

**Community Forums
(Canaan, Stewartstown, Colebrook, Pittsburg)
Feedback to Questions**

The feedback and questions gathered from the four community forums has been great. It is interesting to note that very similar concerns and questions being asked by community members are very much in alignment with those identified by the committee prior to starting the community forums.

Most feedback relates to finances, governance, staffing, and students. The intent of this document is to respond to the more frequently asked questions that have been asked by community members.

Please keep in mind that this is a working document that will be updated and shared periodically. The responses are based on committee conversations and feedback gathered to date. Some of the responses in this document are subject to change as new information comes forward and outstanding questions are answered.

The committee would like to thank everyone that has provided feedback at one of our four forums. The forums were designed to gather your comments, questions and concerns. The committee appreciates your willing participation in this exercise as this valuable information will help shape the next steps of our work if voters approve future exploration of Model 11.

GOVERNANCE

How are school boards determined? Would there be one supervisory union? Which state would govern the school? Interstate school district or continue as independent districts? Funding for governance? Would my child retain the rights and privileges of their home state? Cooperation of states of NH and VT in reference to certifications and funding of Programs? What happens to AREA agreements?

Assuming the passage of the established article that will appear on all warrants, these are the questions that will need to be addressed by future committees. Model 11 will require a much deeper study into the possible governance structures. It will be the responsibility of a future committee to examine these alternatives. As these alternatives are examined and shared with community members it is the hope of the current committee that a best fit for this area will stand out. Most components identified in these governance questions will be evaluated.

It is to be assumed that area agreements will need to be monitored and possible reworked. A separate committee may take the responsibility of identifying state requirements to assure that course and statute compliance is met for each state. Locally established privileges such as scholarships and college acceptance will need review to assure compliance as well. Many of these 'gifts' may contain language that is specific to students that reside in certain towns, while others may have more flexibility.

Will half of Pittsburg School be closed off without a high school? Will each town be responsible for the care and maintenance of their own school? Will each school keep their own busing or will we hire a regional bus company?

Use of existing building space, maintenance, transportation, and other similar decisions will be subject to the board of the agreed upon governance structure.

How would Act 46 (VT) effect something like this?

Act 46 identified the Canaan School District as a remote school district and therefore does not require that it consolidate with any other Vermont (or New Hampshire) school. Therefore the impact of Act 46 on the local Vermont towns has already been met. NEK Choice District utilizes the ENSU administrative services as a result of ACT 46. The foundation of the Act 46 work for Vermont Schools is similar to what Model 11 will do for this region. In Vermont, forty five districts in thirty nine towns have been consolidated into 11 new union school districts.

Will the Columbia Area Agreement become void since Colebrook will no longer have a high school?

The current area agreements (Colebrook/Columbia and Pittsburg/Clarksville) will be reviewed as part of the governance discussions with legal counsel.

Will the next committee work with existing interstate districts and learn from them, rather than reinventing the wheel?

Yes, the precedents of other districts who have examined efforts like this will be viewed for potential benefits/drawbacks. Many helpful resources with this experience are out there for our assistance. There have been discussions with legal counsel (NHSBA) and he has given us the name of the attorney from Drummond and Woodsum that is the current counsel for the Rivendell School District.

Venue for concerts, graduations, etc.

All decisions regarding procedures, venues, traditions etc. will be subject to administrative/board action once a clear model has been accepted. One of the primary functions of a school board is to adopt policies that governs the procedures of the school district.

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How will technology be distributed among schools? Such as chromebooks, access points, mms, networks, etc.

This committee is not designed to make decisions regarding technology. Any influence this committee has will target providing students with the technology necessary to be competitive in the 21st century job market. Current technology will be reviewed and future needs will be identified by future boards, staff, and administration.

Do you have an example of an existing model that is similar to this framework? White Mts. Regional? St. Johnsbury Academy? Rivendell? Dresden? Windsor, VT and Claremont, NH Collaborative?

The areas mentioned all have some form of interstate cooperation. Some are recognized as full interstate school districts while others are based on a tuition model. As this process moves forward it will be important to gather feedback from these regions to assure that we are providing what is best for our communities. Legal counsel with relevant experience in cooperatives and interstate school districts will be supportive once we begin these deliberations.

FINANCES

How will this impact taxes short and long term? Equality of funding / cost sharing?

These two questions will require further review, once again assuming the passage of the article that is to appear on all warrants. Similar to the responses in the governance section, specific committees will work on this information. The two areas, governance and finance, go hand in hand as the governance structure will have significant impact on the funding side of the plan.

Are proposed numbers based on projected growth?

