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**TO: WWSU Local Board Members & Administrators  
FROM: Brigid Scheffert  
DATE: October 11, 2010  
RE: Board Report: Updates & Information**

Hello all! I hope this beautiful autumn October finds you well. We are all very busy doing the work of the WWSU. Here are some of the latest and greatest items of information and/or interest.

### **On the State Level:**

I really do not have much to report from the state. The previous information shared regarding ACT 146, the Challenges for Change Targets, and ACT 153 changes in Supervisory Union Board & Superintendent responsibilities remains the same. Most districts are hard at work determining how to respond to both of these pieces of legislation.

The Executive Committee and the central office administrative team have had the primary responsibility of working through the C4C target voluntary reductions. To date we have decided to:

1. Begin the budgeting process early, using the same rigor and frugality as last year. Specifically identify the impact of reductions in funding as it relates to staffing and student learning.
2. A sub-committee was formed to analyze both the WWSU total amount of \$519,591.00 to other supervisory union district targets and the individual school targets within WWSU. They concluded that if you essentially believe in the process, then the target overall seemed equitable. They did not feel, though, that the individual school targets suggested by the DOE were equitable. The sub-committee established what they believed to be fairer criteria and recalculated these targets. The Executive Committee meets on October 13th, and they will hear feedback from local boards.
3. The sub committee has also been working on a draft position statement, hopefully to be shared with a wide array of Montpelier folks and the media, addressing the process, and their beliefs about local control and school board decision making.
4. We are working on draft #1 of all budgets, so we do not have a definitive answer as to whether we will meet these targets yet.. I will need to report our decision to the commissioner by 12/15/2010.

Here is an Overview of Act 153. We have this topic scheduled for the Executive Committee Meeting on November 8th. The WWSU will need to develop an implementation plan. These changes go into effect on July 1, 2012. We need to begin planning now because if there are budgetary implications, they will need to be incorporated into the 2012-2013 budget process, which begins next September.

### **ACT 153: Duties of SU Boards: Effective July, 2012 (changes in Title 16 § 261)**

- establish an SU-wide curriculum and ensure its implementation;
- provide special education, compensatory and remedial services;
- provide financial and student data management services;
- procurement and distribution of goods and operational services;
- provide construction project management;

- contract negotiations with educators, administrators, and other school personnel;
- provide transportation, or arrange for its provision, in districts that offer student transportation;
- provide human resources management support..

**ACT 153: Duties of Superintendents: Effective July, 2012 (changes in Title 16 § 242)**

- report all financial operations of the supervisory union and/or its member districts;
- hire non-licensed staff and dismiss all staff subject to all legal and contractual procedures;
- nominate individual candidates for licensed positions for board approval. If the board rejects the nominee, the superintendent would bring forth another single nominee;
- develop and implement class size policies in conjunction with school boards.

**ACT 153: Incentives for Voluntary Mergers**

- Incentives for Regional Education Districts (RED)
- For homestead tax purposes, the RED tax rate and income sensitivity percentage would be reduced for four years. The amount of the homestead rate reduction would be:
  - year 1 = 8 cents, year 2 = 6 cents, year 3 = 4 cents, year 4 = 2 cents;
- For income sensitivity, the reduction would be proportional to the reduction in the homestead tax rate. Also during the first four years of RED operation, each of the participating districts that comprise a RED would not see their homestead tax rate or income sensitivity percentage increase or decrease by more than 5 percent annually;
- Stabilization of Small Schools Grant Program;
- The RED would have the option to operate with two-year budgets during the first four years of operation; and two or three year budgets thereafter, subject to the approval from the electorate.
- A provision of existing law that provides up to \$150,000 to any school district merger or consolidation has been extended through 2014. Unlike the voluntary merger incentive program, there are no specific conditions, other than completing a merger, that need to be met to earn this incentive.
- Up to \$20,000.00 to conduct a study of merger possibilities.

