

**Connecticut River Collaborative Exploratory Committee  
July 5, 2018 Session Highlights**

We began the session by conducting introductions and reviewing the Code of Ethics that was agreed to during the initial session:

- Respect
- Open-minded
- Trust
- No side conversations or interruptions
- Listen and ask questions
- No ideas are bad
- No questions are dumb
- Keep it to the committee
- Support committee
- Regular attendance at meetings
- Right to voice opinion

We reinforced our agreed-upon priorities: Doing what is best for students while bearing in mind taxpayer considerations and related efficiencies.

Next, we discussed the potential of a field trip for the Committee so that all are familiar with all school buildings. The options for this are being investigated.

**Clarifying the Array of Options Under Consideration**

We discussed the array of approaches to collaboration, as outlined in the chart. We noted:

- Significant collaboration is underway already. Most of it falls into the “Coordination” category, with a few clear examples of “Collaboration” - including the reciprocal agreements for high school student class enrollment, combined athletic programs and the option of requiring a teacher from any of the schools to teach at another school.

**The Collaboration Continuum**

Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration
<p>Shorter term, informal relationships</p> <p>Shared information only</p> <p>Separate goals, resources, and structures</p>	<p>Longer-term effort around a project or task</p> <p>Some planning and division of roles</p> <p>Some shared resources, rewards and risks</p>	<p>More durable and pervasive relationships</p> <p>New structure with commitment to common goals</p> <p>All partners contribute resources and share rewards and leadership</p>

*(From Collaboration Handbook, by Michael Winer and Karen Ray)*

The desired outcome from this portion of the session was to reach agreement on the array of options the Committee would consider during its exploration. Agreement was reached that the following would be explored for their collaboration potential:

- Student schedules
- Student opportunities (variety of class/program offerings)
- Common curriculum
- Trade programs
- Extracurricular activities
- I.T. and communications among the schools
- Sharing teachers/recruiting talent
- Transportation – busing
- Policy and procedures alignment
- Building utilization
- The number of SU/SAUs – the potential for consolidation into one unit

This array of topics suggests openness to both student services and administrative collaboration – a wide spectrum of options across the collaboration continuum.

Once the focus of the exploration was determined, we turned our attention to information needs. The following information is being compiled by the designated Committee member(s):

### **Determining Information Needs**

- The following information will be gathered by these people:
  - Student to guidance counselor/principal/nurse/school staff ratios – Dan (Canaan), Toby (Pittsburg, Stewartstown, Colebrook)
  - Student to teacher ratios, by class – Karen and Bruce
  - Course options, by school - Melissa
  - Feasibility study on building conditions – Karen
  - Total number of students, by school, by SU/SAU, by class (including out of district – home schooled and private school) – Dan and Bruce
  - Enrollment trends – Dan and Bruce
  - Graduation requirements for each of the three high schools – Melissa
  - Policy/procedure comparison via student handbooks – Bruce
  - Transportation – travel distance by bus route and by town – Dan and Brian
  - Financials/budgets, including cost per pupil by town, and tax rate – Kyle, Rob

### **Next Steps**

- Karen and Bruce will investigate options for school tours and formulate a recommendation for the Committee to consider.
- Tamy, Richard, Kristin, Dan, Brian and Skip will work with Carole to determine the sequencing of the array of options we will explore and bring a recommendation to the August meeting.
- All who are listed in the notes above as having data and information gathering roles will provide Carole with an update on their efforts by July 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## August 2, 2018 Highlights

Reggie substituting for Bob Ormsbee.

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- Support committee
- Regular attendance at meetings
- Right to voice opinion

We reinforced our agreed-upon priorities: Doing what is best for students while bearing in mind taxpayer considerations and related efficiencies.

### Updates Pertinent to Our Work

- Carol Dinco has chosen to resign from the Explorers. Columbia will have the opportunity identify a replacement and will notify Carole Martin once this is accomplished.
- The Explorers contact information list was circulated; all were requested to make sure their information is accurate and to reply to Carole's e-mail to verify that all are receiving e-mails being sent to them.
- The Colebrook Academy exploration is off to a slow start; they will have a recommendation soon. Brian will liaise with John, the chair, and keep us informed.
- Toby initiated a meeting of the school board chairs to discuss a potential approach to school collaboration. He did this without the awareness of or agreement from the Explorers group. Not all board chairs were in attendance; Toby stated that he initiated contact with all but did not reach them. It remains unclear whether all chairs were aware of the invitation.
  - Given the agreed-up Code of Ethics (see above), several Explorers voiced strong disapproval of this tactic. The interpretation is that it violates two fundamental principles upon which the Explorers work is based: We seek to build trust, we agreed to keep it to the committee. Failing to inform and seek agreement in advance of a meeting of this nature siphons valuable energy away from the agreed-upon work. In this instance, the primary driver of the model presented at the meeting was funding – financial efficiency – and not putting the students first, which is another fundamental tenet of our work. Student well-being first; financials, while very important, second.
  - After substantive discussion, the Explorers were polled. Each person gave their word that they will honor the Code of Ethics and not commit a violation of this nature again. Whether initiating or participating in, all are equally accountable for a transgression of this nature.
  - All agreed that exploration of alternatives outside of the Explorers group structure are detrimental to trust, transparency, and working as a team. There is no favored status for school board members; all on the committee are equal in importance.
  - All also agreed to convene at 5:30 for the September 6<sup>th</sup> session to address this incident directly with Bob Ormsbee.

- The Explorers also reach agreement that substitutes will be able to attend in the case of an Explorer's absence; participation is limited to that of a session guest. The rationale is that as the work advances, it will become increasingly difficult for anyone not in regular attendance to meaningfully weigh in.

### **Data Sets Review and Additional Needs Identification**

- All data sets identified in the July session were distributed either electronically or in paper form, with the exception of cost per pupil. Copies are available for those who missed the session.
- Additional data/refinements of data distributed include:
  - Student concentration, by town, by class category (Karen)
    - K-5
    - 6-8
    - 9-12
  - A breakdown of trades/college prep existing courses (Tami)
  - Cost per pupil, per town, and tax rate (Rob)

### **Conducting the Options Analysis and Determining a Course of Action**

- It was agreed that two teams will be formed:
  - Student Opportunities Team (Tami – liaison to Carole – and Sheli, Richard, Dan, Kristin and Karen)
 

They will analyze:

    - Common curriculum
    - Variety of classes
    - Programs/Trade
    - Extracurricular activities
    - Student schedules
    - What is offered to all/some and what could be offered
  - Building Utilization and Transportation Team (Brian – liaison to Carole – and Chris, Frank, Toby, Mike, Skip, Bruce and Sally)
 

They will analyze:

    - Building utilization
    - Transportation

Focusing on grade appropriateness and highest and best use of each existing building
- The first step for each team is to form a work plan with the sequencing of tasks to be accomplished and an estimated timeline for the work.
- Tami and Brian will each update Carole one week prior to the Explorers meeting on progress made so that the Explorers sessions can focus on interpreting and forming recommendations based upon the teams' efforts.
- Tours of all buildings will occur in early September. All Explorers are invited to participate; the Building Utilization and Transportation team will schedule the tours and create consistent criteria that will be used to evaluate each building. They will notify all explorers of tour times well in advance of the tours.

## September 6, 2018 Highlights

### Reinforcing Our Priorities and Expectations of One Another

- The Explorers reviewed their Code of Ethics and discussed a breach in honoring them. Accountability for the breach was taken by the individual in question and the importance of adhering to our Code of Ethics was emphasized. Each Committee member expressed explicit commitment to honoring the Code of Ethics.

### Updates Pertinent to Our Work

- Explorer Committee is changing in composition due to members moving and/or competing demands on available time. To maintain the three-representatives-from-each-community model, effort is being put into clarifying membership. See “Next Steps” section for further information.

### Team Updates

- The Student Opportunities Team organized all high school course offerings, including hope-for ones (see handout). Explorers requested the following:
  - A fourth column added to the handout that is dedicated to a consolidated hoped-for curriculum
  - Arrange for the following parties to provide input on the course offerings document prior to our October 4<sup>th</sup> session:
    - Guidance Counselors
    - A teacher from each subject area
    - Student Council members
  - A designated Student Council representative will be invited to attend a late September Team meeting and provide an overview of Student Council suggestions.
  - IRC designations will be added to the handout.
- The Building Utilization and Transportation Team is in the midst of inventorying each building utilizing a standard set of criteria. Mike created the inventory and will share it with all Explorers.
  - Tours will continue through the end of September, at which time a consolidated report will be created in time for the October 4<sup>th</sup> Explorers session.

