

RNESU Post Act 46 Talking Points
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Jeanne Collins
Superintendent, Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union

Background Dates:

Merger vote: Jan 19, 2016

Board voted in March, 2016

Organizational meeting April, 2016

Merger goes live July 1, 2016

Ultimately, our merger resulted in 6 towns merging into Otter Valley UU and 2 high school choice towns merging into Barstow UU. Thus I have 2 structures within 1 supervisory union and 3 boards instead of 11 boards.

These boards had a very short timeframe before opening as a new district. Most of the work is done by the business office. There are certain tasks that must take place in order to transition work from the old boards to the new board. I appreciate that we did this work quickly. It was difficult to run the district with 2 sets of governing boards, the old and the new. The old did not want to make decisions impacting the future and the new could not. Often, this left the district in limbo. The 3 month time frame gave us time to provide training to the new board to learn to govern a multi-town district and to complete the activities of closing work of the old board and transitioning property and accounts and authority to the new board. I cannot stress enough the impact on the district of taking much longer. The old board becomes less and less engaged, even to the point of not having quorums, and the new board has no authority. I firmly believe quicker is better in this transition and three months was about right.

Act 46 has resulted in several benefits for us, particularly for Otter Valley UU which serves 6 towns. As a result of the merger, we have been able to:

- Offer elementary school choice within the 5 district elementary schools. School choice is a benefit for families and also helped to highlight discrepancies in educational opportunity across the district
- Ensure equity of programs across the district by sharing teachers. For example, our small schools, Leciester, Whiting and Sudbury did not have a library program, as it was not possible to hire the small FTE needed to run the program. With the merger, I could take the FTE from a larger school and keep a full time employee while ensuring the small schools also got the benefit of a mandated program. We did this with library services, nursing, Spanish and art.

- Retain teachers we have invested in through professional development. When a teacher works for a single town and a budget is cut, the teacher is cut. In a merged SU, we can move teachers to other locations where openings exist, leading to less cost for recruitment and retaining those who receive training from us. This is good for students and teachers alike.
- Reduce costs by reconfiguring our small schools, keeping them open but running more efficiently. We have 3 small schools PreK- 6 who had just over 100 students among them. Classes covered 2 to 3 grades with 5 to 12 students in a class, sometimes only 1 per grade. We were able to reconfigure the three schools to cover K-4 and 5/ 6 with a PreK building that also partners with a private child care. This now allows single grade configurations with class sizes of 12-20, leading to better grade level education and peer groups. This reconfiguration was a large reason for the OVUU budget to decrease by \$1.5Million from last year to this year.
- Hire a shared facilities director to do some long range facilities planning and oversee our facilities staff across several schools. This is a cost saver in many ways and could not be done when each town hired their own staff.

For RNESU, the merger had many benefits and the timeline of 6 months from the vote and 3 months from formation to opening was good. I feel strongly that a longer or delayed timeline would have hurt our ability to function well administratively as there would be too many bosses and no clear authority in the 15 to 18 months we would have had 2 boards.