

District Elementary Enrollment Committee  
Humiston Building, Meredith  
Wednesday, June 08, 2005  
4:00 p.m.

Members present: Phil McCormack, Steve Kelley, Richard Hanson, Juli Hird, Jeanne Chute, Kay Marini, Peter Miller, Betsy Paine and John Hansen

Others present: Roberta Tenney, Trish Temperino, Paula Adriance, Jennifer Petitti, Susan Mitchell.

Meeting called to order: 4:11 p.m.

Dr. McCormack introduced Roberta Tenney from the New Hampshire Department of Education.

Public input: None.

Minutes of May 25, 2005 accepted as presented.

Ms. Tenney was provided with questions from the committee before the meeting (see minutes of May 11 meeting). Ms. Tenney noted that she became involved in the NH Department of Education charter school office somewhat by accident, as did the State. She commented that the State did not want to pass up Federal money available for charter schools. There are seven authorized charters, with five of them off to a strong start.

Ms. Tenney handed out some materials produced both at the State and Federal levels on charter schools. She also shared some anecdotes of success stories of individual students in New Hampshire charter schools.

Ms. Tenney reported that there are two options available for charter schools: State authorization and local authorization. She said that there are two planning groups who are looking at local authorization and all the rest are seeking or have received State authorization. Conversion schools will get 80% of the per pupil cost of the authorizing District. She noted that the law says that State adequacy money follows the child, though it is not adequate. Federal dollars are available for start up costs.

Ms. Tenney reported that the Seacoast Charter Middle School is doing a great job informing parents and keeping the students involved in its thematic approach. They are using Federal money of up to \$500,000 over three years. She noted that a school can't get the money until it receives a charter.

Ms. Tenney reported on the status of charter schools in existence in NH and noted that all are fundamentally struggling due to the amount of money they

receive. Six of the seven are doing well in terms of attracting students and positive notice in the media. There was some mention of the conflicts in Franklin being based mainly around how and when State adequacy money finds its way to the charter school.

Ms. Tenney told the committee that there is no funding mechanism for charter schools beyond the adequacy money and start up costs. The North Country Charter School is a cooperative venture of several school district superintendents to work with high school dropouts. The charter school got the adequacy money plus each District paid additional sums agreed upon in advance by the Superintendents.

Advocates of charter schools say that charters can do the same or better for less money. For instance, charter staff only needs to have 50% certified teachers. Highly qualified teacher (HQT) law also applies to charters, but Ms. Tenney was not sure if there was a percentage threshold similar to certified teachers.

Questions were asked about funding of charter schools and conversion schools. There appeared to be great confusion in the discussion between the two. The bottom line, according to Ms. Tenney, is that state chartered schools receive the adequacy money for each student in the school while a conversion school would receive the adequacy money and any other costs that the District chooses to fund at or above 80% of that District's per pupil cost.

In response to a question, Ms. Tenney stated that she thought Tamworth did vote to have a charter school but it never opened. Mrs. Adriance noted that it did not open because of money.

Mrs. Chute asked what the District and Sandwich would gain by converting to a charter school. Ms. Tenney thought that the biggest gain would be Federal money for three years. Generally, charter schools have been created for the under-served. She didn't think that NH students overall were underserved.

Mr. Hanson noted that charter schools should promote innovation, do something special. "Isn't that the reason people go into this?" he asked. Ms. Tenney noted that in her experience that is why people get into this.

Ms. Hird noted that the attorney at our last meeting had said that a conversion school is still subject to most of the same rules and regulations as a public school. Ms. Tenney concurred that that is true to an extent, but there is a bit more flexibility.

Dr. McCormack clarified that becoming a conversion charter would not change the status of being a Title I school or not. It was noted that Sandwich does not qualify for Title I funds at this time due to its low number of students who receive free and reduced lunch.

Ms. Marini asked if the District would be responsible for special education costs of students in a charter school. Ms. Tenney said this is true.

Mr. Hansen asked to clarify that a state sponsored charter school receives only adequacy money and donations, but tuition may not be charged to parents or other districts (beyond the adequacy money that follows the students.) Ms. Tenney said this was true and added that a conversion school can charge tuition from other school districts, but not from parents of students from other districts.

The expectation is that charter schools will look for philanthropic dollars.

Dr. McCormack noted as a point of clarification that he did not think that charter schools had to comply with HQT if one considered a high school charter with only two teachers – they probably would not have the necessary credentials for HGT status. Ms. Tenney said she would look into that, but did not know at this time. Ms. Tenney left at 5:02 p.m.

The committee discussed charter schools a bit more after Ms. Tenney left.

Dr. McCormack commented about the choice program in the Monadnock School District. They are concerned about sustainability once grant funding runs out.

