

Education Governance and Financial Implications Testimony

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Laura Soares

Randolph School Board Member 1993-2014

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective on the financial implications of education governance and unified pk-12 school systems. Based on my more than 20 year experience serving my community on school boards, I strongly support pk-12 systems to support our local schools in providing our students with deep, rich and varied educational opportunities to prepare them for success beyond graduation and I believe such a system can also bring financial efficiencies and benefits. I have seen this first-hand. The communities of Randolph, Braintree and Brookfield have, over the past decade, collaborated to achieve as all the educational and financial efficiencies possible within the constraints of our six board structure.

I look at three levels of focus of school systems. *Instruction* is the core of our mission, *Instructional Support* enriches and expands what transpires in the classroom and *Non-instructional* are those activities that are necessary to allow us to accomplish our mission.

Non-instructional areas should be managed so effectively that our school leaders and educators take them for granted. Our buildings are clean and in good repair. Students are transported safely. Technology works. Food is appetizing and nutritious. Supplies are available. Don't get me wrong- all of these are critical and complex endeavors. This is exactly why we need to have systems large enough to ensure the right level of expertise is available to oversee all non-instructional areas.

My SU developed a unified facility management system. Because it required multiple levels of permissions to accomplish- the lag time between the vision of the superintendent to enactment was multiple years. It can take many months to cycle through multiple board meetings just to introduce an idea. Once we got off the ground, the first year we saved 62,000 while reducing our square foot cost of maintaining our buildings and increasing the cleanliness of our schools. The next year the high school media center was remodeled. We had an estimate from an outside contractor of \$500k. We used the in-house labor and expertise that we now had and completed the project for \$150k.

We unified our technology plan and consolidated our technology buying power- allowing us to both save money and increase the technology available to support teaching and learning. We leveraged grant money to get more results from the same dollars in educational materials and professional development. We use our combined buying power to save money on fuel, supplies, services, food...it is a very impressive record and saved our communities hundreds of thousands of dollars over time.

We have stronger systems of instructional support. Our nursing, music, art, guidance, physical education, educational support systems etc. are all stronger because we combine the vast experience and wisdom of all the professionals across our four buildings to better coordinate and serve our student needs. We are no longer compartmentalized in our approach.

Our instruction is strengthened as well. We have coordinated curriculum, assessment and reporting systems that are aligned not only across our elementary schools but integrated with our high school so our system is focused on following the student k-12 rather than the adults. Our professional development system is aligned with the Ends the Boards and communities established- the results we want from our schools – the difference we commit to making in the lives of our students. Our focus on transforming educational programs to meet the demands of the 21st century- a century we are now 14 years into- has increased exponentially over the past decade as a result of our collaboration. And we have accomplished this with level budgets. Please see the two charts.

Paying attention to the entire k-12 system and maximizing efficiency in every area by leveraging the greater strength we have together is what allowed us to accomplish this. The whole is truly greater than the sum of its parts.

While we have had great success within our current structure – it has taken too long to get here and is still too fragile. We are still too dependent on personalities of school board members and administrators, and whether the strong system of collaboration we have achieved can withstand retirements and turnover remains to be seen. I personally don't want to discover a decade from now we have lost what we have worked so hard to develop.

I include organizational charts from 2002 and 2011 so you can see our evolution. It was challenging to be financially efficient with the structure we had in 2002, and we are less complex than many SUs in the state.

We brought a vote in the fall of 2012 to our three communities to form a Regional Education District. I include a section of the RED Committee's merger plan for your information. Two of our communities overwhelmingly supported this concept but by a very narrow margin it did not pass in a third community.

Therefore currently we still have the limitations of separate financial systems and governance structures that we cannot collaborate away. This continues to require processes and activities that are duplicative and cumbersome. We still require multiple levels of permission to accomplish tasks. Decision-making can still become confused. It is my experience in our system that while we have made tremendous strides, we are about as efficient as we are going to get in our current structure and the system still diverts time, talent, energy and dollars away from our core mission of educating our students for a future in a complex and rapidly changing world.