

BERKSHIRE COUNTY EDUCATION TASK FORCE
SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2017
TIME: 9:00 AM
NESSACUS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Task Force Chair, John Hockridge, called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.

Present: John Hockridge, Chair, MASC Division VI, (member) North Adams School Committee
Michael Case, Vice Chair, MASC Division VI
Douglas McNally, (former) Principal, Taconic High School, (current) Berkshire Compact for Education
Carrie Greene, Vice-Chair, Mt Greylock Regional School Committee
Regina DiLego, Chair, Lanesborough School Committee
Dr. Jake McCandless, Superintendent, Pittsfield Public Schools
Neil Clarke, MTA Senate District Coordinator
Carl Stewart, Chair, Southern Berkshire Regional School District
Dr. William Cameron, (retired) Superintendent, Central Berkshire Regional School District
Brian Fairbank, Chair, The Fairbank Group
Stephen Bannon, Chair, Berkshire Hills Regional School District
Dr. Cindy Brown, Vice President for Academic Affairs, MCLA
Dr. Jake Eberwein, Dean, Division of Graduate and Continuing Education
Matt Kerwood, Pittsfield Finance Director
Kara Dougherty, Berkshire Education Action Network
Nat Karns, Executive Director, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Ellen Kennedy, President, Berkshire Community College
Dan Caplinger, Vice Chair, Williamstown Elementary School Committee
Dr. Peter Dillon, Superintendent, Berkshire Hills Regional School District
Paul Butler, Chair, Adams-Cheshire Regional School Committee
Tony Mazzucco, Adams Town Administrator
Jake Oliveira, Past President, Mass Association of School Committees
Liz Lafond, MASC Field Representative and TF Recording Secretary
Robert Putnam, Superintendent, Adams Cheshire School District School District
Jonathan Butler, President, 1Berkshire
Michael Wise, Moderator, Town of Great Barrington
Poppy Doyle, Mohawk Trail Regional School Committee
Michael Knapik, Director of Governor's Western Mass Office
Karla Baehr, Senior Advisor, District Management Group
Senator Adam Hinds

Distribution of Agenda Packet and Other Documents to Members & Public

- Mass Rural Schools Coalition Flyer

Welcome/Introductions, Members, Consultants and Public

Senator Adam Hinds and Michael Knapik from the Governor's office were present, along with Karla Baehr, Senior Consultant from the District Management Group and Jake Oliveira, Past President of MASC.

Updates were e-mailed to members for review.

Minutes of Meeting 27: April 8, 2017

Carrie Greene noted that on page 3 of the April 8, 2017 minutes, there is a comment that Williamstown and Lanesborough are discussing forming a new regional school district – which is not accurate – Williamstown and Lanesborough are discussing amending the current regional agreement and expanding the number of districts.

MOTION: Mike Case made a motion, seconded by Matt Kerwood, to approve the minutes of the April 8, 2017 meeting, as amended (page 3 *Williamstown and Lanesborough are discussing amending the current regional agreement and expanding the number of districts.*) The motion carried unanimously.

Senator Adam Hinds

Senator Hinds wants to stay involved and up-to-date with what the TF is doing. Few issues are more important in the County than the TF's ongoing work for education. He wants to be thoughtful about how the State is being involved in this unique process. There are only three counties in the Commonwealth experiencing population decline and the resulting impact of student enrollment decline.

Wants to be sure the full range of possibilities are being looked at so that State resources can be mobilized when needed, including engaging the administration to be sure they are up to date, looking at regionalization agreements, and being thoughtful about the ways the State is engaging in the process.

He spoke of the Adams Cheshire experience and, even though the school committee was talking about this three years ago, how residents felt blindsided by the decision to close a school. That makes it even more important that the TF is taking tours and getting the message out alongside current headlines in the county.

He wants to begin the conversation in the Rural Caucus in a meaningful way.

Mike Knapik said that last summer the Governor was presented with the actual data, right here in Berkshire County, and, while he had known about the issues, seeing the presentation Brian Fairbank made and looking at the work the Task Force has done, paved the way for resources for the TF's work. He suggested it could be time for a check-in with Secretary Peyser and Commissioner Chester in terms of the status of the work and potential models that could come forward. This is real, hard, intensive

work on the issues in the County now. This TF has done significant outreach, but citizens are leading busy lives and don't always keep up-to-date on this kind of work. There should be thoughtful consideration of how to reach the citizenry with the messaging about the TF's work.

Nat Karns said this is not just a problem in Berkshire and Franklin Counties. The districts in the Quaboag area and Barnstable County are experiencing similar issues. Essentially, districts statewide are feeling similar changes in population.

Tony Mazzucco said the state should be considering resources needed to assist the work by facilitating communication with the public around the work and the issues that spur the work.

There was discussion related to:

- When funding requests would be appropriate for this budget season.
- Potential for funding through regionalization and efficiency grant program.
- Working with a third party to facilitate discussions with community/residents.

DMG Group: Karla Baehr, Senior Advisor

- Aspirations that Emerged from Community Outreach Meetings
- Goals
- Discussion on Scenarios

There were roughly 349 responses from the outreach sessions. Members received a listing of the most frequently mentioned priorities from those responses.

The top four responses all deal with things that involve breadth and quality of education.

1. Ensure access high quality/rigorous education for all (regardless of background, equity, quality teachers.)
2. Increase arts, electives, extracurricular offerings (including foreign languages.)
3. Provide better access to more career pathways (vocational programs/technical skills - HS.)
4. Build strong support services (special education, ELL and social-emotional.)

Carrie Greene said that one of the lessons she has learned is that it's not enough to hold forums; you have to go to where people are, which the TF did in phase I work. She asked if there would be value in and time to send out the survey via list serves to all parents in all school districts and all town officials.

Peter Dillon liked the idea of widely circulating the survey.

Karla Baehr suggested sending out the draft goals that will be shared, and get reaction to those draft goals, to keep moving the process along while engaging people in the community. The goals come from the input that has been provided to-date.

A group could take a look at the goals and consider what the communication would look like, before the next TF meeting. That survey could then be distributed.

Draft goals to be reviewed and feedback to be provided.

There was discussion on wording of the draft goals that were presented by DMG and how to clarify; preferred wording for goals, and what the goals are intended to do.

Tony Mazzucco said the Municipal Finance subgroup would be putting together a presentation for the TF on municipal finance and some of the challenges, combined with data on the financial aspects of why the current system is not sustainable and why communities can't just shift monies or raise taxes.

The group broke into regions and into small groups within those larger region groups. The task asked was to provide input on the following scenarios, based on conversations thus far, and on lessons learned and best practice:

- Do nothing/no change (assessed against financial considerations, educational considerations, lessons learned and best practices.)
- Shared services (commitment by districts to share services.)
- Shared staffing (commitment by districts to share staffing.)
- New or expanded regional unions or districts (some towns commit to new or expanded school unions/districts/unified districts.)
- Three districts (north, east/west, south.)

Karla Baehr said she heard one group talking about combining shared services and shared staffing into a single scenario. The financial modeling piece will include projections as to annual ongoing costs or savings and one time implementation costs or savings.

Next Meeting Date: Saturday, May 20th, 9:00 a.m.

Future Meeting Date: June 10th

MOTION: Bill Cameron made a motion, seconded by Matt Kerwood, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.

The Berkshire County Education Task Force Meeting of April 29th adjourned at approximately 12:15 p.m.