### Next Steps

- Mike will share the building utilization inventory tool with all Explorers.
- Building Utilization Team will create a summary building inventory report and share it with Explorers.
- Bruce will coordinate Explorers Committee member changes and verify the following:
  - Melissa is moving to Columbia and will backfill Carol Dinko’s Explorer seat
  - Sally is moving to Colebrook and will backfill Melissa’s seat
  - Toby is departing and will be replaced by Reggie
  - Jennifer Rancourt from Clarksville will be recommended as a new member
  - Kathleen Adams from Stewartstown will be recommended as a new memberBruce will keep Carole updated so that Carole can provide an orientation for all newcomers/those who have been absent prior to the October 4<sup>th</sup> Explorers session.  
All newcomers will be offered the opportunity to join one of the two teams.
- The Student Opportunities Team will work on what is outlined in the Team Updates section. They will also finish compiling co-curricular activity recommendations for Explorers’ review and comment. Whenever changes are made to the handout, the date of the changes will be featured at the top of it.
- In October, Explorers will make provisions to seek input from alums on the courses/preparedness they wish they had in high school. Also, military recruiter(s) will be asked for their suggestions regarding graduation readiness needs.
- In October, Explorers will also create a list of high performing schools and research their student offerings in preparation for the November session. This will help inform student offering recommendations.

## October 4, 2018 Highlights

### Updates Pertinent to Our Work

- Kathleen Adams is joining the team and will represent SAU #7.
- Melissa Hall formally resigned due to an over-full schedule.
- The task force appointed to bring Colebrook Academy recommendations to the school board presented a list of options to the board. The board will revisit the issue at some point in the future.

### Student Opportunities Team Update

- 40 students from all SAUs participated in the student input session held by Karen and Bruce.
- Guidance counselor and teacher input was gathered by Karen and Bruce.
- The sum of the outreach to students, teachers and guidance counselors is as follows:
  - There is keen interest in STEAM offerings (see handout grid for specifics). Some courses could be offered on an every-other-year or semester basis, if helpful.
  - Students recognized that it is difficult to maximize arts and music if there are not other students to do it with.
  - Some students emphasized that their recommendations may not serve them - they are interested in ensuring future generations acquire the best education possible.
  - Students do not see a specific need for additional extracurricular activities – instead, they are interested in consolidating existing offerings.
  - Teachers see the value of collaboration and are already working to embrace the opportunities it provides.

### Building Utilization and Transportation Team

- See handouts – an enormous amount of work was done. Analyzing each building utilizing 14 standard criteria for each building is now complete. So is a detailed understanding of the distance between each building/community.
- It is agreed that there will be “no new roofs” in our work to consider various scenarios for better serving students.

### Defining the Parameters of Our Modeling Efforts

- The following priority areas are our focus for modeling purposes:
  - Grades 6,7,8
  - Grades 9,10,11,12
- All information about existing building stock, travel distances, curricula and extra-curriculars will be factored into the modeling.
- There is a strong desire to allow grades k-5 to remain in their current locations with the recommendation that all commit to standardized curriculum that best prepares students for successful middle and high school experiences.
- There is also a strong desire for there to be pre-k for all children like what is available for Vermont. While outside the scope of the immediate work, there is agreement about its longer-term importance.
- Efforts to model various scenarios will be conducted by Rich, Brian, Sharon, Karen, Chris, Frankie, Bob, Mike and Kathleen. Karen and Brian will liaise with Carole.

### Next Steps

- Tami will coordinate efforts to gather input from alums who graduated between 2010-2017.
  - Talk with Patricia Grover.
  - Assemble/access e-mail list for alums.
  - Work with Karen and Bruce to create a survey monkey tool with questions pertinent to our efforts.

- Karen will distribute the survey that was administered during the last round of consolidation explorations.
- Bruce will collect teacher certification standards for each district for grades 6-12.
- The Scenario Creation Team will:
  - Pinpoint scenarios to be investigated and share them with this group by October 19<sup>th</sup> via e-mail.
  - Receive feedback from this group between the 19<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> and identify concretely what is to be modeled in preparation for our November 1<sup>st</sup> session.

### **November 4, 2018 Highlights**

#### **Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- The Secretary of Education in Vermont is supportive of this team's efforts. Karen talked directly with him.
- Jennifer Rancourt will not be joining us as a team member; her schedule does not allow it.
- Dan Wade is due back in January; Kyle is keeping him apprised of our progress.
- The October 4<sup>th</sup> session notes were modified to reflect that pre-k is a priority to this group – adopting a model consistent with what is available in Vermont is the ideal. While this is not within the current scope of work of this team, there is agreement that it is important.
- Alum e-mail contact information has proven difficult to obtain. In most instances, it does not exist. For now, the team is setting aside the possibility of seeking input from recent alums on what they wish they had access to in high school.

#### **Modeling Options for a Re-Envisioned Future**

- See handouts "Model Rubric" and "Top 3 Model Pros and Cons" – Both dated 11/1/2018
- The Process the Model Team Utilized:
  - Three meetings were held –
    - Meeting one focused on creating the rubric and ensuring enrollment numbers were included in every model. The intent is to show the impact on each school. All involved in this exploration were invited to submit models.
    - Meeting two - the models initially submitted were reviewed. Discussion ensued about single versus multiple middle and high schools. Additional models were generated.
    - Meeting three focused on narrowing to the most viable/promising models utilizing a pros/cons approach. Every option for each community was reviewed.
- One superintendent/central office was not discussed and is not driving the modeling process. While it is a possibility, it is not an area of focus at this time.
- Essential next steps:
  - Definitions for key terms must be created. Examples include:
    - Alternative education
    - Charter
    - Dual enrollment
    - High school completion program
    - Special education
  - The building inventory and student offerings work that was compiled in September and October must be overlaid onto the models.
  - Financial analysis must be performed for the final 1-2 models. It must factor in cost per student, by community.
- Timeline for our work:
  - We will hold a special meeting in two or so weeks to further discuss the models and ensure all understand the options and the tradeoffs of each.
  - At our December session, we hope to form a recommendation.
  - January's session will be used to prepare for one all-community public meeting, which will be held mid-January.

- All timeline considerations are based upon school budget timelines.
- Thoughts from the team about the three finalist models:

#### Model 15

- Model 15 requires the most bussing and Columbia's bussing will be especially tedious. Travel is increased by up to 30 miles. For students on the fringe, this is especially challenging and may result in opting out of this region. The goal is to regain kids who are currently enrolling out of the region.
- Alternative education is proficiency-based and the students frequently change their minds about what to enroll in. Distance is a real challenge in these situations.
- A single middle school is good, though it will result in empty building space.
- Elementary schools are untouched.
- Colebrook could move the high school to the elementary school.

#### Model 11

- Elementary children are all close to home and there is potential for pre-k programs.
- School to work is simplified from the employer's vantage point.
- All are within 20 miles.
- It causes the least change/amount of disruption of any of the models.
- Building improvements are needed to some buildings and alternative sources of funding would be sought for this (philanthropy/federal government).
- 5<sup>th</sup> grade transition for Norton is substantial.
- High school is under one roof.
- There is choice in middle school.
- Streamline curriculum and simplified high school scheduling.
- a/p is not split up.
- As children grow up, the distance to school increases slightly, aligning with their ability to cope with it.
- All buildings will be occupied.
- Staffing efficiencies are likely.

#### Model 12

- Stewartstown has central office and alternative education with small children going to Colebrook or Pittsburg.
- It is the most efficient model, financially.

### **December 6, 2018 Session Highlights**

#### **Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- Colebrook received quotes for closing the Academy and moving to the elementary school. There will be a more detailed update at our January session.
- The Colebrook board is receptive to our work. They grasp the big picture and that this is the way to do and provide more to students.

