

Dresden Education Exploratory Committee
Minutes of April 10, 2023

Present - Leah Bickford (Chair), Lisa Hewitt (Vice Chair), Cindy Moeller, Reid Anderson, Josh Atkinson and Scott Silverman

1.) *Leah* called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. noting that we do have a quorum present.

2.) *Public Comments* - None.

3.) *Approval of Minutes* - Cindy M. noted that part of her report was different verbiage than she had given, requesting to clarify from what the secretary had written. After discussion, the group said it could either be rewritten or deleted. It was then voted to remove the incorrect wording and strike them from the minutes. Also, it was noted that the RSU could say that if we keep our school, we would need to fund it. With that, Lisa motioned to approve the minutes as amended; Josh seconded and the motion passed by all.

4.) *Old Business* - We have been working on finalizing the questions. The Survey Monkey will come later.

Team Reports

Team 1 - No information available.

Tuition-based - Gary Blau has resigned due to personal reasons. Scott Silverman was able to join as of March 28th.

Lisa & Leah had a meeting with MSAD 11 (Gardiner) Superintendent on April 03 which they provided an update at the last meeting.

Cindy had her meeting with the RSU2 Superintendent and has provided her report on that.

Leah said all of this information has been uploaded to Google Docs.

Reid is working on the organizational structure to get it updated.

5.) *New Business* - Cindy asked if the questions that have been rewritten are what we will use for everyone? Reid said all the questions were shared to him and he took them all and put them into a spreadsheet with topics such as structure, costs, student outcomes, ratings, and area culture. Culture and structure were the two most key recurring themes.

Audience - who is most appropriate to talk to as it may not be our contact person. It could be the people in specific categories such as food service, transportation or other.

Source - filtering of something we should answer ourselves or do we ask them. Much is on the State website. Things like number of techs, teachers, etc.

Required by law - these are things we don't need to ask. Like shared vocational transportation to go out of district. They have to provide that. Asked if they have that, Reid said all schools have that whether in-house or another place. Example - Bath has a very nice in-house vocational.

Will transportation be provided for extra-curricular? Reid said they don't have to have for that as it's not required.

P.E. is required, but not a specific time length. Most Special Ed is required by law. It does include a lot. They have to have a safety & security policy in place. Leah asked if that's just public schools? What about ones like Chopp's Point which is considered a private school? We are not asking about

this to all schools.

Reid said schools are required to have at least one lock down drill per year.

Subjects to consider:

Discipline Policy is a must.

Who is the source?

School Contract - Graduate courses to staff. Josh added that it is required for teachers to have certification. Reid said it depends on their status - Teachers would have 2 graduate classes per year; Techs would only need one.

Wellness Programs - Reid wonders if it is beyond the Anthem. He was wondering if the teachers have access to places such as the Wiscasset Rec Center. For example, if Dresden were to join Wiscasset, would Dresden teachers have a membership to their program. Cindy asked if it would be outside of their contract. We would need to check their contracts to see what's in there.

Check the ratio to students. Also consider the OT/PT.

Have any teachers put on a performance plan. If yes, why? Reid said they should not answer that. Cindy asked why. Reid said it's a personnel matter. We could eliminate part of that. He suggested taking that one out altogether.

Will the school accept partial enrollment. For example - Just the middle & high school, if Dresden leaves RSU2? There are a couple of options to consider. We keep our elementary school open and join another district, would they allow us to send just our middle/high school students, or would they say no unless we close our school and send them all of our students. Josh asked what would be the rationale? Reid said that would be part of the restructuring.

Things we could answer ourselves. Reid hasn't gone any further on that at this time.

Transportation - in-house or leased. Wiscasset has their own busses; Bath used Bert's Bus Service, Nobleboro uses First Student. Something we would need to research. The next seven (7) questions wouldn't apply if they rent their transportation.

He hasn't gotten into the Survey Monkey yet.

Leah asked Reid if he had found any redundant questions or any we could trim out or combine. Reid said he found more questions that he wondered why we were asking them. Others he didn't understand, such as staff flexibility. Cindy said that would refer to having an Ed Tech to work doing something else. She also mentioned those who are per diem. Reid said some of that is required as well as having shared staff.

Leah asked if there is some way to trim some of this? It seems like a massive overload to ask. Even after we pull some out, Cindy said one concern is the kids who can be at risk. Also, we talked about absenteeism and issues that prevent students from wanting to return to school. Reid said most schools have MTSS. Cindy asked what that is. Reid said it is Multi-tiered System of Support. Some schools have a designated team. They meet to discuss any at-risk students due to chronic absenteeism. Some schools only have a process, but no team. Cindy said that could be one of our questions.