**The Vermont Dept. of Education Basic Steps Involved in Creating a RED**

1. Get the necessary district boards to form a study committee (4 or more districts or 1250 + students or a State Board of Education waiver.
2. Apply for up to \$20,000.00 in consulting services reimbursement grant.
3. Create a plan to form a RED, and prepare a report.
4. Conduct the necessary cost-benefit analysis.
5. Submit the plan to the State Board of Education requesting approval.
6. Schedule the necessary electorate vote in all involved districts.
7. Begin operation of the RED.
8. Apply for an additional \$130,000.00 facilitation grant.

9. Provide students with expanded educational opportunities.
10. Realize the incentives and economies of scale.

### **Adoption of the National Common Core Standards**

The 2010-11 school year will be spent listening and learning as information comes from the VT DOE. Sheila Rivers, our Director of Curriculum, is leading our work in this area. One of the Administrative Workgroup Teams will work with Sheila to develop an implementation plan and timeline for the WWSU. Basically, we will all need to realign curriculum to fit with these national standards, and transition from the NECAP assessment to the Smarter Balanced Assessment by 2014-2015.

Much of the conversation at the state level is around funding for this significant shift in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Some believe that districts will need to adopt entirely new math and language arts curriculums in nearly all grades, which could represent major new costs for teaching materials, textbooks, computer programs, teacher training, etc. The tests themselves may be more costly. These assessments will all be taken online. We will need to ensure the necessary technology hardware, software, and student skill level to successfully participate. The debate around unfunded mandates continues.

### **On the Local Level:**

ACT 153 has brought about much conversation and debate about whether or not it makes any sense to consider consolidation and/or redesign/reconfiguration within the WWSU. At a minimum in order to comply with this legislation, I will need to report to the commissioner by 12-1-2010 that we have been discussing this in our SU and have "considered" the possibilities. Then by 10-1-2012, each supervisory board will need to vote to either do a more comprehensive study of the options or not. So, what are the possible options in our district?

The WWSU full board met last year to discuss this topic at a preliminary level. The consensus of the group was that given the levels of our declining enrollment, we should in fact look at what might be possible. Support for merging with another supervisory union(s) was not indicated. There did not appear to be much interest in changing much at the elementary level. However, the middle school and high school levels seemed like areas that board members wanted explored.

This exploration work began in September 2010. The administrators from both middle schools, the high school and all central office administrators have met three times. Each session was about 3 hours. We decided the first place to begin was with data in the form of a three part feasibility study. Part #1 is simply an audit based on the number of students and the physical spaces of the facilities. Michelle has put together an extensive enrollment projection report to inform our work at this stage. (All administrators and board members should have received this.) She will soon begin a report analyzing the teaching staff equivalents throughout the district.

Part #2 (if the board decides) would involve an in-depth financial study of one or more viable options to determine if any money would be saved, if so how much, and would the savings be sustainable for years to come.

Part #3 would be a quality study. If a viable option moves forward, and it proves to be highly cost effective, then a study of student opportunities and quality would need to be conducted. Sheila put together the Comparative Program of Studies Report for HUHS last year, and I completed the Comprehensive Data Report this fall. We are working hard to build our data resources so that all decision making is as informed and thoughtful as it can be. There is no point in doing the financial models and staffing plans for any model that is not viable given the amount of time and energy this would require from all of us.

After the Executive Committee discusses consolidation/redesign after looking at preliminary data, they will set a course as to if and how both financial and personnel resources are expended to go further. These

conversations will most likely go on throughout the year. About \$20,000.00 in grant money is available from the DOE to study consolidation, with no strings attached, if the board chooses to move forward. We most likely will plan some additional full WWSU board meetings to discuss any of the options they feel deserve serious attention.

By doing this work, we will have met our statutory requirement to have "considered" all the options. The information gathered can be used to address the challenges that the continuing declining enrollment present us with, and to help to grow each of our schools in a transformative, 21st century direction.

