

District Elementary Enrollment Committee
Wednesday, October 19, 2005
7:00 p.m.
Humiston Building – Meredith

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

Others Present: Heather Littlefield, Maggie Mills, John Martin, Betsy Paine, Amy Morse, Connie Ryan, Jennifer Petitti, and Kate Potterfield.

Meeting called to order at 7:03 p.m.

Minutes of last meeting: No changes.

Public Input: Ms. Connie Ryan took a careful look at the draft recommendation report and thought it was a coherent, readable document. There is a paragraph that she wanted to support about what is working in Sandwich. She wants to focus on whether children are receiving a quality education. If there is any room for the school board to leave as much as possible in place in Sandwich, that would be better. She noted that she is a taxpayer in Meredith and supports the quality of the education in Sandwich and Meredith. If we look at what's working in all of the schools of the District, you will see that much is working in Sandwich and Inter-Lakes.

Ms. Betsy Paine commented on a few concerns related to procedure. She noted that the DEEC moved quickly to the multiage solution, while the issue of equity seems to have been dropped from consideration. She noted that the DEEC didn't examine why Inter-Lakes moved away from a multiage curriculum in the ILSD. What were those reasons and why are they not being equitably applied in Sandwich? For the rest of the kids in the District, we went back to a single grade model. She noted her surprise in getting to this solution so quickly without considering these issues.

Ms. Paine also noted concern that the DEEC had not recommended an actual class size policy. The report says that the District will be shifting one school to an entirely different philosophy, so the Board policies cannot be the same for single grades verses multiage. She was also concerned about the lack of discussion in the report of historical issues, including the equity piece. We waded into some of the big issues, but then pulled back. She's worried that the DEEC is moving too quickly. If she were still a committee member, she would not be able to support this recommendation. She was not disappointed in the quality of the work, but only in the outcome. She thanked every committee member for his/her hard work.

Ms. Paine didn't think that as a committee it could recommend the elimination of two staff members as that is a managerial decision. She also didn't think the committee could promise a specific dollar savings. The elimination of staff positions is the only thing in the report that has a District wide impact. She understands that the cuts will happen

District wide. Most likely staff members currently working at the Inter-Lakes Elementary School will be laid off and Sandwich staff members transferred to Inter-Lakes Elementary, if she understands the contractual provisions that govern reductions in staff.

Ms. Johnson asked why ILES went from multiage to single grades. Dr. Kelley noted that it was a decision that was impacted by State frameworks that were grade level specific as well as that State testing was being implemented at the 3rd grade level. He noted that the school didn't get to the point of looking at re-writing the curriculum, whereas the proposed plan before the DEEC tonight does point in that direction.

Ms. Johnson clarified that it seemed that assessment and student performance on these assessments was a major reason for discontinuing multiage.

Ms. Chute noted that some teachers, with administrative support, created multiage classrooms. It was not a District initiative.

Dr. Kelley commented that there were both single grade and multiage classes at the same time. Parents had some ability to choose, but this added a difficult piece to the model at ILES. This raised the question of whether it was really worth it to continue with two different models in one school.

Mr. Miller asked if he could respond to Ms. Paine's thoughtful comments. Dr. McCormack asked if he would try not to get into an exchange as this is not a public hearing.

Ms. Chute asked for clarification on page 2 of the draft. There were action words at each bubble except under "Staff Training". The committee agreed that some action words should be inserted so all bubbles are consistent in their construction.

Ms. Johnson noted that she is still having problems with the overall recommendation. Ms. Johnson believes that the most positive and productive learning environment for children is the one currently in place in Sandwich. With all the training and support necessary to implement multiage, it is unclear whether it will be cost effective. Equity and parity is not that far off between Sandwich and ILES. She noted that these issues need to be fleshed out or she would not be able to support the final report.

Mr. Hanson was going to offer some editing type comments, but also had some concerns other than editing. In paragraph one, he would rather have "support and implement". [As grammatical and wording changes were suggested, they were noted in one of the drafts but not in these minutes. Dr. McCormack, Juli Hird and John Hansen will meet to rewrite the proposal taking into consideration all of the suggestions made during the meeting. A new draft will then be discussed at the next meeting. The following minutes contain highlights of discussions generated during this process of changes being offered.]