The proposal is based on current enrollments. The information that we are working from does not show any anticipated growth in student numbers for this area. This is actually one of the burning platforms that led to the formation of this group. Numbers have been on the decline for most towns creating smaller class sizes.

Will a budget analysis be presented before voting?

Yes. Once the governance question is answered and staffing needs are finalized then a budget analysis should be included in a final presentation to voters.

What if North Country population doesn't increase?

This plan is proposed in anticipation that the local population will continue to decline.

Where do cost savings come from?

The majority of anticipated cost savings will come from reduction in staff. The areas to reduce have not been identified and will require further review. Some of these reductions will also be determined by the governance structure that is put in place.

Why not close more buildings?

Closing a building was one of the final three models that the committee examined. The proposed plan allows for early elementary aged students to attend elementary school in close proximity to their residence. It is also important to note that the committee felt that a school in each town was best.

Who pays for building improvements?

The committee feels that there may be funds available for the initial building improvements. Future improvements could be a result of the governance structure that is put in place.

STAFF

Teacher Certification (two states), health insurance, professional development? How will you determine who keeps their job? Union impact? Would teachers have to reapply? Will NH teachers working in VT have to pay VT taxes? How will severance pay be funded for staff/faculty losing their jobs?

The questions above will require advice from legal counsel once again assuming that the warrant article is passed. Superintendent Conroy and Superintendent Beasley recently submitted an application to the North Country Charitable Foundation for funds to support the legal fees associated with these issues.

How will staff/faculty redundancies be handled?

The first step is to determine the number of staff necessary to provide a high quality education to all children. Once there is a clear picture of staffing needs then we can begin the process of reducing staff in areas where there is duplication. The reductions will be guided by feedback from legal counsel as some faculty works under a negotiated agreement while others do not.

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What will happen with counselors? Students have built trusting relationships?

This is always a concern when there is a change in school counselors. This same scenario occurs when there is a retirement or resignation in the local school. There will be transition time before new relationships are built. This is to be expected.

Teachers will not want to manage larger class sizes.

It is anticipated that class sizes and staffing numbers will be aligned with state and federal recommendations. Current class sizes are typically small, many are combined grade levels at the elementary level while many of the high school courses have limited enrollment.

Were all teachers interviewed?

Teachers have given input into ways to improve education in the area. They have answered questions that get at things like what are they proud of and how can education be improved? In terms of sitting one to one with every staff member, that has not happened. In advance of Model 11 being publicized, all staffs were made aware of Model 11 and the impacts as they currently exist.

Will there be “caps” on salary?

Anything to do with staffing such as salaries, benefits, union rights, etc are all to be discovered at a later date once a clearer governance structure is identified.

Could the committee put together a student/teacher ratio for all grades?

Yes. The committee will look at student teacher ratios as the process moves forward and staffing determinations will be based on the identified student/teacher ratios.

STUDENTS

Will students have the same scholarship opportunities crossing borders?

This is an area that will need to be examined as many scholarships have specific criteria built into the award. Some of these are specific to the donor, some are specific to state, and some are specific to federal guidelines.

How will local graduation awards be handled? How will class ranks be effected for high school students?

Similar to previous question, there may be guidelines to follow. There is also some room for local policy and procedure that will come into play regarding areas like graduation, class rank, and other honors/recognition.

What makes this option more attractive for my Errol student than sending him to Berlin or Gorham?

The model will allow for the design of a comprehensive high school. Dual enrollment, Career Technical Education, numerous co-curricular offerings, ample extra-curricular options, and a high quality Division IV school is possible. The proposed location is still fairly close in distance compared to Berlin/Gorham.

Where would students at SCS have PE, Music, Art?

Again this is a scheduling issue that will be worked on but courses like Music and Art could still take place at Stewartstown Community School. Physical education opportunities can take place at the school or via travel to a larger gym. This will need to be discussed further once a decision is made.

School climate issues – bullying

Policies are developed that specify how bullying is to be handled in schools. If any parent feels that their child has been bullied it needs to be brought directly to the teacher/administrators attention. It will be the work of staff and administration to create a culture/climate that is free from bullying.

Why does one child have to go to different schools?

This appears to be a natural consequence of any form of combining grade levels and schools. There is going to be give and take to make any model work.

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Transportation? How would it work? Children in one family attending different schools? Logistics and cost? Amount of time on the bus? After school program/activities transportation? All NEK Canaan Elementary students will lose busing in model 11? Will SAU 7 continue to bus these kids? Will busing become universal for the NEK kids on both sides of the river? Losing their busing will be a hardship on the families who rely on it currently.

