

School Consolidation Task Force Meeting – HCR 39

September 18, 2017 - Meeting Minutes

Woodbridge High School

Greenwood, Delaware

Members Present:

Representative Earl Jaques, House of Representatives – Chair of Task Force
Representative Joseph Miro, House of Representatives – Deputy Chair of the Task Force
Secretary Susan Bunting, Secretary of Education
Ciro Adams, Wilmington City Councilman
D. Dusty Blakey, Colonial School District, Superintendent
Heath Chasanov, Woodbridge School District, Superintendent
Mark Dufendach, Vo-Tech School District Representative
Kevin Fitzgerald, Caesar Rodney Superintendent
Loretta Greig, Kent County School District Parent
Lauren Hudson, Parent/Guardian from a Sussex County Public School
Gina Jennings, Sussex County Administrator
Mary Nash Wilson, Office of Management and Budget
Robert Overmiller, Governor’s Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens
Senator Brian Pettyjohn, Delaware Senate
Jon Sheehan, Education Policy to the Governor
Senator David Sokola, Delaware Senate
Jeff Taschner, Delaware State Education Association (DSEA), Executive Director

Members Absent:

Jill Floore, Parent/Guardian from a Wilmington City School
Nacole Gardner, Parent/Guardian from a New Castle County Public School
Matthew Meyer, New Castle County Executive
Michael Petit de Mange, Kent County Administrator
John Skrobot, School Boards Association Designee

Members of the Public Present:

Kevin Carson, Seaford School District Director of Administrative Services
Fred Sears
Michael Houlihan, Mayor of Delmar, Delaware
Jill Lewandowski, Sussex County resident, Woodbridge School District employee
Steve McCarron, Sussex County resident
Todd Lanier, Seaford resident and Delmar teacher
Shawn Larrimore, Laurel School District
Herbert Wright, Delmar High School
Tammy Croce, Delaware Association of School Administrators
David Blowman, Department of Education
Bob Fulton, Cape Henlopen School District Superintendent
Yvars Shuey, Woodbridge School District
Martin Shuey, Woodbridge School District
Paulette Rappa, Indian River School District
Kent Chase, Woodbridge School District

Carl Anderton Jr., Maryland House of Delegates, Delmar, Maryland
Kaylee Smith, Delmar High School
Rhiannon O'Neal, Woodbridge School District
Kara Davis, Delmar High School
Morgan Paradis, Delmar High School
Jennifer Wheatley, Delmar High School
Shayna Dashiell, Delmar High School
Destiny Milton, Delmar High School
Joy Baker, Delmar High School
Monyae Alexander, Delmar High School
Bernadette Maxwell, Delmar High School
Nicole Mezick, Delmar High School
Amanda Wallace, Delmar High School
Amy Livingston, Delmar High School
Joe Conaway, first principal of Woodbridge High School
Bob Andrzejewski, Retired Superintendent, Christina and Red Clay Consolidated School Districts
Charity Phillips, Delmar School District Superintendent

Rep. Miro, Task Force Deputy Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. He welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded the members of the public present that there would be a time for public comment at the end of the meeting. He encouraged those interested in speaking to sign-up on the sheet provided.

Rep. Miro presented the meeting minutes from the last meeting, held on August 1, 2017 to the task force for approval.

A motion was made by Robert Overmiller and seconded by Sen. Pettyjohn to approve the minutes. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Rep. Miro called attendance of the task force members and noted that seventeen of the twenty-two members were present. He explained that many different people from across the state with different perspectives and expertise had been added to the task force and needed to be voted in officially by the task force members.

Rep. Jaques shared the twenty-six names of prospective task force members with the members of the task force.

Senator Pettyjohn motioned to approve the addition of the members and the motion was seconded by Rep. Miro. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Some members of the task force asked if those people were now voting members of the task force to which Rep. Jaques replied in the affirmative.

Rep. Jaques reminded the task force members and those present in the public that the main concern of the task force is not just to save money but to improve student educational outcomes. He asked the task force sub-committee chairs to begin their reports.

