

**Poultney School Board and
Fair Haven Union High School Board
Special Meeting
Date: November 1, 2010
Time: 6:00 PM
Location: Poultney High School Library**

Official Minutes

Poultney Board Members Present: Tracee Oakman Rupe, Mary Jo Teetor, Pat Davenport, Alicia Marcy, Jerry Keezer.

Fair Haven Union High School Board Members Present: Sharon Adams, Patricia Belden, Rick Buxton, Pete DeCarolis, Mary Droege, Trevor Ezzo, Wayne Hall, Joseph LaRosa, Fred Lewis, Cheryl Schneider.

Administration Present: Rutland Southwest Supervisory Union Superintendent Joan Paustian, Addison-Rutland Supervisory Union Superintendent Ronald Ryan, Poultney High School Principal Tom Fitzgerald, Poultney Elementary School Principal Kristen Caliguiri, Fair Haven Union High School Principal Brett Blanchard, Poultney High School Dean of Students Joe DeBonis, Jr., Poultney High School Director of Guidance Tracy Gallipo, Rutland Southwest Supervisory Union Business Manager Louis Milazzo.

Guests: Numerous community members, faculty and students, and other interested parties.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by both Chairs and began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Poultney Chair, Tracee Rupe thanked all those in attendance, then asked Superintendent Ryan to provide introduction as to the purpose of the meeting.

Superintendent Ryan suggested that introductions be made by the board members and administration present to open the meeting. Superintendent Ryan stated the intent of the meeting was to hold an informal discussion due to the economic/financial challenges both boards are facing (as well as many other boards across the state) as a result of decreased enrollments and the state mandated legislation which requires boards to make significant cuts to budgets, etc. Discussion is intended to look at possible options for mutual cost savings by possible collaboration.

Principal Blanchard stated that the initial intent of his suggestion to the FHUHS Board was to examine data to determine if collaboration or sharing of resources might result in a mutual cost savings. He further stated that it is not his intent to close any schools, only to review data.

A written statement was read by a member of the FHUHS Board, prefaced by the statement that it was his personal opinion and not that of the FHUHS Board. Two suggestions were made 1) hold discussion regarding possible shared resources and to come up with possible ideas for shared services 2) invite the Vermont Commissioner of

Education and possibly the Vermont State Board of Education Chair to attend a joint board meeting to address the expectations of the proposed legislature and impact it would have on boards and to discuss options regarding same.

FHUHS Board Chair, Pete DeCarolis commented that the FHUHS Board did not expect any answers at this meeting. Both schools may have resources which the other does not have.

Superintendent Ryan elaborated (as an example) that going out to bid on items such as fuel oil, custodial supplies, general school supplies, food service supplies/services jointly might result in a lower cost to both districts. Superintendent Paustian commented that this had been discussed at a recent Vermont Superintendent's Association meeting as well.

Superintendent Ryan commented that due to the complexity of the law around supervisory unions; a meeting with the Vermont Commissioner of Education and/or of the Vermont State Board of Education may provide a more clear understanding of the expectations regarding Challenges for Change Legislation.

A PSD Board member inquired regarding the intent of the meeting (what were the expectations of the FHUHS Board). A FHUHS board member commented that the FHUHS board had interest in discussing the possibility of collaboration in order to save costs by sharing resources and inquired whether or not PSD Board had held any discussions regarding collaboration.

A PSD Board member commented that the PSD Board had only recently received the 1st Draft of the FY12 Budget and Enrollment Study and were in the process of digesting both; it seems too early to begin any work regarding collaboration, and suggested once the board had a better idea of the FY12 Budget it might be more appropriate to discuss. She stated, personally, she felt it was premature to hold a meeting with the Commissioner and/or the State Board of Education. Superintendent Ryan commented that the intent of the FHUHS Board not wish to rush into anything either; and that by entering into discussion he did not anticipate any resolution overnight.

A FHUHS Board member stated that the intent of the FHUHS Board was not to close any schools. Consolidation is not intended as part of the discussion at this point; only discussion regarding possibly sharing resources. The primary goal is to provide the best possible education for students for both boards and by pooling resources it might result in a cost savings in some areas in order that funding could be utilized for education opportunities.

