

TOWN OF LITCHFIELD
REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 6
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
November 1, 2021

Temporary Regional School District Study Committee

- 1) Call to Order The Temporary Regional School District Study Committee meeting held at the Litchfield Center School and via teleconference was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mr. Davenport.

Members present: Mr. Davenport, Co-Chairman, Mr. Tracy, Co-Chairman, Ms. Hunt, Secretary, Mr. Bergin, Treasurer, Mr. DeLayo, Ms. Johnson, Mrs. Weik, Mr. Morosani, Mrs. Sideris, and Ms. Stone. Also present: Mr. Leone, Superintendent, and Mr. Venhorst, CSDE.

- 2) Approval of Minutes (from October 25, 2021)

Mrs. Sideris made a motion to approve the minutes from October 25, 2021. Mr. DeLayo seconded the motion.

Mr. Davenport asked for any discussion points regarding the minutes.

Mr. Tracy requested the following words be added to the last sentence on page 1, Part 2 – Process and Timing, “in order for the plan for the new district to proceed.”

Mr. Tracy also requested the following words be added to the second to the last sentence on page 1, Part 3 – Legal Consequences of Plan, “with an affirmative result in each town.”

Mr. Venhorst commented his name should not be reflected in the list of “Members present:” rather under “Also present:” as he is not an official member of the committee.

Mr. Venhorst requested the following words be added to the end of the sentence on Page 3, 4th paragraph, “up to a statutory limit as specified in section 10-42.”

Mr. Venhorst also requested a correction on page 4, second paragraph, and changed the word “centennial census” to “decennial census.”

Mrs. Sideris made a motion to amend the minutes from October 25, 2021. Mr. DeLayo seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

Mr. Davenport requested a vote to approve the amended minutes from October 25, 2021. The motion passes unanimously.

Before the start of the Work Product Review section, Mr. Leone distributed a memo on the Regionalization Committee - Report Requirements that was discussed at the last meeting. He went on to say any work products shared at these meetings will be posted on the district’s website by the end of each meeting week. This can be found under Temporary Study Group or Workgroup on Collaboration on the main page of the site.

Mr. Leone commented, two email addresses have been created for community members to use and submit questions to the committee. The addresses are Regionalization@lpsct.org and Regionalization@rsd6.org. Committee members commented it is important to promote utilization of the email addresses to ensure community members receive an accurate response to their questions. Additionally, it was requested the district create a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section on the website.

Robert's Rules of Order on Voting was also distributed to committee members as "homework." While there are no Action Items on the agenda this evening, the committee members should familiarize themselves with these rules.

3) Work Product Review

a) 2020 Census Data

Requested from the October 25th meeting, Mr. Leone provided the calculated percentage by towns based on the 2020 Census data. (This does not include school enrollment)

Goshen - 21.07%

Litchfield - 54.8%

Morris - 15.09%

Warren - 9.04%

If this was broken down to individual votes:

Each Goshen vote would be worth: 7%

Each Litchfield vote would be worth: 18.27%

Each Morris Vote would be worth: 5.03%

Each Warren vote would be worth: 3.01%

b) Local Enrollment Percentages (as of October 1, 2021)

Warren: 128 resident students or 8.82% - Compared to the Census 9.04%

Morris: 205 resident students or 14.12% - Compared to the Census 15.09%

Goshen: 308 resident students or 21.21% - Compared to the Census 21.07%

Litchfield: 811 resident students or 55.85% - Compared to the Census 54.8%

Mr. Leone pointed out the local enrollment number is important because the percentages by town account for the annual assessment. And if you compare enrollment to the Census, the numbers are within a percentage point of each other. Additionally, it is important to consider the Pre-K enrollment, as these are the incoming students to the district compared to grade 12 as the outgoing students of the districts.

While the previous workgroup looked at a 5-year enrollment average, Mr. Leone is recommending this committee consider looking at a 10-year enrollment average for Region 20, combining Litchfield and Region 6, and not looking at enrollment by district in isolation.

Having presented the Census data and enrollment data, Mr. Leone opened the floor for questions.

Mr. Davenport asked if there is Pre-K 3 for Litchfield, as there are no enrollment numbers on the report. Yes, there is Pre-K 3 for Litchfield it is just the numbers aren't broken out that way in this report.

Mr. Morosani asked if cost allocations are made based on K-12? And if yes, how do you account for Pre-K? Mr. Leone responded by explaining, by law districts are required to offer Pre-K for special needs students. Additionally, the districts set tuition annually for non-special needs students. The district does not recoup the expenses associated with Pre-K, which sits in the general budget, and it is not factored into the assessment budget. Mr. Leone went on to say that what is also not factored into this enrollment is the 190 ASTE (Agricultural Science and Technology). And while the 190 ASTE students are not factored into enrollment, the revenue associated with the students will be factored into the Region 20 conceptual budget that will be discussed later in the meeting.

