

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

To: State Board of Education

From: Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education

Date: March 2, 2022

Subject: Final Report of the Ansonia-Derby Temporary Regional School Study Committee

Executive Summary

Introduction

Section 10-39 of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) authorizes two or more school districts to join in the establishment of a temporary regional school study committee to study the advisability of establishing a regional school district. The communities of Ansonia and Derby formed such a committee (hereinafter “Committee”), and the Committee held its first meeting in June 2018. The Committee’s charge is to study the advisability of regionalization and to prepare and submit a written report of its findings and recommendations to the respective towns and the State Board of Education (SBE). If the findings of the Committee support the feasibility and desirability of establishing a regional school district, and the SBE approves the Committee’s report in accordance with statute, the question of whether to form a new regional district ultimately goes to referendum in each of the towns. Upon an affirmative vote to regionalize in each of the towns, a new regional school district is formed.

History/Background

The Committee – along with its consultant, District Management Group (DMG) – has worked diligently to address a number of the important issues relating to the study of the advisability of forming a new regional school district, including, among others, examining enrollment trends and projecting student enrollment; conducting an extensive school facility analysis and review; considering the proposed educational plan for the new district; outlining a number of different budget and potential cost-savings scenarios; and achieving consensus on the proposed grade configuration for the new district. As the study committee process proceeded, however, some significant areas of disagreement amongst members from each of the two towns became apparent. While the Committee worked hard to find common ground and sought creative solutions to these issues, compromise ultimately was not achieved and the Committee did not make a formal finding as to the advisability of regionalization.

The first significant area of disagreement pertained to the number of schools that would be part of the new regional district. The full Committee was generally of the view that the PK-12 grade configuration was advisable for the proposed district, but did not agree on whether to use all of

the existing four elementary schools within the two school districts, or to move to a three school model, which would have required closure of an existing school in one of the towns. Another significant issue pertained to the governance structure of the proposed regional board of education. Committee members acknowledged and understood that, in compliance with Federal Constitutional law, each town's representation on the regional board of education must be proportional to each town's share of the population of the regional district as a whole. As such, Ansonia was to have approximately 2/3 of the voting power on the proposed regional board of education, with Derby having the remaining 1/3. Given this imbalance, Derby members of the Committee proposed to require a "crossover" vote for actions of the new regional board of education. This is a mechanism that some existing regional boards of education currently employ that requires at least one affirmative vote from a member in each town in order for a measure to pass. The Committee was ultimately unable to agree on how to resolve this issue, however. The Committee also was unable to reach consensus on the question of how to allocate any savings achieved as a result of regionalization.

The Committee's draft interim status report for the end of the 2021 year is attached hereto. While the full Committee did not meet to endorse this draft report,¹ both Committee co-chairs – including a member from Derby and a member from Ansonia – have endorsed the report and agree that it fairly summarizes the Committee's work through its last meeting, held on October 26, 2021.

Conclusions

On February 6, 2022, the Committee was disbanded by operation of law based on the amount of time that had elapsed since the Committee's inception. While the Committee was cognizant of the statutory timeline governing its operations, in recent months the Committee cancelled a series of meetings at which actions were proposed that would have moved the study committee process toward completion. Given that these proposed meetings were not held prior to the Committee's expiration, the study committee process is now concluded and there is no formal action for the SBE to take.²

¹ The report that is attached is substantially the same as the draft end-of-year report for 2021 that was prepared for endorsement by the full Committee in advance of scheduled meetings between December 2021 and February 2022. Because these meetings ultimately were not held, the Committee did not meet to endorse this report. Please note that, as reflected in the attached report, the Committee co-chairs amended the conclusion section to address the expiration of members' terms and the co-chairs themselves signed the report.

² Connecticut law provides that, when a temporary regional school study committee makes a finding in its report to the SBE that regionalization is inadvisable, the SBE must, within 30 days of receipt of the report, "send to the committee and the town clerk of each participating town a statement of its agreement or disagreement with the committee report and the reasons therefor." (C.G.S. Sec. 10-43(b)(1)) Because the Committee did not complete its report and made no such finding, we believe such action on the part of the SBE is not required or warranted.

Recommendation

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) recommends that the SBE receive this report regarding the operations of the Ansonia-Derby Temporary Regional School Study Committee.