A PSD Board member stated that she felt it would be remiss to not look at sharing resources on items such as fuel oil, supplies, etc as it could potentially result in a cost savings.

Superintendent Ryan mentioned that the supervisory unions/school districts were under time constraints to meet certain requirements such as combining special education services, and transportation but it had not been well publicized. These are not easy pieces to work on unless the law changes.

At this time the meeting was opened up for public comments and questions:

A community member suggested that combined bids for insurance could result in a cost savings.

A community member inquired if the demographics are currently going down and if so, why? She also inquired, if

the projected trend was for it to continue to go down, and for how long.

Superintendent Paustian commented that enrollments are down state-wide, and the trend is anticipated to continue. Unless the state encourages businesses to come into the state, economic growth is likely to continue to decline and this does not attract families to the state.

A community member stated that the school age population is declining throughout the nation, based on research conducted by colleges. The only growth areas are currently the South and Southwest. The decreased enrollment in the state is of concern to higher education facilities as well as primary and secondary education facilities across the state and beyond.

A FHUHS board member suggested research is completed regarding the possibility of combining classes in order to save costs. By doing so, eliminating programs might be kept to a minimum, and retention of offerings to students may result or improve.

A comment was made by an audience member that the tone of the meeting was quite different than the “word on the street”. He expressed his opinion regarding the pros of increased class size as it related to preparing students for life after high school, stating that he did not feel that small class sizes were beneficial to students. He gave his opinion regarding the possible benefit of combining transportation services within the supervisory union. He also inquired if the FHUHS Board has completed a cost analysis regarding the cost per student/class size.

An audience member inquired if a study had been conducted regarding potential cost savings by combining the two schools. Superintendent Paustian responded that it had not been considered previously. Superintendent Paustian commented that preliminary discussion had begun at the RSWSU level regarding options; but discussions were still in the preliminary stages. No discussion had occurred previously regarding consolidating Supervisory Unions, except to inform the boards of the options based on requirements in Challenges to Change.

Superintendent Ryan commented that combining transportation services within a Supervisory Union was not as simple as it may seem, and it could be very difficult for some boards to relinquish control at the local level, especially if great efforts had been completed to purchase vehicles for that individual community. He further noted that all Supervisory Unions are currently looking at the pros and cons of small class sizes and that all are tasked with establishing a “class size policy” by January 2011.

A FHUHS Board member noted that some classes are never going to have 18-19 students enrolled (e.g. some Advanced Placement courses), this is not reality for some courses.

A community member inquired what the average class size was at PHS. Principal Fitzgerald stated on average the class size is approximately 12-16 for regular classes and approximately 4-8 for AP classes. The average grade size is between 35-40 students. There are currently 228 students enrolled at PHS in grades 7-12.

Principal Blanchard commented that he suggested looking at the numbers. A per pupil policy is also due in the near future. Perhaps a 3-5 year plan could be discussed. Gathering information and using same to be proactive is our best option as the status quo is no longer a viable option. He indicated that he was in favor of consolidation, however, he opted not to discuss further at this time.

A community member commented that it appeared two discussions needed to occur, a school to school discussion

and a supervisory union to supervisory union discussion.

Superintendent Paustian commented on what has been discussed at the RSWSU level to date; elaborating on the two different options. One option is to combine supervisory unions, but in order to do so require a combined student population of at least 1250 students; while another option is to combine four school districts into one new school district.

An audience member spoke regarding concerns of “mixing students” from both high schools and the rivalry that exists between the two schools. A board member commented on the concern and referenced an example of Twin Valley whereby two rival school districts merged successfully.

Another board member stated that this meeting was a “baby step” meeting and not intended to take over or take the identity of any school; the intent was simply to open discussion on finding an affordable way to provide the best possible education to all students.

A community member spoke in reference to the successful collaboration of the two towns (Poultney and Fair Haven) regarding public safety and the increased opportunities which have resulted. He highly recommended working together to provide the best possible education for students while saving costs.

An audience member emphasized that the need to provide the best possible education was priority and although recognizing sports rivalry exists between the two schools, the emphasis should be on education. A board member echoed this comment.

Concern was expressed regarding the fact that a school is the hub of a community, and without a school a community begins to die.

A community member suggested that block scheduling be replaced with shorter period schedules. It was suggested that block scheduling does not allow opportunity for some students to access all required courses, making it difficult to meet graduation requirements, and possibly limiting class sizes.