#### **Narrowing the Options: Selecting One Model to Recommend for Deeper Analysis and Consideration**

- Exploratory Committee members each ranked the three options based upon which they believe provides the best possible experience for students. The overwhelming majority support model number 11 for deeper analysis and consideration, and all can live with it as the recommended option. Their reasons include:
  - It is fair to Columbia in terms of travel expectations.
  - Model 12, while good, asked too much of Stewartstown.
  - With model 11, if a high school student changes their mind about what to enroll in, other options are within reach – no extra travel required.
  - Model 11 has the least overall disruption.
  - There is room to grow – more students can be accommodated in model 11, if needed.
  - All schools gain – and lose – with model 11.
  - There is no obvious bussing quagmire.

- CTU will be in union with the high school – all students will feel the same.
- It accomplishes taxpayer balance.
- Students gain – one roof – more enrichment and more classes.
- The model does not alienate any students.
- Questions to include in the analysis:
  - Is there enough classroom space in Canaan? What about the art and science rooms? Can they accommodate the student numbers?
  - Is a bond needed to meet New Hampshire standards?
  - What alternate funding sources exist?
  - Will people question having two junior highs?
  - How many bus routes are needed?
- Next Steps:
  - Karen and Bruce will update staff no later than mid-week next week. Board updates will follow. Board meeting dates will be circulated so that all Committee members can attend as a sign of support.
  - There will be three public sessions during which the model 11 recommendation will be reviewed and community members will be invited to share questions that they would like answers to as a result of the deeper analysis.
    - January 9<sup>th</sup> 6:30-8:00 in Canaan
    - February 12<sup>th</sup> 6:30-8:00 in Colebrook
    - February 18<sup>th</sup> 6:30-8:00 in Pittsburg
  - Three planning teams were created:
    - Newspaper Article draft to be published in December (Bruce, Karen, Brian, Kyle and Chris)
      - Core focus is on outlining the Committee’s recommendation and issuing an invitation to the public sessions. An e-mail address will be included so that community members can send their questions about model 11 to the Committee.
    - The analysis team (Skip, Phil, Sharon, Richard, Shelli, Brian, Sally and Dan)
      - Core focus is on inventorying known areas for deeper analysis that will test the viability of model 11. This team will factor in the questions outlined, above. Their initial inventory will be ready for Committee discussion at the January 3<sup>rd</sup> session.
    - The public session design team (Brian, Mike, Dan)
      - Core focus is on the format of the public convenings – the flow of the event and speaking roles. The draft agenda will be ready for review at the January 3<sup>rd</sup> session.
      - Secondary focus is the presentations to the school boards – who will present, and why? What role will other Committee members play at the meeting?
  - At our January session, an attorney will attend to help Committee members understand the interstate issue. To see existing Vermont statutes, look here:
 

<https://nam01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flegislature.vermont.gov%2Fstatutes%2Fchapter%2F16%2F015&data=02%7C01%7C%7Cb79775da8e3e4cde339208d65bd898e8%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C636797383160713620&odata=KOl%2Ffv4Kurnc3woOxc7OjM%2FGtETF%2F2DI3D6dsNrFTF4%3D&reserved=0>

## February 8, 2019 Session Highlights

### Updates Pertinent to Our Work

- Bruce, Karen and Carole were interviewed as part of the Tillotson Grant application process. The outcome of the funding request should be known in late March.
- Bruce and Karen met with the Vermont Secretary of Education. He offered to speak to his counterpart in New Hampshire. He is supportive of the exploration underway and stated that funding from AOE is available to support the kind of work we are doing. He also clarified that if k-6 is not offered in a Vermont district, school choice is required unless there is an interstate agreement in place. Since our model 11 is predicated on a

balance of student numbers and this requires combining Canaan and Stewartstown, we must carefully consider how to address this.

### **Interstate Agreement Rules Review**

- Will Phillips, an attorney with the New Hampshire School Board Association, addressed the committee. He said:
  - For the interstate process, Vermont and New Hampshire statutes are mirror images of one another – RSA 200B. Steps include:
    - The existing exploration committee can continue or if we are focusing on an interstate compact, the state commissioners determine committee composition, taking into account the informal committee composition that we currently have in place. A minimum of two members from each district, one of whom must be a board member is a requirement – the committee is given a specific charge. The work accomplished by the informal committee (us) can be ratified, or not.
    - The term for committee participation is concurrent with board term, or three years for non-board members.
    - The formal committee focuses on:
      - Advisability of idea being explored
      - Construction
      - Operations
      - Financing
  - And creates a written report to the districts with recommendations.  
Expenses are shared equally across districts.  
There is no timeline specified for the work.
  - If a recommendation to proceed is formed, articles of agreement are created. Then, with 15 days notice, it is put forth to the community for review and input. Any modifications are made. The plan is submitted to the respective state boards for review and approval. It is then presented to voters at a special meeting. If one community does not pass it, the state can authorize a second vote for that community. 2/3 of those present for the vote must approve it.
  - There is a lot of flexibility for construction, etc. Buildings can be leased in co-op form or all assets can be transferred to the interstate, for instance. All indebtedness and capital outlay belongs to the interstate agreement.
  - Getting out once in – indebtedness is according to the terms of the debt – it is its own problem. See article 8.
  - Hiring of staff is not clearly defined. The interstate district is the employer – geography defines retirement plan and employment laws of the state apply. It is not as flexible under a tuition agreement.
  - With interstate agreements, only a majority is needed to pass a bond.

### **Review of Community Questions submitted at Forums**

- There is agreement among the group to publish a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document that is updated after each community forum. Bruce will continue to create the responses to the questions and Kyle and Sharon will serve as first readers.
- The work-in-progress FAQ will be handed out at the end of each of the final two public forums. After the final forum, the comprehensive FAQ will be published in the paper as an insert and will be posted on all websites.

### **Next Steps**

- Colebrook forum – Chris will open the session; Brian and Karen will review the slides. Kyle will conduct the questions portion of the session.
- Pittsburg forum – Michael will open the session; Rich and Karen will review the slides. Kyle will conduct the questions portion of the session.
- Our goal is transparency. Brian and Bruce will work together to modify one slide to accurately reflect our emerging learning about Vermont school choice for k-6, etc.

- All are encouraged to allow community to speak – and to place special emphasis on allowing new voices to join the conversation. While we want to hear from community members who attended earlier forums, we want newcomers to be heard.

### **March Meeting Date**

The March meeting date has been changed from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> due to budget meetings.

### **March 14, 2019 Session Highlights**

#### **Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- The Tillotson Fund application will advance for funding consideration. The outcome will be known in June. Karen and Bruce will explore with the Tillotson the anticipated needs for additional off-grant-cycle funding to support the detailed professional analysis needed for the next phase of our work.

#### **Lessons Learned: What Worked – and What Didn't – about Our Approach to the Annual Meeting/Warrant Process**

- Be prepared to repeat and explain the content, rationale, and possibilities of what is being explored, and why. Misinformation is inevitable. The work is to patiently support factual understanding.
- Be accessible – go out of your way to find opportunities to positively engage with people.
- Leverage key people who are respected and have a reputation for fairness. Ensure that they understand the facts.
- Acknowledge and validate legitimate, accurate concerns.
- Involve parents earlier.
- Don't answer or speculate about questions the committee is not done exploring (or haven't begun to explore).
- Continue to build partnerships and collaborations with Pittsburg.
- Rely on other committee members to blow off frustration, get backup support, clarify talking points.

#### **The Road Ahead: Clarifying What Happens Next, and Why**

- Target end date for approval – March 2020
- Target end date for all analyses and recommendation formulation – December 2019
- Steps to be taken/investigations to be launched, in sequential order:
  - Now that the communities that want to be part of the exploration is clear, re-evaluate which model(s) to fully explore and do analysis about (April meeting). Mike, Karen, Kyle, Dan, Sally, Sharon and Brian will evaluate model options and provide a recommendation.
  - We will examine committee composition and determine whether it should change/expand.
  - Examine all governance-related matters (May/June meetings):
    - Types of legally binding agreements for bringing the communities together and pros and cons of each.
    - Pittsburg's role in future voting/decision making/status in the new model, given their decision not to participate – become their own SAU? Be a sending school?
    - Board and committee structure.
    - Other communities that have consolidated – what works/what they would do differently, and why.
  - Student/teacher/curriculum and transportation needs and opportunities analysis. (July meeting)
  - Architecture/building costs and needs. (August meeting)
  - Financial analysis. (September meeting)

#### **Next Steps**

- The model recommendation group will provide recommendations in April.
- Committee composition will be reviewed in April.
- Karen and Bruce will explore professional support options for architecture, finance, and legal matters.