Secretary Bunting, Chair of the Academics and Student Needs Sub-Committee, began her presentation to the task force. She shared that the first sub-committee meeting had a great turnout. She said that the sub-committee used the first meeting to brainstorm on what students need to succeed academically. She listed some of the concepts that were brought up in their discussion, including some things the group thought that a school district should have, such as a standard curriculum, well established needs assessments, a uniform intake system and a shared data system. She ended her report by explaining that her sub-committee is waiting for a report from the Structure Sub-Committee to inform their future discussions and research.

Fred Sears, Finance Sub-Committee chair, gave his report next. He thanked Mike Jackson, Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and Mary Nash Wilson, OMB Fiscal and Policy Analyst, for their help with the sub-committee's work. Mr. Sears explained that they looked at different options in relation to the current financing infrastructure. He reiterated remarks made by Sec. Bunting, saying that the Finance Sub-Committee is waiting to see where other sub-committees go with their suggestions and research so they can plan their budgets and run models accordingly. Mr. Sears mentioned that property tax reassessment and capital needs came up during the sub-committee's meeting, as did ideas on changing the current state education funding system. He shared that there was also discussion on how schools are currently spending money and how that could potentially change if district boundaries were to change. Mr. Sears ended by saying that the sub-committee would like to look into consolidating services among the different school districts, even if the districts themselves were not consolidated per se.

Rep. Jaques took a moment to recognize Rep. Postles, who had joined the room during the sub-committee reports, and thanked him for attending the meeting.

D. Dusty Blakey, Teachers and Staff Sub-Committee Chair, gave his report next. He explained that the sub-committee met on September 11, 2017. He mentioned that the sub-committee members were looking to the Structure Sub-Committee for instruction to help guide their further discussion and research. He shared that the members looked at collective bargaining, food service, pay scales across the state, and the consolidation of services in different areas. He reiterated earlier sub-committee chairs' remarks, saying that it was difficult to figure out a path forward as a sub-committee without more direction.

Rep. Jaques commented that he and others realized that the Structure Sub-Committee needed to give some guidance to the other sub-committees for them to be most effective with their research. He invited Kevin Carson, Seaford School District Director of Administrative Services and Chair of the Structure Sub-Committee, to give his report next.

Mr. Carson said that the Structure Sub-Committee met on Monday, August 28th and had about eleven members present. He shared that the majority of the meeting was a discussion about what the task force wanted to evaluate. He posited that when the task force decides on that the sub-committee would be able to move forward. He believes that the theory question itself must come from the full task force, not just the sub-committee. Mr. Carson explained that the current system would serve as the control variable and any experimental consolidation plans would be compared against the current system to see if it would be an improvement and remarked that the sub-committee discussed possible efficiencies that could be gained through shared services. He stated that the sub-committee intended to continue gathering information from members and from the public, and that their assumption was that the submissions would be vetted and then used to direct the four sub-committee's future work.

Rep. Jaques added to Mr. Carson’s report, saying that a call for submissions from the public was made in the News Journal. He summarized that there were 146 submissions that came in and that he and his staff organized the submissions into categories. The graph of the submissions that was shown in the meeting is below:

Submission Category	Number of Submissions
Status Quo/Remain As is	40
For Consolidation	88
<i>General “Yes” to Consolidation</i>	20
<i>State-Wide District</i>	2
<i>3 County-Wide Districts</i>	32
<i>County-Wide Districts w/ variations*</i>	22
<i>Other Consolidation Plans</i>	12
Comments	18
Total Submissions:	146

Rep. Jaques explained that the “Status Quo/Remain As Is” category included all of the submissions that said no to consolidation, but he added that some mentioned consolidating services. He explained that a number of responses were general comments on the education funding structure of the state, state of education, and questions about the goals of the task force; these submissions make up the “Comments” category. He remarked that the submissions in raw form had been sent out to the members of the task force.¹

Rep. Jaques shared that a question arose in the Structure Sub-Committee about the geographic distribution of students across the state, including students with ELL needs or who are low-income. He invited David Blowman, from the Department of Education, to share a presentation on different maps of the students in the state.

