

April 1, 2014

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Randolph School Board Member 1993-2014

**Bramtree School District
Brookfield School District
Randolph School District**

**Regional Education District (RED) Planning Committee
Merger Plan**

July, 2012

Amended August 2012

The Planning Committee has completed its year-long study on the formation of a Regional Education District in accordance with Act 153 and Title 16, Section 706. A unanimous decision was reached to recommend the formation of a RED, comprising the Braintree Town School District, Brookfield Town School District, Randolph Town School District, and Randolph Union High School District #2, with a vote of the communities to be held on November 6th, 2012.

The request to bring this recommendation to the voters of Braintree, Brookfield and Randolph is contingent upon recognition by the State Board that the resulting Regional Education District will be considered a Supervisory District, employing a full-time Superintendent of Schools exclusively dedicated to serving our schools and communities. In addition, in the event two of the three necessary Town School Districts vote in the affirmative and one Town School District votes in the negative no new district shall be formed.

It is the unanimous finding of the Committee that merging our three towns, four school districts and five school boards is in the best interest of our communities. The formation of a RED serves to reduce the complexity of the current SU structure and protect the benefits achieved to-date through voluntary collaboration over the past decade. By creating a kindergarten through grade 12 system with one governing Board and a Superintendent of Schools exclusively dedicated to a unified structure, we will be best positioned to achieve the critical goals of an improved focus on student learning and continued economic efficiencies.

Incentive Option

The Committee requested calculations from the Department of Education to better understand the two incentive options available under Acts 153 and 156. In August 2012 the decision was made to take advantage of the tax incentive option offered under Act 153.

Increased Efficiency

As required in Act 153, the Committee examined, and to the extent possible, documented how the proposed merger could provide cost efficiencies and improved educational outcomes in order to demonstrate a rational basis for the decision to merge.

The Committee's findings are included in the remainder of this plan.

Attachment A: Improved Student Learning

The schools of The Orange Southwest Supervisory Union are dedicated to ensuring our students are well-educated: acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary for success in the next stage of their lives. All of our students come together in grade 7 as one community at Randolph Union Middle School. From the perspective of our students we are one system. Increasingly over the past decade board members, school administrators, teachers and staff see themselves as a part of one system as well.

Research demonstrates one of the most significant in-school factors in student learning is the classroom teacher. In addition, research identifies strong educational leadership, stable over time, as a critical element in the success of students. Finally, we know that the culture of a school, encompassing everything from the cleanliness of the bathrooms to the driver on the bus, must be supportive of student learning. Therefore the most effective approach we can take to improve student learning is to ensure our system attracts, retains, and supports high quality teachers, administrators and staff. They are essential to our success. If we can make our system the most attractive place in Vermont to teach, be a principal or superintendent, be a support person, then we are guaranteed to have the best pool of applicants possible for any opening we may have. This is key to the sustainability of our work.

Equally as vital is sustaining our schools as community schools; each reflecting the unique history, culture and tradition of their location. Collaboration and centralization at the system level allows the focus at the local level to be on implementing the shared vision for student learning consistent with the unique talents, interests and traditions of the individual school community.

Over the past decade we have collaborated to bring about these conditions within our supervisory union, and to an increasing degree we are successful. It is a testimony to the people at every point in our system that so much has been accomplished within a complex structure of 4 districts and six boards. Our biggest risk now is fragmentation. It takes significant energy and effort to sustain this work under the best of circumstances; our current supervisory union structure inherently creates unnecessary complexities. The formation of a RED is the next logical step in our evolution as a system. It will allow us to maintain our focus on student learning and continue to build and sustain the conditions that allow us to meet our commitment to our students and our communities: that our students leave our school prepared for success in whatever they choose to undertake.

We have identified the following components as critical to improving student learning in our schools and believe the structure of a RED supports the achievement and sustainability of this work.

1. Staffing

- a. Hiring and retaining people who share our values and expectations for learning: people who are innovative, creative problem-solvers, invested in their own learning as well as the success of our learners.

- b. Having an appropriate level of staffing in every area and the flexibility to adapt to the changing needs of our students and our schools.

