

MEMORANDUM

TO: Elizabethtown-Lewis-Westport Merger Study Advisory Committee
FROM: Suzanne Gilmour, Alan Pole and Bill Silky
RE: Meeting Notes-Meeting of August 23, 2017
DATE: August 26, 2017

Attendance:

Committee Members: Cena Abramo, Paul Buehler, Michelle Feeley, Jason Fiegl, Judy French, Dina Garvey, Scott Gibbs, Ryan Hathaway, Sarah Kullman, Tonya Lackey, Josh Meyer, James Monty, Pam Nicholas, Roger Sandwick, Keegan Sewell, Sam Sherman, Debbie Spaulding, Kathleen White, and Rob Witkiewicz

Consultants: Suzanne Gilmour, Alan Pole, and Bill Silky

Superintendent Advisors: Scott Osborne and A. Paul Scott

Observers: Baronese Rutz, Ofa Vaiciulis, Aubrey Pulsifer, Medara Sherman, Cathy Brankman, Heather Olson, Sharlene Petro-Durgan, Scott Osborne, A. Paul Scott, Eve Bailey, Micah Stewart, Breda Bramich, Ellen Cole, Lorraine Hathaway, Arin Burdo, Analise Burdo, Sarah Chandler, Stites McDaniel, Kim Dedam, Alvin Reinier, and Joanne Mazzotte

Location: Westport

1. A. Paul Scott, Interim Superintendent in Westport, welcomed everyone to the district and introduced the merger study consultants and Scott Osborne, superintendent of Elizabethtown-Lewis. Committee members were asked to introduce themselves and describe their connection with the school districts.
2. Alan Pole provided an overview of the motivation for school districts to engage in a merger study including higher expectations for students, declining enrollments, and challenging financial times.
3. Meetings of the District Advisory Committee will be held from 6:00-8:00 pm as follows:

Date	Topic	Location
August 23	Organization, Overview, and Enrollment Projections	Westport
September 27	Instructional/Extracurricular Program	E-L
October 25	Facilities	Westport
December 6	Transportation	E-L
January 24	Staffing	Westport
February 28	Finances	E-L
April 25	Review Findings and Recommendations/React to Draft Final Report	Westport

4. A contact list of the members of the Merger Study Advisory Committee was shared with email addresses. Members of the group were asked to verify the accuracy of the information, as email will serve as the primary means of communication between the consultants and the committee members. Whenever possible, meeting materials will be emailed to all committee members prior to the meeting. Paper copies of the materials will be made available at each meeting.

5. Meeting notes will be provided after each meeting. The notes will be emailed to all committee members and copied to the two superintendents. It will be the responsibility of the superintendents to distribute the notes within their district, as they deem appropriate. It is anticipated that, at a minimum, notes will be provided to board members and posted on each district's web site. Meeting notes will also be emailed to the District Superintendent and the State Education Department. The Power Point that is used at each meeting will also be posted on the districts' websites after each meeting occurs.

6. All meetings of the advisory committee will be open. Members of the public will be welcome at these meetings. The public will be asked to allow the committee to do its work for the first part of the meeting. At the conclusion of each meeting, the observers will have the opportunity to offer comments or ask questions. In addition, the consultants will remain after the meeting should anyone wish to speak with them at that time.

7. Alan Pole presented a PowerPoint overview of the school district merger process in New York State. He began by reviewing the reasons for considering reorganization including the ability to increase course offerings, the potential for upgrading facilities, as well as the ability to reduce taxes by eliminating duplication and consolidation of functions. He also reminded everyone that reorganization may be difficult because of the fear of losing local identity, the uncertainty over board representation, increased busing time for some students, and the natural resistance to change.

He indicated that the merger study is designed to provide information for the school districts, the communities, and the Commissioner on enrollments, program, facilities,

transportation, staffing, and finances. The study will describe the current status of the districts and will provide a set of recommendations for the new board of education to consider should a merger occur. Each of the Boards of Education will have an opportunity to decide how to proceed once the study is concluded.

The study will use data to provide objective information to make decisions on adding classes and/or reducing staff, creating building configurations by grade level, adding bus runs and drivers, calculating potential staffing savings, and assessing the financial impact of the merger. Alan indicated that decisions will not be made for the new district regarding the name, colors, or mascot, the specific classes to be added or the staff reduced, the new bus routes and stops, or deciding when staff savings might be realized or how financial decisions will be made. These are the decisions that, if a merger occurs, the new board of education is responsible for making.

The role and function of the School/Community Advisory Committee was reviewed. He indicated that the function of the committee is to advise the Boards of Education and the consultants, to communicate with the public about the process, and to prepare informative materials. The committee includes 10 people from each school community including 5 community members, 2 teachers, 1 building administrator, 1 support staff, and 1 student. The superintendents are not members of the committee but serve as resources to the committee. Committee members are expected to attend all committee meetings, freely express their points of view, be key communicators with stakeholder groups, and be a respectful, contributing member of the committee. Alan asked that all committee members come to the meetings with an open mind.

