

VII.B.

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

To be Proposed:
May 4, 2022

Resolved: That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-43 of the Connecticut General Statutes, hereby accepts the recommendations of the Litchfield-Regional School District 6 temporary regional school study committee -- and in accordance therewith shall certify to the town clerks of Goshen, Litchfield, Morris, and Warren that such recommendations have been approved and shall have sent a copy of such certification to the Litchfield-Regional School District 6 temporary regional school study committee -- and directs the Commissioner to take such actions as are necessary to effectuate this resolution.

Approved by a vote of _____ this fourth day of May, Two Thousand Twenty-Two.

Signed: _____
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Secretary
State Board of Education

VII.B.

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

TO: State Board of Education

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

DATE: May 4, 2022

RE: Litchfield-Regional School District 6 Temporary Regional School Study
Committee Final Report

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 school districts of Litchfield and Regional School District 6 (“Region 6”) formed such a committee (the “Committee”), and the Committee held its first meeting in October 2021. The Committee’s charge is to study the advisability of regionalization and prepare and submit a written report of its findings and recommendations to the respective towns and the State Board of Education (“SBE” or “State Board”).

If the Committee finds the establishment of a proposed regional district to be advisable, the Committee shall submit its final report to the SBE and the town clerk of each participating town. The SBE has 30 days in which to accept or reject the recommendations of the Committee based on established statutory criteria. See C.G.S. § 10-43(b). If the SBE accepts the recommendations of the Committee, the SBE must certify to the town clerk in each of the participating towns that the Committee recommendations have been approved and send a copy of such certification to the Committee.¹ Thereafter, the Committee must, in accordance with C.G.S. § 10-43(b), hold a public meeting in each town to present the certified report. Referenda in each participating town must subsequently be held on the advisability of establishing a new regional district. Upon an affirmative vote to regionalize in each of the towns, a new regional school district is formed, and the Committee’s report becomes the operating document or “plan” of the regional school district. See C.G.S. § 10-43 et seq. and Reg. School Dist. No. 12 v. Town of Bridgewater, 292 Conn. 119 (2009).

¹ If the SBE rejects the Committee’s recommendation, the SBE must advise the Committee of the reasons for the rejection. The Committee may thereafter, within 30 days of receipt of notice of the rejection, submit an amended report.

Background

The Committee submitted its report formally to the SBE on April 4, 2022.² The Committee has determined that formation of a regional school district is advisable and is seeking the State Board's approval of its plan. As described more fully below and in the Committee's Report, under the proposed plan, the school districts would form a single consolidated regional school district consisting of the towns of Goshen, Litchfield, Morris, and Warren, with enrollment at the K-12 level.

As described in the Committee Report, both districts "are grappling with challenges to long-term viability resulting from over a decade of declining enrollment and the consequent increase in fiscal and programmatic constraints," and the districts already have a history of sharing certain services since 2019. (Committee Report, p. 4, ¶¶ 2, 7) The Committee further reports that the "formation of a new district can be completed in good faith with minimal impact on jobs" and the "consolidation of the two districts will yield long-term fiscal savings for all four towns." (Committee Report, p. 4, ¶¶ 8, 9)

In evaluating the Committee's plan, the State Board must consider whether the Committee's report contains the following elements, as required by C.G.S. § 10-43(a):

- (1) the findings of the committee with respect to the advisability of establishing a regional school district;
- (2) the towns to be included;
- (3) the grade levels for which educational programs are to be provided;
- (4) detailed educational and budget plans for at least a five-year period including projections of enrollments, staff needs and deployment and a description of all programs and supportive services planned for the proposed regional school district;
- (5) the facilities recommended;
- (6) estimates of the cost of land and facilities;
- (7) a recommendation concerning the capital contribution of each participating town based on appraisals or a negotiated valuation of existing land and facilities owned and used by each town for public elementary and secondary education which the committee recommends be acquired for use by the proposed regional school district, together with a plan for the transfer of such land and facilities;

² The Committee's submission consists of the following two parts: (1) Temporary Regional School Study Committee Report ("Committee Report"); and (2) an "Appendix," which consists of multiple subparts.

