



**Belfast · Belmont · Frankfort · Morrill · Northport
Searsmont · Searsport · Stockton Springs · Swanville**

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Board of Directors of RSU #20
From: Bruce A. Mailloux, Superintendent of Schools
Date: May 17, 2011
Subject: **Reorganization Plan Concept**

The following RSU #20 reorganization concept is presented to the RSU #20 Board of Directors in response to a request from the Board for a vision of the future. Specifically, a vision that addresses the crucial financial situation we are in and the predicted continuing decline in student population. This has been a long process and I would like to thank John McDonald, Mitch Brown, Michael Johanning (WBRC Architect), Scott Brown (Maine Dept. of Education Director of Facilities), RSU #20 principals, many of our staff and citizens that have given of their time and opinions. We have talked with many folks and tried to cover all possible details prior to bringing this forward. With any major change, there will be many questions, and I feel we are ready to provide answers to those questions. I will offer the concept in (4) four categories: a) Background; b) Restructure; c) Savings and Issues; and, d) Timeline.

A. BACKGROUND

Why even consider such a move? Many feel the idea of reorganization is *“all about the money.”* I would have to agree that finance has been the catalyst that sparked this consideration. We have been in a cut back mode for the last five (5) years, eliminating positions, reducing supply lines, freezing the budget, reducing services – **“holding the line.”** The FY 2011 RSU #20 expenditure budget is \$32,514,987. This amount is \$73,258 less than the combined MSAD #34 and MSAD #56 budgets in FY '07. During the same period of time, we all know what has happened to the cost of fuel, insurance, goods and services, and the day-to-day operation of school facilities. If we hope to maintain the quality of our education in RSU #20, this is a trend that cannot continue.

We are experiencing financial shortfalls in several areas beyond our control. This state is shifting costs onto school regions and communities. Federal grants such as Title II-D, IV, IV-A, V, VI, and VI-A have been reduced or eliminated over the course of the last few years by \$74,820. Grants from the government and large corporations (MBNA) are declining or being eliminated. Those of you involved in the budget process this year may have noted that in the past, we might have been talking shortfalls in the range of “hundreds of thousands”; this year, the word “millions” was heard frequently.

We have been experiencing a slow decline in student population, and it is predicted that this trend will continue. During school year 1999-2000, RSU #20 had 2937 students. In 2009-2010, the enrollment decreased to 2569, and the projected enrollment for 2019-2020 is 2409. The resulting decline has left us with the following:

1. Six out of 13 schools have an enrollment of 83-111 students;
2. One large school at one-half capacity;
3. One elementary school with the capacity to totally absorb a smaller elementary school;
4. Operational costs (heat, lights, maintenance, etc.) per student that range from \$810 to \$2390 per year, depending on the building;
5. Rural small classes that range from 9-20 students per classroom

While I feel we have been able to maintain the quality of instruction to date, without a change in the financial trends, we are going to erode the quality of our programs and services. It is one thing to cut back on supplies, equipment, co-curricular, professional development, field trips, and administration, but another when one has to cut our most valuable asset – people.

Even though financial reasons may be the force behind this reorganization concept, one can find some significant educational benefits. We currently have building applications submitted to the Maine Department of Education for a new centrally-located K-5 school for the Towns of Belmont, Morrill, and Searsmont. We are listed as #25 on the list, but there is no timeline for projects to begin. If finances improve, the estimated time would be six to ten (6-10) years. There is no guarantee with regard to funding, so we really do not know when that project might move ahead. With the reorganization, the Tri-Town students can move to a facility that has a gymnasium, cafeteria, art room, music room, and full-size library. There would no longer be the K-2, 3-5 split in grades, allowing the “older” students to work with the “younger” students.

Elementary teachers would be able to collaborate with fellow teachers of the same grade level. Experienced teachers sharing with new teachers and working together to determine the best way to provide instruction on a particular concept would be possible. Multiple minds working toward a solution result in a better solution and bring consistency across the grade levels.

For high school students, access to higher level classes and AP classes, numerous electives and additional foreign language classes would be available to all high school students in the Region. Currently, Searsport District High School is too small to provide these classes.

Middle school students would benefit from expanded offerings in foreign language, inquiry based learning, such as the garden project and science curriculum, as well as tech education (formerly known as shop class). Itinerant teachers spend too much of their time on the road between schools. By consolidating elementary schools, the travel time becomes instructional time.

B. THE RESTUCTURE

The actual reorganization concept has come together after reviewing many options. The RSU #20 vision/mission work last year emphasized the need for consistency and equal opportunity for all students, the ability for high school students to move freely between the high schools and the vocational schools, and even spoke to the possibility of three (3) high schools – one possibly strong in the humanities area, one with a math/science focus, and a vocational high school. There were comments of Troy Howard Middle School becoming a high school with a direct connection to post-secondary work at the Hutchinson Center. These are just a few of the options considered as we moved through the process.