He emphasized that the consultants bring an outside, unbiased perspective and will ensure that the process is open. They will maintain contact with the State Education Department and the District Superintendent, will produce meetings notes after each committee meeting and will be responsible for the final report. The recommendations in the report will benefit student learning and will be educationally sound and fiscally responsible. They will also be independent of special interest groups. The final report will not recommend whether or not a merger should occur.

The draft time line for the merger study was reviewed. The study begins with this meeting in August 2017 and is slated to be completed by May 2018. The study will be reviewed by the State Education Department in June 2018 and presented to the Boards of Education in August 2018. In September 2018, the districts will have public information and discussion sessions culminating in a decision by the two Boards of Education about whether or not to go forward. If both boards vote in go forward, then an Advisory Referendum (straw vote) will be held in November 2018 and, if the votes in each district are positive then a Final (Statutory) Referendum will be held in January 2019. If that vote is positive in both districts then the new district will begin operations effective July

1, 2019. While these dates are all subject to review and change as circumstances occur, the State Education will set the final schedule once the study has been completed.

8. Bill Silky presented an overview of past enrollments for Elizabethtown-Lewis and Westport as well as projected future enrollments for both districts. The study begins by reviewing enrollment trends as enrollment influences all decisions regarding staffing, class and curricular offerings, facilities, transportation, and finances.

Enrollments in both districts have been declining over the past few years. Since the 2011-2012 school year, the enrollment in Elizabethtown-Lewis has declined 24.5% from 306 to 231 and the enrollment in Westport has declined by 0.3% from 232 to 224.

To predict future enrollment, the consultants employ the Cohort Survival Projection method that uses information on the number of births in each school district over a period of years and calculates patterns of enrollment. A cohort survival ratio is developed that tracks how each cohort of students changes as it moves through the grade level. This ratio, used with the live birth information, predicts what the enrollment will be for a period of years given consistent and predictable conditions. It does not take into account significant economic development changes such as a major employer leaving or entering the area and other similar changes. However, it is not anticipated that either of these conditions will be taking place within the borders of these two school districts.

Using this method, the Elizabethtown-Lewis enrollment is predicted to increase from 231 in 2016-17 to 200 in the 2023-2024 year, a decrease of 31 students. Westport's enrollment is predicted to increase from 224 in 2016-17 to 275 in the 2023-2024 year, an increase of 51 students. Bill indicated that there was one birth-to-kindergarten ratio that he felt was an aberration and may have caused an over-inflation of Westport's future enrollments. He indicate that he will do some recalculating of the future enrollments without this ratio and will update enrollments once the October 2017 data are available. If the districts were to be merged, the combined enrollment projects a relatively constant combined enrollment from 455 students in 2016-17 to 475 students in 2023-24.

The number of home schooled students, non-resident students, and resident students enrolled in non-public schools are all factors that are considered in projecting enrollment. Over the past five years, an average of 5.4 students were home schooled in Elizabethtown-Lewis and 6.6 were home schooled in Westport. Elizabethtown-Lewis has averaged 16.8 students per year that attend public or private schools other than Elizabethtown-Lewis; Westport has averaged 6.1 students per year attending other public or private schools. Elizabethtown-Lewis has had three non-resident students per year over the past five years; Westport has averaged 39 non-resident students per year over the past five years. Obviously the non-resident population is a significant part of the Westport enrollment and will be explored further in the next meeting.

9. Comments and questions were entertained from the committee and the observers.

- *How many students were enrolled in each of the districts 15-20 years ago?* This question will be answered at the next meeting.
- *How many of the non-resident students that attend Westport are from Elizabethtown-Lewis?* This question will be answered at the next meeting.
- *How many of the non-resident students in Westport are children of Westport teachers?* This question will be answered at the next meeting.
- *What is the format of the report going to look like?* In addition to an introductory chapter, there will be a chapter on each of the topics that will be covered with the advisory committee; enrollment, program, facilities, transportation, staffing, and finances.
- *What percentage of districts that undertake merger studies actually end up merging?* It is estimated that approximately 10% of the districts that study merger actually merge. The most recent merger that is close to these two districts would be Oppenheim-Ephratah and St. Johnsville.
- *How many Boards of Education agree to have a public referendum after the study is completed.* While we have no hard data on this question, it is estimated that 80-90% of the districts have a public referendum after the study.

10. The next advisory committee meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 27, 2017 at Elizabethtown-Lewis. A tour of the school will begin at 5:15 for anyone who is interested. The meeting of the Merger Study Advisory Committee will begin at 6:00 p.m.

We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on August 23. If you have questions with these notes, please feel free to contact me. We will also review these notes as the first agenda item at our next meeting.

Looking forward to seeing you again on 9.27.17 in Elizabethtown-Lewis!

C: Scott Osborne
 A. Paul Scott
 Mark Davey
 Christina Coughlin

