

Regional School Unit #18
Report to
Maine Department of Education
March 28, 2008

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TO: Susan Gendron, Commissioner
Cc: MSAD #68 School Board, Union #60 School Boards, Governor Baldacci,
Senator Smith, Representative Annis

Submitted by: RSU #18 Regional Planning Committee Co-Chairs:

Ralph Johnson	R.S.Johnson@hughes.net
Rick Johnston	fjohnston2@verizon.net
Sue Mackey Andrews	sdmandrews@aol.com

RSU #18 currently consists of MSAD 68 and Union 60, without the community of Willimantic, and includes Bowerbank. Towns included are:

MSAD #68: Sebec, Dover-Foxcroft, Monson, Charleston
Union #60: Greenville, Shirley, Beaver Cover, Kingsbury Plantation

It is estimated that RSU 18 will serve approximately 1,300 students K-12. It will include one public high school in the town of Greenville and a private school, Foxcroft Academy, in Dover-Foxcroft. Other school facilities are in Greenville, Shirley, Monson, and Dover-Foxcroft.

Since our initial organization on September 29, 2007, this RPC has worked diligently during bi-weekly meetings to develop responses to each area of the Reorganization Plan. We have held three (3) public informing sessions since submitting our December 1, 2007 "check list" to the MDOE.

Governance has been a major stumbling block to greater collaboration in our area. RSU #18 originally was composed of 4 School Districts (MSAD #4, 41, 46 and 68) and Union #60. Local issues and concerns over equity and parity, school closings and "local control" resulted in the loss of the larger partnership early on in the process. Our RPC genuinely would like to see this more expansive partnership be rekindled and we are hopeful that the legislative changes under L.D. 1932 are approved, particularly the change dealing with the union-form of governance.

We value a community school concept in this county and we don't want to compromise educational excellence, options and opportunities for our students. Union 60 has been a strong voice in this process, emphasizing the need for:

- local control of schools,
- budgetary control of all but merged functions.
- a community veto over closure of any school facilities,
- continued municipal ownership of all school facilities, and
- an exit plan should conditions change from those anticipated at the time of the public referendum.

In the interim, we have reached out to each of the area school districts in the hopes of partnerships for educational excellence through collaborative program and service initiatives for students, increased efficiencies through collective purchasing or service agreements (such as accounts payable), etc. Discussions continue to occur at several levels and we remain hopeful that the number of partners within RSU #18 will grow. Union #60 and Jackman are currently sharing a Superintendent, as one example. This experience should provide our RPC with additional information about the logistical and technical realities for these types of arrangements in this rural county.

Our RPC continues to meet bi-weekly and to tackle our work plan, which was built along the component areas of the School Reorganization Plan submission guidelines. We have also added a section on educational excellence as we feel that this is an area which should have been addressed in the plan in general. We are nearly finished with our deliberations and will review and vote on the whole plan in another few weeks.

Subsequent to this, individual School Board presentations will be made and arrangements defined for public information and engagement sessions to be conducted by the members of the RPC. We will also work with our local school Boards to develop a plan for the RSU referendum, and support them in the interim budget referendum responsibilities.

As a team, our RPC is pleased with our deliberations, our product and our outcomes. We have all learned a lot in this process and have appreciated the opportunity that being a member of the RPC has afforded us. We will continue to finalize our Plan with the notion of a school union structure to ensure local participation.

Sincerely,

Ralph Johnson, Greenville

Rick Johnston, Charleston

Sue Mackey Andrews, Dover-Foxcroft