

## Dresden Education Exploratory Committee Minutes of April 24, 2023

Present - Leah Bickford (Chair), Lisa Hewitt (Vice Chair), Cindy Moeller, Reid Anderson, Erica & Josh Atkinson, and Shari Lilly (recording secretary).

Others - Mike & Kathy Dekker, Holly Morgan (residents).

1.) *Leah* called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. noting that we do have a quorum present.

2.) *Approval of Minutes* - Reid made a motion to approve; Josh second. So voted.

3.) *Public Comments* - An introduction of the members and the residents in attendance Leah gave a summary of the reasons for this group being convened so those new to attending would be aware of our purpose. She explained that it was from request of the public to research what avenue would be best for the education of our children moving forward. We have talked to different schools to see what they are doing, as well as seeing what we can change or improve on. We are looking at all options, whether it be to continue the DES or close it, or if we would be better off moving away from RSU2 or continue to stay with that district. Erica added it's research as to what our students are getting in comparison to what others can offer.

Holly Morgan has interest in finding out what this group has for information.

Leah continued by saying Reid Anderson is helping with the organization and compilation of questions that will be provided for the survey we will be using when talking to other schools.

4.) *Old Business* - Reid has been working to narrow down the list of questions. He has cut it from 200 to a little over 100.

### *Team Reports*

Updates from Richmond / Wiscasset. We were unable to have it at the last meeting. Erica said Erin Bean has been quite busy so they haven't been able to connect yet.

Tuition-based - Josh & Scott - Scott is not here tonight.

Lisa & Leah - Lisa prepared a nice report from their visit with the Gardiner Superintendent (MSAD11).

Cindy gave a really nice report from her meeting with the RSU2 Superintendent.

Reid said, the last meeting we talked about the questions. Some we could answer ourselves, some we didn't know if we should ask and many we can go over to cut them down as we have a large amount still. We do have some questions that will be different; such as for tuition-based. He then passed out some options for all the members to consider.

Basically, there are 3 options for any town about their school(s).

1.) Stay in the district.

2.) Withdraw and join another district. (If not in another district, we would have to support our own school fully).

Keep DES open.

Close DES - no school in town so all students would have their choice of schools. Plus, there are other implications with each option.

### *Other Options*

Withdraw from RSU2 and join another district. Keep DES open, 6-12 grades go to other schools of the new district.

Keep grades K-5 in DES, (but it could be restructured; example grades K-3 or K-7).

If we join another district, we could close DES and all students would go elsewhere.

These are pretty much what we would have for choices.

Reid also listed some links that give a lot of information as to Tuition rates; i.e. how much can be charged

and how much it would be at other schools. As to private schools, the State says they can only charge a specific amount per student. He included a link as to questions on how much can be provided to private schools.

Holly Morgan asked Reid his connection to Dresden. Reid explained his family history with the town as well as connection and knowledge with educational facilities.

Reid continued by indicating the second tab - There are 15 questions he pulled out as they are already required by law. There are 30 questions we can get the answers to ourselves, so we don't need to ask them. That still leaves about 160 +/- . He will set up a compressed, filtered list. There will be 8 columns for each member who can then leave a mark as to whether they want to keep or get rid of a specific question. Also, the site will tally how many are the same. That way we can list the ones that are most popular to keep.

Cindy asked if it's accessible in Google Docs. Reid said, yes, he put it in our folder. Leah will send a link out to everyone. Reid will also refigure a link for accessing. Plus, he can check questions we don't understand and we can work them out together.

Leah thanked Reid for the great work and use of Excel.

*Team Updates - Erica & Erin (Richmond & Wiscasset)* -Erica reached out to Erin who has not been able to make our Monday meetings, but has not connected with her as yet. In regard to the Survey Monkey, Erica would rather not ask Richmond right now where they are just getting out of the RSU2 and are trying to restructure. She feels they may not want to do the survey at this time. She added that Wiscasset hasn't been contacted yet.

Reid also mentioned that if we hadn't joined the RSU, there would have been a large penalty if we didn't make our own union. Kathy Dekker said that was State-wide. Erica will contact Erin again to see if they can connect with Wiscasset.

Holly M. said she would like to also see what the results have been for the schools that did withdraw so we could know what the financial and community effects that have come from it. It's great to have info from all the other schools, but this info would be helpful. Erica said DES had been a stand-alone school prior to joining the RSU2.