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**TEMPORARY REGIONAL SCHOOL STUDY COMMITTEE
OF
THE CITY OF ANSONIA
AND
THE CITY OF DERBY**



**Temporary Regional School Study Committee
2021 Final Report**

In February 2018, the Temporary Regional School Study Committee (TRSSC) was appointed by the respective legislative bodies. Current members include:

Ansonia:

Dr. Steven Adamowski
Rich Bshara
Joe Jaumann
Chris Phipps
Dr. Josh Stuart

Derby:

Barbara DeGennaro
Jim Gildea
Tara Hyder
George Kurtyka
Ronald Luneau, Jr.

The TRSSC elected the following individuals to serve in the respective positions:

Jim Gildea, Co-Chair
Joe Jaumann, Co-Chair
Dr. Steven Adamowski, Treasurer
George Kurtyka, Secretary

The TRSSC, working with the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) created an RFQ, interviewed consultants and chose District Management Group (DMG) based in Boston, Massachusetts.

District Management Group work on and presented the following:

- Task 1 Report on Regionalization Advisability
- Task 2 Report on Savings from Shared Services



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The Task 1 Report on Regionalization Advisability is broken out into 7 sections:

- I. Regionalization in Connecticut
- II. Academics, Programming and Educational Plan
- III. Facilities
- IV. Enrollment
- V. Finance
- VI. Governance and Administration
- VII. Culture

Here is an overview of progress made and where we have had consensus, and in some cases, obstacles.

Section 1: Regionalization in Connecticut:

DMG presented 4 potential regionalization models to the TRSSC that were then reviewed:

- Model 1 – Regionalization Grades PK – 12 (4 elementary school)
- Model 2 – Regionalization Grades PK – 12 (3 elementary school)
- Model 3 – Regionalization Grades 6 – 12
- Model 4 – Regionalization Grades 9 – 12

The TRSSC reviewed and discussed the 4 models and decided that we would center in in the following 2 models:

- Model 1 – Regionalization Grades PK – 12 (4 elementary school)
- Model 2 – Regionalization Grades PK – 12 (3 elementary school)

This was one area that after initial progress from narrowing the list from 4 models to 2 models, we did reach an impasse on narrowing this down to one agreed upon regionalization model.

This 4-elementary school model versus 3-elementary school model was an issue that became a focus among the respective city members. Ansonia members supported the 3-school model based upon reimbursement rates and enrollment projections, reduced operational costs and in this model, and their potential increased budgetary costs would be lower. Derby members were in support of the 4-school model due to the investments that have recently been made at Irving School, the 4 school model increased savings to Derby, there was a concern about the possibility of a vacant school building becoming blight and that negative impact on the neighborhood, and finally, actual enrollment numbers having been higher than the original pre-Covid projections.



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Section 2: Academics, Programming and Educational Plan:

DMG had provided the committee with the programs of study, and they were discussed over several meetings. The goal was to adopt a program of study that satisfies the requirement in state statute and that could potentially be offered in a regionalized school system recognizing that they would not bind a future regionalized school system and regionalized board of education as they, statutorily, are the ones that would be setting the future curriculum.

With that as backdrop, the TRSSC did unanimously approve and adopt:

- Regionalized High School Program of Study
- Regionalized Middle School Program of Study
- Regionalized Elementary School Program of Study

Section 3: Facilities:

DMG and Milone and MacBroom (MMI) gave an overview of each school that defined both the condition of the school, year of construction, expansion potential and possible needs that include code updates, maintenance issues and potential upgrades.

- Ansonia: Mead School
- Ansonia: Prendergast School
- Ansonia Middle School
- Ansonia High School
- Derby: Bradley School
- Derby: Irving School
- Derby Middle School
- Derby High School

Each city reviewed the list with their Central Offices and arrived at a list of work they felt would need to be done at the respective schools based upon code violations and / or safety issues. Based upon the fact that in either PK – 12 model, the work recommended at Ansonia High School and Derby High School would not need to be performed.

There was consensus on the recommended work and these costs were factored into the costs associated with regionalizing for both cities.

Section 4: Enrollment:

Milone & MacBroom Inc. (MMI) presented demographic and housing trends in each community as well as enrollment trends for each school district. Population for each town was relatively stable. Ansonia K-12 enrollment has decreased by 14% over the last decade, however, a decrease of less than 1% in the last five



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years. Elementary enrollments (K-6) increased by 3% over the last three years. Derby K-12 enrollment has decreased by 13% over the last decade; the decrease over the last five years is 15%. There is a 23% decrease in K-5 over the last five years. Combined enrollment history reflects a decrease of 13% for K-12 grades over the last decade and 6% over the last five years. K-5 combined decrease of 14%, grades 6-8 combined decrease of 7%, and grades 9-12 a decrease of 18% over the last decade. Combined K-12 projects a district population estimate of approximately 3,500 students in 2018-2019.