Mr. Bergin inquired, what is the impact if you open up Pre-K to all. Mr. Leone responded if you open up Pre-K to all it will change your assessment slightly, but will also drive up expenses significantly. It will lead to a discussion on ½ day Pre-K versus full-day Pre-K, impact to before and aftercare childcare businesses, as well as transportation issues.

c) R20 Proposed Voting Concept

Mr. Leone will share his thoughts on the voting concept for Region 20 but is waiting for input from Fred Dorsey, LPS BOE attorney, and Chris Chinni, RSD6 BOE attorney, to weigh in on the topic and will table his thoughts until the next meeting.

Mr. Leone then provided historical information for the prior workgroup commenting, if this committee proposed one-person vote, based on a Census count, then one town would control the whole Board. This concept was a non-starter for the Region 6 group.

The next concept brought forward was to have a supermajority; starting with 9 members, and then back to 8 members to ensure that 8 out of 12 members voted in the affirmative.

At the last meeting, Mr. Venhorst shared a crossover theory that Mr. Leone would like to verify, if a majority or supermajority that every town had to be in attendance and have at least one affirmative vote. This protects any one town from ganging up on another town and requires that each town has at least one person on the Board voting for the item. Mr. Leone shared that someone politely commented this would create a personal filibuster. Mr. Leone further responded he did not agree with this comment because whomever the Region 20 Board hires as the Superintendent should not go into a Board meeting needing one or two votes, but rather should build consensus before bringing items forward.

Mr. Leone is recommending that Proposed Voting Concept be an agenda topic at the next meeting as a discussion topic and try to finalize language to meet a consensus that the representative members can agree to.

Ms. Hunt asked if Mr. Venhorst could offer some models for types of voting to add to the discussion. Mr. Venhorst described three main ways voting could occur. Discussion ensued. Mr. Davenport then asked Mr. Venhorst if there are methods of voting structures of existing Regional Districts and would he share with the committee. Mr. Venhorst will provide such a document to Mr. Leone to share with the committee members.

d) School Debt - Update

Mr. Leone spoke by thanking Denise (Raap, First Selectwoman), Amaechi (Obi, Director of Finance, Town of Litchfield), and Jeremiah (Sattazahn, Chief Operating Officer, RSD6) for gathering these documents on behalf of the committee. Mr. Leone went on to say much has been said and discussed regarding the school debt and would share what is currently outstanding and what could be outstanding by June 2024.

Mr. Leone opened with the Region 6 debt schedule for school roofs that showed payments, principal, interest, and debt services. By June 30, 2024, the balance would be \$1,755,481.25, two years after the possible creation of Region 20.

Starting with the summary, Mr. Leone shared the Town of Litchfield debt, as of June 30, 2024, is \$1,817,790. This debt comes from 6 bonds with issue dates that started in 2012, with the last issue date being 2019. When looking at the total principal and interest remaining, there is approximately a \$75k difference between the two entities. Again, two years after the possible creation of Region 20.

Asking if there were any questions, Mrs. Sideris asked how this will impact the committee if the current group operates under the previous recommendation that each district reconciles its debt before a merger. Mr. Leone replied, debt comparison has come up several times and this committee needs to make a decision on how debt should be handled. Mr. Leone outlined the debt of Region 6 as three roofing projects and gave examples of some of the Litchfield debt being a lighting project that goes back 15 years and tennis courts bonded in 2012.

Mr. Morosani requested clarification on the timeline of a referendum vote and if we were looking at 15 months out or something longer? Mr. Leone commented post-referendum vote the committee would be looking at 2 years out which is why he has presented documents showing June 2024 date.

e) Building Appraisals - Update

Mr. Sattazahn acquired three price quotes for building appraisal work ranging from \$15-25k for all the buildings. The appraisal work can be completed relatively quickly, within 2-3 weeks. Mr. Leone will meet with the Boards of Education and seek approval to move forward with the appraisal work.

f) 5-Year R20 Budget

Mr. Leone presented the conceptual 3-year Region 20 budget. He is waiting for the enrollment figures to complete the 5-year budget. Mr. Leone shared this is a revenue-driven budget versus an expense-driven budget. Many districts begin budgeting with their expenses to determine revenue needs. The Litchfield Public Schools and Region 6 do not.