Lisa said she would like everyone to see Reid's final results after taking out whatever he feels we don't need. Also she would like to look at the ones he pulls out so they can be reviewed and prioritized. Reid added that he could do it on a 'rating system'. They can be rated by important to us. What we don't need, we can eliminate. He will do it through Excel so it can be shared and rated. This could help to narrow it down and make it more acceptable on the survey. Josh said it may depend on how long we want it to take. How we want to make it more manageable. Lisa said yes or no answers would be best. Josh added people may lose focus if there are too many questions. Reid asked if our next step can be to go over the questions to rate them before we do the survey.

Lisa asked if the ones you extracted could be put into a separate sheet. Reid said he will put them into two (2) separate areas - 'questions for schools' and 'questions for us.' Leah asked if we will be rating all or just certain questions. Reid said we'll do a thumbs up or down and see what the rating is.

Reid -structure - will be the base line of the options. The questions are like a phase 2.

- 1.) Stay as is - With RSU2
- 2.) Withdraw - become a stand-alone.
- 3.) Withdraw from RSU2; join another district.

Josh said the stand-alone would be tuition-based because we would need to tuition out anyway.

Reid added that if we go stand-alone, you then have two (2) sub options;

1.) keep the elementary school open and tuition middle/high school. We would have all the responsibility for DES.

- 2.) Withdraw and not join a district; Close DES and all students tuitioned elsewhere.

Withdraw; join another district; keep DES and only grades 6-12 would be tuitioned. Cindy said that staying with the status quo, with the low numbers here, the district would make the decision for us. Reid noted that RSU2 cannot close DES. Cindy said she would like to see that as no one she has talked to seems to know where that is in writing. Reid said the restructuring of the contract would have it. Cindy asked where she can find that. Lisa replied that perhaps it would be at the Central Office. Reid said to ask for the restructuring contract. Lisa said she would hope there would be a copy at our town office, but she's not sure. Cindy added that there seems to be some confusion on the date of the RSU. Some have said 2014 and some say 2018. We'll look into this.

Reid mentioned that he also noticed how a school was listed as closed, but the students had actually been relocated to another school. That has happened in other towns too which makes it seem like some of the schools have been closed. It was noted that whether we stay with the RSU or move on, we will still need to decide on DES.

Team Updates - No report available from Richmond or Wiscasset.

Tuition-based - Peter Elvin has resigned as of April 05th. Josh is the only one for this research. He had gotten a list of questions for this segment as this is not the same as others. Josh said he did check the DOE website and actually that's where you'd have to get a lot of information. There's really no one to ask questions of. It's just mainly research on the website. Leah added that research from other teams may help with answering questions, such as what the costs would be. Lisa asked if we get some per child from the State as to what the district charges. Reid said it may depend on where they want to send kids as they don't set up a site for people to visit for information in order to tuition the kids out. Josh asked how do we enforce that (students going to school) if we close DES since we already have trouble getting them to attend. Issues of truancy and absence are still present. Reid said they will be students of the other school, so everything follows the student. Cindy wonders about Sp. Ed and where would we get the best deal. Reid said we'd have to look around for who has what we need. Cindy added that it is set by law. Reid agreed, but added unless it's a private school, the State sets a certain amount of money for that, but the school could ask the parents to pay any extra. Cindy then mentioned that you can find all the figures on the website as to population, tuition, costs, ratios, etc. Reid said it's cost-per-student total budget is a percentage of students. Josh asked Leah if Jeff Bickford had attended the school budget meeting last week? Leah said he did and she has an update from that. Reid said, if you look at the cost-per-student for RSU2 it's like \$16,000. plus. Leah said Gardiner also gave a list for surrounding schools that has a lot of their information. Reid said it's about \$16,000., but Dresden is about \$27,000.00?. Leah passed out copies so members could see the comparisons. She added that this is a start for us. Dresden is a

major outlier. Reid said we break it down and Dresden is 27. Cindy added that Dresden is an expense for the RSU2. She also added that RSU2 is more expensive than even Augusta. Reid said Augusta has about 10% more students. Cindy said we are one of the more expensive schools even though Augusta has more students. Leah gave information from the RSU2 budget which has been cut down to \$683,677. This is an increase across the RSU2, so Dresden would have a percentage of that. She reported that the school committee had to make significant cuts. Reid explained there also was an error at the State level so all schools had a different figure than had been first thought. Cindy mentioned that insurance rates are also a reason.

Leah asked Josh if his questions need to be revised for him? Josh said he would just leave them as they are for now.

Leah & Lisa's report was not available at this meeting, but it will be posted on Google Docs. They met with the Superintendent for MSAD 11 who provided them with a lot of information on their classes, etc. Lisa said it covers all their buildings.

