

**JOINT MEETING OF BMU, BRADFORD, NEWBURY, AND OXBOW/RBCTC BOARDS**

**BRADFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

**July 24, 2018**

Present:

BMU: Angeline Alley, Judy Murray, Julie Oliver

Bradford: Lucas Barrett, Julie Bingell, Angela Colbeth Kim Frydman

Oxbow: John Brochu, Kathy Damon, Pat Dwyer, William Ellithorpe, Adam Lornitzo

Newbury: Danielle Corti, Paul Jewett

Facilitator: Jennifer Knauer

Members of the Public

- I. Lucas Barrett welcomed everyone at 7:07 PM and introduced Jennifer Knauer, Facilitator of the meeting
- II. Goal is to come out with a unified statement from the four Boards
- III. Opening Statements—Status Report
  - A. **Bradford:** We view that we will be successful as a whole rather than parts. Each student, regardless of school, should have access to any and all shared resources. Coming together as one entity, we can still have local voice from our school.
  - B. **BMU:** We come as the newest part of the group. We were assigned in May to be a part of this group. BMU has been independent for over 60 years. We have concerns related to some discussions that went on in the 706(b) meetings regarding plans for our school and our children. Merging as a Unified District is too much too soon. We need to figure out how we work together now and move on from there. We need to figure out how we work with you rather than become a part of you. BMU has a very strong program with a very strong curriculum.
  - C. **Oxbow:** We already exist as a merger between Bradford and Newbury. One person speaking for this Board is a challenge because there are different opinions on the Board. Our interest is what's best for students and taxpayers. I personally would fight very, very hard to never close BMU or Newbury.
  - D. **Newbury:** We are the smallest entity in this process. There are tax implications to a forced merger. If we are forced to merge with BMU, taxes in Newbury and Bradford will go up significantly. I can't imagine telling another Board that we are forcing them to do something they do not want to do. We need to figure out a way to get everybody to work together. I don't think there is a Board member here who believes that the OESU Board does things more efficiently than their own individual Boards. I don't believe that the OESU is doing just fine.
- IV. Comments:
  - A. P. Jewett: Elaborate on implications of taxes? 706(b) committee looked at implications if BMU was forced to join. Talks broke down. Lori Blood, Emilie Knisley, Beth Cobb, and Keith Merrick worked to put together financial figures. We were looking

at little over \$425,000 increase based on decrease in taxes from the State. Tax savings originally offered by the State have now been rescinded. If we are forced to merge, Newbury and Bradford would take on a new tax rate since BMU's taxes are higher. We would feel the impact of a new merged labor agreement.

B. P. Dwyer: Money is a big scare. We need a better understanding of a new tax rate. Research needs to be done

C. L. Barrett: SBAC scores have been published for the last two years. School rankings are being reflected in our property values. Good governance results in good scores. OESU has five smaller Boards, which takes the time of the Supt. We care about improvement in governance. One School Board will have one focus and curriculum and another a different one. Disjointed. We were able to consolidate our salary schedules. We have been working hard to coordinate curriculum.

D. D. Corti: Correlation that you (Lucas) are making between merging and SBAC's may not be accurate. We have been able to do contract negotiation as a merged group. What we can't seem to do is to build on that. We're very vested in our local schools. That independence could potentially be lost. In a perfect world, we could continue to have individual Boards. One big Board with 12-15-18 members is not effective. A consortium with one rep from each Board can work with the Supt. to streamline. Forcing us to get this done will bruise and damage communities.

E. A. Alley: I agree with what you said, Lucas, which is exactly why BMU would like to stay our own district. BMU has been innovative. We have a joint busing contract with Haverhill. Lucas has given reasons why we would like to stay our own PreK-12 district.

F. K. Damon: I have a concern about consolidation—I would need to have something in the agreement stating that the status of Newbury Elementary can only be decided by the voters of Newbury.

G. J. Murray: As far as correlation between scores and property taxes, poverty and being in the opioid corridor contributes to the value of our properties. BMU has spent the last three years developing a curriculum PreK-12 aligned with state standards. That is something that could be shared that does not require merger.

H: W. Ellithorpe: Nothing new has come about in the last two years. We need to go along as we are in the Supervisory Union. To create a whole new bureaucracy is not a good idea. We need to welcome BMU into the Supervisory Union. Maybe later something will pop up. They will not get on board now! I don't see the advantages of merging at this point.