**April 4, 2019**  
**Session Highlights**

**Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- Karen and Dan spoke to the Vermont Secretary of Education and learned the following:
  - Their attorneys are willing to provide written clarification of what was discussed. Karen will request this.
  - Canaan can decide to close certain grades and tuition them, offering transportation to one school system to encourage enrollment there. For instance, they could close the middle school and focus on CTE/high school.
  - It is possible to do what is outlined above while simultaneously pursuing an interstate agreement. The process is not difficult – rather, it is complex and laborious but achievable. Taking this approach would allow for deep collaboration among the schools sooner while also piloting its workability.
  - If the interstate agreement is the chosen approach, NEK choice would be governed by a different SAU.
  - Statute protects bargained-for employees from layoffs until the new structure is in place.
  - At this time the Secretary has no funds to assist with this effort until ACT 46 is sorted out.
  - He is very impressed that the community is initiating this.
- Tillotson Fund application is due on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Sasha Isele, who represents the Fund, said additional needs could be included without impacting the standing of the original request for support. Karen and Bruce are finalizing the application for submission.
- Pittsburg is hosting a public forum at which the community will discuss the future of education of their children.

**Reviewing the Options: Modeling and Cost Analysis**

- See document titled “CRCC Proposal Comparison”. It outlines considerations, by topic, for strengths and limitations of the options being explored.
- After reviewing the document and offering additions and refinements to it (which Kyle will incorporate into the document), the Committee determined that more information is needed on the following:
  - The governance model that would be adopted for each model and its cost implications.
  - The cost of buildout for both models – for instance, if the high school is located in Colebrook, construction for CTE is needed – either a new building or perhaps the repurposing of the Academy. While the group set a cornerstone agreement that “no new roofs” would be part of this exploration, they are reconsidering.
  - The impact on educators, factoring in contractual obligations, retirements, seniority.
  - Class size and enrollment – using projections for two years from now for all modeling. Also, determine the number of teachers needed based upon these projections.
  - Course and extracurricular offerings – what is concretely possible, factoring in what students informed us matters most to them.
  - The viability of closing Stewartstown and consolidating elementary level grades – class size.
  - Overall financial efficiencies/add-ons for each model.

The work group will continue its work in preparation for our May session.

- At the May meeting, the group will discuss the merits of hosting a community forum to review the two models and seek insights/buy-in before proceeding with further exploration.

**May 2, 2019**  
**Session Highlights**

**Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- Applications for funds was formally submitted to Tillotson; a phone interview with the funder is scheduled for the week of May 6<sup>th</sup>. A copy of the application will be shared with the group.
- The work group failed to notify Exploratory Committee members that the April 29th work session was cancelled. All will work to coordinate communication to avoid instances like this in the future.
- A new administrator has been secured for Colebrook; shifts are underway as a result – and they are considerable.
- Jamie Gray and Toby Owen spoke to Exploration Committee members about the possibility of Pittsburg representatives re-joining the Committee. The Pittsburg school board chose to host a community forum after the annual meeting warrant vote in which the community voted not to continue to be part of the exploration process. The result of the community forum was a unanimous vote to ask the Exploratory Committee for permission to re-join. Toby and Jamie stated that the board unanimously supports this and they were deputized to represent the community and the school board when approaching the Committee. They claim there was confusion about the process underway and that Pittsburg residents received inadequate information from their representatives to fully grasp it. Committee members cited specific instances of Pittsburg failing to honor the process and code of ethics all Committee members agreed to late spring/summer 2018 and inquired as to whether there was adequate reason to believe this can change. There were multiple assurances from Toby and Jamie that this will be the case if they can re-join.

**The Committee voted in favor of allowing Pittsburg to re-join the group if the Pittsburg school board acknowledges and accepts the following:**

- **The Committee has identified that there will be one high school and one middle school – with locations of Canaan and Colebrook. There will not be two middle schools, as contemplated in model 11.**
- **Pittsburg Committee representatives will uphold and honor the agreed-upon code of ethics. This includes the expectation that each community is fully committed to the exploration process and is not actively working against the process by pursuing other alternatives while the exploration is underway. Jamie and Toby will relay these terms to the full board and update the Committee of the outcome.**

**Work Plan Review**

See handout of draft work plan titled “CRCC Sub-Committee Meeting – April 15, 2019”.

- **All Committee members will submit content recommendations by Friday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, via a google doc version of the work plan that Kyle will create and manage.**
- **Work plan subcommittee members will convene prior to the Committee May meeting and finalize it so that it includes sequencing of tasks and timelines for each task.**
  - **Bruce, Chris, Sheli and Karen are responsible for curriculum work plan items.**
  - **Brian will coordinate efforts on governance and financials and convene the group to clarify work plan-related roles and outlining tasks, etc.**
- The Committee agreed that the research and analysis will focus on one model – middle school in Colebrook and high school in Canaan.

**Committee Composition**

- **The Committee agreed to move toward formalizing its role and efforts with the State of New Hampshire and State of Vermont. The benefits of doing so include access to legal advice that is needed to complete a robust process. Karen and Bruce will take the necessary steps to launch this process. The intent is to have current Committee members formally appointed to the state-recognized committee.**

## June 6, 2019 Session Highlights

### Updates Pertinent to Our Work

- The Collaborative welcomes Billie Paquette to the team; she has a son in third grade in Pittsburg.
- Options are being actively explored for repurposing the Colebrook Academy building. A privately-owned intermediate care facility is one of the options.
- The transition to one school in Colebrook is also actively underway; it is time-consuming. Procedures are being put in place and the new principal is meeting with staff next week. She will be on site full-time beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>.
- In both Canaan and Colebrook, staff resignations are happening and some of the positions are especially difficult to fill. The belief is that a consolidated district would help make the school a more attractive employer.
- The interstate agreement communities exploration, including site visits, have been initiated and dates will be scheduled for visits. All Collaborative members are welcome to join the visits.
- The commissioners who oversee the interstate agreement process for the states are scheduling a visit to the area to host the signing committee and to answer questions about the process. The secretaries of education are supportive of this process and the formalization of the committee. All will be invited to this session, as well.
- The Tillotson Fund request outcome will be known next week.

### Curriculum Team Update

- See handout (copy of shared google drive document).
  - A survey was developed for gathering information from high performing school districts about curricular priorities and approaches. It was distributed to several districts in and out of New Hampshire and Vermont. Four responses have been received, to date.
  - A second meeting of this team is scheduled – the initial focus is on the middle school curriculum.

### Governance and Financial Team Update

- Governance - See handout
  - An exploration is underway of schools with interstate operating agreements with other schools. Part of the exploration is review of their operating agreements – both the terms included in them and how they have changed over time. There is also interest in lessons learned. To this end, the group will schedule site visits/information exchanges with these communities. All are welcome to attend. This includes Norwich/Hanover. So far, what is known is that there are challenges but the conditions are workable. Revendell and Dresden visits are part of this exploration plan.
- Financials
  - At this point in our process, all financial analysis will be based upon actuals; the two school business administrators will work on the analysis over the summer. The approach is to create ten or so categories of existing financials and to lay out the information in a manner that can be easily understood by residents.
  - The focus between now and our August 1<sup>st</sup> meeting is to identify the financial categories/template for the analysis. Essentially, establish the baseline expenses and budgets, by town.
  - Outside guidance – a CPA – will be engaged. We will seek the services of someone who is skilled at consolidation analysis and projections for modeling purposes.
  - The Collaborative understands that cost savings are unlikely as an outcome of consolidation – rather, a higher quality education with a wider array of offerings is the point, along with more efficiencies across the schools.

### Other

- A Colebrook community member guest expressed concern that only one model was being rigorously developed by the Collaborative. He stated that the community wants to choose among options. Collaborative members explained why this approach is problematic and unlikely to result in a workable outcome; the community

member emphasized the importance of being able to demonstrate why the chosen model is the preferred one, and without options, the plan is likely to be rejected without consideration of its merits. The Collaborative is taking this under advisement.

### **Next Meeting**

- The next meeting is scheduled for August 1<sup>st</sup>. There will be no July meeting.
- The governance/finance team will meet Monday, July 29<sup>th</sup> at 5pm at Colebrook.

