

Berkshire County Education Task Force

August 29, 2015

Location: Nessacus Middle School
35 Fox Road
Dalton, MA 01226

Time: Called to order: 9:10am
Adjourned: 11:40am

Materials Provided:

Attached mailed electronically by W. Cameron prior to meeting:

Agenda
Draft White Paper
Berkshire Record article (“14 South County towns support Baker initiative...”)
Road Map

Members Present:

South County:

Stephen Bannon, Chair, Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee
Dr. Peter Dillon, Superintendent BHRSD
Christopher Ketchen, Lenox Town Manager
Carl Stewart, Chair, Southern Berkshire Regional School Committee
Bob Vaughn, Lenox School Committee
Andrea Wadsworth, Chair, Lee School Committee

Central County:

Dr. William Cameron, (retired) Supt., Central Berkshire Regional School District
Mike Case, Vice-Chair, MASC Division 6, Vice-Chair, CBRSD School Committee
Dr. H. Jake Eberwein, (former) Supt., Pittsfield Public Schools, (current) Berkshire Compact, MCLA Dean, Graduate & Continuing Education
Brian Fairbank, Chair, The Fairbank Group
Edward Gibson, Becket Town Administrator
Douglas McNally, (former) Principal, Taconic High School, (current) Berkshire Compact

North County:

Paul Butler, Chair, Adams-Cheshire Regional School Committee
Dan Caplinger, Chair, Williamstown Elementary School Committee
Regina DiLego, Chair, Lanesborough School Committee
Carrie Greene, Chair, Mt. Greylock Regional School Committee
Tony Mazzucco, Adams Town Administrator

Other:

Devin Sheehan, MASC
Jake Olivera, MASC

Agenda Items:

1. Welcome & Introductions, W. Cameron

- Introduction of members.
- Participation by non-members reserved to the end of the meeting.

2. Acceptance of minutes, August 8, 2015

- Passed unanimously

3. Discussion of South County Grant Initiative

- Bill Cameron offered observations based on a Berkshire Record article (sent electronically to members) that reported a south county Community Compact grant planning/application process.
- Of concern, comment by Representative Pignatelli that suggested shared services may be better approached by maintaining regional identities and – to what degree – is this counterproductive to the charge of this task force?
- There has been a south county group advancing (for a longer period of time) the kinds of work that this our task is now doing. They are moving forward several collaborative agreements related to special education, food, transportation, and personnel. That said, there is (may be) a tension that exists. It was noted there may be a problem between what is happening and what is reported (may be the case in this Berkshire Record article).
- A concern over the disparagement by Rep. Pignatelli and dismissal of the county-wide spirit. Could this be counterproductive to our efforts? Does it the comment, demean or diminish our task force charge and efforts?
- The south county group, although named shared services, is more than just that. Smitty may have been suggesting that a consolidated county district (1-3) may be unrealistic.
- There is a question of funding from the state, who is applying and might this be perceived by the state as an internal struggle/competition? That we don't have our act together?
- Communication pertaining to what we are doing will be important, others may just not be aware. There was a comment about asking Smitty to attend a future meeting, or not. No action was recommended related to this.
- We will have to put other initiatives (such as the south county effort and/or the north county Lanesborough conversation) into context with ours, as part of our work.

- These other working groups are ahead of us – they started earlier. Is this competitive (for recommendations and money?) or can we both exist? It was suggested that both group needs to exist – it should not be a competition. The challenge for the group is the ability to move forward, while local decisions won't always be aligned.
- Where do we fit in with everyone else with people who are running schools on a local level? We are here to develop a model on a county-wide scale – people may or may not buy into this based on their individual, local level, and district perspectives. Our vision is for the entire county, however.
- How do we get buy in? We don't want to produce just another study. This will require legislative support. Is this a future barrier? The notion of protecting and maintaining local identity “as long as you can” (as cited by Rep. Pignatelli) will be a primary obstacle. This may be a good test case on how we will deal with these (issues) as they continue to come up. We should continue to move ahead with our best intentions. We are not in competition with the south county group.
- Troubled about how it will be seen from the state. Are they looking at Berkshire County as being splintered? Communication is key – we need people to know what we're up to.
- It was reported that the Greylock building project may also be impacted given some are suggesting that it be tabled (put on hold) until the Task Force recommendations are made and considered.
- We need money to move our work forward. We are dead in the water without funding.
- Should we jointly send a communication to Boston that the two groups are working collaboratively and working actively together to develop a long-term plan? We need money to complete the research. We need to get to Peyser and the Governor's office ASAP, time is of the essence. This is the takeaway...to figure a way to communicate with the state.