Mr. Leone went line by line, reviewing the Year 1 revenue budget that includes tuition, state revenue, miscellaneous, and town contributions. He did the same for the expense side. Additional negatives not included in the expenses are \$194k for electricity and \$250k in capital coming from the Town of Litchfield. These expenses result in savings to the Town of Litchfield.

Mr. Leone outlined this conservative Year 1 budget and savings to the towns.

The Year 2 and Year 3 budgets show a 2% increase in revenue while holding a majority of expenses flat, reflecting additional savings to the towns.

Ms. Hunt asked why the regionalization concept budget showed a cutting of two school buses when the two districts have already combined their bus schedules and are sharing buses. Mr. Leone replied that having the schools on one bell schedule and a centralized middle and high school would allow the new district to reduce its fleet by two buses.

Mr. Morosani asked about the Vo-Ag state reimbursement numbers. Mr. Leone explained over the last four years, Vo-Ag reimbursement has gone from \$3,800 per student to \$5,200 per student. The Vo-Ag program has tremendous support from the local legislators. Mr. Leone believes the AgSci tuition fee (the per-pupil fee from sending towns) set by the state should be annually reviewed and addressed by the new district.

Ms. Johnson inquired about savings for two outplacement students. Is the district bringing back the students in-house? Mr. Leone replied these are initial savings from students aging out of the program.

g) 10-year R20 Enrollment Projection

Mr. Leone will bring the draft 10-year enrollment projection report to the next committee meeting on November 22nd.

h) Litchfield Solar Projects – Update

Mr. Leone thanked Denise (Raap, First Selectwoman) and her staff for quickly providing him with the Town of Litchfield solar project documents. The documents are currently under review. Mr. Leone will have an update on solar at the next meeting.

i) Plumb Hill Playing Fields – Update

Mr. Leone plans to have the districts take over the Town of Litchfield expenses for the Plumb Hill playing fields and include these costs in the 2022-2023 school budgets. Everyone across the two districts uses the fields, and this shows a sign of good faith. Mr. Leone anticipates a

co-op agreement between the Boards of Education. The proposed 2022-2023 school budgets are presented to the Boards of Education in March 2022.

4) Public Comment

Mr. Leone shared a copy of an email from Jackie Tuil, a resident of Litchfield. After members read the email, a discussion ensued. Mr. Leone stated that directing people to the district website under Temporary Study Committee and Workgroup on Collaboration will address many of the questions and comments in the email.

Julia Hrica, a resident of Litchfield, commented she had been reading the minutes of the previous meeting and listening to discussions at this evening's meeting. There is a lot said about the financial benefits of a merger. Ms. Hrica is concerned about the dwindling enrollment and how it affects offering enriching classes and courses in school. As a former Litchfield graduate with a class of 124 students, she is asking the committee members to keep in mind why they are here - to improve the quality of education and life for our children.

Jeff Zullo, a resident of Litchfield, was listening to some of the conversations about the financial data. Mr. Zullo encourages committee members to be certain the information they are working with and analyzing is fully vetted by the town financial departments. Mr. Zullo disagrees with some of the material presented. His concern is not to have any differentials, discrepancies, or misinterpretations when the committee produces its final report. The information needs to be agreed to by the towns.

Mr. Leone commented for the record that the Town of Litchfield debt data was received from Amaechi Obi, from the Town of Litchfield.

Mr. Davenport is suggesting in the future to footnote the source of data on documents.

Jen Dorne, a resident of Litchfield, asked about town pooling of health care insurance. Mr. Leone explained Litchfield Public Schools, Region 6, the Towns of Goshen and Morris, and Woodridge Lake Sewer District are pooled together for health insurance. The Town of Litchfield was invited to join but decided to stay with the state plan. The experience of the pooled group has had a -2% return. The district is looking to increase the size of the pool with other school districts. Ms. Dorne further asked if the districts pool for oil. Mr. Leone said the district pools for oil, gas, fuel for our buses, and the two district bus contracts are in lock step.

5) Discussion/New Business

Future meeting discussion items will include a walk-through of the proposed course offerings. Mr. Venhorst will provide information on the voting structure of other regional school district Boards of Education.

The committee had a general discussion on staffing and the organizational structure. Mr. Leone encourages everyone to familiarize themselves with the original Workgroup on Collaboration Recommendations as it includes recommendations on staffing. As the conversation continued, it was decided at the next meeting the committee will review the previous Workgroup recommendations, section by section, and decide what to keep, revise or discarded.

6) Next Meeting Date

The next meeting of the Temporary Regional School District Study Committee will be on November 22nd at 6:00 p.m. The location will be announced at a later date.

- 7) Adjournment There being no further business to come before this committee, **Mr. Morosani made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.** The meeting adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Escobar
Secretary, pro-tem