

**MSAD #61 Reorganization Ad Hoc Committee
Recommendation to School Board
Alternate Plan Format
November 5, 2007**

Summary

The purpose of this document is to provide a recommendation to the School Board on the content of the alternate plan which is due to be filed on December 1, 2007.

The committee met on November 2, 2007 and reaffirmed the following points...

1. No other districts are currently interested in merging with SAD #61.
2. The potential merger of SAD #55, #72 and #61 did not look like a strong match from the committee's perspective anyway. Cost savings were projected to be minimal, geographic barriers appeared significant and the mechanics of implementing the merger appeared quite complex.
3. Developing our own plan to reduce cost while continuing to stand alone as a district appears to be the best path to achieving our three objectives of maximizing educational quality, minimizing cost and maintaining local involvement.
4. However, it is important to understand that the alternate plan is not a path of business as usual. The quantity of cost that must be reduced from the district is significant. The core issue is not the consolidation legislation. The core issue is that the State of Maine is reducing its funding to our district in what we must anticipate to be permanent ways. No district in Maine has lost more funding under the new EPS subsidy model than SAD #61. This loss of funds is occurring at the same time that cost and complexity of providing educational services is rising and that residents of our district are becoming increasingly agitated over rising property taxes. Simply put, we are in a perfect storm. Tinkering around the edges will not achieve the necessary cost savings results.
5. Therefore, SAD #61 needs to move decisively to restructure the delivery of educational services to the students of our district in a manner that reduces significant cost.
6. The number of facilities in our district is a much bigger driver of cost than the size of our district. The fastest and most meaningful way to reduce cost is to consolidate operations into fewer, bigger schools and to reduce the number of facilities that are managed, staffed and maintained by the district.
7. As a result, on Friday November 2, 2007 the Reorganization Ad Hoc Committee passed by a vote of 8-1-1 the following recommendation to the School Board...

Committee Recommendation

- 1. That expense reductions in the 2008-09 school year be targeted to reduce “system administration” costs approximately \$280,000 to meet the EPS subsidy of \$204 per student.**
- 2. That a formal strategic alliance be created in 2008 with other districts in the region through participation in coalitions such as the Sebago Alliance.**
- 3. That a facility consolidation plan be presented to the voters of the district for approval in 2008. The object of the plan is to reduce the number of facilities in the district from nine to five or six by the 2010-2011 school year.**

Specifically, the committee recommends eliminating the superintendent’s office, selling the property and consolidating the office into the existing high school or middle school. The committee also recommends reducing the number of elementary schools in the district to two or three. Finally, the committee recommends selling or transferring ownership of the old Casco Elementary School and Bridgton High School properties.
- 4. Should a merger partner (or partners) surface in the future, the district should be receptive to re-examining the consolidation option for possible synergy and cost savings.**

Closing Thoughts

1. School Board Chair Brook Sulloway and I met with Department of Education Commissioner Susan Gendron at her office of October 30, 2007 to review this alternate plan with her personally.
2. The Reorganization Ad Hoc Committee does not bring forth these recommendations lightly. The committee has over 1,000 hours of work invested in this effort since July and has worked diligently to come to terms with the magnitude of the issue and to explore all possible alternatives. In the end, our committee did not believe we would be serving the citizens of the district well by softening the message or down playing the challenge. We believe that the best path for the future lies in confronting the reality of our situation head on.
3. The committee also proactively believes that fewer facilities could be more than just a cost cutting imperative. The committee believes that fewer facilities to manage, maintain and supervise could, in the long run, actually be an optimal platform from which to control and strengthen the quality of education in our district.

4. Finally, the committee believes that its recommendation will help accelerate a necessary and healthy discussion and decision making process on the part of our community regarding the future of public education. Simply put, it is not possible to 'keep everything the same' and cut cost at the same time.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kevin Hancock
Committee Chair