Action:

- *None was decided, although it was implied that some coordinated communication need occur.*

4. Approval of proposed white paper

- The white paper that will serve as the foundation of our work was reviewed (and updated draft had been sent electronically)
- It was decided to amend recommendation 6 to read:
“Proposed recommendations may be reflected in district budget models as early as FY17.”
- Approved unanimously with revision.

- Jake E. will send out edited version that members can then post on websites and to key stakeholders, such as school committees.
- The Communications subcommittee has recommended that (school) committees vote to endorse the Task Force White Paper. It was recommended that a comment period be provided to improvement buy-in, feedback, and transparency. Also, it was felt select boards should review (and possibly vote) also. We should allow time for questions based on feedback.
- Conversation about how to best roll out white paper, timing, distribution and feedback mechanism. A good date? Concerns about open meeting and how we best distribute.
- Suggest that we move the October meeting to an evening to focus specifically on the white paper feedback. A possible combined and in person and call-in. We would cancel the meeting on the 10th (possible, but not decided). Again, the focus of the short meeting would be to specifically focus on the white paper.
- It was decided that the White Paper would be edited and quickly distributed to members for circulation and presentation to boards and stakeholders. Members should also solicit feedback. That feedback will be collected and shared at a special evening meeting to be determined in October. This meeting will be used to integrate feedback, and edit a final version of the White Paper. This version will then be circulated back to members and committees for a formal vote (late October, early November).
- Andrea will follow up with a doodle poll to determine the best date/time for the October meeting.
- The white paper would come back through John to all school committees and Mike will present to the executive council.

Actions:

- *Andrea W. will follow up with a doodle poll, which will determine final date for evening/call-in special meeting.*
- *Jake E. will update the white paper and sent to all members through the chair.*
- *A date for the evening meeting will be determined and shared at the next meeting.*
- *Mike C. will send white paper to the MASc executive council.*
- *All members should share white paper with their stakeholder groups for input and be prepared to share input at the to-be-scheduled October evening/call-in meeting.*
- *(?) The White paper can be posted on district websites.*

5. Subcommittee Reports

a. Capital inventory (Ed G.)

Teleconference meeting on August 18. Notes were sent to everyone. John had information outline (characteristics of school buildings) of data that will be collected. Members are being asked to support local data collection. Would like to have the list back by the end of October.

b. Fiscal Factors (Chris K.)

Have met twice. Will reach out to experts at the state to create an apples-to-apples comparison. End-of-year reports provide some accounting, but is difficult to get to a bottom line that we all have confidence in. Have also included town accountant and school business officers. Currently, focused on the road map...from which the data will quickly fall into place.

Tom Moreau and Roger Hatch are credible sources. The state-wide Chapter 70 review committee has just gone through all of this – and no significant changes are impending.

c. Communication (Andrea W.)

Met on August 17. Notes have been sent to all members. Current conversations regarding Williamstown, Adams, Lanesborough. How to get the \$500 commitment to the work? Get commitment first, money second. Statement of commitment will be the formal endorsement by vote of the Task Force approved White Paper based on conversations today. Other funding sources through public and private. Getting message out – social media and Facebook pages. Will also create press releases – to get our voice out. School districts will post notes on their websites. How do we address attitudes to build trust with community? Peter will serve as press lead, with review by John. This will allow quick responsiveness and release of information following the meetings.

Who is custodian of records? John, as chair, would be the official custodian. We will confirm with John when he returns.

d. Additional discussion

Peter forwarded a list of all shared services electronically. We should all share (other districts) what the shared services are across the county. This would allow the generation of a master county lists.

Actions:

- *Subcommittees will continue to meet and move forward agendas.*
- *Collection of capital inventory information by all members based on spreadsheet variables.*
- *Credible state-level finance experts will be engaged in supporting the financial work.*
- *Facebook page is in development.*
- *White paper should be shared, as mentioned previously.*
- *John H. will serve as custodian of all records.*
- *Peter D. will serve as lead press writer, with releases vetted through John H.*
- *We should all work to continue to compile shared services lists. Data will be compiled by the following members:*

- *Andrea W. will volunteer to collect southern Berkshire.*
- *Carrie G. will compile north county.*
- *Jake E. will compile central county (Jake M. and Laurie C.)*

6. Review of Task Force “Road Map”

- Two themed priorities were distributed prior to the meeting. Does this capture everything that was discussed at the last meeting?
- List subcommittees at the bottom of this based on what we currently have in place.