## **August 1, 2019 Session Notes**

### **Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- We welcomed new Committee Members and acknowledge the departure of others. Skip Covell and Tami Frechette resigned from the Committee – Skip, for health reasons; Tami, for a too full calendar. New members include:
  - Laurent Giroux – Canaan
  - Sandra Cabrera – Columbia
  - David Covill and Lindsay Gray – PittsburgOur contact sheet will be updated to reflect these changes.
- Rivendell and Dresden are willing to host visits so long as they occur after August. Karen asked them for potential dates and representatives from our team will accommodate what works for them, schedule-wise. Kyle offered to serve as team driver to the site visits.
- There is a \$ 2,800 credit remaining from the last Tillotson Fund grant cycle. We can roll this forward for future use. This, combined with the recent \$ 60,000 award, is the existing fund balance.

### **Team Updates**

- Curriculum (see template handout)
  - The team created a template that captures the curriculum offerings, the current number of FTEs by curriculum area in high and middle schools, the projected FTE under consolidation, the number of blocks that could be offered, and the overall budget impact of the changes. The next step is to fill this out, using total average compensation actuals for budget projections.
  - Middle school and high school grade clustering (middle school 5-8 or 6-8) will be determined during this process.
  - Since k-8 teaching certifications are less specific/exacting than the advanced grade certifications, the degree of flexibility about what is taught by whom will vary.
  - Drivers ed is required in Vermont and will be added to the curriculum layout.
  - Co-curriculars will be added.
  - The goal is to have the initial draft of the template completed for our September meeting, during which we will review it. Feedback will then be sought from a wider audience, including students.
- Governance and Financials
  - The Team reviewed its work, to date, focusing most heavily on preparation with the joint commission on August 15<sup>th</sup>.
  - Black River Designs, a firm that specializes in school building projects, did a preliminary review of the Canaan high school. They are generating a proposal for renovations, etc., and we will receive it in one week. The cost for the initial work is \$ 1,500; it will cost between \$ 10-15,000 to receive a detailed analysis from them of student space ratios, building modification recommendations, and so on.

## Grant Funding

- The group decided that available funds will be used to:
  - Pay for session facilitation
  - Work on curriculum
  - Secure a CPA for detailed financial projections and analysis
  - Receive a renovation cost detailed understanding of options
  - Pay legal fees (as needed, after consultation with Sandra)

## Other

- Karen will circulate the report generated in 2009 that outlines governance model options for an interstate agreement.

## Preparing for August 15<sup>th</sup> Session with the Join Commission

- Dan Wade will make provisions for the session to be videotaped.
- The session runs from 11:30-3:00 at the library in Canaan.
- Lunch will be served at 11:30.
- Karen and Bruce will represent our group and pose all questions to the Commissioners. All others from this team, and anyone who joins from the wider public, are observers and note takers.
- Kyle will send out a summary document of the questions we would like to pose to the Commissioners. Any additional questions that arise during the session will be provided to Karen and Bruce on index cards so that they can determine if/when to pose them.
- Our desired outcome is to have the Commissioners declare this work as that of an Interstate Committee.

## September 5, 2019 Session Notes

### Video Conference with Dresden Representatives

- Neil Odell and Jay Badams, Board Chair and Superintendent, provided an overview of the Dresden Interstate Agreement (Norwich, Vermont and Hanover, New Hampshire).
- The Compact was formed in 1963. Currently, there are 150-200 students per grade. This recent radio story provides useful context about the Dresden approach from the New England News Collaborative radio segment on the Dresden School District (<https://nenc.news/podcast/episode-159-holy-sites-harvards-vocarium/>). The Dresden segment begins at about 25:12 into the broadcast.
- The combined effort focuses on grades 7-12; primary schools remain part of their original districts. Sixth grade is tuition-based. Other grades are not.
- Governance:
  - Each of the three schools has its own school board and there is a SAU board. The SAU has five representatives from Norwich and seven from Hanover. Size of the towns determines proportional representation. One Norwich representative is non-voting and is designated as such to avoid an even number of voting members.
  - Board representatives are selected from among the board members serving the other schools – they have a dual role.
  - Budget votes all happen on the same day. Dresden votes are combined before being counted to reduce a town-by-town interpretation of the votes. Even though Hanover is a larger community, Norwich has more active votes, so the size of the community is not informing outcomes.
  - There are many gray areas about which existing policies and laws are silent. The school has developed a pattern of interpreting them in ways that best support the interests of the school; so far, there have been no negative ramifications from this process.
- Funding formula:

- Norwich and Hanover each individually fund their elementary schools.
- Dresden is the combined school and the budget is based/apportioned on the % of students in the October enrollment numbers and the tax rate of each community.
- There are separate maintenance budgets for the four schools.
- The Board Chair expressed a personal preference for a single budget for all schools – it would streamline the decision making regarding resource allocation. Currently, if one community/board votes down a budget, all others must realign/remain open to changes and it complicates and makes less effective the overall allocation process.
- Some additional towns tuition into the schools via negotiated agreements. They have no voice at the board level.
- Property/Assets
  - Dresden owns property in Vermont that can be used for expansion, even though it is located in New Hampshire.
  - The approach was to use existing buildings.
  - The Board Chair expressed a wish for a capital reserve fund, which is not currently in place and may be legally prohibited.
- Scholarships:
  - Students are eligible for scholarships across state lines.
- Faculty/Staff:
  - The Compact allows Dresden teachers to opt into either state retirement system. If they switch jobs and locations they can become vested in both systems.
  - All entities are part of one SAU.
  - There are separate bargaining units for each school.
- Legal Support:
  - Paul Guliani is their current attorney. David Bradley was the attorney of record at the time of the Compact creation.
- Wish List:
  - That the “why”/rationale for each decision at the time of formation was outlined – it would help inform potential changes in current-day matters.
  - One unified system pre-k-12<sup>th</sup> grade with one budget.
  - Clarified description of who board members are representing because they are wearing multiple hats and there are redundancies.

-end-

### ***Regular Meeting Notes:***

#### **Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- Don Tase joined the Committee and is a Colebrook representative.
- The SAU 2018-19 enrollment numbers by grade were distributed (see separate handout sent via e-mail today by Kyle). Karen will follow suit.
- The Colebrook Academy AHEAD program discussions are ongoing. The third visit to discuss repurposing of the structure occurred and are promising.
- All boards but Stewartstown have voted to have Connecticut River Collaborative Exploratory Committee members serve on the Interstate Agreement Committee. Stewartstown is voting soon.
- The building merger in Colebrook is going well. Kim Wheelock, the principal, is doing a very good job.
- The newly arriving teachers are assimilating well and are actively embracing their roles.

#### **Curriculum Sub-Group Update**

- The Collaborative Team (a combination of faculty and administrators from the two SAUs) is meeting on September 23<sup>rd</sup> to offer their insights into the sub-group’s templates and models for future staffing needs. They

will also recommend a process for seeking input from all faculty, staff and students. These outcomes will be brought to our October Committee meeting for approval.

- Known retirements/departures of faculty and staff will be factored into our modeling efforts.
- One important possibility: If there is a consolidation, the agreement can be to only hire fully licensed teachers and not those with provisional licenses. This could help enhance the quality of education.
- We are clear that cost savings for a consolidated effort will most likely come from staff and buildings.

### **Governance and Financials Sup-Group Update**

- The Interstate meeting on August 15<sup>th</sup> with the two commissioners provided useful insights. It is evident that both commissioners are committed to being supportive while honoring the need for their role to be one of approval and oversight (and compliance).
  - They made it clear that the choices and direction setting belong at the community level and they will not guide this.
  - The downward trending of student enrollment over the years is alarming and predictions are that this will continue.
- Next steps – once Stewartstown board votes to approve its designated members for the Interstate Agreement Committee, Bruce and Karen will send a letter to the Commissioners seeking their formal approval. The outcome of this launches all future steps. In the meantime, the sub-group will meet and make provisions for drafting the various components of the Interstate Agreement. The work plan will be established, including timeline, and shared at the October Committee meeting.

Interstate Agreement sub-group members are:

Frankie, Sally, Brian, Mike, Sandra, Kyle, Laurent, Don and David

- Canaan Building Assessment – Black River Design went through the entire building and are forming their recommendations, including costs. For an additional \$ 5,000, they will do class flow modeling. If affordable, Committee members recommend investing in this. Their initial report will likely not be ready for our October meeting.

