

GREENFIELD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE: Shared Superintendent/Superintendency Union Meeting with Mohawk Regional Subcommittee

DRAFT Minutes

Thursday, April 2nd 2009

1. Call to Order at 7:07 p.m. by Maryelen Calderwood.

Present: (Greenfield) School Committee Members M. Calderwood, Mayor Forgey, D. Eastman and 3 School Committee Members on the Mohawk Subcommittee; Superintendent Hollins, members of the press, and others.

2. Subcommittee Chairperson M. Calderwood commented on a recent article, explaining “we never had an April 15th deadline. We are continuing as planned, pursuing good data. We are moving at the speed we intended to move at.”

3. Update of discussion:

Jon Wyman, School committee chair and vice chair of the Mohawk Subcommittee, explained a public discussion of merging with Hawlemont. They met with their superintendent about the shared superintendent and there was a general comfort level. They have renewed their superintendent’s contract and feel in a good place with their town and finance committee. Based on what has been going on of late with rushing the shared superintendent model through, they don’t have support now. In order for a shared superintendent to work out, the new superintendent would have to have the support of everyone.

Mr. Wyman was clear that his school committee has a preference for their current superintendent being the shared superintendent. “That’s the only situation we would consider.” Mr. Burrington said the choices now were tabling or slowing down. He noted that Mohawk and Greenfield school committees are soon going to change with the election.

Mr. Lunt of Greenfield said he appreciated de-linking from the April 15th, 2009, date. “The rush is not tenable.” The proposal “has to work for everybody.”

Mr. Eastman said he never saw April 15th as the Greenfield timeline. “As we look back, it was probably never realistic.” He believes any money saved will be available to move into classrooms so on the face of it, combining administrative services makes sense.

Greenfield Superintendent Hollins was asked her thoughts. She mentioned that she has had experience in a superintendency union and that she is not unsupportive, in general. The focus on eliminating one administrator’s position is uncomfortable and it has been a distraction and unsettling to Greenfield which is just getting settled. “The committee should be pursuing a model, not an individual, and pursuing information about the model.” She mentioned the quick discussions have been destabilizing for the Greenfield public schools and offered to help with joint planning.

She stated that Greenfield schools are more complex than people seem to realize or mention. Greenfield schools are a department of a city. The Greenfield superintendent already has two boards making requests for time and reports—not unlike a shared superintendent of two districts. Ten percent of the population is comprised of other language speakers and immigrant children. Due to the volume of work specific to Greenfield, she thought an associate superintendent would be needed. She does not see much savings with the superintendent position but sees other services that could be shared where there could be savings.

Mayor Forgey was asked for her opinion. She said all issues need to be given consideration. She agrees with a prior comment that the study needs to go from data to model, not model to data. She proposed a long-term strategy and expressed interest in collaboration around business services.

Greenfield Sc member Lunt opined that the Superintendent’s position, like the school committee, is “strategic”—deciding how to use resources and deciding the best actions for a specific school district given its funding. Other jobs in central school offices are more common from district to district and are more easily shared. He shared that he has had national and international experience with consolidation of operations vs. strategic jobs and “the metrics of success are different.”

Calderwood mentioned she has asked the state for data.

Mayor Forgey clarified that she is only open to discussing the superintendency being shared if Mohawk is open to looking at other ideas. She asked if Mohawk could clarify its focus and mission for its subcommittee—can members discuss other possibilities for sharing resources and saving money? She asked about a timeframe and also asked if Mohawk and Greenfield might make a set of shared questions for the DESE.

Superintendent Hollins shared information she had researched about cities in Massachusetts. She suggested it was important to know and understand if under this form of government there are examples of school departments that are part of regional districts or superintendency unions because a city school department is not an independent school district. Mr. Lunt asked if the Mohawk budget was online.

There then was discussion about sharing information through email. The Superintendent cautioned that school committees as well as school subcommittees can share information online but cannot conduct business online.

Mr. Eastman said he wanted to move forward with “due haste.”

A next meeting was set for April 16th—2 weeks from today for the subcommittee to come together. This will give each committee time to clarify with its committee whether or not a broader range of ideas for sharing can be discussed.

4. Motion by Subcommittee Chair Calderwood to adjourn; 2nd Lunt: Pass. Unanimous. Time was approximately 8:28 p.m.

Minutes drafted,
Susan Hollins