

Approved Minutes
SAU6 Study Committee

6/22 2015

Attendees: Glenn Thornton, William Palmer, Holly Taft, Sandra Carlson, Nicole Saginor, Heidi Jaarsma, Peter Lynch

Absent: Middleton McGoodwin

Meeting was called to order at 6:01PM

A motion to accept the agenda was made by Glenn Thornton and seconded by William Palmer. Motion accepted.

Minutes from the May 25th meeting were reviewed; correct grammatical error, change Thorntons to Thornton's in minute's paragraph. Add Middleton McGoodwin to the absent line. Change line 12 on page 3 to read; the New England Classical School may be interested in working together on a PreK – 12th Grade merger with Cornish.

Motion to accept the minutes as amended was made by William Palmer, seconded by Glenn Thornton. Motion Passed.

Heidi Jaarsma asked William Palmer to report the results of the meeting with Plainfield's School board.

Dr. Palmer stated that Chris Forman, Plainfield Chairman, explained Plainfield's position indicating that their board was authorized to do anything as long as it did not cost Plainfield more money, or effect the autonomy of their school.

Heidi asked if they expressed a preference between us creating a single SAU and purchasing services, or merging with Plainfield.

Dr. Palmer stated that Plainfield felt that the savings for both schools would be greater with two-district SAU vs. purchasing services. They further indicated that it is in both school's best interest to join together to offset declining enrollments in both schools allowing us share staff and students.

Dr. Palmer also said they are eager to meet soon, to explore how a two-district SAU would look and discuss finances.

Nicole Saginor stated she thought the new Superintendent should be hired together because that individual will be critical in our plans to move forward.

Heidi Jaarsma asked if they had discussed a possible budget adding we need a Plainfield's Projected SAU budget that will include the two schools.

Dr. Palmer responded saying that we need to meet about that and discuss all the variables.

Heidi Jaarsma asked, how do we envision future meetings?

William Palmer responded that we might send some of us to meet with some of them and have topic specific people attend. Dr. Palmer added we need to get a first meeting together and then move forward.

Holly Taft asked if the topic of one school vs. two schools was discussed.

William Palmer stated this would have to be discussed as populations actually changed. He added perhaps a K-4 and 5-8 format could be discussed down the road.

Nicole Saginor stated, we will need to build a budget together and discuss autonomy. The SAU should have 2 boards each running their own school.

Regarding governance, William Palmer if there might be a SAU board in addition to the school boards and how voting might work at the SAU level. Would it be population dependent?

It was agreed that all of these details would have to be worked out, and that the benefits for both schools go beyond money, curriculums would be strengthened and preserved.

Heidi Jaarsma moved on to the committees meeting with the SAU 6 Business Manager, Mike O'Neill.

She began by saying, although new to the position, he has a great deal of experience, including having been contracted by other school districts that have been involved with a split from a larger SAU.

When asked what he perceived as being the advantage of Cornish being in SAU 6. He offered that energy pricing would be a line item to consider. Mr. O'Neill said

that it might be difficult to duplicate the level of service for the money that Cornish receives from SAU6.

He continued by stating that if Cornish were to leave SAU 6 there would be no liabilities we would be responsible for and that Assets due to us from the SAU would be small.

He went on to provide us budget projections that outlined SAU 6 without Cornish vs. SAU 6 with Cornish.

Nicole Saginor pointed out the difference was no huge impact.

Heidi Jaarsma pointed out that Cornish already purchases Health insurance independent of SAU 6, and outlined what Mr. O'Neill had shared regarding schools that shared staff. Insurance and wages are covered by one school or the other, in order to provide full time benefits.

The committee agreed Mr. O'Neill had been very helpful and forthright.

Conversation continued regarding the town of Mason N.H. that split from a large SAU to become a single SAU.

It was pointed out that they had no small neighbor town to join with thus forcing them to become their own SAU.

Caroline Storrs said she had served on a collaboration committee when conducting a study on Pellet use.

Heidi Jaarsma said she would contact Mason for more information about their experience.

Heidi Jaarsma addressed the committee, asking what direction do we want to take from here.

She shared that the idea of a single SAU is nice but with start-up costs and other factors in purchasing services it may not be practical at this time. She went on to say that it appears joining Plainfield would save us time and money. She finished by saying she did not want the Cornish school to close.

Heidi Jaarsma then asked for a sense of the Committee as to which direction we want to pursue.

Nicole Saginor shared that she has gone back and forth on the issue. She feels that forming a single SAU and “living together” for a while has appeals, Bill Palmer’s report outlining Plainfield’s preference to merge and the advantages it might bring, make it the most viable option.

She also added that a union with Windsor could have some interesting possibilities if the Plainfield process failed.

Sandra Carlson stated that, given the information we have, merging looks like the way to go. If in the future we discover otherwise we can always switch directions.

Holly Taft indicated she believes joining with Plainfield is the proper direction to pursue.

Peter Lynch also embraced the idea of a merger pointing out that we are in unique place where both schools stand to benefit from a partnership. A merger with Plainfield might bring back programs such as Foreign Language, Art and Music, as well as provide a more beneficial financial environment.

William Palmer said we was against the idea of a single SAU and felt the partnership with Plainfield was the right way to go.

Glenn Thornton declined to support taking any direction, indicating it is too soon to make these decisions. He further stated that no direction should be pursued until we see hard numbers.

Public Comment:

Marianne Thompson stated that the time to look at numbers will come, we need to put education first. The change occurring in Cornish is bad for the children. The attritions hurt them. Pay attention to offering more full time positions versus looking at numbers only.

George Edson commended the committee on making a decision to take a direction. “Let’s see where it goes.”

Char Delmar said she was confused about what services would be purchased if we were a Single SAU.

William Palmer explained the purchased services would be Superintendent, Business Manager, SPED coordinator and other positions.

Alicia Simino asked if the committee was familiar with the Long Report, produced by Plainfield, that she said advocated for the joining of the two school districts and then “mothballing” one of the schools.

Heidi Jaarsma stated we were familiar with the report and that no one but the school district board can close a school.

Nicole Saginor shared that there are people that would wish the school closed no matter what we do.

Alicia Simino said she would hate to see the school close.

William Palmer added that a merger with Plainfield does not mean that Plainfield will have all control. He further suggested that the report was looking at every possibility and that neither towns want to close a school.

Alicia Simino further stated that she hears a lot of distain in Town directed at Dr. McGoodwin and believes he makes the best academic decisions for the students.

Nicole Saginor said the number of programs available in Plainfield make it a better fit for Cornish vs. SAU6

Heidi Jaarsma stated that we now have to look at Plainfield’s Organizational Structure and put numbers to it. Then look at the Organizational Structure of both schools.

Glenn Thornton asked, “are we at the point where we will see a spreadsheet?”

Heidi Jaarsma responded yes.

Alicia Simino asked, “SAU6 has a Curriculum Assessment person. Does Plainfield have that?”

Heidi Jaarsma said we will look at each position in each SAU one piece at a time.

Marianne Thompson said she wanted to see a stabilization in the Cornish School.

Caroline Storrs asked what we meant when we said we would look at each position and service.

Nicole Saginor offered that the process looks at how SAU6 provides services and what it costs, and the will look at how Plainfield provides the same services and compare costs.

Heidi Jaarsma closed by stating that we need to look at educational Mission and vision statements, organizational structures and fiscal analyses. Projected next meeting July 27th barring School Board conflict.

Glenn Thornton motioned to adjourn, seconded by William Palmer. Motion passed.