

Alternative Governance Plans

The September 2009 presentation on the need for consolidation of services in SAU 7 and ENSU suggested a change in the governance structure, replacing the two existing school districts with an Interstate district. The governance issues are technically complicated, politically charged, and they ultimately affect adults in the community and employees in the schools far more than they affect the students attending school. Therefore it is important for the communities to first determine how they want to organize the schools to improve instruction for students and then determine the governance structure that accomplishes that outcome most effectively. Among the governance structures that might be applicable are:

- **Rivendell Model: An interstate district with one board serving all ten communities**

Under this model, the ten districts in SAU 7 and ENSU would be replaced with a single board whose membership would be defined by the Articles of Agreement adopted by the districts affected by the proposed reorganization. Ideally, board membership would be limited to no more than nine members who proportionally represent the Vermont and New Hampshire towns in ENSU and SAU 7.

- **Dresden Model: An interstate district with three boards: one serving Vermont elementary students; one serving New Hampshire Elementary students; and one combined board serving Interstate secondary school(s).**

In Dresden, where there is one elementary school in each state and a shared middle school and high school, the elementary/secondary divide is relatively clear-cut. There are, however, differences in the elementary school grade spans that result in complicated tuition calculations, a situation that could be avoided in a newly established interstate district.

The Dresden Interstate district also works because the size of each elementary board, when combined, roughly corresponds to the proportion of the elementary students attending the secondary schools. The Dresden board includes all twelve board members from each community, but only four of the five Norwich Board members have a vote on the Dresden Board though they fully participate in deliberations on personnel matters and negotiations and serve on board committees. This balance could be more difficult to achieve in ENSU and SAU 7 where a disproportionate number of New Hampshire students would be attending any combined secondary school.

- **Co-op Board for Combined Secondary School: Retention of current board governance arrangement for elementary schools with a new secondary co-op Board serving interstate cooperative secondary school(s).**

In some New Hampshire and Vermont towns, an independently elected board oversees all or some of the secondary schools or programs. Should the districts wish to retain local control without creating an unwieldy 20+ member secondary board it might consider creating an independently elected interstate board to oversee secondary schools. At the same time it might explore dissolving all elementary boards where no school is open. This concept would require further research before public dissemination.

- **Retention of current board governance arrangement with tuition agreements established to allow for inter-district and intra-district transfers and expanded sharing of staff and resources**

Vermont districts with "choice" and New Hampshire districts without secondary schools that operate outside of AREA agreements often negotiate tuition agreements with neighboring communities. Instead of pursuing the complicated action of creating an interstate district or creating a new governance structure, the SAU 7 and ENSU Boards could remain as they are and negotiate tuition agreements that provide a means of accomplishing the educational outcomes each board seeks. At the same time, the Boards could explore the possibility of sharing administrative, instructional, and specialized services either through formal contracts or arrangements achieved administratively.

Logistical Issues

In the introductory paragraph I indicated that the governance issues are "technically complicated and politically charged". Among the technical complications the ENSU and SAU 7 Boards will need to address are:

- Differences in state regulations: Vermont and New Hampshire have different regulations governing issues like Special education; school quality standards; curriculum standards; transportation, etc.
- Differences in State funding: Revenue streams vary between the states as they apply to special education, building aid, Federal aid; etc.
- Collective bargaining: There are differences in wages and benefits within each district and differences in negotiations procedures in each state.
- Debt service: In reaching any interstate agreement or modifying the governance in a fashion that creates a new district, any overhanging debt will need to be taken into consideration
- Contracts: Any extended contracts with vendors (*e.g. transportation, food services, etc*) will need to be examined.
- Legislative: Any interstate district will require legislative action in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Congress. It is conceivable that legislation might be required in one or both states if a new district is created or new form of tuition agreement is adopted.

The overarching politically charged issue is local control. Additionally, each of the issues described above incorporates a political component either internally (*e.g. collective bargaining agreements*) or externally (*e.g. involvement with parents and community members*).

As the above list indicates, changing the governance structure will require more time and more technical assistance.