Ms. Hird spoke about a charter school in New York City operated by Deborah Myer that was very successful. Money came from tax dollars and philanthropy.

Mr. Hansen told the committee about a “Pre-Charter Planning Grant” of \$10,000 received by a group of parents, teachers, and community members in Sandwich. This grant will permit this group to examine the feasibility of creating a charter school in Sandwich. The intent of this group is to look closely at a conversion charter school. If a charter is not created, it is hoped that the work done on developing a theme for the proposed charter might be applied to the public school.

Ms. Chute noted that there are so many different groups doing things on this issue. There is the DEEC, the Sandwich town committee, and the pre-charter planning group. Are they working together or are they at odds with each other? Committee members thought the different groups had a common goal of finding a solution to the enrollment issue in Sandwich.

Mr. Hansen noted that the Pre-Charter Planning Grant is not a district grant; it is awarded to an independent group of parents, teachers, and administration. However, stated in the grant was the intent to investigate a charter conversion school with local, i.e. District, authorization. This group does not intend to seek a State charter.

Dr. McCormack noted that all the different groups do know what is happening. Ms. Chute commented that it would be important that information presented at the Sandwich Town meeting doesn't conflict with other groups' work. Mr. Hansen noted that all of the different groups would be presenting information to the Town Meeting.

Mr. Hansen noted that it was important for our committee to investigate and allow others to investigate all the options. He noted that by next March he would not be afraid to face the District voters so long as the DEEC had truly looked at all identifiable options.

Dr. McCormack addressed future meeting schedule. Once we reach the end of the school year, it is difficult to get everyone together. Ms. Chute said she wanted to go back and look at the ideas that were brainstormed last year and review where we are with that list. She also thought it was important to review what happens at tomorrow night's Sandwich town meeting to see what comes out at that meeting. We should have a wrap-up meeting before summer.

**Next meeting: Tuesday, June 21, 2005, 4:30 – 6:00 p.m. at Humiston Building, Meredith.** Agenda will be to review where we are, what we've learned, where we want to go.

Mr. Miller noted that on the 21<sup>st</sup> we might have an opportunity to reflect on what Attorney Loughman told us last meeting. His understanding was that the committee was also going to look at the financial aspects of the different options.

Ms. Hird commented that she would be presenting tomorrow night a template of a program that the teachers worked on as a possible option for the community. She wanted to know if she should present information about that at the next DEEC meeting.

Dr. McCormack commented that no one has authorized the Sandwich staff to go its own route, to change the school's focus. Mr. Miller asked that Ms. Hird identify tomorrow night how she is speaking – as a committee member, as a teacher, or as a townspeople.

Mr. Hansen commented that it should come as no surprise that the staff has been exploring ways to increase enrollment. They have tried to reach consensus on what they might be willing, as a staff to do differently that the town might endorse that would help to increase enrollment.

Mr. Miller asked why there isn't more patience with this process? Ms. Paine said because some were not happy with the K/1 merger.

Dr. McCormack expressed concern with the process. Until and if Sandwich decides to withdraw or amend the cooperative agreement, Sandwich is not an

independent entity. Establishing a thematic school is not the right of the Sandwich school but is a District prerogative.

Mr. Hanson asked if this was going to be presented as a charter school? Ms. Hird said it would not.

Ms. Paine said that she attended a meeting at the school last week at which she noted that the staff has spent so much time and energy on this issue that they must not sleep. They are trying to find ways to help.

Mr. Miller again stressed that people need to have more patience. The number of different voices concerns him. He would like the committee to have the time to do its work. There is a slight risk of chaos following this meeting tomorrow night.

Mr. Hansen noted that folks in Sandwich might not appear patient because they are fearful of the December, 2005 deadline on this committee. They are afraid that they may not have a say in what happens or that the committee may not explore all options.

Dr. McCormack noted he met with a demographer today and they looked at projections through 2014 and there is a steady decline in enrollment District-wide projected.

Public input: None

Plus/delta: Mr. Hanson said he is learning. Dr. Kelley is at an analysis and synthesis point right now with the data generated. He needs a few steps back to see where we are. He said that the committee needs to start honing in on the next set of recommendations. Mr. Miller is confident that the committee can make excellent long-term recommendations that will benefit both schools. He wants to look at hard financial projections associated with the different scenarios. Ms. Marini is looking forward to stepping back and looking at what we have done. Ms. Chute now has a better frame/concept on charter schools. She still is having difficulty processing all that we learned at the last meeting. Ms. Paine hopes that the committee can look at the Inter-Lakes Elementary School enrollment issue. Mr. Hansen noted that he still thinks there is a win-win solution. Ms. Hird believes with what Mr. Miller and Mr. Hansen said, but cautioned that might need the information yesterday.

Meeting adjourned 6:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Hansen