

M.O.R.E.
Regional Entities Subcommittee
MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, April 28, 2015

Those Present:

Rep Peggy Sayers, Sen. Paul Formica, Jeff Bridges, Rep. Theresa Conroy, Rep. Mike Demicco, John Elsesser, John Filchak, Betsy Gara, Scott Gaul, Rep. Bob Godfrey, Sam Gold, Rep. John Hampton, Richard Ives, Pat Llodra, Sheila McKay, Robert Namnoum, Leo Paul, Jonathan Steinberg, Lisa Pellegrini, Bonnie Reemsnyder, Christine Ruman, Melissa Schlag, Donald Stein, Daniel Steward

Those Absent:

Carl Amento, Brian Anderson, Susan Bransfield, Rep. Aundre Bumgardner, Sen. Steve Cassano, Peter Foote, Carl Fortuna, William Fritz, Deb Hinchey, Rep. Susan Johnson, Matthew Knickerbocker, Robert Labanara, Rep. Gail Lavielle, Cynthia Mangini, Steve McKeever, Jeff Otto, Lena Rodriguez, Rep. Jason Rojas, Rep. Christopher Rosario, Joyce Stille, Jeff Tomchik, Steve Vavrek, Jim Vigue, Stephen Woods, Lyle Wray, Rep. Tami Zawistowski, Jeremy Zeedyk

The meeting was called to order by Rep. Peggy Sayers at 12:06pm and she introduced Bruce Douglas from CREC.

Bruce Douglas presented on CREC's responsibilities and what towns can do to save costs relating to school districts.

Don Stein asked about barriers relating to local control.

Bruce Douglas recommended oversight committees. CREC uses 35 board of education members to oversee its actions.

Leo Paul asked if certain entities were allied with CREC.

Bruce Douglas responded by explaining that Leo Paul was inquiring about the RESCs. He then stated that there are six RESCs and they all exist for the same reason because they contain the specialized staff from the Connecticut State Department of Education.

Pat Llodra discussed how Newtown had Blum Shapiro conduct a study to find efficiencies, but there was opposition due to trust issues with the associated parties.

Bruce Douglas explained that the RESCs are neutral and held accountable to both parties, which helps navigate the trust issue.

John Filchak inquired to possible restructuring due to the large number of Superintendents.

Bruce Douglas stated that restructuring the Superintendent numbers is a volatile discussion.

John Filchak asked about how the RESCs are related to special education.

Bruce Douglas said that CREC was working on it, but the origin of the issue relates to local control.

Rep. Demicco asked if the lack of cooperation was due to legal issues and what the legislature could do to resolve those issues.

Bruce Douglas deferred to Mary Glassman.

Mary Glassman stated that support from the legislature would help the towns save money.

Bruce Douglas stated that incentives would be useful for creating cost savings and efficiencies for towns.

Rep. Demicco asked if there were other areas in which regionalization could save money.

Bruce Douglas responded by saying that technology was one of the big areas in which a lot of money could be saved because reduced access to technology is slowing down progress.

John Elsesser asked if RESCs can defend the school districts plans for less than the attorneys that the school districts generally use.

Bruce Douglas said that CREC has considered it, but is not able to due to a guideline set by the State Department of Education. He further explained that CREC has explored the possibility of creating additional co-ops.

John Elsesser expressed his concern for the digital divide.

Bruce Douglas responded by saying that upgrading the technology in schools would bring better deals for the municipalities.

Richard Ives discussed the declining enrollment in public schools

Bruce Douglas responded by stating that attrition with regards to smaller student populations should lead to efficiencies in small numbers. He further explained that if the schools can't afford to maintain the student population, they should explore regionalization.

Richard Ives stated that the town population was increasing, but the school population was decreasing.

Bruce Douglas explained that if that was the case then the schools should consider regionalization.

Scott Gaul discussed the need for better demographic data to enable towns to make better decisions.

Bruce Douglas stated that demographic data would be useful, but the logical solution would require incentives to the towns to regionalize.

Betsy Gara stated that UCONN recently conducted a demographic study.

Bruce Douglas added that towns can be granted the right to not give up funding with the goal of implementing regionalization.

Leo Paul discussed the issues that his town experienced when attempting to regionalize, and added that the legislature's involvement would be absolutely necessary when implementing regionalization.

Bruce Douglas said that the use of language that expresses regionalization as being in the best interest of the children is optimal and that there needs to be an extensive plan developed.

Leo Paul stated that his town had a study performed by education connection and the study illuminated the potential for a large amount of cost savings. However, they were still unable to regionalize due to staunch opposition.

Bruce Douglas agreed and stated that the legislation is the answer. He recommended that the committee explore the legislation that Vermont and Maine used to implement regionalization.

Rep. Sayers added that the information from Maine and Vermont should be available at the next meeting.

Pat Llodra stated that the state as a whole would be interested in knowing the demographics.

Bruce Douglas agreed with Pat Llodra.

Mary Glassman discussed the study conducted by Blum Shapiro for CREC.

Christine Rumen added by stating that there were several conferences on renewable energy and other topics.

Rep. Sayers stated that the schools don't provide meals for students with special diets.

Christine Rumen stated that it is a priority and that it needs to be addressed.

Bruce Douglas added that CREC magnet schools provide gluten free lunches. He added that responsibilities given to CREC did not result in a loss of jobs due to the issues that job loss would create with smaller towns.

Rep. Sayers asked Sheila McKay if she had anything to add from a board of education perspective.

Sheila McKay stressed the importance of creating trust and forming relationships for the purpose of generating efficiencies.

Rep. Sayers opened the floor for additional questions.

Betsy Gara inquired into possible issues regarding transportation.

Christine Rumen answered by saying that the regional calendar was created to address the issue of transportation.

Bruce Douglas added that CREC has a regional transportation system, but even with a common calendar there was still resistance.

Betsy Gara stated that state law requires every child to have a seat on the bus even though many students do not ride the bus, which is a missed opportunity for savings. She then asked if CREC had encountered that issue.

Bruce Douglas responded by saying that it is a problem and that it should be addressed.

John Filchak asked if there were functions of the State Department of Education that should be delegated to the RESCs for the purpose of creating efficiencies.

Bruce Douglas stated that there should be a closer relationship between the RESCs and the State Department of Education for the purposes of sharing human resources. He then added that the state should take a serious look at staffing and funding the Connecticut State Department of Education.

John Filchak added that there was nobody in charge of the bureau of special education for several years.

Bruce Douglas commented by stating that the lack of someone in charge of the bureau comes off as neglectful to the parents of special education children.

Rep. Sayers identified NBR and the bidding process for schools as two things that the state would need to examine. She then inquired into the possible use of a mandate.

Bruce Douglas stated that a conceptual design, strategic plan, and legislation would be necessary for instituting regionalization.

Rep. Sayers said that a working group could be created for the purpose of examining the issues and thanked the participants for their presentations.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:22pm.