A community member suggested re-establishing the collaboration with Green Mountain College regarding AP course offerings; she commented it was successful in the past and was not certain why it is ended. Principal Fitzgerald and Superintendent Paustian commented that there were several students taking college courses at present, and that one of the reasons this has declined is that the schedules were not compatible.

A community member suggested that projected teacher salaries are anticipated to increase significantly within the next ten years, if they continue to increase as they have in the past. She acknowledged that boards and superintendents face difficulties in containing costs and producing budgets, while also having to comply with negotiated agreements. Expectations may need to change in regard to salaries.

Superintendent Paustian commented that the boards were faced with making very painful cuts and/or level funding all salaries in FY12 in order to meet the state mandated 2% targeted cuts. Boards were also in the process of negotiations; therefore efforts to level fund may be subject to change.

A board member commented that he was excited to see student participation at the meeting, and spoke to a student’s

concerns stating that the intent (of the meeting) was not for consolidation or changing Poultney High School. The intent is to offer opportunity for discussion regarding cost savings in order to provide the best possible education for all students.

Superintendent Paustian suggested that it was necessary to “think outside the box”. Over the years secondary education has changed the least. Project based learning should be considered, as well as other options for 21st Century Learning. Vermont currently has the highest graduation rate (90%) and with increased motivation we could see that increase to 100%.

A PSD Board member inquired if the FHUHS Board has completed a Student/Teacher Ratio study. She suggests sharing this data as budgets are developed. There may be information that would be beneficial in the immediate future as well as distant future pertaining to possible collaboration. Sharing resources may result in a more immediate savings.

A community member suggested that combining supervisory unions may result in a savings of administrative costs.

Both superintendents offered information regarding the requirements from the legislature. Information is not clear from the state as to the consequences if certain mandates are not met. Superintendent Ryan commented that many scenarios have been suggested by the state regarding reducing the number of supervisory unions/boards, etc. Transportation and geography must be considered. The state is looking to narrow the current 63 superintendents to 14 and restructuring administration/boards.

A community member inquired of Principal Blanchard if FHUHS had block scheduling. Principal Blanchard stated they did not; they have an 8-period schedule. He elaborated. Principal Blanchard respectfully stated that block scheduling was only one piece and that there were many pieces to consider. Changing block scheduling would not solve many of the issues regarding class size and financial impact.

A community member inquired where this goes from here (regarding this meeting). She inquired if there would be subsequent meetings and suggested that there were likely many other community members who would be interested. She inquired if there would be future opportunity for public participation.

Superintendent Ryan suggested that collaboration between the schools regarding items such as fuel oil bids and other items could be discussed immediately and could bring immediate results. This could be facilitated fairly easily.

Further discussion is needed at the supervisory union board level (both boards); Principals can share enrollment data and class size data.

Clarification was sought by an audience member regarding the required 1250 student requirement vs. the four school district requirement options. Superintendents Paustian and Ryan provided clarification that the 1250 student requirement pertained to the combining of supervisory unions, while the four school district combination was a different option within one supervisory union. Discussion ensued.

A Poultney Board member suggested that the Superintendents and Business Managers from both supervisory unions

meet to discuss what could be done in a very non-threatening manner regarding sharing resources (e.g. fuel oil bids, transportation, supplies, etc.). She further suggested that teachers be asked to discuss options regarding cost savings from an educational perspective.

Superintendent Paustian commented that the boards are doing their best to follow the required mandates being imposed by the state, however, the state is not providing clear information regarding what the consequences would be if certain mandates cannot be met. Quality of education is the focus at each board level.

A FHUHS Board member requested a show of hands from both the audience as well as the board members present as to their preference for continuing discussions. The majority of both groups indicated by show of hands that they would support continued discussion.

Both boards thanked each other for the opportunity to meet and look forward to continued discussion.

A FHUHS Board member suggested that whatever transpired in the future, that both boards pledge to keep their communities well informed.

Motion made by Poultney Board Member Alicia Marcy, seconded by Pat Davenport to adjourn at 7:50PM.

Motion made by FHUHS Board Member Joe LaRosa, seconded by Pat Belden to adjourn at 7:50PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Dente
Poultney Board Recording Secretary