I. K. Frydman: When we put this meeting together, we wanted to come out of tonight with One Voice. Let's listen to one another. We agreed that we would come to a unified voice.

V. J. Knauer asked Board members to put together a list of driving factors toward merge and restraining factors against merge

A. Restraining

1. Tax implications of a merge
2. Cost to individual homeowners
3. Community sentiment and a vote
4. Town representation in decisions

5. Mixed review of how OESU Board works together effectively

B. Driving

1. What do we need to be doing differently to do things more efficiently? Align policies?

2. Leadership presently at OESU gives hope. Get collaboration between administration and OESU Board.

3. P. Jewett: Idea for interim plan: Trying to set up a process to meet Act 46 goals. Series of meetings over course of year. Set up sub-committees. Four quarterly meetings of full OESU Board to hear from action committees and sub committees. We are taking control of fixing things in our schools. Seek direct input from principals and any other administrators.

C. J. Brochu: To have a willingness to listen to each other is where we need to take this.

D. J. Murray: Working through how we can make each other better in a collegial and productive way. Emilie Knisley turned our school around. Had us working toward goals. Lori Blood turned our finances around. Concern is too much, too soon. We can work collaboratively and grow.

E. J. Knauer: It sounds like you feel you need more time. Our goal is how we can make this collaboration happen? What do you want to articulate for August 15<sup>th</sup>?

F. K. Damon: BMU shared how successful Ms. Knisley was in coming up with a 3 yr., 5 yr., 10 yr. plan. We can have our Supt. help drive our progress.

G. J. Oliver: One Voice is that we remain our own district under one Supervisory Union.

H. A. Lornitzo: I see Newbury, Bradford, and Oxbow merged. BMU as separate. Waits River will be a separate Board. However, Newbury is not on board with that plan.

I. D. Corti: Stay as we currently are and have a timeline to merge. Maybe 3-5 years.

J. A. Alley: We would prefer a 7-year timeline. Students entering 7<sup>th</sup> grade would be able to continue until graduation. The problem is that we are being forced

K. J. Oliver: Local preference and timing is very important

L. D. Corti: There has been no effort by the other communities to listen or to compromise during this process over the past few years. Our freedoms and rights are less valued if we are merged.

VI. J. Knauer: Under what conditions could a merge work best? Be favorable and effective?

Will our feelings be heard at the table? How will Boards and Schools be represented?

A. Three years ago some things were different than they are today

B. The State Board got a win by getting BMU under OESU's umbrella

C. The schools here tonight want to work to be sustainable, collegial.

D. W. Ellithorpe: We are representing the voters in our community. They are happy with what we have. BMU has been willing to pay more per pupil. This should be voluntary, not forced.

VII. Straw vote:

A. Remain our own districts under one Supervisory Union—8 support, 3 neutral, 3 oppose

B. Bradford, Oxbow, Newbury merge, BMU alone-- 4 yes, 7 neutral, 3 no

C. Expand timeline 3-5 yrs. (BMU 7 yrs.) 10 yes, 4 neutral, 0 opposed

VIII. Public Input:

A. Margaret MacLean: Everyone wants the system to improve. 706(b) broke down and there was not consensus around merger. There was no wish to merge within the community, but there is a wish to improve. There is now new leadership and you can now work together. You know more about this situation than the State Board does. You know what is best. You want to work together to improve. Speak with One Voice. We need time to do a long list of work together. What this will lead to is improvement. It may be in a merged way, or it may not. Ms. MacLean spoke about some precedents around the state. She thinks that we are much better off going in with One Voice. It's in our interest to get on the same page.

B. Maartin Smit: It is not a solution to come up with a larger Board.

C. Brent Abare: How do you speak with One Voice? That's synchronized with what the community wants.

D. Richard Roderick: 50 years ago, Ryegate, Wells River, and Groton all closed their schools and have been acting as one. The BMU communities are adamant about not being forced into a merger. BMU communities have an advisory vote on August 14<sup>th</sup>. Do we want to accept the Secretary's proposal? Or do we want to keep our structure as a PreK-12 district? If we are forced to merge, should BMU vote to dissolve PreK-12 structure and have school choice for the high school? It's important tonight to go forward with one Supervisory entity and separate Boards. It's hard to make a merger work with unequal partners. There has to be a way for Newbury Elementary to be made to feel important. Same with BMU high school. That is the perception of a lot of people. To do some good will tonight, come with One Voice to say this is not the right time for a merger. Possibly have school choice between Oxbow High School and BMU High school. A forced merger would be a very unhappy marriage.

