

***Durham, Freeport, & Pownal
Reorganization Planning Committee
Meeting Minutes
May 14, 2008
Durham Elementary School~Durham***

Members Present: Fred Palmer, Paul Schumann, John Gleason, Allan Purinton, Jennifer Kaplan, Rhonda O'Shea, Amber Snell, Cliff Ruprecht, Laurie Poissonier, Rick White, Sherry Dietrich, Nelson Larkins

Advisors Present: Elaine Tomaszewski, Superintendent of Schools, Freeport; Shannon Welsh, Superintendent of Schools, Durham; Joe Feeney, Superintendent/Principal, Pownal

Also Present: Bob Kautz, Facilitator; and 1 member of the public

Not Present: , Wesley Bennett, Tim Giddinge, Cathy Messmer, Business Manager, Durham, Diane Boucher, Business Manager, Freeport/Pownal

- The meeting convened at 7:01 pm.
- The previous meeting minutes were reviewed. They were accepted by consensus.
- There was one question asked regarding negotiations. If a contract was going to expire and a new contract began before the RSU started; is it the RSU responsibility or the school board? It was explained the law states does not specify this as one of the RSU's responsibilities. The existing school board should negotiate or make an arrangement for the RSU board to be involved. It was explained that Freeport would be in that position and it was stated the bargaining agent would more than likely to have to approve this.
- There were no public comments questions.
- Jen Kaplan's plan was discussed and the guiding questions were reviewed. It was explained this would be thought of in a theoretical way without the constraints of the law. It was requested that Jen review her proposal. She stated the truly combined piece of the plan would be the High School with all three communities funding the school. Each community would fund their own elementary and middle schools. Each community would have its own board for their representative school. Members from each board would be chosen to represent communities at the RSU board which would be responsible for the Central Office Administration and High School budgets. The RSU would then bill each town their respected amount which would be decided upon by an agreed cost sharing model. This plan would leave local control to the elementary and middle schools. It was believed with this plan the expenses for the administrative structure would be decreased. Debt sharing would only be applicable to the High School and administrative structures. Contracts and bargaining would be different because the local communities would keep their own schools; except for the High School. Students who choose to attend other schools within this structure the communities would pay tuition and their boards must make their own

decisions about students attending other schools within their combined communities. It was stated this is an organic approach. There was explanation about collaboration within the communities with respects to curriculum and other items. Local community boards would continue to have collaboration as a goal. On the basis of the new law, it was stated that transportation, Special Education and Nutrition would fall under the umbrella of the RSU. Under the new law, these items should be under the structure of the RSU. It was stated that new employee contracts were an issue and Jen felt it should be fought that each community keep their own collective bargaining.

- It was stated that this proposal should be thought of as an alternative and it is understood some of the deficiencies could be worked out. This could be an example of an alternative. It was explained that plan could be a basis and suggested the RPC have a discussion contrasting both plans. Bob explained the first question should be what the RPC sees as reasons to consolidate. This discussion may reflect on work that was done last summer, but it was requested by members as a discussion. The Durham contingents were asked to give their feelings. The statements were: the combined High School gave Durham students a place to go. It would give the High School a larger group and better opportunities for programming. It gave the Town of Durham a say in their students' high school education. It was agreed that the prospect of keeping the K-8 grades under local control was key. A larger group of students at the high school level, but not huge. The expansion of options for grades 9-12. A consistent K-12 curriculum will help students prepare and combined professional development to have a strong professional learning community. The Freeport contingents gave their feelings. The statements were: to move all three districts forward educationally and develop new programs and stabilize the existing program offers. To offer a better educational process. Having one high school is a plus for all three communities. The benefit of having a coordinated curriculum within the system and shared programs. The communities are ever mindful of trying to improve the education for students. The critical mass issue and student numbers within the future are a concern. The combined professional development and curriculum is a must. It was stressed that the curriculum K-12 for all three communities must be coordinated and all higher performing schools systems have this. Cost sharing was a concern and how would every community save by going it alone. Each community must have the commitment to make this possible. The synergies of all the pieces discussed were stressed again. It was stated that combining the communities can do so much more which then results in a better product for students. It was stated the flow of students into the high school with the coordinated curriculum would be beneficial. There would be a cost savings by combining Transportation, Special Education Service and Administration long term. It was stated that consolidation would increase options for programs for high school students. It was reiterated that the high school consolidation is the biggest goal. The other schools will need to focus on how to funnel students into the high school. Pownal contingents feelings were: A larger amount of

students is a benefit. Having some flexibility and improving programs is a benefit. There is a strong feeling about what the local schools have to offer. The alternative would be more like an S.A.D. and all schools would be working together. It was stated that money is the biggest roadblock. Maybe this alternative would be an example for the communities to follow. Curriculum for K-12 would need to be supported and the communities would need to give the Curriculum Coordinator the power of having the schools move forward. Having the options of flexibility to moving schools within the communities where students would not be able to do that in a small community.