I cannot emphasize enough that this work is EXPLORATORY. It does not mean that we will necessarily promote or move forward any of these scenarios. Regardless of what gets decided, the information gathered will be valuable in the coming years, given the tax burdens within our communities, to be able to clearly articulate both the data and rationale as to why we are not consolidating if that becomes the final decision.

Here are the options that the administrative team working on the project identified during brainstorming. Please remember that these are VERY ROUGH notes from our chart papers, but I thought you might like to see the thinking. Duane Pierson has created a visual map of each identified option. The software used does not allow us to send them electronically. You will receive hard copies at an upcoming board meeting.

### **Possible Consolidation/Re-design Options for WWSU:**

1. Grades 5-6 CBMS stay there; add HUMS 7-8.  
Central Office goes to Harwood.

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3 4-person teams (-4 FTE teachers in core)  
3 teams of 100 = 25:1 ratio  
3 wings of school in 7-8  
1 wing with 1 5-6 team (75 students); 3 teachers; 25:1 ratio  
Portable classrooms for 75 kids for the other 5-6 team. 3 FTE teachers 25:1 ratio  
This comes to a -5 FTE savings.  
Central Office to HU  
CBMS gr. 5-6 145-150 kids; All 7-8 = 300 kids; work with 450 student model. This would be for 2015 at the earliest. Find out how much modulars cost; Act 250 permits. -5 FTE would save around \$350,000; save \$40,000 in C.O. rent; annual savings approximately \$400,000.00 then deduction of modulars.

2. Grade 5 CBMS students go to TBPS; Gr. 6-8 CBMS students stay; HUMS 7-8 to CBMS.  
Central Office goes to Harwood.

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3 4-person teams of 7 & 8 = 300 kids (-4 FTE)  
1 3-person team for 6<sup>th</sup> grade = 75 kids (-1 FTE) \$350,000  
5<sup>th</sup> grade to TBPS = 75 more students there (+3 FTE to TB)  
Central Office to HU (\$40,000 in rent savings).  
No all-day kindergarten option in future if 5th goes back;

- 2-b. Same as above, but TBPS and Moretown merge grades K-5, still using both sites.

3. 5<sup>th</sup> Grade CBMS goes to TBPS; Gr. 6-8 from all schools to CBMS. Central Office goes to Harwood.

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Grade 5 CBMS to TBPS

3 4-person teams for 7-8 = 300 kids 25:1 ratio (-4 FTE)  
 2 3-person teams for 6<sup>th</sup> gr. = 152 kids 26:1 ratio (-2 FTE)  
 Portable classrooms for 76 kids (\$60,000)  
 Elementary schools:

GRADE 6:	<u>2010</u>	<u>K-5</u>	<u>FTE</u>
Fayston	16	91	-1
Moretown	21	93	-1
Waitsfield	15	123	-1
Warren	26	128	-1

Total -2 FTE for 6<sup>th</sup> grade; -4 FTE for 7-8

\$420,000

\$40,000 rent savings with C.O. going to HUHS

4. Gr. 11-12 at HUHS would stay as an Institute/Academy; Gr. 7-10 for all schools at HUHS; all elementary schools would be PK-4; CBMS would house all Gr. 5-6. Central Office goes to CBMS.
5. CBMS becomes Grades 5-8 for all schools; all elementary schools are PK-4; HU is 9-12. Central Office goes to Harwood. (Not viable. CBMS cannot house 600+ students)
6. Status quo for middle school and high school; Valley schools merge with 1 board and share kids. Central office continues to rent, goes into modulars, or into a valley school.
7. Status quo for TBPS, CBMS, and HUHS. HUMS sends students back to valley schools, which becomes K-8. Central office moves into HUMS.
8. Any 4 of the 5 WWSU elementary schools merge.
9. Any 3 elementary schools could merge with waiver.
10. Moretown closes and the kids go to Waterbury-Duxbury and Waitsfield.
11. Fayston closes and the kids go to Waitsfield and Warren.