Transportation is another one of those things that will need a deeper dive to gather specific bus routes, distances and time spent on the bus. Students being transported from NEK Choice school to any of the possible schools will need further exploration.

If a grade 5 student goes to middle school, do they still need a parent to meet the bus?

This is another area that will be addressed in the established procedures and policies.

How does this proposal increase opportunities for our younger students? Concern: Decreased opportunities for younger children i.e., enrichment, clubs, sports, town library activities they won't be able to take part of

Areas such as band, shared staff, coordination of after school activities etc. can lead to additional opportunities for younger students. The committee believes that there will be similar opportunities to those that exist currently. Creating an aligned curriculum for our younger learners was noted as important in the committee discussions. There is also the potential to explore a middle school model within the schools.

In regard to athletics it has been discussed within the committee that a regional effort will increase the number of athletic offerings (i.e. golf) and limit the number of athletes that are participating on multiple teams in the same season (i.e. J.H., J.V., and Varsity). It is important to note that by combining at the high school level the school will still be classified as a Division IV program. Nothing will rally communities more than winning kids and winning programs!

How can we believe in the potential for stronger activities such as band, chorus, clubs, etc in a few years when those activities are being cut back now?

By increasing the number of students within the grade levels, it is the committees' belief that it will increase the number of kids that participate in band, chorus, clubs, etc.

How will placement of middle school students be determined?

This is an area that will need continued study. The model calls for a similar number of students in each building. How that division occurs and where is the best line for division will need additional time.

Will there be duplication of programs between the 3 elementary schools and if not, will students be allowed to attend programs at other schools?

Another area that requires continued study. The committee sees positives in developing a schedule so that all PK-4 students have access to a common curriculum and additional offerings.

Title I Services - What would special education programs look like? i.e., where would services be provided?

These are federal programs and will require the continuation of all identified services. How those services will be delivered and how many staff members will be required to deliver the services will be part of future conversations regarding staffing and programming.

Will there be more or better resources for diverse learning rates in the same grade/class? Larger classes are not always beneficial. What will happen to more advanced elementary/middle school students who would benefit from access to high school classes but will now be in different buildings?

Being able to provide an education that is guided by individual learner needs is important in any system. It is the belief of the committee that we will have staff that is able to differentiate instruction at all levels so these concerns will be addressed.

Why can't we just focus on the high school and leave other grades as is?

As the committee worked through the models, a main area of focus was to keep school enrollments similar to their current population. The current proposal creates a High School/CTE center in Canaan which requires the elementary students to be placed elsewhere.

Have you gathered input from the students as it affects them? Why haven't teachers and students at Stewartstown been spoke to about this?

As was identified in an earlier question the Stewartstown staff has had similar opportunities as staff members in the other schools. The committee has not met with middle school aged students but it will be placed on a future agenda of an upcoming committee meeting.

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Why is grade 5 included in the middle school structure - not typical?

Having grade 5 as part of a middle school, while not common, does occur. The makeup of a school is often dictated by population or enrollment. In Model 11, in order to keep a like number of students in their school, we needed to have grade 5 in with grades 6, 7, and 8. The current school structures have grade 5 students with other middle school grades.

What if a high school student in Vermont wants to go to UNH? What impact, if any, will NH students attending high school in Vermont have on available scholarships and grants?

Any student regardless of state has the option to attend UNH. In-state tuition is based on residency not location of the high school. Similarly, scholarship awards are already subject to existing criteria regarding residency, academic requirements etc. The location of the high school does not change the criteria by which most scholarships are awarded. For example, NH students currently graduate from Canaan High School and are eligible to receive awards for NH students. Similarly students from area towns in Vermont have been awarded state specific awards like UVM's Green and Gold Scholarship while attending school in New Hampshire. A district with students from both states may in fact provide more opportunity for scholarships and awards, not less.

Why are we not utilizing media to offer classes online?

We do offer courses online at all three of the local high schools. Many of these are dual enrollment courses, through local technical schools, colleges and universities, while others are courses that meet the requirements of a high school diploma. An online learning environment requires significant self discipline and has proven to be effective for some and challenging for others.

Grading systems different between Canaan and SAU 7

This is another area that will be addressed in future conversations that involve staff, parents, administration, and school boards.

Will current Canaan Elementary kids in their ski program continue to have it available to them?

This will be a decision of school administration and the board. Programs like, Learn to Ski, are valuable programs in all schools and the hope is that programs like this become available to every student in the area.

MISCELLANEOUS

Proposed schedule for regionalization

If the article is approved at each of the local meetings then a reorganization of the committee and timeline of the work will be discussed and planned.

What building modifications are needed?