Projections for Ansonia reflect that the elementary level will increase 3% over the next five years before decreasing to below current levels in nine to ten years. Middle school projected to increase 7% over five years and 17% in ten years. High school is projected to decrease about 10% in five years and about 6% overall in ten years.

Projections for Derby reflect that the elementary level will decrease 13% over the next five years and by 14% in ten years. Middle school is projected to decrease 28% over five years with additional decreases in ten years. High school is projected to have steady enrollment over the next five years before declining due to smaller cohorts.

Combining the projections from both towns K-5 is projected to decrease 3% over the next five years and about 6% over the next ten years. Grades 6-8 is projected to decrease 8% over the next five years and remain stable at about 800 students in ten years. Grades 9-12 are projected to decrease 6% over the next five years; however, experience a more significant decline in the latter half of the projection for a total decrease of 14% in ten years. The combined projections would likely result in a K-12 student population of 3,500 in five years. Combined 6-12 would result in 1,700 and 9-12 would result in approximately 900 students in five years.

This was an area that the TRSSC came to consensus on and were comfortable using the data that was provided. It is important to note that a recent analysis of the actual numbers showed that since the original projections, Derby has a higher enrollment than was projected while Ansonia has a slightly lower enrollment than projected.

Section 5: Finance

In the area of costs, after much discussion and deliberation, the focus came down to costs versus potential savings.

In the area of costs, DMG took the code violations, expansions and requested work and calculated the overall costs. These costs were calculated out by regionalization model.

The TRSSC worked with our legislative delegation on attempting to lower the costs associated with regionalizing. As outlined in the new statute, there would be a regional bonus of 20% added to the higher reimbursement rate across the two cities, meaning the new reimbursement rate in the regional district would be 97.5%. The tables below outline the cost of expansions, code violations, and work selected with that new reimbursement rate.



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Total cost of expansions, code violations, and work selected, at 97.5% regional reimbursement.

School	Status Quo	Central Office	9-12 Regionalized	6-12 Regionalized	PK-12 Regionalized (4 elem.)	PK-12 Regionalized (3 elem.)
Ansonia High School	\$2,205,109	\$2,205,109	\$1,905,542	\$1,905,542	\$1,905,542	\$1,905,542
Ansonia Middle School	\$5,578,220	\$5,578,220	\$5,578,220	\$0	\$0	\$0
Mead Elementary	\$591,475	\$591,475	\$591,475	\$591,475	\$507,395	\$368,601
Prendergast Elementary	\$547,911	\$547,911	\$547,911	\$547,911	\$461,154	\$309,270
Derby High School	\$2,518,786	\$2,518,786	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Derby Middle School	\$7,455	\$7,455	\$7,455	\$328,463	\$328,463	\$328,463
Bradley Elementary	\$1,313,317	\$1,313,317	\$1,313,317	\$1,313,317	\$1,848,438	\$462,925
Irving Elementary	\$1,600,594	\$1,600,594	\$1,600,594	\$1,600,594	\$1,087,979	\$0
Central Office Renovations	\$0	\$637,563	\$637,563	\$637,563	\$637,563	\$637,563
Total	\$14,362,868	\$15,015,981	\$12,197,627	\$6,940,414	\$6,792,083	\$4,027,913



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**Overall allocation of
costs – 97.5%
Reimbursement**

	Status Quo	Central Office	9-12 Regionalized	6-2 Regionalized	PK-12 Regionalized (4 elem.)	PK-12 Regionalized (3 elem.)
Total*	\$14,362,868	\$15,015,981	\$12,197,627	\$6,940,414	\$6,792,083	\$4,027,913

If buildings contributed

Ansonia	N/A	\$163,899	\$(10,549,907)	\$5,089,768	\$12,843,278	\$5,253,598
Derby	N/A	\$489,214.16	\$13,108,562	\$(2,202,650)	\$1,394,002	\$3,455,340

If buildings leased

Ansonia	N/A	\$415,754	\$1,629,938	\$1,792,275	\$4,323,655	\$2,564,059
Derby	N/A	\$237,359	\$928,717	\$1,094,843	\$2,468,428	\$1,463,853