### **Other**

- Bruce and Karen are attending (by invitation) the Tillotson Fund advisors meeting in a couple of weeks to provide an update on our work and to prepare to ask for additional financial support for legal expenses, in particular, and the creation of the Articles of Agreement.

**October 3, 2019**

**Session Notes**

### **Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- Stewartstown voted to appoint existing committee members to the Interstate Committee.
- When Karen and Bruce met with the Tillotson Fund advisors, the discussion was positive and the advisors were supportive. Karen and Bruce left behind an information packet. There is permission to seek additional funding.
- Black River Design continues their review of the Canaan school buildings. Early indications are that there is not need to connect the buildings. They will present to our committee in November and priorities will be established for repairs and improvements.
- The hospital and AHEAD program's financial modeling suggests that the Colebrook Academy building may not work for their purposes; Medicare reimbursement rates will not cover costs.
- Colebrook, Stewartstown and Pittsburgh are in serious need of school nurses. The hospital is doing what it can to help.
- The Commissioners of Education have approved our request to be designated as a Planning Committee and the approving document is near completion. It needs the addition of one name from our team and formal sign-off. This should happen very soon. (see handout)

- Votes will be weighted by state to ensure balanced/equal decision making power between Vermont and New Hampshire. The final formula for vote count will be sorted out once the number of representatives from each state who serve on this Committee is updated in the document. Committee members understand and accept this approach to decision- and recommendation-formulation.
- Call-in votes will be accepted. Votes in absentia will not.
- The superintendents are non-voting advisors to the committee.
- No new members will be added to the committee after today.
- NEK has voice in the agreements and recommendations at this juncture but will not have vote/representation in the district as a tuition-paying contributor.
- Karen is headed to a rural education national conference in Kentucky. A rural state of the art educational cooperative will be the focus; Karen is seeking funding sources for this project and to learn about the state of the art education model.

**Curriculum Sub-Group**

- The Education Collaborative group (administrators from the schools) did not meet – the session in which they were to review the outputs from this project and provide feedback is rescheduled for Monday, the 7<sup>th</sup>.
- The enrollment numbers for start of school were updated and shared. (see handout)

**Governance and Financials Sub-Group**

- The work flow is established as follows with point/coordinating people listed:

<p><b>October</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review other school agreements</li> </ul> <p><b>November Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I.D. / elect chairperson and clerk-treasurer (Brian)</li> <li>● I.D. member districts (Brian)</li> <li>● Grade structure (P-8) (Brian)</li> <li>● Properties to be acquired (Brian)</li> <li>● Identify financial analysis questions (Kyle &amp; governance committee)</li> <li>● Establish financial analysis calendar</li> <li>● Retain educational funding person(s) (Bruce, Karen)</li> <li>● Determine costs</li> <li>● Retain project manager (Karen, Dan)</li> </ul> <p><b>December Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acquire grant funds for analysis</li> <li>● Analyzing financial data</li> <li>● Apportion operating &amp; capital costs</li> </ul> <p><b>January Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Analyzing financial data</li> <li>● Apportion operating &amp; capital costs à tax implications</li> <li>● Determine board composition</li> </ul>
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**November 7, 2019**  
**Session Notes**

**Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- The Interstate Agreement
  - The New Hampshire attorney declared the weighting of the votes structure outlined in our October 2019 session notes inadvisable. Equal representation is the recommended approach. The Committee understands and agrees to accept this approach, designating the following as voting members with all other members in an advisory capacity:
    - Clarksville – Michael
    - Colebrook – Brian
    - Columbia – Chris
    - Pittsburg – Lindsey
    - Stewartstown - Phil

Additionally, if a vacancy arises on the Committee, the nominee will have to be approved by the Commissioners.

All the above modifications were approved by the Committee.
- The “Portrait of a Graduate” approach is one the curriculum sub-group is considering as the approach for our consolidated vision. Many public schools are using this approach, successfully: <https://portraitofagraduate.org/>
- Black River Design is still working on cost estimates – doing additional analysis on the ADA-accessible alternatives. They will present to us in December.

**Committee Work – What Lies Ahead**

*See shared document titled “Connecticut River Planning Committee – Outline of Work Ahead” and accompanying documents.*

- A consulting team has been identified for recommendation to this group. The combined work covers the following areas:
    - Project Management
    - Financial Study/Analysis
    - Legal Counsel on Articles of Agreement
    - Transportation Study
- A team was formed to define the scope of work for each of these, interacting with the consultants to better understand cost and scope of work options. This team will present their findings to the Committee. The team includes Dan Wade, Kyle Daley, Don Tase, Karen and Bruce.
- Funding must be secured for this work to be undertaken. A cost estimate and proposal will be prepared to submit to the Tillotson Fund. Karen and Bruce will contact the program officers at the fund to seek advice on when to submit the proposal.

**Timeline**

- All work outlined above will be completed by June 2020, with recommendations fully formed.
- Preparation to support the public in understanding the recommendations and how they were arrived upon will be done in July and August 2020.
- The recommendations will be shared in entirety in September/October 2020.
- A public relations/communications firm will be hired to assist with clear communication of the Committee’s work and its aspirations. Jaime at Louis Karno works on education-related matters and has done a good job in Gorham/Berlin: <https://www.lkarno.com/>
- Once the Committee has Interstate Agreement approvals, Sandra will write a press release that explains the Committee’s progress.

### **Curriculum Sub-Group**

- In addition to what is outlined, above, the group is working on laying out teacher roles for the high school, middle school and elementary schools. With this in mind, each board will be asked for approval at its next meeting to create a master schedule for 2020. A written statement of the case to be made will be created by Dan, Brian and Phil – and the explanation offered to each board will follow this case outline. The big question is “Do you support a north country master schedule being created at this time?”. This will allow for reasonable assessments of compensation needs.

### **Governance and Finance Sub-Group**

- Identifying a Planning Committee Chairperson and Clerk/Treasurer is required by the Interstate Agreement. Utilizing the criteria outlined in the earlier referenced document “Outline of Work Ahead”, all will contemplate who is well suited to these roles. One must be held by a Vermont member – the other, by a New Hampshire member.
- Proposed grade distributions by site:
  - Four models were shared for Committee review and eventual narrowing to one. This discussion will continue in December.

### **THERE WAS NO DECEMBER 2019 MEETING**

#### **January 2, 2020 Session Notes**

### **Black River Design Canaan Building Evaluation – Rick Burroughs**

*See separate report and financial analysis documents for detailed information. Presentation highlights:*

- The purpose of Black River’s work was to evaluate the two school buildings – understand the deficiencies and do a program overlay.
- A team of engineers visited the schools. Overall, the school conditions are solid, but outdated, especially in terms of systems – heat, ventilation, light, handicap accessibility, sprinklers.
  - The buildings are well built. The high school has good space at the foundation and top floor levels (attic).
  - It is not possible to ascertain proximity to flood plain since Vermont does not have this information.
  - There are some current code violations. Once certain types and magnitude of improvements begin, compliance to current code becomes a broader issue with cost implications and should be considered as such. Vermont has more rigorous standards, overall.
  - An important consideration with program overlay: Whether the buildings will be schedule-driven versus each teacher having a classroom.
  - A first step is to determine use and to clarify what the top priorities include, and why.
  - The elementary school roof was not properly engineered at the time the pitch roof was added on top of the existing flat roof. As a result, structural repairs are needed.
  - It is important to differentiate between “broken” and “in need of repair” and “nice to have”. All things considered, much of what could be done falls into the “in need of repair” – not urgent nor such that it would prevent use of the buildings for consolidation purposes.
  - Connecting the two buildings would be a “nice to have”.
  - All things considered, it is a wise investment to upgrade the existing buildings versus build new ones.

### **Tillotson Fund Grant Application**

- The grant application filing deadline is January 16<sup>th</sup>. The Advisors remain supportive of this exploration and funding to continue to support it is probable. If awarded, the funding would be available beginning in March

2020. \$4,700.00 contribution from each the ENSU and the SAU school budget was included in the proposal. The funds exist to do this.