Leah has printed off generac questions to help Josh & Scott with the tuition-based. Scott is acting as ad-hoc to help where he is needed. Josh said tuition-based can be complicated due to the percentage changes. It can be difficult to regulate, but he would like to add this to our Google Docs. He gave examples of other schools, such as Chelsea. Erica said we don't have control over what they charge for the tuition-based. Reid said they may say you owe a certain amount per student. Josh added they can then change that without our input. Holly M. said that if you have a Special Ed. student, this creates another set of issues.

Mrs. Dekker said there are some schools who will not take Sp. Ed. so you have to find another. She explained that some don't take them because they don't take federal funds. This could be a question as to any Special Programs; especially where there are so many schools that won't take Special Ed.

Leah & Lisa - Team Gardiner & Morse - As previously stated, they had met with Gardiner and that information is on Google Docs. They will do the same process when they meet with Morse (Bath).

Cindy Moeller said we need to find out what's out there. What can we do for our kids. Examples - grades, teachers, etc. She looked at the data for the schools in regard to class size. She wants to see what makes certain schools so good. She has taken the last five (5) years to compare counts, etc. The data report gives a lot of the numbers. Cindy also looked at rates of absenteeism. Our DES numbers are low, so she wonders what is going on. In looking at the data sheet, Erica remarked that the data is incorrect for the 5th grade last year. Reid said that data came from NEO.

Erica also mentioned the Pre-K can be a significant difference going into Kindergarten. Reid said Pre-K isn't required. Cindy said, but they do get subsidies for it.

Cindy then asked what PR stands for. She knows PK is Pre-kindergarten. She found PR to be interesting. Reid said that stands for the number of students in Maine. Seems they base it on pupil to teacher ratio. Cindy was surprised at the percentage rate of the graduates pointing out that the RSU2 schools didn't do

so bad in the graduation ratio. The absenteeism is a problem everywhere. She also gave a list of the percentage per school. Reid said that data is all over the place. Erica said, if you have a sniffle, you have to stay home. Cindy added that, as we are a fact-finding group, we need to put the data out there. As well as the cost-per-student.

Holly M. said Harpswell is part of MSAD75, but their data is different as they may send some students (behavioral) to other schools. They also send their high school students to Topsham.

Cindy said, if the district has a pretty good rating, why not bring them all together and see how we can all work together to bring our levels up. She asked if Dresden and the other schools ever get together. Erica said they do have monthly meetings and they are trying to get our students the opportunity to do activities together.

Mr. Dekker asked what this group is trying to get information about? Leah said the survey that went out to residents gave replies that people wanted to research the possibility of other options for our students. Lisa added that the public wanted to find out if we can improve within the RSU2 or find other alternatives to provide the education we want and need for our kids. Erica said we are trying to compare what our students are getting now to what we could find out the other schools are doing. We want to explore options that will give the public more information. Reid said it could be that people want to keep DES open, but are not satisfied with things such as transportation and extra-curricular. Cindy added that a lot of kids are leaving Dresden for other schools and she would like to find out why. Kathy Dekker said one issue she ran into was no daycare in Dresden, so she opted to school her kids in Brunswick where she works and daycare is available. That could be one problem as to why the kids are going to other schools.

Cindy then read from the per-student ratio and noted that Dresden seems to be paying more than other towns. Erica mentioned that her day at DES is longer than others, but they only get paid the same as the others. Holly M. mentioned how the ages can be intermixed due to class sizes.

Cindy said some towns have been able to control their budgets, but they have had to make the choice of closing a school. She is worried that we may have to 'voluntold' what will happen here to our elementary school. Erica said the budget did have some cuts, but some members of the school board didn't want to, so they have to redo the budget.

Leah will make sure everyone has access to the link for this information.

**5.) New Business** - Lisa reported that she attended the last selectboard meeting to give our report and also asked why they aren't showing our information on the town website. She was told by Daniel that all committee chairs had been emailed a link so they can input their information and then he'll put it on the website. She added that the selectboard would like us to give a presentation on what the group has done and give any updated information. Also, it was mentioned this group could connect with the PTO (Parent, Teacher Organization) and they could do the presentation with us.

**Feedback** - Questions. We'll take the 50 most popular. Reid said they will tally automatically as each person makes a choice. He will have a printout at the next meeting.

**Our next meetings will be on Monday, May 08 & May 22 at 6 p.m. in Bridge Academy Library.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shari Lilly