- (8) a recommendation concerning the size of the board of education to serve the proposed regional school district and the representation of each town thereon; and
- (9) such other matters as the committee deems pertinent.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the State Board accept the Committee's recommendation regarding the advisability of establishing a new regional school district. The Committee has submitted a thoughtful and detailed report that meets the required statutory elements. Each such element will be considered in turn below:

(1) Findings of the committee with respect to the advisability of establishing a regional school district

The Committee deems it advisable to establish a regional school district. (Committee Report, p. 5)

(2) Towns to be included

The Committee recommends that the towns of Goshen, Litchfield, Morris and Warren be included in the new regional district. (Committee Report, p. 5)

(3) Grade levels for which educational programs are to be provided

The Committee recommends that the grades included in the proposed regional district be Kindergarten through Grade 12. (Committee Report, p. 5)

(4) Detailed educational and budget plans for at least a five-year period including projections of enrollments, staff needs and deployment and a description of all programs and supportive services planned for the proposed regional school district

The Committee Report meets the requirements of this statutory element for the reasons set forth below. First, with regard to budget, the Committee has devised a budget detailing projected revenues and expenses for a five-year period, including projected cumulative savings of more than \$13 million over a five-year period. (Committee Report, p. 9) These projected savings are based on the 2021-22 actual budget compared to the proposed budgets for the new regional district budget beginning in the 2024-25 school year. (Committee Report, p. 8) Additional information regarding the proposed budget appears in Appendix 2. Savings projections – particularly those in the out-years – reflect the potential for cost avoidance as opposed to tangible savings. It is also important to emphasize that these projected savings are just that – projections – and may not be fully realized depending on future circumstances (e.g., enrollment, state funding, program costs, etc.).

In general terms, the Committee finds that the consolidation of “Litchfield High School and WAMOGO³ programs will not only enrich and expand their strengths but will also offer new opportunities.” (Committee Report, p. 4, ¶ 6) The specific programs proposed to be offered at the secondary level are outlined in the tables on pages 11 through 14 of the Committee Report and in Appendices 5 and 6. The Committee recommendations make clear that course offerings in the proposed secondary program would exceed those currently available to students. For example, under the proposal, a total of 54 Humanities courses will be offered at the secondary level, compared to 30 total courses at Litchfield High School and 40 total at WAMOGO currently. (Committee Report, p. 12) Similarly, the proposed school would offer a total of 27 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) courses at the secondary level compared to 20 currently at Litchfield High School and 14 at WAMOGO. (Committee Report, p. 13) Additional information regarding proposed course offerings at the secondary level appears in Appendix 5.

At the elementary level, the Committee reports that “consolidation of the two districts will also sustain and enhance the already excellent elementary (grades K-5) curriculum and instruction currently being provided to students as well as positively impact the residents of Goshen, Litchfield, Morris, and Warren.” (Committee Report, p. 4, ¶ 6) In particular, the Committee recommends retaining the current programs and staffing currently in place at the existing elementary schools. (Committee Report, p. 11) Appendix 9 contains additional information regarding the elementary curriculum and staffing.

The Committee Report addresses staffing on pages 14 and 15 and in Appendix 5 under the section “Current v. Potential Staffing.” The Committee Report recommends no changes to current staffing levels at the elementary level. (Committee Report, p. 11) At the middle school level, Litchfield Middle School currently has 17.3 staff members for 201 students, and WAMOGO Middle School has 14.5 staff members for 163 students. (Appendix 5, “Current v. Potential Staffing”) At the proposed middle school, the total number of staff would be 30.6, a reduction of 1.2 FTE from current levels. (Appendix 5, “Concept Staffing (Grades 6-8)”) At the high school level, Litchfield High School currently has 24 staff for 233 students, and WAMOGO has 33.6 staff for 379 students. (Appendix 5, Current Staffing (Grades 9-12)) Proposed staffing at the high school level would include a total of 53 staff members, a reduction of 4.6 FTE. (Appendix 5, “Concept Staffing (Grades 9-12)”) The Committee recommends that “[a]t least 75% of any reductions from current total staff levels resulting from the creation of Region 20 will come from retirements and natural attrition.” (Committee Report, p. 15)