### **Master Schedule Exploration**

- The administrative collaboration team is working to sort out the potential for students to remain in their schools with teachers traveling to teach classes. This is one approach to sharing instruction. While it will not increase class sizes – a priority – it will reduce the need for teachers, in the long run. The current thinking is to be super-intentional about backfilling any openings that arise through retirement or changing jobs to outside the SAUs and instead, look to share teachers. The work is partly done to analyze the information and identify plausible options.

### **Reintroducing and Completing the Class Schedule Model**

- The Curriculum Sub-Group will complete the Class Schedule model and present it at our February meeting.

### **Options for Middle School Class Distributions**

- Each board member is charged with reviewing the options with their boards prior to our February 6<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- Brian Laperle and Dan Wade are creating a handout outlining the pros and cons of each model, setting the stage by reminding everyone that the focus is on what is best for students. Brian and Dan will complete this task by Tuesday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, and circulate the document they create. Each board member is expected to utilize this document when initiating a conversation about future middle school options. They will ask their board members:
  - Which options can you live with?
  - Which is your favorite, and why?
  - Which ones are you unwilling to consider, and why?

All board chairs will bring the results of their discussion to our February 6<sup>th</sup> session.

### **Annual Meeting Preparation**

- At the February meeting, we will outline a series of talking points about this exploration. These will be used at each community's annual meeting.

### **Electing the Connecticut River Collaborative Committee's Leadership Roles**

- Kyle Daley was unanimously elected Chair – nominated by Brian, seconded by Don.
- Laurent Giroux was unanimously elected Clerk-Treasurer – nominated by Kyle, seconded by Dan.

## **February 6, 2020 Session Notes**

### **Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- The Governor of Vermont and the Commissioner of Education are confirmed for a visit on February 24<sup>th</sup>. The group agrees that extending an invitation to the New Hampshire Commissioner of Education is wise, as is opening the session to Steering Committee members. It will be during the day – specific time to be determined. The PowerPoint presentation created for use at the district annual meetings will be introduced at the February 24<sup>th</sup> session.
- Bruce and Karen were interviewed by Sasha Tracy, a grant reviewer from the Tillotson Fund. She is a school board member in a different district and understood the need for off-cycle fund access if the grant is awarded. She also initiated a call to Carole and during it, expressed her enthusiasm for the exploration.
- The increasing number of students who are enrolling in classes and programs that take them to other districts is exciting and rewarding. Capturing their stories will be an important part of the communications plan – why they find it worth doing, what they are gaining from it, etc.

- Pittsburg and Colebrook settled the teachers’ contract and it addresses dual enrollment – another incremental step in the process we are cultivating.

### **Examining Our Starting Point Assumptions and Identifying Next Steps – Facilities Needs and Cost Projections**

- Since Black River Design presented their findings at the last meeting, much discussion has ensued about their “soft financial estimates” and how the various districts prioritize building upkeep (capital expenditures/budgeting) and student learning costs. The prevailing perspective is that Canaan emphasizes student learning and tends to make that the top priority while making building upgrades and related maintenance a lower priority. Colebrook, Pittsburg and Stewartstown place greater emphasis on their infrastructure. Reaching agreement on a philosophy and shared quality standards is important to the collaboration.
- From the beginning, the following principles have guided the group –
  - Students first
  - Funding, second – an important consideration, but not more important than ALL students in the region
  - No new roofs, because existing building capacity is sufficient to meet anticipated need if properly maintained and utilized.

The group’s first preference is to continue to honor these principles going forward. There is also a need for Canaan as a district/community to own the investment needed to bring its buildings up to the standards of the other districts. All are clear that comparable quality does not mean identical in features and structure.

- Acknowledging that Canaan voters are considering a one-million-dollar bond to begin addressing a needed roof repair and ADA accessible issues, along with a few other needed improvements (see handout for cost estimates and best-guess priorities created by Karen), the group’s next steps are:
  1. To form a sub-group (David/ Pittsburg (point person); Sally/Colebrook; Laurent/Canaan; Phil/Stewartstown; Mike/Clarksville) to create quality standards for use going forward for facilities-related matters. Initially, this can help guide Canaan in needed investments and build credibility across communities for what can be expected now and in the future.
  2. Begin to educate the Canaan voters about cost projections beyond the one-million-dollar bond and why their ownership of this is important to a positive starting point for a formal collaboration. (Dan/Karen)
  3. Seek input from Colebrook school board members and key others about the scenario of adding on in Colebrook – this is to ensure a back-up plan scenario in case Canaan voters are not in favor of needed upgrades. (Brian)

The Steering Committee’s first preference to have the high school/CTE in Canaan, with the proviso that the above-outlined issues can be favorably resolved.

- The State of New Hampshire reintroduced building aid to the state budget. This could be a future funding source.

### **Keeping the Wider Community Informed of the Work -Annual Meeting Presentation**

- Agreement was reached that as Chair, Kyle will present at each annual meeting. In order to adequately prepare all board chairs for questions that can be reasonably anticipated at the meetings, a “frequently asked questions” (FAQ) document with talking points will be created, along with a standardized presentation to support Kyle’s role. (Dan/Brian/Kyle). The presentation and FAQ documents will be circulated to all Steering Committee members for review and suggested edits by February 15<sup>th</sup>. All input should be shared with Dan, Brian and Kyle by February 21<sup>st</sup> so that it can be introduced at the governor’s visit on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **Curriculum Future Projects Overview**

- The curriculum sub-group is gathering information from teachers in the various subject matters. See handout – an example of what is being gathered (Math Staff is the title of the handout). All committee members are asked to review the document and provide input about the questions posed to teachers. Are they the “right” questions? What is missing? Input should be sent to Bruce by February 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Sub-Group Session Notes**  
**February 25, 2020**

**Attendees**

Kyle, Mike, Sharon (partial), Dan, Brian, Chris, Phil and Carole, facilitator

- The session was convened to address recent decisions by Canaan to utilize a CT River Interstate Committee report for its own use without consulting committee members, along with other, related decisions (sharing the report with Canaan board members without notice or approval by the committee when the committee had not had an opportunity to review and discuss it; putting forth a bond to pay for construction outlined in the report without notice; sharing the report with the press without notifying committee members after explicitly committing to do so; delegitimizing the report publicly and thereby affecting public perceptions of the collaboration's efforts).

The above-outlined events are not in dispute. Canaan representative Dan was unapologetic for these decisions.

- The following protocols that were agreed-upon by attendees will be reviewed with committee members at the March meeting and the intent is to adopt them during the session:
  - The role of the committee facilitator extends beyond establishing agendas, facilitating meetings and generating session notes. She is to be consulted on decisions related to information release, use of committee resources and all matters involving committee strategies.
  - The chair is the sole point of information dissemination. All information requests, including interviews, will be handled by the chair and matters of this nature should be referred to him. No information will be disseminated beyond the committee without the chair's knowledge and agreement.
  - The superintendents are in a supporting capacity – making no decisions. They will provide information, make introductions and generally ensure the committee has the information it needs to make informed decisions. When asked, they will provide recommendations.
- The visit by the education commissioners and Vermont governor went well. They were provided an overview of the committee's work that was based upon what will be shared at each community's annual meeting.
  - Vermont will not be able to provide financial support for building-related projects for the foreseeable future.
  - New Hampshire is eager to receive a summary overview of building-related projects within the next two weeks. The probability of support is much higher in New Hampshire than Vermont.
- Each participant reports that no new programs/major building projects/ staff increases are included in the 20-21 draft school budgets.
- Kyle will attend the upcoming annual meeting in each community and provide a brief verbal update about the committee's work and related timeline. Board chairs will work collaboratively with Kyle in each session to ensure questions that can be answered, are. The script of his talking points were reviewed by all. Any additional edits are due to Kyle by Thursday, the 27<sup>th</sup>, at which point he will format the document and make copies to hand out if various situations warrant it.