Mr. Blowman started the presentation, which included graphs on general enrollment trends, charter school, non-public and special education enrollment over time, and the geographic positioning and spread of students with different needs in relation to where schools are located. The full presentation can be found at the task force website.²

Rep. Jaques opened the floor to the task force to ask questions on the presentation.

Robert Overmiller asked how many people are listed as being both poor and ELL, and how many overlap from both groups.

¹ The submissions can also be found on the task force website (www.tinyurl.com/SCTaskforceDE17) at the bottom of the page. The file is titled: *Consolidation Proposals from the Public- Compiled 9.12.17*

² The powerpoint file of Mr. Blowman’s presentation, including the comments and explanations can be found on the task force website (www.tinyurl.com/SCTaskforceDE17) at the bottom of the page. The file is titled: *Consolidation Task Force Presentation from DOE with legend and definitions 09-18-17*

Mr. Blowman replied that there is a significant overlap between the two groups and that he could provide the exact numbers to the task force at a later time. He estimated that about fifty thousand students in Delaware are classified as low-income while ten or eleven thousand are classified as ELL students. He remarked that the ELL section is a rapidly growing part of the community.

Rep. Jaques asked what the definition for low-income is for the statistics shared.

Mr. Blowman replied that low-income students, for the purpose of these statistics, are those students who are eligible to receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Mr. Overmiller asked how many students are not legal citizens.

Mr. Blowman replied that he did not know but could try to find out.

Rep. Jaques asked if there were any more questions from the task force for Mr. Blowman. Seeing none, he opened the floor for public comment and explained that each person would get two minutes to speak.

Michael Houlihan, the mayor of Delmar, DE, spoke about the unique agreement between the state of Delaware and the state of Maryland. He explained that because of the agreement students in Maryland can cross the state line and attend Delmar Senior High School. He said that the town works together and that the community is all about what is best for the children. He highlighted that he is a parent and chose to share the example of his daughter as successful student from Delmar. He said that she graduated with honors and took courses at Wilmington University as a high schooler. He went on to say that she was accepted into the Presidential Scholars Program and is the product of the quality education available to students in Delmar.

Jill Lewandowski, a Sussex County school educator, spoke next. She shared that she is the product of the Woodbridge schools and is the daughter of the first principal of Woodbridge High School. She noted that small school districts like the one she works in struggle to get enough funding, which has been frustrating for her because it leads to them losing effective teachers. She thinks that consolidation can offer a vehicle for equalization, and that equalizing pay would help with teacher retention which in turn helps children. She said that, at the very least, she hopes the task force will start a conversation around equalization of pay and funding for different districts.

Steve McCarron, a Woodbridge parent and board member, shared his comments next. He stated that he is firmly against consolidation and that it would cost a lot of money up front without any savings in the long-run. He added that any money saved would go towards leveling up the salaries if consolidation were done. He argued that consolidation would decrease the local control and representation that currently exists between parents and schools now. He said that he would not mind an increase in taxes but that the oversight necessary in a consolidated district would not be practical. He said that it would eventually lead to the community losing its voice and that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be a good thing.

Todd Lanier, a teacher at Delmar High School and resident of Seaford, shared his comments next. He remarked that if student achievement is what the meeting is about then an investment needs to be made to create smaller class sizes and other needs in schools. He said that the Delmar School District is a good example of a district with great community involvement. He spoke about the way that residents

who are not parents still support the schools in the district, and he argued that smaller schools should be the model not larger schools. He commented that people can make a real difference the way it is set up now because they can easily reach those who make decisions for the district; a larger bureaucracy would be less responsive to parent and student needs and not cost-effective. He concluded by saying if the main issue is that there are too many superintendents then he is open to allocating less funding for superintendents of smaller districts, or a compromise along those lines.