We need to answer two questions: Are any of these 11 options physically viable? Can money be saved in any of them? From the 11 options we have, the board will need to determine if any of them should be studied further. Everyone on the team agreed to this.

It is really very difficult to have conversations about consolidation for many reasons. Emotional thinking permeates every discussion, and why shouldn't it? We are proud of our schools and believe that we are doing a good job. Just this past weekend the Burlington Free Press ran a front page story on small school consolidation. Addison County was highlighted. They have schools that will soon drop well below 100 students. Once again though, the local elementary school was

sighted as the hub of the community; where the chicken pie supper is held, voter registration occurs, scouts and other clubs meet, etc.

The WWSU administrators working on identifying the options had much heartfelt conversation about how school consolidation has been talked about, if not promoted, at the state level for over 20 years, and yet these proposals have been met with a resounding NO throughout Vermont communities. Why would we think our communities in the WWSU would be any different? What would be the real impetus or tipping point? How would we ever convince the larger community to take drastic measures such as merging and/or closing schools when we cannot even predict the savings as it relates to lowering property taxes? After hours of discussing questions such as these, the group was really left with what can be done in a down economy with continuing declining enrollment?

The conversation really turned to governance. We focused on what gets in the way when we really try to spend what we currently spend differently. The largest single contributor was the inability to share staff across all buildings. The group felt that the flexibility of sharing and reassigning staff (the largest part of our budgets) was truly what is needed to adequately address the fluctuations and changing needs of students from year to year. Obviously, having two separate contracts and pay scales coupled with multiple boards does not lend itself to solving this dilemma.

Throughout the year, I suspect that we will all be more engaged than ever before in trying to find ways to improve our schools, holding the line or reducing spending, and possibly changing the structure of schooling and/or the governance in the WWSU. The WWSU board, each local board, and the Executive Committee need to provide direction as we move forward, while furthering the "football" of debate. None of us can afford to shy away from the uncomfortable. Our schools are getting harder and harder to afford, but more importantly our students are counting on us to be change agents where needed and to figure it out.

### **WWSU Governance Possibilities:**

1. Status Quo; 7 boards
2. One board PK-12
3. One elementary school board, 1 middle school board, 1 high school board, plus WWSU Executive Committee; 4 boards.
4. Waterbury-Duxbury, Harwood, Valley, plus WWSU Executive Committee; 4 boards

Michelle did an enrollment history presentation. From there we projected a middle school of 300 kids, that would be 150 per Gr. 7-8. State-wide enrollments will continue to decline until 2014, and then rise to the level of 2009 by 2024. Next steps for Michelle will be to put in state-wide numbers.

Again, this was a rich, interesting exercise. We will head back to the Executive Committee for direction on really where to go from here. The enrollment projection report will be integral in forming some conclusions. In summary, Michelle's report indicates when looking at *actual students in our schools now, from 1997- 2015 that:*

- WWSU overall will enroll 315 less students in K-12 grades (15%).
- Fayston will enroll 3 less students, but will be down 19 students from their high in 2008 (17%).

- Moretown will enroll 66 less students than their high in 1997 (40%)
- Waitsfield will enroll 58 less students than their high in 1997 (35%)
- Warren will enroll 39 less students than their high in 1998 (22%)  
However, their Cohort survival is much higher. If it holds true, they will have 10 less students than in 1998.
- Waterbury-Duxbury will enroll 177 less students than their high in 1997 (22%)
- Thatcher 100 less (22%) Crossett Brook their high was in 2004, now 77 less (21%)
- HUHS will increase 24 students from 1997, but since their high in 2004 will enroll 114 less students (13%).
- HUMS will enroll 15 less students, but 33 less from their high in 2003 (17%).
- HUHS will enroll 39 more students than in 1997, but 98 less students than their high in 2005 (14%)

