

**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 23rd.

August 2, 2018 Highlights

Reggie substituting for Bob Ormsbee.

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- No ideas are bad
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- 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.

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 6th 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 4th 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 4th 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 4th 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 19th via e-mail.
 - Receive feedback from this group between the 19th-26th and identify concretely what is to be modeled in preparation for our November 1st 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 4th 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).
- 5th 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 9th 6:30-8:00 in Canaan
 - February 12th 6:30-8:00 in Colebrook
 - February 18th 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 3rd 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 3rd 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&sdata=KOI%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
 - FinancingAnd 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 7th to the 14th 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 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.