Mr. Miller asked to speak to some of the content of the proposal. Mr. Miller is pleased with the recommendation of the committee and the way it is expressed. If he were the

parent of a child attending SCS, he stated that he would be thrilled with this recommendation. Early in his career, Mr. Miller noted he observed two very progressive schools. Instruction was developmentally based and they were wonderful learning environments for students, teachers, parents and the larger community. They sold him on the power of the developmental approach to the education. Sandwich is fortunate to have people like John and Juli who have the ability and motivation to implement and make this recommendation work. It will bring stability to the issue of declining enrollment.

Mr. Miller commented that the draft lists matters that should be taken up by the Board and administration. Previously, Mr. Miller noted that he had wished that the committee would make more definitive stands on some of these issues, but he has pulled back from that. He still feels we may have passed the “hot potato” to the Board, but he has confidence in the Board and administration. He does not feel the DEEC has been premature in its recommendation. Mr. Miller plans on attending Board meetings at which these issues are discussed.

Ms. Chute liked that the narrative made reference to more data in appendices instead of making it bog down with too much detail.

Mr. Hanson had a concern with the wording on page three regarding the reason for the formation of the DEEC. He noted that the DEEC was formed to advise the Board on declining enrollment rather than just the small class sizes in Sandwich.

Ms. Chute generated discussion about the idea on page 5 that multiage would provide an equal or “superior” education and she thought the word superior should be stricken. There was concern that we could not predict a superior outcome. Ms. Johnson suggested the word “adequate”. Dr. McCormack was opposed to the use of that word. Mr. Miller liked the word superior, saying if the proposed change is only equal with no potential to be superior, why would we recommend it? Someone asked that if it is superior, why ILES wouldn't go this route. Another suggestion was the use of “potentially superior”. It was noted that part of the reason it would be superior is that it would eliminate the ongoing issue of class sizes; there would be a consistent arrangement at SCS that would be superior to the unknown of each year.

Mr. Hanson agreed with Mr. Miller's comments. He said that in all of the time the DEEC has looked at this issue, no other viable alternative has been discovered. He hopes that it will be a superior solution.

Mr. Hanson commented about the savings noted on page 5. He wanted a parenthetical notation that the savings might not be as great as noted. Mr. Hanson would not be in favor of the multiage recommendation if it only saved money, but because it provides continuity to the program at SCS and is an educationally sound solution.

There was discussion about what the maximum class size would be. Dr. Kelley noted that there isn't extensive research specific to multiage class size, and it really depends on the composition of the class. Mr. Hansen noted he is not concerned about the teachers'

ability to successfully teach 20 students in a class, but that they might not be able to deal with some of the ancillary things that they were able to do with class size of 13-15. He noted his concern about a small school not having regular resources of a nurse or a guidance counselor. Teachers at SCS are expected to help students with issues such as a playground problem. The time spent doing this can be made up in a small class, but teachers will not be able to spend as much time doing these sorts of things with classes approaching or exceeding 20 students.

Ms. Johnson was concerned that the committee should be making a recommendation of the maximum class size. She emphasized that there should be a maximum noted. Mr. Miller commented that the report should note what class sizes would be in the near future, not recommending a specific class size.

Mr. Hanson said part of the reason for deferring a recommendation on class size is that it should be deferred to the educational professionals. Dr. McCormack read from the class size policy noting that it states that classes should be kept at a level that is educationally effective. Dr. McCormack noted that the newest state standards “strongly encourage” student to teacher ratios at or less than 20:1 in grades K-3; 25:1 in grades 4-8. Mr. Miller noted that the paragraph about the number of students in a class and the anticipated dollar savings is important and he is glad that it is included. It is part of the charge.