Lisa said she and Leah talked about the staff, adding they have no counselors. Their Resource Officer is shared with the town. The Superintendent provided information on her accomplishments and her challenges.

One thing Lisa found interesting is that if they have a student who has trouble in a specific class, they will still need to attend that class, but will take them from a class they do good in so they can have extra help in the class they are struggling with so they don't miss anything. This is a good concept.

Coaching - they have teachers who are trained to become coaches to other teachers. They can evaluate teachers or provide help if a teacher is struggling with a class or difficulty presenting. As to the challenges, behavioral is always an issue. Drugs are a big problem, both inside and outside of school which they are dealing with along with the Resource Officer and have also brought in social workers for each middle and high school in the district.

School closures - there was one that was closed a few years ago when they shifted students around. Prior to that, they had combined grades which she felt can hinder teachers as they have to stay with a class for two (2) years. Sometimes this can restrict teachers. Lisa would like to have more clarification on how that was dealt with.

Focus is on class size. Twenty (20) is a reasonable amount unless there are 4 or 5 behavioral issues. *They have adequate bussing,* but no late bus and none for after school programs. It was interesting to find out that they do have a bus that goes to the daycare in Dresden and transports students to their elementary school. This was a surprise to all. Leah said Gardiner doesn't have enough daycare places so that's why they do come to Dresden. Lisa said they have a Boy's Club funded by Century 21. They have about 120 middle school students which gives the teachers the opportunity to tutor. They talked about how the school board functions. Also, they are very active in communications with the public. They also do their budget as a line-item vote at a summary level. Leah said she would like to see us do that. Reid said that's your Budget Review Committee meetings. They probably don't advertise as well as they do in Gardiner. Josh asked about a referendum. Lisa said the referendum is just the total of all - not broken down. These totals are what creates the referendum.

Cindy said a lot of people get involved for specific reasons. Sports is one that brings a lot of people. Gardiner has a lot of sports for both boys & girls. So when something controversial comes up, the people come out.

Josh said the debt servicing is 50% higher, but if it was eliminated, we'd be more than competitive than the others within the valuation as it is the biggest expenditure. That raises our per-pupil ratio.

When does that stop? That's the trouble with these large capitol expenses that they didn't have the money for so we had to foot the bill. Lisa isn't sure just how reliable this information is at this time. *Survey Monkey* - the Superintendent told Leah & Lisa she would be willing to do it depending on the length.

Leah & Lisa will set up a meeting with Morse High School.

Cindy gave a summary of the last RSU2 meeting. It was held at Richmond and was very cordial even though Richmond is leaving the district. They are willing to help Richmond to move forward. *Adult Ed* is something we don't have in RSU2. Kids can go to off-site places to get their GED or diploma instead of just dropping out of school. Most places are doing diplomas as that is more beneficial for the student's future. The RSU can buy into that for \$25,000.00 of which Dresden's portion would be \$5,000. She suggested that if we stay in the RSU, we can do that at DES and be funded by the RSU.

She went on to note that DES doesn't have much for opportunities for our students. While the other schools are going on field trips of various types, our young students have only been able to go to Bridge Academy Library here in town. She wonders why our students can't be involved either in joining the field trips or planning others for them. Scott said that the other trips are primarily for the high school students. Reid said we should take the high school off the list. Josh told about a special presentation at DES that the kids really enjoyed and learned a lot. If we don't go with a large school system, we are not going to be able to offer any more than we have. Cindy just wonders why DES students couldn't have been included in some of the trips with the middle school. She added that this is something that stood out to her. We should make the option available. *Also, we should have information as to what extra-curricular will be offered no matter where our students attend.* Leah said that could be in our questions. Reid said if we go with another district we can ask what they have for opportunities. Cindy said to ask about extra-curricular opportunities other than class. Josh said there are many things in our own back yard. Many DES students had never been inside of the library building, but the field trip opened up that opportunity and he's sure there are more that people don't know about right here in our town.

Scott asked where he can help with this. Cindy mentioned that with his background, he would be a good one to research the contract.

As some people are having trouble with the Google Docs, Leah will see about getting the minutes uploaded there. She will also talk to Daniel about the town website. Lisa said we could ask about it at the Selectboard meeting tomorrow night.

Task list - Reid will do that.

Cut down on questions (filter them out)

RSU2 - Contract - Research

Google Docs

Leah - Website

Lisa will send out the link to our Google Docs folder

Our next meetings will be on Monday, April 24 & May 08 at 6 p.m. in Bridge Academy Library.

Meeting adjourned at 7:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shari Lilly