Canaan has an existing architectural design completed by TRH Design. This design, termed The Connector Addition, links the elementary section of the school to the high school section of the school. ADA compliance, updated office space, traffic flow, and security concerns are accounted for in this plan.

Do school buildings meet safety and handicap standards?

A formal audit of compliance concerns will be conducted and a plan to remediate any issues will be a part of the future work.

What factors led to selection of Model 11 - need transparency?

Model 11 provided each school with a similar number of students as currently attend. By compressing the grade levels at each building it creates larger, more diverse, class sizes. Model 11 keeps an elementary school within 10 miles for 95% of the students and 99% of high school students will be within 20 miles of the Canaan School. The committee also feels that Model 11 has the most potential to maintain local agreements, retain choice students and potentially attract additional students from those same regions. There were 2 other models that received votes as potential solutions. After consideration and a near majority vote of the committee, it was determined that time would be best spent focusing on Model 11.

Why do we need 3 Pre-Ks?

The committee feels that a local Pre-K offering is critical to the early development of our youngest learners. Keeping the youngest learners close to home was an identified goal of committee members.

Could there be designated space in the newspaper for future articles/updates/information to prevent misinformation from circulating?

All committee meeting minutes are forwarded to both the News and Sentinel as well as the Colebrook Chronicle. Forums are open to the public and therefore are subject to the interpretation of any media that is present.

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What will happen to the Colebrook Academy building?

For the most part this is a Colebrook School Board decision. They have received feedback from a community committee that has identified some possible uses if it becomes a vacant site.

What happens if one or more towns vote "no"?

The possibility exists that the approving towns will choose to move forward with the discussion. The committee hopes all communities choose to explore the impact of governance, finance, staff impact, and the opportunities of Model 11 at a deeper level – together!

Splitting families not good

The committee understands that this will be an adjustment for some families. Transitioning students between schools is not uncommon in other districts and the committee feels that by working together we can overcome the challenges that this presents.

How do we get parents to become one community?

Thanks to the person that identified this as an important issue. While we understand local traditions and how difficult other community decisions can be to overcome, the committee believes that a regional education effort can be a significant influence in the revitalization of the North Country.

Why would two schools go to Canaan when Canaan could go to one?

Having high school students under one roof will provide the best opportunity to increase class size, narrow the opportunity gap, and limit the competition for resources and staff. Transportation and geography were influential to committee members in identifying Canaan as the location for our learners from grades 9-12. Canaan is the identified as the Region I CTE Center for students in this region.

Why aren't questions being answered from prior meetings?

Community forums were designed to identify questions and to hear community concerns. This document will be updated and available to community members at future forums, on school websites and via local news outlets once the forums are complete. The committee is concerned with transparency and wants to assure all community members that we are dedicated to this process with the intention of improving education for every student regardless of zip code.

Superintendents should be adversaries not advocates for an agenda

As leaders of education it is imperative that superintendents participate in the process to improve education. Early in the process the board chairs recognized that hiring a Project Manager was critical. This assured that a neutral process with a clear code of ethics would be followed.

Why are there teachers on the Committee when there was not supposed to be?

This committee is comprised of community members. Teachers are an important part of their community. The established guidelines provided for up to 3 community members from each district. It was recommended that the representation be comprised of one board member, one community member and a third member of the boards' choice. There were no restrictions placed on profession or occupation.

If you are considering renaming any school, will there be a vote?

Yes. The committee is aware that this is an important piece of this process.

Too little research to present as an option

The committee spent a considerable amount of time touring buildings, examining travel distances, meeting with students and staff, and gathering feedback from community members. This committee has met regularly (30+) since it formed in June of 2018. The committee does feel that Model 11 has been adequately vetted to the point that it deserves a deeper review in the months ahead. Community members are accurate that there are unanswered questions that must be answered before any binding decision is to be made. The regional committee knows that community questions and concerns will require additional time. They are really trying to gauge the interest of the communities in this as a "Big Idea" before spending time and resources getting into the weeds on the details.

Any members of the committee have experience with building, inspection, engineering, etc.

The committee does not have any professional engineers or building inspectors. Each building included in Model 11 is currently in compliance with their state established guidelines.

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Can you provide a list of committee members?

Sheli Aldridge, Bruce Beasley, Sally Biron, Chris Brady, Kristin Brooks, Karen Conroy, Skip Covell, Kyle Daley, Michel Dionne, Tami Frechette, Miles Etter, Richard Judd, Brian Laperle, Bob Ormsbee, Philip Pariseau, Frank Sawicki, Dan Wade, Sharon Ellingwood-White.

How much power do the sub-committees have?