Ms. Marini inquired whether the committee had actually recommended a grade configuration. Dr. McCormack and Mr. Hansen each noted that the committee had not, but that it was put in the draft to generate discussion. Dr. Kelley noted that he would not be in favor of the configuration recommended, but he believed that there would be many different thoughts on this. Dr. McCormack noted that he has had experience with the arrangement as presented and would support it. After further discussion, Dr. McCormack suggested to the committee that the grade band issue be passed on to the Board and administration.

Ms. Johnson asked about the issue of challenges that are listed in the first paragraph of page 6. Will these things be able to be addressed so that this can be implemented in 2006-07? Dr. McCormack noted that this is addressed on page 7 as something the Board needs to take under consideration.

Dr. Kelley liked the wording on page 6 that clearly states that the structure of multiage should stay consistent. There was discussion about how it should be stated, perhaps more strongly. Dr. McCormack and Dr. Kelley noted scenarios where even with a large class; one might not split the class, but perhaps hire a part time teacher for reading and math only. This has been done at ILES in the past, and is currently being done in Ashland.

Mr. Miller suggested a change in wording to the last sentence of the fifth paragraph on page 7: The DEEC believes that the fundamental quality of SCS is enriched by the proposed changes and the District is strengthened through a better use of resources.

Mr. Hanson suggested that it read, “... is not diminished, but enriched ...”

Mr. Hanson had concerns with the first paragraph under final thoughts. The current model actually is broken because it isn't consistent. The paragraph seems to lead to nowhere. Mr. Miller agreed.

Ms. Johnson suggested wording similar to this: "The DEEC believes that the fundamental quality of SCS is not diminished, but enriched by the anticipated stability to be brought about by the proposed changes, yet the District's resources will be more efficiently utilized."

Mr. Hanson liked this suggestion, but thinks it is more than just stability. Multiage is a great idea for more than the stability it creates.

Dr. Kelley noted how impressed he was with the professional quality of the document. Dr. McCormack noted he was proud of the work the committee has done.

Next meeting will be Monday, November 7, 2005 from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. at the Humiston Building in Meredith.

Public input: Mr. Martin appreciated the fact that the draft report was shared ahead of time with the public. He also wanted to reiterate that just because Sandwich staff will be reduced by two positions does not mean that it will be Sandwich staff members who will actually lose their jobs. Finally, he was uncomfortable without a class size cap. He strongly urged the consideration of a maximum cap.

Ms. Littlefield thanked the committee for its hard work. She felt that the committee should note the amount of hard work that has gone into the current K-1 when looking at the grade bands. She noted that that arrangement should be given a chance so its success can be measured.

Plus-Delta: Ms. Marini thinks the DEEC is coming closer to consensus, though she is not sure if she had a child at elementary age if she would be supportive. However, it appears to be the best choice. Dr. Kelley was worried that we would bog down with wordsmithing, but was pleasantly surprised at how fast it went.

Mr. Hanson is happy with the fact that we might be reaching a conclusion. He noted our intentions are good. Mr. Hansen noted that although he had a large role in drafting the proposal, he was concerned with the things left out of the report. He voiced concern that if too many critical issues were left to the Board and administration, it might be difficult to get the full support of the Sandwich community behind the multiage recommendation until answers are known to the several critical issues of grade bands, class size, and implementation timeframe.

Dr. McCormack greatly appreciated how respectful people are of different points of view. Mr. Miller is very proud of the committee in terms of its process and accomplishment. He is confident that the report as amended will be a fine document.

Ms. Chute noted that she can stand behind the document as written and amended. Ms. Hird is very proud of the report. She is excited about the potential. It's time to acknowledge that a large school and a small school cannot be expected to operate in the same way. She puts much trust that the School Board will treat with respect the issues that have been highlighted in the report as "ultimately critical to the successful implementation of multiage."

Ms. Johnson thinks that it should be clear that the recommendation is contingent on these other critical issues being addressed in a satisfactory manner. She thinks she might be able to support the proposal with the changes suggested tonight and the confidence that the Board will resolve the issues critical to successful implementation.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
John Hansen

NEXT MEETING: **MONDAY**, November 7, 2005 from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. at the Humiston Building in Meredith.