We spent significant time ensuring we are in compliance with codes and Department of Education requirements for schools. Elementary schools have a number of requirements for the K-2 population that needed to be reviewed.

Presently, there are well-established programs that are part of schools' curriculum; *i.e.*, the greenhouse and "shop" programs at THMS. Provisions should be made for those to continue.

It has taken a long time to put this together, and I am sure that we have inadvertently omitted some details that will need to be addressed. However, I am also confident that with public support, we are good to move forward with the following concept:

1. Searsport District Middle/High School complex becomes the RSU #20 middle school. All students in Grades 6 through 8 will attend the school.
2. Belfast Area High School becomes the RSU #20 high school, with BCOPE continuing as the alternative high school.
3. Troy Howard Middle School becomes an elementary school housing students K-5 from Ames, Weymouth, Nickerson and East Belfast Schools. Ames, Weymouth and Nickerson Schools will be closed. Four hundred thirty-five (435) students will move to a building with a capacity of 450 students.
4. East Belfast School will become a pre-school (4-year-olds) center housing the 4-year-old program from Ames, Nickerson (currently located at the Swanville Town Office), East Belfast and two (2) classes housed at the Methodist Church on Mill Lane in Belfast.
5. Frankfort students will move to the Searsport Elementary School and the Frankfort Elementary School will be closed.
6. Stockton Springs Elementary School and the Drinkwater School in Northport will remain open, as there is not enough space to move those students into other schools.

C. SAVINGS AND ISSUES

The reorganization concept has the potential of annual savings of \$1,836,020. This is a very conservative estimate, with the actual savings likely being higher.

Elementary Schools:

Teaching Positions (4)		- \$200,000
Operational Expenses: (heat, lights, maintenance, etc.)	Ames	- \$110,410
	Weymouth	- 86,623
	Nickerson	- 124,729
	Frankfort	- 126,154
Principals' Offices	Ames	- \$ 51,307
	Weymouth	- 60,000
	Nickerson	- 101,797
	Frankfort	- 90,000

Middle School:

Teaching Positions (3.5)		- \$175,000
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High School:

Teaching Positions (10)		- \$500,000
Guidance & Secretary		- 75,000

MS/HS Principals' Offices:

Administrator (1)		- \$ 75,000
Secretaries (2)		- <u>60,000</u>

Total Potential Savings \$1,836,020

At the request of a taxpayer, I have included below the savings per municipality that could be realized if the reorganization were in place presently. Please note: the savings for each municipality would vary from year to year as town property valuations change.

Belfast	- \$717,520.78
Belmont	- 52,839.71
Frankfort	- 76,129.70
Morrill	- 54,338.71
Northport	- 228,585.75
Searsmont	- 133,494.18
Searsport	- 254,044.53
Stockton Springs	- 218,675.36
Swanville	- 100,391.28

Are there some drawbacks to the concept of reorganization? Yes, of course. Examples:

1. It represents a major change in what we are accustomed to providing for schools. Access is not as easy and schools will be larger.
2. While some students will have less of a bus ride, most students will require more travel time on their bus.
3. The high school will be a little crowded, though well within the capacity. Common areas (lobby, café, and library) will work, but additional space would be preferred. Further consideration on this may be warranted in the future.
4. A concern already expressed is that the high school would now be considered a 'Class A' school for athletic purposes .
5. Some folks have stated the nurturing, secure and intimate feeling of elementary schools will be lost.

D. **TIMELINE**

The first step will be to have the Board of Directors review and discuss the idea. If there is a majority that feels the concept is worth exploring, then I would look for approval from the Board to seek public input. Such a Board action would not imply there is approval to adopt the idea, only that there is a willingness to explore the concept.

Assuming the Board gives the go ahead, I would then set up public forums throughout the Region to explain the concept and gather public comments, concerns, and/or suggested changes. I would also be available to speak with various organizations, civic groups, and student groups. I would expect the informational gathering process to continue throughout the summer and into September.

At some point, maybe late September or even in November on Election Day, I propose a Region vote on a non-binding referendum. The referendum would provide a an opportunity for all citizens to express their opinions.

After the forums and referendum, I feel the Board should have some sense of the level of public support. If public support is evident, and it must be or this idea will struggle for a long time, then it would be time for the Board to take formal action. If the Board acted in late November or December of 2011, and the result was to move forward, I feel it is realistic to look at September 2013 as the implementation date. It might be possible to go in September 2012, but with all that needs to be done, I think that would be unlikely to happen. If we make the move, it needs to be done right.

On a final note, I realize the concept represents major changes and will certainly meet with significant resistance. However, I continue to feel that to be fiscally and educationally prudent, I have a responsibility to put this forth as an option for voters to consider. I, like everyone else, like the way things are and do not want to see big changes. However, the finances are not what they were in the past. The quality of our educational offerings will decline unless we pay more in taxes or reduce our cost of operations by more efficiently utilizing our current facilities.