Enrollment in the proposed combined district is addressed on page 5 of the Committee Report and in Appendix 3. In general terms, enrollment in the combined region (Litchfield and Region 6) peaked in 1971 at 3,032 students and declined to 1,725 students on October 1, 2021, roughly following the statewide enrollment trend during this period. (Committee Report, p. 5; Appendix 3a, p. 1) According to the enrollment projection conducted by Dr. Peter Prowda, the combined

³ The term “WAMOGO” refers to the regional high school serving the Regional School District No. 6 community. The term is derived by taking the first two letters of the constituent towns, Warren, Morris, and Goshen.

total enrollment in the region could increase from 1,725 students in 2021 to 1,755 students in 2031. (Appendix 3a, p. 17)

(5) Facilities recommended

The Committee recommendations as to school facilities appear on page 6 of the Committee's report. As noted in the summary findings of the Committee, the maintenance of current elementary schools is important to the Committee. In particular, "[e]ach of Region 20's four towns has its own elementary school facilities and programs and is committed to keeping them localized." (Committee Report, p. 4, ¶ 4). The specific grade configurations served by each of the schools is outlined on page 6 of the Committee Report. In addition, the current Litchfield Middle School/High School will house the region's Grade 6 to 8 students in a regional middle school; and the current Region 6 high school will house the regional high school. The existing elementary schools will continue to accommodate the region's elementary students within their respective towns. (Committee Report, p. 6)

(6) Estimates of the cost of land and facilities

The Committee Report includes appraisal and assessment information of the land and facilities in Appendix 4. As outlined more fully in the paragraph immediately below, in accordance with C.G.S. Sec. 10-43(a)(7), the Committee used negotiated valuations of existing land and facilities for purposes of determining the respective capital contributions. (Committee Report, p. 10)

(7) Recommendation concerning the capital contribution of each participating town based on appraisals or a negotiated valuation of existing land and facilities owned and used by each town for public elementary and secondary education which the committee recommends be acquired for use by the proposed regional school district, together with a plan for the transfer of such land and facilities

The Committee's capital contribution recommendations appear on page 10 of the Committee's Report. In accordance with C.G.S. Section 10-43(a), the Committee recommends that the capital contributions be made in proportion with student enrollment in each of the districts, with Litchfield contributing approximately 55% of the total value of capital and Region 6 contributing approximately 45%, consistent with Goshen, Morris and Warren's collective student population within the proposed district. The Committee further recommends that, should the new regional district be formed, the property transfer to the new entity occur on a date to be negotiated between January 1 and June 30, 2024. (Committee Report, p. 10)

(8) Recommendation concerning the size of the board of education to serve the proposed regional school district and the representation of each town thereon

The Committee recommends that the new regional board of education consist of twelve members, including three members from each of the constituent towns. The Committee further recommends that the votes shall be weighted in proportion with each town's population relative to the regional district as a whole, and that the board of education approve items by a weighted

2/3 majority vote, including at least one member from each member town voting favorably. (Committee Report, p. 6-7).

(9) such other matters as the committee deems pertinent

In addition to the aforementioned subjects, the Committee Report makes recommendations in a number of other areas, including in matters relating to the culture, identity and history of the region. (Committee Report, p. 15) The Committee Report further recognizes that collective bargaining will need to occur with the various employee unions, and it makes a number of suggestions relating to district operations in the event a new regional school district is created. (Committee Report, p. 15-16)

Conclusion

In summary, the Committee has carefully considered the question of whether regionalization is advisable, and has generated a detailed and thoughtful report that complies with the elements required by C.G.S. § 10-43. As such, it is respectfully recommended that the State Board accept the recommendation of the Committee and, in accordance with § 10-43(b), certify this fact to the town clerks of Goshen, Litchfield, Morris, and Warren, and send a copy of this certification to the Committee. The Committee would then be authorized to move forward with the statutory process and ultimately present the question of regionalization to the voters of the communities in referenda held in accordance with C.G.S. § 10-45.

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