Please keep in mind that this committee is an appointed committee by each of the school boards. Current sub-committees as well as future sub-committees will report to the larger committee regarding all findings and research. It is expected that at some point a final proposal will ultimately make its way to the voters through their locally elected school board.

Parking in Canaan is a concern

This will be addressed in future planning as the sub-committee also identified parking as limited on the Canaan campus.

Why did the PowerPoint presentation only include the positive aspects of Model 11 and none of the negatives?

Our original slide-deck did not include cons when we started the forums in Canaan. The committee realizes that this would have been a valuable addition. As the forums have progressed, it is clear that the cons identified by community members are in alignment with those of the committee. These cons included high school building improvements, decreasing staff, travel, and building utilization.

What is the biggest opposition to regionalizing the North Country Schools and how do we eliminate that opposition?

This is tough to answer but from the forums we have held already, it appears that communities are concerned with their local school and how does this impact that school for the long term. Community members have been clear that they want to see the financials, travel impact, job loss, and governance for this model and how it will impact their town. Concern has also been raised regarding the renovation work in Canaan and who will be responsible for paying for this work.

It is the hope of the committee that by providing transparent answers to the identified obstacles and opposition we can meet the burning platform of this committee which is to increase students opportunities at a reasonable rate to taxpayers.

Why weren't other models brought forward to the public (such as the top 5 being considered)?

After numerous sub-committee meetings and group deliberation, three of the twenty three models were endorsed by at least one member of the committee. One of the models included closing Stewartstown Community School while the other was deemed to have too much impact on students that live in the fringe areas due to travel distances. This left Model 11 as the clear standout option. Therefore, committee members made a near unanimous decision to focus their work and energy on Model 11.

The question at the Town Meeting is "shall the voters.....only consider Model 11? Versus what?? Status quo?

Status quo is an option if towns are not interested in moving this conversation forward for deeper details. According to the attorney that drafted this article it also allows committees and boards to adjust Model 11 prior to presenting it to citizens for a binding vote at a future date. The reshaping of Model 11 would be based on input and questions being gathered at these forums as well as future committee work.

If the vote in March is "in favor of going forward", will that make consolidation a done deal?

No. The vote in March will allow the communities to exam at a deeper level and make necessary adjustments to Model 11. Going forward will allow future committees to answer the questions that surround things like governance, finances, and staffing.

What happens to NH State Titles with sports? No varsity sports in NH...no state title.

NHIAA recognizes Canaan as a competing school in New Hampshire sports. Therefore students in this region will remain a Division IV level school in NHIAA sponsored tournaments. The Executive Director for NHIAA was asked this question when our journey started last year.

At this time Colebrook will be busing 50% of the high school students to Canaan. Looking at the upcoming school enrollments in each school, that will climb greatly. Why would Colebrook bus its children greater distances, increasing our costs and putting our students on the road for longer periods of time, allowing for less time to participate in extracurricular activities?

Colebrook and Columbia make up nearly 50% of the students that will attend Canaan. The location in Canaan is geographically centered, places CTE/High School on one campus, and places extra and co-curriculars under one roof. The committee placed a premium on student opportunities and feels that Model 11 delivers on that premium.

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Can you still snowmobile to Canaan school without double registration?

The school departments have no influence over the laws that govern snowmobile use in neither New Hampshire or Vermont. According to the New Hampshire Bureau of Trails page, machines registered in either state may operate on all commerce trails and Canaan Schools are located on the commerce trail.

Why is there no representation on the committee from the Pittsburg School Board?

Initially there were two members of the Pittsburg School Board on this committee. They chose to leave the committee at different times. Over the course of the meetings a few members have determined that due to other commitments and conflicts (time/personal etc.) they were unable to continue. The committee determined that it was not in the best interest of the mission to allow members to be replaced once the work was in full swing.

If there is an unruly committee member, why aren't they being relieved of their duties?

The committee spent considerable time in the beginning determining a Code of Ethics that all members would be expected to follow. The committee worked hard to hold others accountable to this agreed upon code. Any perceived breaches were addressed by the full membership.

Is Model 11 able to be modified if we do approve further study?

If Model 11 is approved, the committee anticipates that there will be adjustments and tweaks to the proposal. After consulting with the attorney that wrote the article, it has been clarified that this is allowable.

What if Canaan stayed PreK-8 for Canaan and Stewartstown and Stewartstown School was expanded for the high school?

One of the identified goals of the committee was to minimize any new construction and to utilize existing rooftops. The committee focused on existing high schools and identified Canaan for three reasons. Canaan already exists as a high school, has the most potential to offer HS/CTE programs in one location, and it is located closest to the geographic center of the region.