Action:

- *Add subcommittees to the Road Map document.*

7. Third Priority – Modeling (Brian F. facilitated)

- At the last meeting we did not have a chance to get to this final priority.
- Do we look at external models, such as Maine? May not be the best, given they created superintendents unions but did not get to a shared/collaborative services. Is widely considered a failed model.
- Is there a need to focus group/subcommittee for this work? Even focus areas within these subcommittees, such as special education.
- How do we frame the communication/task pertaining to modeling? We don’t have the resources or time to get this work done
- What would this consultant do, would we hand them data we collect– what is the scope of the work?
- The group agreed (with emphasis dots) to the following key areas:
 - Models of shared services
 - Models to provide best quality education
 - Scope of work
- Gathering is part of the buy-in. Small or medium scale intermediate solutions.
- A potential subcommittee should possible be added to tackle the scope of work for the consultant.
- This additional subcommittee should include two subgroups:
 - shared services
 - scope of work (for the consultant)
- Cost saving versus educational measures – as we examine the shared services.
- Should we table the scope of work committee as we collect more information. We should begin the RFP process with consideration of data we are currently collected (such as buildings and shared services). It was suggested that getting to this scope of work (and associated funding) is a top priority.
- It was suggested and agreed that rather than add a third subcommittee, we add these two additional tasks to the existing subcommittees as follows:
 - Communications subcommittee will work on the shared service collection task.
 - The finance subcommittee will add putting together a scope of work (RFP) for the potential consultant.

Actions:

- *Current subcommittees will tackle the new tasks of compiling shared services and preparing a scope of work for the consultant.*
- *Brian F. continues to reach out to state level sources of funding.*

8. Public input

Chip Elitzer. The bottom line is quality education, which costs money. We need a framework for financing – in order to deliver the best education for our children. His analysis of how we tax ourselves in order to support education. If, for example, Stockbridge taxed at the levels of other towns, the district would have more money available for education. There is untaxed capacity with the county – BHRSD at full tax capacity would have more resources to support the schools. May require state legislative action. Appeal to task force to focus on this issue of taxing.

Shaun Armacost. Efforts of task force are very important to see communities more as partners rather than competitors. Gratified that many districts are coming together to tackle this work.

Follow up comment: A danger to step into question of tax equalization given our public relations issue – to convince stakeholders. We have to think about what we advocate for, how does the tax question relate to our mission?

9. Future meetings

Next meeting September 19, 2015
9:00am at Nessacus Middle School

October 10, 2015

October 31, 2015

November 21, 2015

December 12, 2015

Berkshire County Education Task Force membership:

South County:

Stephen Bannon, Chair, Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee

Dr. Peter Dillon, Supt., Berkshire Hills Regional School District

Christopher Ketchen, Lenox Town Manager

Carl Stewart, Chair, Southern Berkshire Regional School Committee

Robert Vaughan, Chair, Lenox School Committee

Andrea Wadsworth, Chair, Lee School Committee

Central County:

Dr. William Cameron, (retired) Supt., Central Berkshire Regional School District

Michael Case, Vice-Chair, Central Berkshire Regional School Committee & Vice-Chair, MASC Division VI

Dr. H. Jake Eberwein, (former) Supt., Pittsfield Public Schools, (current) Berkshire Compact, MCLA Dean, Graduate & Continuing Education

Brian Fairbank, Chair, The Fairbank Group

Edward Gibson, Becket Town Administrator

Douglas McNally, (former) Principal, Taconic High School, (current) Berkshire Compact

North County:

James Brosnan, Supt., McCann (Northern Berkshire Regional School District)

Paul Butler, Chair, Adams-Cheshire Regional School Committee

Dan Caplinger, Chair, Williamstown Elementary School Committee

Regina DiLego, Chair, Lanesborough School Committee

Carrie Greene, Chair, Mt. Greylock Regional School Committee

John Hockridge, Chair, MASC Division VI, (member) North Adams School Committee

Jon Lev, Supt., North Berkshire School Union

Tony Mazzucco, Adams Town Administrator