2. Time

- a. Teachers need the time to focus on student learning and principals need the time to be educational leaders. The ability to protect this time and keep the focus on improving student learning is essential. This happens when we maintain well-functioning systems for board governance, school maintenance, transportation, food services, such that administrators and teachers are allowed to focus intensively on instruction and school culture.
- b. Educators and their administrators need time to meet together with colleagues to share, collaborate, plan, learn from each other, analyze and respond to data. Furthermore, educators need a community of role-alike peers, so that they are not working in isolation. (eg first grade teachers need other first grade teachers with whom they can learn and share; principals need other principals with whom they learn and share best practices, etc).
- c. Teaching, support staff and administrators need time for professional development to advance their skills and knowledge in their role and stay current with ever changing expectations, regulations and mandates.

3. Support

- a. Our system and our schools must be structured in a way that supports our values and expectations for learning.
- b. Our schools require the support of the school board as well as the state and the federal government. The decisions of these policy-making bodies can enhance what happens in our schools or create barriers to learning.
- c. Students, families, teachers, staff, principals, the superintendent, the board, and the community all contribute to the fabric of learning. Each of us requires the support of the others, working together toward a common vision of success for our students.

4. Flexibility

- a. The professional administrators and teachers we hire to educate our children need the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions, deploy resources to best serve the needs of students, and to make timely decisions within their expertise.
- b. Individual schools need the flexibility to meet the needs of their students in a way that reflects the unique culture and traditions of their community.

5. Organizational Alignment

- a. At the high school, and at the middle and elementary schools who feed into it, we need a common language, a common curriculum aligned with a robust and meaningful assessment and reporting system. Continuity of language and expectations helps students because they don't need to waste instructional time re-learning a new language of teaching and assessment in each different grade level or subject area. Continuity among teachers in a k-12 educational system can mean more time for learning.
- b. We need common standards for performance, a clear understanding of the outcomes expected, and a system of oversight based upon continual improvement not reproach.
- c. Our systems must be designed to enable success, not filled with barriers that limit our flexibility, creativity and ability to respond to the needs of learners.

6. Resources

- a. We need the resources to invest in ongoing meaningful professional development, technology and learning materials to ensure rich educational experiences for all our students. This requires maximizing efficiencies in every area, to make available resources for instruction and learning without undermining the ability of the system to function in a sustainable way.
- b. We need to continue to invest in our buildings and grounds so that they serve our communities into the future.

7. Board

- a. We need to maintain a board dedicated to leading by governing, with a strong focus on accountability to the communities.
- b. We need stability of leadership on the board, balanced with the energy of new voices.
- c. The board must remain connected with the diverse perspectives of our communities.
- d. We need a board vested in its own professional development to ensure it functions effectively and with integrity.

Attachment B: Centralized Efficiency Balanced with Local Control

The School Districts of Braintree, Brookfield, Randolph and Randolph Union District # 2 have worked collaboratively for the past decade to consolidate services, bringing about efficient and effective operations. Since 2002, student enrollment has decreased by 22%. In response, we have reduced staff by 24% in order to keep expenditures reasonable. As an SU we have made significant strides in stabilizing and controlling spending. The proposed 2012-13 budgets in aggregate are \$200,000 less than in 2006-7. We have bent the curve. Had we continued to operate as we had the previous decade, and had we followed the statewide trends for budget increases, our spending would have been 20 million dollars greater over the past decade.

Through collaboration and leadership of the boards and administration, we have maximized the efficiencies possible under our current governance structure. And, most importantly, we have done this without losing any of the most essential autonomies that local schools need: the teachers, parents and administrators of our local schools are still the ones making the instructional decisions every day based on what those children need in those schools. Our school staff, students, and families are still the ones who actively shape school culture. Indeed, our school staff are better able to focus on the essential tasks of instruction and culture-building because they are not distracted by inefficiencies in school operations.

The only remaining part of our system that is compartmentalized is our board configuration. Not only does this increase the complexities of governing, it limits the ability to utilize the expertise of people across district boundaries and requires us to maintain six separate financial systems. Moving to a single governing board will allow us to be as efficient in governance as we have become operationally.

The formation of a RED will allow some additional efficiencies realized through the consolidation of business functions and financial systems. In addition, the joint ownership of buses will reduce wear and tear due to rotation based on the life of the vehicles as a whole. Finally, the ability to share staffing, especially in more specialized areas, will allow for more flexible and efficient utilization within the system.

The greatest advantage of a RED to efficiency is the ability to sustain our level of collaboration into the future, beyond the tenure of the current leadership. Again, strategic centralized efficiencies, and the formalized coordinated collaboration between boards and administrators, means that individual school staffs can maintain local control over that which is most important to every child and parent: the excellent instruction and healthy culture of the individual school and classroom.