Non-regional costs

Ansonia	\$8,922,715	\$8,922,715	\$6,717,606	\$1,139,386	N/A	N/A
Derby	\$5,440,152	\$5,440,152	\$2,921,366	\$2,913,911	N/A	N/A

In the area of savings, the committee explored 3 options:

Scenario # 1: Take advantage of appropriate economies of scale at the central office:

- Current Central Office Headcount: 34
- Proposed Central Office Headcount: 19
- Reduction of 15 positions

Scenario # 2: Maximize Existing Resources

- Current Central Office Headcount: 34
- Proposed Central Office Headcount: 32
- Reduction of 2 positions

Scenario # 3: Improve and expand management and leadership functions

- Current Central Office Headcount: 34
- Proposed Central Office Headcount: 38
- Increase of 4 positions



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The TRSSC came to consensus on utilizing scenario 3 as they felt that this was the method best geared towards improving the educational experience for the students. As we did not come to consensus on the 4 school versus 3 school model, the savings for both scenarios are listed below.

Difference from Status Quo – 4 Elementary School Regional:

City	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Ansonia	\$(1,006,999)	\$(902,177)	\$(792,092)
Derby	\$2,449,208	\$2,418,430	\$2,385,514
Total	\$1,442,209	\$1,516,254	\$1,593,422

Difference from Status Quo – 3 Elementary School Regional (General Fund):

City	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Ansonia	\$(727,581)	\$(616,858)	\$(500,748)
Derby	\$2,611,410	\$2,584,057	\$2,554,638
Total	\$1,883,829	\$1,967,199	\$2,053,890

It is noted and referenced elsewhere that in this scenario, Ansonia has cost expenditures in each of the first 3 years, and they would not have cost savings. All the savings would be realized by Derby.

While it was the consensus of the TRSSC to recommend a lease option, it was also decided to discuss this issue further and to compensate schools who may be contributing more based upon using the lease option. This was never pursued as we were unable to come to a final agreement on which regionalization model we would utilize, therefore we were never able to fully vet this issue out because the 4 school versus 3 school model would impact this.

Section 6: Governance and Administration:

DMG proposed several different options to comply with the one-person one-vote rule. One option was weighted voting either through appropriating and weighting Board of Education members per town, or by having equal members but weighing the votes. They also talked about an at-large election filling the board by a collective election of the two towns. In summary, the 3 options presented were:

- 6 board members from Ansonia, 3 board members from Derby, each with equal voting rights
- 5 board members elected from each city with Ansonia's vote counting at a greater weight – (Each Ansonia member's vote counting as 12.8%, and each Derby member's vote counting as 7.2%)
- 9 at-large board members

The TRSSC did come to consensus on the following option:

- 5 board members elected from each city with Ansonia's vote counting at a greater weight – (Each Ansonia member's vote counting as 12.8%, and each Derby member's vote counting as 7.2%)

There was then discussion on how to attempt to provide the city with the less-weighted votes some level of increased local control. This discussion then centered around providing a crossover vote. A crossover vote



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was defined as an affirmative vote from one member of the city with the lesser-weighted vote necessary for an item to pass. This was another area that presented an obstacle and the TRSSC was unable to consensus on this issue.

The Ansonia members were in favor of a crossover vote that would be in place for a limited duration, putting in place what they defined as the major issues that would appear before a board including budget, hiring, capital improvement, adopting by-laws, etc. This would preserve the minority community's ability to have an equal voice in the beginning and would dissipate over time as the board begins to act as a regional board, as opposed to members from different communities. Finally, Ansonia believed that since they were bearing approximately 64% of the cost of the educational system, their voting rights should not be diluted. The Derby members favored having a crossover vote with no time limit and no limit on subject matter. Their reasons include the concern that the loss of local control and influence on their constituents' education is a significant issue for the Derby community. In addition, Derby members believed that every issue that comes before the regional board is important - one issue should not have priority over another. Finally, they felt that with Derby having the lesser weight of votes, they would exercise little influence on the education of the students from their own city.

Section 7: Culture:

The TRSSC did review and read the content from the focus groups and felt that the communities were similar in nature and closely linked. The committee felt there were no issues from a cultural perspective.

Conclusion

The Derby committee members saw their terms expire on February 6, 2022, and the Ansonia committee members saw their terms expire on February 8, 2022. As such, the TRSSC has statutorily come to an end without any recommendation as to whether regionalization was feasible.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Gildea, Co-Chair, Temporary Regional School Study Committee

Joe Jaumann, Co-Chair, Temporary Regional School Study Committee