Now that we have solid, longitudinal data including historic, current and projections, then what? One of the challenges is that the decline in enrollment is not equally distributed across the environment, allowing for services/positions to be reduced or eliminated in a directly correlated calculation. *The next question that we need to answer is whether it is true that during the years of increasing enrollments, new staff positions were added, and since the declining enrollment has continued from year to year, that those same positions were not reduced accordingly.* Michelle's report on FTE's throughout the district will help us to answer this question. Again, this is where the power of sharing and reassigning staff might have considerable merit moving into the future.

Ultimately then, ACT 153 really addresses two areas; consolidation/governance and centralizing services at the central office. Conversations about how to interpret H.66 (ACT 153) as it relates to the change in responsibilities of the supervisory union are just beginning at the state level. Technical assistance will be forthcoming throughout the year. The Commissioner spoke at our last VSA meeting. His focus was much about his belief of what the legislature intended, and why H.66 was significantly broadened from its once limited scope. The overall message was that more centralized services at the SU level should and will provide greater efficiencies and cost savings. He warned us essentially that waivers would only be granted for extreme exceptions and only when it can be proven that to continue to provide a service at the local level instead of the SU level will absolutely result in the service being provided more efficiently and effectively, including cost.

Recently, HUHS has been able to see some serious benefit thanks to the centralized purchasing of maintenance/custodial supplies that our new WWSU facilities director, Ray Daigle, put into place. HUHS will save approximately \$8000.00 as a result of Ray's planning and effort. We are hoping for all the other WWSU schools to get on board with Ray's help and realize some savings. The central office team is already exploring other ways to achieve savings such as this in other areas. ACT 153 will be discussed throughout the year at the Executive Committee meetings.

### **The Administrative Team at a Glance:**

We have been busy working as a strong team and here are some of our accomplishments:

- Evaluation tools are in place for evaluating the superintendent, principals, teachers and support staff common throughout the district. Most everyone is at a goal setting stage. The central office maintains a database to manage the evaluation system.

- The new structural model for policy work is complete. We are in the first run of packet #1. This design will allow all 7 boards to get to compliance and to remain in compliance. The work will no longer be people dependent. Cost savings will be realized for all districts in areas such as legal reviews and warning advertisements. Required policies for volunteers/chaperones, harassment, truancy and class size are complete. Principals are working on drafts of class size minimum/optimal guidelines for local boards.

More detail can be found in the WWSU Policies, Procedures, & Protocols Guidelines 210-2011 document. Here is a repeat of the timeline for this first collaborative round for your convenience:

**F-20-R Student Harassment:**

- (1). local boards warn first reading in October (MES in November); Laura has already warned on behalf of all districts.
- (2). local boards adopt in November (MES in December)

\*\* this was out of order due to a compliance issue

**Policy Packet #1:**

- (1). the month of October is used for read & review and/or sub-committee work.
- (2). all suggested edits need to be sent to the superintendent or your executive committee representative by November 1.
- (3). all edits will be considered and incorporated by the Executive Committee at their November 10, 2010 meeting.
- (4). by November 15, 2010 final WWSU suggested model policies will go out to local boards.
- (5). all local boards warn these 14 policies for a first reading at their December meeting.
- (6). all local boards, after receiving public input, warn and adopt these 14 policies at their January meetings.
- (7). policy packet #2 will be distributed for read, review, and sub committee work in February.

