

Chittenden East Supervisory Union Regional Education District Cost Benefit Analysis
April 8, 2011
Attachment A
Cost Benefit Analysis

Improved student opportunities and outcomes

The creation of a RED would give one board the authority to provide students and families of elementary aged students school choice options. The possibilities in this area are extensive. Policies and procedures could be written and revised to respond to exceptional circumstances and the needs of students, schools and communities. Currently, in CESU, tuition is required for students to enroll in elementary schools outside of their town of residence. The flexibility and ability to avail school choice opportunities for students and families has the potential to expand educational options.

Formation of the Chittenden East Regional Education District would allow for flexibility in the use of facilities and resources. A unified board would be empowered to use personnel, facilities and financial resources to institute educational programs such as technical schools and specialty educational environments to meet the needs and interests of the 21st and 22nd Centuries. Currently, Mount Mansfield Union School District is spending \$982,843 to send students to technical schools outside the school district. The agility realized through a RED would increase the possibility of fashioning educational environments that meet these students' needs. This has the potential to save money over time and keeps these students in their home school district.

A RED would allow staff to be moved from one school to another in order to meet the needs of the student population and take advantage of staffing expertise. Currently, the majority of staff are employees of the local district. This significantly limits the administration's ability to adjust staffing based on academic and social data. Often, districts make additional hires in response to needs that arise within their current district instead of studying the entire Supervisory Union (SU) to identify existing staff that could be reassigned. This is a cultural shift that has the prospect of saving money.

Equalized programming opportunities for all students within Chittenden East could be advanced with the formation of a RED. Currently, resources, offerings, staffing and supplemental support varies across Chittenden East. One unified school district would reduce or eliminate the disparities in support services, staffing and programs that now exist (e.g. some schools have an enrichment program, others do not; instructional support varies between school districts; supplemental support is not equal or allocated based on SU-wide factors; infrastructure funding differs from school district to school district).

Technology

The use of technology as a teaching and communication tool has expanded exponentially in the later portion of the 20th Century and early part of the 21st Century. Parents, colleges/universities and employers are expecting students to have adequate technology skills and understand its capabilities. Equalized conditions and support of technology is essential in the successful transition of students to work or higher education.

Chittenden East Supervisory Union (CESU) has assembled a centralized team of technology support personnel to maintain systems and services, but the ability to perform these functions in an effective and efficient manner is significantly influenced by the variances in equipment and software within CESU. There is a large difference in the investment member school districts have made in technology over the past several years. This has affected some school's ability to follow and meet the goals of Chittenden East's comprehensive technology plan. A unified school district increases the likelihood of resources being distributed evenly and provides flexibility in the allocation of resources based on necessity. The versatility of a RED could allow schools to upgrade their technology systems to better support students, staff and families.

Teacher staffing

As mentioned earlier in the report, flexibility in staffing assignments empowers a unified school district to adjust staffing assignments based on need, current demographic realities and staff expertise. This authority also has the potential to save money and intensify continuity and coordination of personnel. Often, school districts are faced with the choice of reducing staff because of a shift in student population while a neighboring school district is considering adding staff. These decisions are often complicated because from year to year grade-level populations ebb and flow. Administrators and school boards frequently deliberate about reducing or adding staff or maintaining staffing levels when faced with these grade level ebbs and flows. The ability to move teachers from one school to another has the prospect of saving money because the RED would have the option of assigning staffing levels based on annual needs. An additional benefit in the RED's ability to assign staff is the district's realization of its investment in training newly hired employees. School-based training and mentoring involves a considerable investment in time and money. Keeping teachers in the system enables the RED communities to realize the full potential of its financial commitment.

Non-teacher staffing

Many of the efficiencies and benefits pertaining to teaching staff also relate to non-teaching staff members. A RED has the authority to shift and use personnel based on student population, student needs, staff needs, programming changes, building renovations and staff certifications (e.g. Master Electrician License, Master Plumber License, HVAC License, Physical Trainer Certification, Counseling License etc.). This could reduce the need to contract with outside service providers. Furthermore, it is an efficient and cost effective method of aligning personnel to requirements, responsibilities and obligations.

Student data collection and reporting

Collecting, reporting and analyzing student data from PreK-12 supports coordination, continuity and responsible allocation of resources. In a RED, a single board would govern a PreK-12 system and hold schools accountable for student results at every level. Attention and accountability to every grade in the system would become a necessity because staff, administration and the board would be responsible for collective results. Strategic plans and action plans would be written and implemented for all students PreK-12 rather than the current fragmented PreK-4 and 5-12 planning process. Each grade would be a

building block to complete a student's experience within Chittenden East. In most cases, school boards focus on the needs and results of their local school district and not on the entire PreK-12 system. Data compilation and analysis as a RED, optimizes the capacity of our curriculum and data management system (VCAT), creates a user-friendly reporting tool and affords more opportunities for universal and streamlined training of staff.

Financial, accounting and budgeting (Central Office Functions)

The formation of a unified school district could streamline accounting systems by creating a single budget, eliminating assessments to member school districts for costs currently incurred at the supervisory union level, and eliminating the bill-backs required when employees are shared by more than one school district. Employees would no longer receive multiple checks and W2s from different employers (school districts). Central office would be processing fewer checks. There would be one treasurer for the RED resulting in reduced services required from town offices. Budgets would be prepared at the school level, but would be encapsulated into one school district budget. One annual report would be prepared and audited (compared to the eight that are now being prepared). The RED would be required to submit one statistical report and staff census to the state.

Chittenden East has made a sizeable investment in new accounting/human resource software. Our hybrid nature of incurring costs and distributing revenue between the local school district and the SU complicates our accounting. This structure inhibits the efficient functioning of this business software. None of the business software systems investigated in the selection process was designed specifically for our complex system. All choices require costly adaptation.

As a single district, coordination and implementation of benefits would be more manageable. Determination of benefits (e.g. insurance, seniority, participation in retirement systems) eligibility would be more transparent and clear.

When considering grants, viewing Chittenden East as a whole presents a stronger case due to combined enrollments - often student population is a criterion in competitive grant opportunities.

The reductions in duplication and increased efficiencies would allow for reallocation of staffing resources to facilities coordination and human resources. These areas have been identified as in need of additional attention and services. Furthermore, staff savings could be realized in special education administration, bookkeeping and grant coordination (see Potential Savings in the Formation of the Chittenden East Regional Education District Chart).

Improved utilization of buildings and sport facilities

Addressed in Improved Student Opportunities and Outcomes

Centralized contracting

A RED could benefit from contracting with a single provider for selected services (e.g. trash, fuel, food, supplies, plowing).

Chittenden East Supervisory Union presently has a unified employment agreement for teaching and support staff.

Transportation

Chittenden East currently has centralized transportation services.

Food service

A RED would permit and encourage staff collaboration and networking for food services across Chittenden East. Schools could take advantage of the talents and skills of current food service staff employed by other districts. Innovations and techniques could be implemented throughout Chittenden East. This has the potential to improve quality/nutrition of meals, increase revenue, reduce costs, expand partnerships with local farmers, grow composting efforts and broaden purchasing power with suppliers and vendors. Implementation of a “point of sale” system in all schools would have a better chance of coming to fruition. This service reduces bookkeeping costs, is convenient for busy families and maintains up-to-date information for federal reimbursement.

School choice

School choice options will be expanded in the RED. Within allowable space and within reasonable limits of the existing transportation system, parents may apply for their student(s) to attend any elementary and/or middle school in the RED. School choice for high school students will remain within the current system of choice at MMU within the Champlain Valley School Choice Collaborative established under Act 150 by the Vermont legislature.