**March 12, 2020**  
**Session Notes**

**Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- The visit by the education commissioners and Vermont governor went well. They were provided an overview of the committee’s work that was based upon what will be shared at each community’s annual meeting.
  - Vermont will not be able to provide financial support for building-related projects for the foreseeable future.
  - New Hampshire is eager to receive a summary overview of building-related projects within the next two weeks. The probability of support is much higher in New Hampshire than Vermont. Kyle drafted and circulated a letter to some members of our committee and submitted it. He will share it with all.
- The Whitefield/Lancaster school bond of six million dollars failed. Some districts voted it down; others did not. There is a question as to whether the state match for this might be repurposed for our project. The commissioners expressed strong support for a CTE center that focused across the age continuum – including re-training adults for workforce development specifically for jobs needed in the region. This will be investigated by Kyle and Bruce.
- The district annual meetings went well, generally.
  - Pittsburg’s residents urged caution about committing and some expressed clearly that beyond a shared high school, they are not interested. Some believe that Pittsburg is “wanted for their money”. In response to this, the committee expressed strongly that Pittsburg funding has never been the rationale for wanting them included in the exploration. Rather, the well-being of students and the opportunities consolidation presents for them is the focus.
  - Canaan’s residents were very supportive of the regionalization. The one million dollar bond passed.
  - Colebrook was supportive, as well. Questions were raised about the condition of Canaan’s buildings and a request for better ongoing communication from the committee, including a detailed understanding of what is needed at Canaan, are noted. There was confusion about closing the Academy and the fact that the savings from this decision was a one-time \$ 400,000 – and not an annualized savings. Questions about cost per student and some form of tax stabilization and reduction through consolidation were raised. The committee’s financial analysis is designed to accomplish this.
  - Stewartstown’s meeting was brief. Interest was expressed about the needs outlined in the Canaan building report. They, too, want to understand the savings consolidation will bring.
  - In Clarksville and Columbia, there was not much feedback or questions. One that was raised was about the ownership of buildings, post-consolidation, and how things would be structured.
- All Area Agreements were renewed and written so that the three year notice threshold has been met. This accommodates any changes that may result from consolidation and related shifts.

The committee went into executive session. Guests and school employees departed.

**April 2, 2020 Session Highlights**  
**Session Held via Zoom Video Conference**

- New Hampshire Education Commissioner Frank Edelblut requested a letter of interest for support from the Department of Education’s building aid fund. Kyle crafted a draft of the letter and circulated it to a small group for editing; it was submitted the first week of March, as suggested by the Commissioner. Copies of it are available from Kyle, if interested.
- The Tillotson Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation awarded the requested \$85,500 to the Exploratory Committee (us). These funds are to be received immediately and will support project financial modeling, session facilitation, project management, and legal guidance. If it proves necessary, funds will also be utilized for a transportation study. The award requires a 10% match from local sources, which was approved at the time of application by the involved school boards.
- The Committee directed the superintendents to create a single school staffing model for use in the financial analysis. This is a priority. Secondly, the Committee encourages the superintendents to continue to work together on a short-term (next school year) A/B schedule – a cooperative model already partially underway that

accommodates the traveling of teachers who are willing between schools. The goal is to utilize existing talent, fill gaps, reduce cannibalizing of staff between the schools and reduce unnecessary overall hiring.

- After considerable discussion, the Committee reached consensus on the number and type of financial models it would like created at this time. Three models will be created:
  - High school and CTE at the Colebrook existing school site (requiring an addition)
  - High school and CTE at the Canaan existing site
  - High School and CTE in Stewartstown or thereabouts (site requirements being reviewed) – a new building
  - And, as financial analysis funds allow, a k-12 new building estimate

The rationale for investing in this array of financial analysis is to be able to appropriately satisfy public need for an informed decision. Without understanding the cost of a newly built school, we cannot adequately assess the tradeoffs of one site over another. This acknowledges the very real preoccupation of some community members that there will be winners and losers if one community ends up with the school in their existing location.

- Enrollment trends – past and future – will be part of the baseline information that informs all modeling.
- Running Start programming will also be a factor.
- The reality that New Hampshire has building aid and Vermont does not is also a factor.

Next Steps:

- Kyle and Karen will serve as the liaisons to the consultants who perform the financial analysis. They will work with volunteers Sharon, Brian, Laurent, Phil, Sally, David and Mike to ensure the analysis is robust and accurate. As superintendents, Karen and Bruce will ensure access to necessary financials in order to complete the analysis.
- The governance, terms of agreement, transportation study-related work will follow once there is an understanding of the timeline and cost of the financial analysis.

### **June 11, 2020 Session Highlights Session via Zoom Videoconference**

#### **Updates Pertinent to Our Work**

- George Cormier, the business consultant whom the Committee had hoped to work with on the financial analysis, withdrew his name from further consideration due to family obligations. Outreach was conducted to secure the names of other consultants experienced at this kind of work in New Hampshire and Vermont. Four were identified. One never responded, one declined consideration due to his current workload, one has been interviewed and is interested, and one will be interviewed. RHR Smith, a consulting firm with staff in western Maine and Vermont, are the interested firm – after a productive and positive interview, they offered to invest a day at no cost better understanding the project.  
**ACTION: Kyle and Carole will coordinate a visit with RHR Smith. Kyle will schedule a time to interview the second consultant and invite Carole, Don and Kristin to join the interview.**

- On August 11<sup>th</sup>, the Canaan bond vote will be confirmed, following the procedures necessary to legally certify it. The originally approved bond amount and conditions remain the same.
- In their May 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> sessions, the Sub-Group re-opened the issue of which school configuration to model. Given the pandemic and related shifts in community and economic health, the need for a re-vote/confirmation on the Canaan bond, the overall condition of the Canaan school buildings as outlined in the Black River Design report and the reality of future enrollment trends/state funding support, the Sub-Group believes it is worthwhile considering one location for middle and high schools at this time. In previous discussions, this was perceived as a potential eventuality, perhaps happening five years post-consolidation. All things considered, now may be the time to embrace this.

Discussion about what to model, and why, included the following:

- As a result of the Black River Design report and subsequent follow-up, we have a good idea of what the Canaan building needs in terms of upkeep and improvements. With this, there is an expectation that

Canaan would pay for its improvements. We need a similar assessment of Colebrook, conducted by someone who is local, acquainted with the facility, and credible.

- The Canaan bond covers one million of the needed upgrades, but that clearly is not the total amount. Colebrook will not support investing in Canaan – and it is a fair question as to how Canaan would feel about investing in Colebrook. Tuition/student funding calculations would be a primary method for this, so it is possible it will be part of the embedded cost, in any case.
- A cornerstone consideration is what we learned from the DOE Commissioner: there is 60% crossover in partaking of programs/classes when CTE and the high school are co-located and 4% crossover when they are not. New Hampshire is very motivated to support this crossover for workforce development reasons.
- The radically changed COVID19-related landscape (economic/health/social) means a one campus middle school/high school grades 7-12 is worth analyzing. This, in combination with “Model 11”, heretofore known as “Model 1” and the one campus model as “Model 2” are the first financial analysis priorities – and this will be presented as a recommendation for the full committee’s review on June 11<sup>th</sup>.
- This approach aligns with our north star – doing what is best for students versus “What can we sell to the community?”.

**The Committee considered the Sub-Group’s recommendation for modeling two approaches – “Model 1 (High school and CTE in Canaan/middle school in Colebrook, with elementary schools largely untouched and Pittsburgh middle school remaining there) and Model 2 – one middle school/high school grades 7-12 in Colebrook, with elementary schools absorbing grade 6)” and approved it with the following comments:**

- While Vermont does not provide building aid for CTE, it does invest in programming.
  - Having staff on one campus would allow for expanded instruction/utilization of teacher expertise across grades 7-12. It would also allow for CTE to be available for middle school grades.
  - It is essential that we move away from “Colebrook/Canaan” and instead regard the locations as “our schools”.
  - The Articles of Agreement will outline the who-pays-for-what terms; the commitment is to an interstate approach, governance-wise. Mutuality/joint ownership and collaboration is a cornerstone of this project.
- The single school staffing model work is incomplete. Woodsville has been identified as a similar size model and can be utilized for staffing numbers/ratios. See notes shared by Kyle in May. The educational benefit in terms of electives/array of courses based upon input gathered earlier from students and staff has not been compiled. **Action: Working with Kyle and Kristin will pull together the staffing numbers utilizing the Woodsville model and including student preferences/staff recommendations in terms of course offerings. Debra will serve as first reader. The services of Steve Sanborn and Judy DeNova will be secured to create a cohesive single staffing model that can be used to help voters better understand what is possible through consolidation from cost, quality and array of offerings perspectives. Target draft date for Committee review is July 2<sup>nd</sup> – in time for review and discussion at the next Committee meeting.**