- The WWSU goals are being worked on. We hope to bring a draft forward to the Executive Committee in December. Instead of a content specific approach (math, writing, civic responsibility) which really is nicely addressed in each school's action plans, we are working on large areas such as the National Common Core Standards implementation, Pre-K to 12 Local Assessment Plans, WWSU Professional Development, the WWSU Graduate Profile, etc.
- We have been implementing a strong systems approach to the delivery of special education services throughout the WWSU. Donarae continues to move all schools in this direction using the guiding work of Project Evolve. Our staffs are hard at work in all buildings so that more students are receiving services in classroom settings where appropriate.
- This year's service plan for special education has just been submitted. We anticipate the following projected savings:

Fayston:	\$19,262.00
Moretown:	\$74,990.00
Waitsfield:	\$66,031.00
Warren:	level 0

Waterbury-Duxbury: increase \$129,000.00

HUHS: \$285,646.000

- We had a presentation at the full administrative council by the service learning team in the district. One of the admin workgroups will discuss further the growth and sustainability of this learning strategy/approach.
- The team moved forward with the implementation of ALERT NOW throughout the WWSU. This enhanced messaging system integrates with and is updated by PowerSchool. Each family can have up to 12 contacts of phone numbers and email addresses. Safety, security and parent/customer satisfaction should be improved greatly. The total cost in WWSU is \$5,500.00. It will be assessed as a per student cost.
- The Administrative Guidebook work continues. We now have written procedures for paying substitutes, and summer services providers, a new process and approval forms for approving coursework, new forms for paid time off for employees, hiring procedures and guidelines, and bullying and harassment investigation forms.
- We made decisions about aligning the math units in the middle schools.
- Local school boards asked us to discuss what is done in each school when a staff member retires. Most often the staff has a party of some sort for the retiree, and the board contributes about \$300.00 towards a gift.
- Common report cards online using the Vermont Common Assessment Tool are being developed at Warren, Waitsfield and Thatcher.
- Approval procedures for providing extended summer school services for students based on the WWSU policy are being developed.
- The team reviewed all the staff sign-ups for the early release days. Written expectations for employees on ERD days were completed.
- We are discussing the length of the school day, school year and busing.
- We are discussing student behavior on buses and cameras.
- Preschool screening and developing common schedules throughout the supervisory union for preschool are being worked on.
- We are revising the Climate Survey questions to be clearer. This is in an admin. workgroup.
- We have been discussing administrative guidelines/procedures for public solicitation in schools, facility use, dropping off pre-K and K students at bus stops, networking issues within the WWSU and technology coordination.
- I have been developing a set of 3 workshops for our administrators on Dealing with Employee Misconduct. Pietro Lynn, an attorney known for his expertise in employment law, will provide the training at the central office. VSBIT has agreed to pay for it. We hope to agree to a schedule for the second half of the year.

- The areas covered will be:
  - Written Directions or Directives
  - The How of Employee Discipline
  - The Differences between a Warning and a Reprimand
  - Best Practices in Writing Reprimands
  - Minimizing Legal Risks: The Pitfalls
  - Working with the Associations
  - Suspensions and Terminations
  
- Future admin team work includes examining the safety plans at all schools, including inside and outside drills.
  
- In the area of labor relations, I have one lawsuit pending and I have addressed three grievances since the start of the school year.
  
- I have been asked to be the keynote speaker at the annual meeting of the Vermont Association of Educational Office Professionals for the state. Sue Premore from Thatcher is organizing the event, which will be held here in our district on October 22nd. The theme is G gathering knowledge R reaffirming abilities O overcoming barriers W willing to be flexible (GROW).
  
- Both the transportation contract and the lease at Small Dog are up at the end of this year.
  
- Both teacher and support staff negotiations are complete. Both teacher associations have ratified the teachers' agreement. This agreement is for 2 years. Teacher salaries are frozen at 0% new money this year, and they will receive a 1.5% total new money next year. Benefits are largely the same. Teachers' negotiations will begin 6 months to 1 year from now for the FY 2013 contract. The support staff negotiations will begin very soon for a contract for next year. The support staff contract that we just completed for Moretown, Waterbury-Duxbury, and Harwood is a two year agreement covering last year and this FY 2011 year. The support staff agreement calls for a 1.9% increase in each year. Benefits are largely unchanged.