E. Bud Haas: The concern is that the BMU community does not want to close BMU high school. If there is a merger, there is no way it can be written into the bylaws that a school will not be closed

F. Mark Gleischer: BMU towns are happy with what we have. We are being pushed into doing something that the communities do not want. There is no justification for merging except the State forcing it. Oxbow goes into this with debt. BMU has no debt. It's not equitable, and you don't push someone into doing this.

G. Kathy Davidow: If this is an indication tonight of how a large Board will work, this is dysfunctional. Bradford is seeming like a bully.

H. Dawn Blanchard: Anytime you have 3-4 parties coming together, there has to be give and take. It seems like now there is assumed give and assumed take.

I. M. MacLean: One Voice. The time line piece—we are in a period of fiscal pressure. Boards that promised that schools would not close have gone back on that promise. Once the mergers have happened, you may not have the luxury of 7 years to make a decision. The reality will be the fiscal pressure. New Board members will come on. Articles of Agreement can be changed at any time—rapidly.

J. Bruce Williams: The confidence in Emilie is warranted. She can give you an elegant 5-yr. plan on technology, etc., but not a 5-yr. plan of governance. She was the CEO of a unified school district.

K. Deborah Jurist: If you make the decision for a merger, that will last 10 or more years. Emilie may be a goddess, but leadership changes.

L. Community member: I am concerned that the Newbury Board feels oppressed. They have an equal voice on that Board.

IX. Final Reflections from Board Members:

A. L. Barrett: Believes that one Board with one meeting a month is more effective

B. P. Jewett: Need to not lose sight of the fact that we represent our communities. Newbury had surveys and public meetings. It is very clear that we should remain the way we are. When the communities that elected us tell us how they feel, it is our responsibility to follow

C. J. Murray: I sense "A sprout of growth". A dysfunctional Board is not a reason to merge schools. We can achieve trust working toward a common goal. One Voice –let's move slower, but let's move together.

D. J. Oliver: It should not be what's easier for us, it's what is best for kids

E. K. Damon: Go in with One Voice, we have a change now in governance

F. P. Dwyer: I. listened to Margaret very intently. I think we do want to merge, but we don't know how we're going to get there.

G. J. Bingell: We're all part of a local community that needs to work together.

H. L. Barrett: I hear the confidence that we have in our new leadership. I'm excited for the future. I'm excited about our new Supt. and Asst. Supt. and want to empower that new leadership. We should make her job easier in following her vision and live up to the confidence we have in her.

I. A. Colbeth: Remember that little places have good stuff to share. Remember that we are talking

J. A. Alley: The biggest word is improvement to make our schools better for our kids.

K. K. Frydman: We're not bullies. We are here ready to listen. That is the farthest thing from being a bully.

X. J. Knauer: Next steps between now and August 15<sup>th</sup>? We had a straw vote tonight, but not a binding vote.

A. A. Alley: Can we go together with One Voice?

B. D. Corti: Would this vote be binding, or do we need to go back to our Boards?

C. P. Jewett: The OESU Board is meeting on August 7<sup>th</sup>. Could we have that on the agenda that night? Do we need to do something sooner? We will have representation from each Board that night. Should we have another Joint meeting that night? All Board members from all four Boards would be invited to attend.

XI. Next Steps

A. Warn meeting for August 7<sup>th</sup> for all Board members from the four Boards here tonight

B. Objectives:

1. Plan for meeting with the State Board on August 15<sup>th</sup>

2. Strategizing the three time slots as scheduled for meeting with the State Board

3. Create a list of criteria

3. On August 7<sup>th</sup>, do we vote as individuals or as a Board?

4. Supt. Knisley was tasked with making a proposal for equal representation for voting at the August 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:43 PM

Respectfully submitted:

Nancy Perkins, Minutes Clerk

**The minutes are in draft format and are unofficial until formally approved by the Joint Boards at a subsequent meeting.**