Forward

- Connecting with local boards/stakeholders
 - Going back to all boards/stakeholders that were visited last fall
- Some people are afraid to speak out because of battering on social media/being trolled.
- Creating groups of haves and have-nots.
- Questions on financial impact to cities/towns.
 - Implications of school choice going away
- Assumptions on savings and ability to achieve assumptions
 - People don't understand transportation/reimbursement
- Does the supervisory union phase obviate the one region aspiration?
- Governance and how it would work
- The opportunities at the high school level is a highlight that the group has not focused on enough.

Concerns

- People do not understand transportation funding that would come with regional district. (Need for positive communication on that.)
- Elementary school closing concerns. (Need to meet that head on to quell that concern.)
 - Will I lose my job? Will I lose my school?
- History of votes around the county and how that might impact the forward momentum
- Notion that education would suffer even if districts paid more – that haves would be dragged down because of have-nots.
- Concern about single salary scale
- Concern that this would be driven by educational community rather than supported by it.

- Some mistrust of TF – even though all meetings were open to public – there is some feeling the TF has done the work without folks being part of the decision-making.
 - TF has stressed its role as advisory.
- Loss of local control

Input on FAQ's

The FAQ document drafted for print and social media was reviewed.

Decision for subgroup to work with John Hockridge on the FAQ document.

The work now will center around describing how to get to the one region aspirational goal.

Folks want to have answers to the hard questions, such as, whether their school will close or if they will lose their job. Those kinds of questions should be addressed up front.

Begin FAQ with the educational vision and how the TF arrived at that vision, what are the goals and what are the gains. It's important not to be in a defensive position, rather, to explain how the decision was reached.

Any TF member with specific feedback can send it electronically to John Hockridge.

The FAQ will be on the next agenda.

Discussion and Assessing of Options of Outreach

A large part of Phase III would be community outreach. The more people know about the work that has been done, the more it will quell naysayers.

It's important to get the message to superintendents, principals and school business administrators – sooner rather than later.

There will likely be a need for special meetings in September (last two weeks and possibly into first week of October) with School Committees to discuss Phase II report and work going forward in Phase III – and ask that public are invited. There will also be a need for three larger regional meetings for community stakeholders.

Suggestion that those meetings can be of small groups of School Committees (to cut down on the number of meetings necessary.)

Have webinar or phone conference with principals, school building administrators so they get the information early.

Presentations will be educational, describing how the TF got to the recommendation.

During presentations, TF members should answer questions that can be answered (related to Phase II) and not questions that have not yet been answered (related to Phase III.)

Other Discussion & Public Discussion

Jake Eberwein distilled parts of the Phase II report to be emphasized as the underlying rationale for the recommendation for presentation to the Berkshire Leadership Council. He will make that presentation available (also send to Karla.)

Next Meeting – Saturday, August 26th, 9:00 a.m.

DMG to bring draft of Phase II report to the next TF meeting (August 26th) for discussion.

MOTION: Mike Case made a motion, seconded by Andrea Wadsworth, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.

The August 12, 2017 BCETF meeting adjourned at 12:22 p.m.