- The major points heard were reviewed by Bob; the combination of high school, a coordinated curriculum K-12, savings by combining the administrative structure, local control of elementary/middle schools, having a Curriculum Coordinator with the Superintendent in charge of the overall combined school unit. It was stated the funding for programs would come out of each local community and if they decide not to fund the directives of the Curriculum Coordinator a combined curriculum will not work. It was asked if Curriculum could be budgeted out of the high school budget. A suggestion of having curriculum charged to each community through the RSU board. Bob explained that as an alternative structure this would be an example of shared services and would need an inter-local agreement.

- The next question was how well does the current plan address the outcome of consolidation? What is the feasibility of the current plan for each community? Bob stated that cost sharing and cost savings were the biggest stumbling points and most other items within the Plan were essential agreed upon. It was stated there seemed to be a mismatch from what has been said and what the RPC has been doing and Bob stated he was unsure of how this can be reconciled. Bob asked how members felt the current plan matches with the themes that are common for each community. Statements from committee members were: the plan developed does accomplish what the RPC was charged with as a goal. The school choice phase-in was a good example of the plan's integrity. It was stated that some did not see real gain combining at the elementary/middle level. Some members were disappointed in non-cost savings at the beginning of the combination of services. There was concern of the identity for the rural schools and communities losing control of the local school philosophy. It was stated there are very different cost of administrative structures within the three towns. It was understood why townspeople had concerns of debt sharing at the elementary levels. Leveling up costs were also a concern. It was stated that some townspeople fear of not having local control with combination of RSU. It was stated the original plan addressed secondary school needs and representation on the board for Pownal. The original plan opens up flexibility for students at the elementary level. It creates an entity that has many possibilities. The Plan has value in opportunities to keep rural schools viable in the future. It was stated that losing sight and going it alone may not be the best thing for the K-8 level with a non-growth community. We will need each other with shrinking

populations. The Cost sharing discussions were moving in the right direction with the original plan. The plan has the education component which makes the structure viable, but would work only if there is a shared vision. The communities can still retain local control at the elementary level with the original plan. The basis is still there within the original plan it would just be forging through the details. It was stated the communities have not reckoned with the loss of the local control of the schools as they are each communities' center. We are not going to save money, but we will mitigate some cost increases with the influx of students in to the high school. It was stated that Freeport does not have the same concerns because it is basically in control. It was stated this was a good discussion. It was stated that contingents did not want to lose an identity of the high school for Freeport as well. The overall idea from the communities would be to commit additional resources which then may cost more. Some members wanted to review the facilities study and see whether or not the influx of students at the high school level was truly feasible. The Plan offers a platform for what has been discussed. There needed to be a genuine effort to make the RSU collaborative. The RSU may spend money more wisely, but there will not be a savings at first. There is need for a Curriculum Coordinator and maintaining autonomy was important. We will need to have coordination in programs even in the elementary/middle school to prepare students at the high school level. If committed to the expansion of programs the RSU will have some expenditures. The current plan does have strong governance and same curriculum. The guaranteed numbers will give influx to students at the high school. It was stated that finances have not been resolved and it will be a major issue within any plan. The current plan meets what Durham's goal was. The current plan is hard to prove the savings and why the plan has 'bang for the buck' with showing no savings. It was unfortunate a savings for all communities is how the bill was presented to the public. The current plan does meet the expectations. There is concern that the projections of students coming from Durham are over exaggerated. There has been a big commitment from Durham on school choice which allowed the plan to continue. There have been times when the feedback is not the same commitment from Freeport as the other communities. Cost sharing is a stumbling block and the existing plan will not succeed because of it. It was asked if cost sharing was the reason. It was stated that this seems to be the perception. Some of the perception is that some of Durham's share of subsidy comes from the state and it should be shared with the other communities. It was believed these concerns needs to be discussed. The current plan is lean on administrative structure. It is believed that there is a different financial philosophy with the three towns. It comes down to different visions. It was stated that in Freeport businesses offset the tax base an it makes some frustration for others. The current plan has an educational philosophy which is well stated. It was stated that the perception of the plan is the communities were forced into consolidating and each is trying to hold on to identity, but also wanting to move forward. It is more difficult for community members to view this plan as a success as they have not spent

months on this. The goal would be for the RPC to come to some agreement around cost sharing and clearly articulate to the communities what pieces of the plan are effective and why. The plan can not address the fear of what is being given up by each community. It was stated that some members are not sure if an alternative union would address these fears either. It was asked whether or not the RPC would have efficient time to compare different plans. It was agreed that cost sharing and control are the biggest roadblocks.