Shawn Larrimore, Laurel School District superintendent, said that it is logical to try to look for ways to save money and that districts already consolidate services such as payroll, technology and data, and nutrition services. He said that there is room for improvement in the realms of consolidating services in transportation and purchasing. He went on to say that the charge of the community is to look for improvements in educational outcomes for students, yet the students in Delmar, Seaford and Laurel are under threat of losing their identities as districts. He outlined the recent rankings of some of the schools in these districts that have been at the top of the list in Delaware in terms of student achievement, and mentioned that Laurel has climbed a significant amount in under four years. He shared that the only comparable district in size to a consolidated district is Prince George's County in Maryland, and he reflected on a presentation he saw where the district was described as being highly dysfunctional. He expressed his dismay that the task force would want to replicate a situation like that one. He shared his disdain for those outside of Sussex County who are trying to dictate what is best for Sussex County school systems. He implored the task force to work towards helping improve schools for students and to leave the smaller districts in Sussex County as they are.

Herbert Wright, a graduate, parent, and grand-parent of graduates of Delmar High School said that the 88 responses in favor of consolidation were not from Sussex County. He remarked that consolidating school districts would negatively impact town and school spirit, and that the way it is now is great. He questioned the task force members' motives and thoughts on the issue. He said that he would rather pay higher taxes if it meant the schools would stay the way they are.

Martin Shuey, a resident and taxpayer in the Woodbridge School District, shared his comments next. He explained that before living in the district he lived in Virginia, under a county-wide school district model. He said that the system there meant that the tax rate agreed upon that went towards schools had no input from residents, and he warned that this would happen in Delaware if county-wide districts were created. He expressed that a state-wide system would be even worse, and mentioned an example of Sussex Technical School. He said the school used to be a vocational school and now it is an academic school that prepares students for college. He asked a rhetorical question, remarking that we must not need plumbers, electricians or others with technical skills anymore.

Carl Anderton Jr., a member of the Maryland House of Delegates, thanked the task force for allowing him to share his remarks. He explained that he represents the citizens of Delmar, Maryland and Delmar, Delaware in Annapolis and that he is honored to do so. He said that Delmar is growing and thriving and that he wanted to explain the importance of the Delaware-Maryland agreement that exists in the city of Delmar. He shared his contact information³ with those present and urged them to reach out to him if they ever have issues he could help with.

Nicole Mezick, parent, faculty member and cheerleading coach in Delmar School District, was joined by her cheerleaders from Delmar High School. She shared that Delmar is a town too big for too states and that it is also a town too big to consolidate.

³ Carl Anderton, Jr. Contact Information | Phone: 443-359-1335 | Email: Carl.Anderton@house.state.md.us

Katie Bornikcy, a senior at Delmar High School, spoke next. She shared that she went through the Delmar school system from elementary all the way through high schools. She spoke about the importance of the shared opportunities the partnership between the two states is for students in Delmar, on both sides of the border. She explained how she it is important to her that her siblings and others have the same opportunities for academic success as she received.

Joe Conaway, the first principal of Woodbridge High School, brought attention to the fact that the meeting was being held in one of the first consolidated school district buildings. He remarked that the comments from Delmar residents paralleled those comments made in the late 1960s when discussions around consolidation were taking place with Governor Peterson. He shared that he thinks it is time the state progress from its current situation. He argued that Delaware can no longer afford to have the current system and that it is time to consolidate services and to control administrative salaries. He commented that he ran the Woodbridge High School with one secretary and one counselor when he was principal, now there are assistant principals, deans of students, guidance counselors, and other positions that did not exist then. He thinks that the state needs to reverse that trend.

Rep. Jaques thanked those who shared their comments and reminded everyone in attendance that the next meeting would be on October 16th at William Penn High School in New Castle County.

Rep. Jaques asked if there were any further questions or comments from the task force members, seeing none he entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Robert Overmiller motioned to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by Sen. Pettyjohn. Motion carried.

Rep. Jaques adjourned the meeting at 7:37pm.