- The Alternative proposal from Jen was discussed. Bob asked the RPC members to consider how well the alternative plan addresses the goal of consolidation. Freeport contingents feelings were: the alternative measure addresses local control issues and the fear of losing control over costs. This idea is a branch off of the original plan. Focusing on the high school aspect offers the opportunity to advance for all three communities. This idea offers what the current plan does. This idea is taking the new law and trying to figure out what the minimum the state will accept and how the communities will comply with the law. This idea saves administrative costs and makes the high school mandatory for all communities. The concept of elementary school choice must be discussed in great detail. The alternative does not address the goals. It is a very complicated idea and not sustainable. It does not give the vision of being one unit. The rural schools would be in a reactive stance with this alternative. If we are intent on this then we should just look on sharing the high school with a tuition agreement. The Pownal contingents feelings were: The alternative does address issue surrounding debt sharing and keeping costs low but some members don't know if these are the true goal of what was first discussed. This idea would get better acceptance from the public, but may not be in the best interest of the communities. A suggestion of taking some of Jen's thoughts and incorporating them into current plan was made. It was stated it would be nice if there were pilot projects for other communities to view. Maybe an idea of viewing both ideas and combining pieces for a revised alternative plan. A suggestion of asking the state if a 3 year trial would work was made. Some members felt this group should propose something different then the mandated state law. Some feelings were that the alternative would not pass. The combination of the high school meets the needs of the communities. The alternative idea may put constraints because there is no alignment within the elementary level. The alternative offers opportunities for students to attend other elementary schools, but may not be viable. This idea suggests that there may be a comparable cost sharing that may be more agreeable to community members. Local identity considerations can be addressed in both plans. There is some opportunity to change what the RPC currently has. This idea is structurally cumbersome. It does get rid of one of the rationalities with the leveling up costs. There could be irrational costs with this idea with less of a chance of achieving the educational advancements in other plan. Not consolidating completely will foster separation. Local identities will be kept and there will be addressed with the original plan as well. Durham contingents feelings were: the original plan fits the original vision. The alternative plan could keep communities

divided. The viable and sustainability of so many boards would be difficult. This alternative idea could be an easy sell on town floor but some members are not sure it fits the original intent of consolidation. The alternative plan recognizes local control but does not include the educational vision. It could be more costly to run the administrative structure. The idea seems to defeat the philosophy of bringing the communities together. Educating the voter will be difficult and the last thing that should be considered is tuition agreements with secondary students. The individual identity defeats the combined philosophy. The alternative idea defeats elementary choice for students. The costs and tuition dollars of creating the “union” would be difficult and would limit the choice options K-8. Bob suggested the discussion continue at the next meeting for the “what ifs” and what might be allowable. The AOS law states you must have consistent employee contracts however there may be more time allotted for this to take place. It was asked if consistent meant across the board or what is there already. It was explained that the contracts must be consistent across the board. It was stated The Commissioner does have the authority to create tentative arrangements within the law. It was explained that the RPC needs a little time to discuss the alternative option and what the net result will be compared to current plan. It was suggested that members review the MDI alternative plan. It was stated that the MDI plan has a better chance in achieving AOS but they need accomplish some things before they achieve it. It was explained that communities wishing to become an AOS will need some agreements on many items and have inter-local agreements. There was a discussion on types of the agreements that need to be made within an AOS structure. It was stated that there were some meetings being offered to communities on consolidation and it was suggested that the RPC request technical assistance. It was explained there are no answers the technical assistance can currently give on the AOS structure. Bob reviewed the law for AOS again. Bob stated he would try to structure some comparisons between the two plans for the RPC to consider.

- The presentation from Finance subcommittee was tabled until the next meeting. It was stated that member feedback was needed and the presentation would be emailed before the next meeting. It was suggested the presentation be at the beginning of the agenda.
- The timeline was reviewed. It was propose the RPC meet the next week on May 21st. It was suggested that due to time constraints there may need to be subcommittee work if the RPC considers doing something different. It was explained if the RPC decides to pursue an AOS, a new notice of intent will need to be passed by each school board and then filed with the Commissioner. The process would start over and is not up to the RPC to decide. It was stated that the next meeting will need to have progress as it is believed that in order to have a finalized plan for a January 30th referendum it must be finalized and voted on by school boards by mid-October. There was question about when finalized plans need to be completed. It was stated for the sake of all communities the RPC needed to keep in mind the penalty is looming and mid-October is a newly submitted plan deadline. It was agreed that cost savings

needs to be discussed at the next meeting and then the RPC needs to discuss compromised plans. The consensus was that the RPC needed to accomplish both of the stated agenda items at the next meeting.

- Meeting adjourned at 9:10pm

Respectfully submitted by S.Brewer 5.19.08