

**KEENE BOARD OF EDUCATION
STEERING COMMITTEE
KEENE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

**JANUARY 23, 2012
4:00 – 6:00 p.m.
Conference Room 100
193 Maple Avenue**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Wayne Woolridge - Chair, Kristin Blais, Neil Donegan, Carl Panza, Gwen Mitchell, Cathy Doane, Celia Slason, Rand Lounsbury, Maureen Meyer, Bill Harris, Patty Yoerger, Misty Martinez-Bohannon, Richard Cate, Paul Huggins, Bill Gurney, Meredith Cargill (left at 4:30 p.m.)

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Chris Coates, Amy Strong, Jennifer DeCoste

OTHERS PRESENT:

Press (1)

Britta Reida, Stenographer

1. Call to Order

Mr. Woolridge called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. He welcomed everyone and spoke of the complexity of the work to be done. He stated that it is difficult to get people to consider a system-wide change with so many variables. The Ad Hoc Committee has done a great job putting it all together. The community has been very generous and supportive of education and everyone wants that to continue. He hopes this committee will continue the open transparent process established by the elementary ad hoc committee.

2. Elect Committee Chair

Mr. Harris nominated Mr. Woolridge to be Chair. Mr. Cate seconded the nomination. Given there were no other nominations, Mr. Woolridge accepted.

3. Petition Warrant Articles

Mr. Woolridge stated that two Warrant Articles were added by petition:

*We, the following registered voters of the City of Keene, submit the following warrant article to be inserted in the warrant for the 2012 annual meeting of the Keene School District. **Shall the Keene School District discontinue the use of the Jonathan Daniels facility as an elementary school?***

*We, the following registered voters of the City of Keene, submit the following warrant article to be inserted in the warrant for the 2012 annual meeting of the Keene School District. **Shall the***

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Keene School District restructure the existing K-5 grade span configuration and convert the four (4) remaining schools into a split grade elementary structure?

He stated that this is an opportunity for the Steering Committee to discuss whether or how the Articles might influence the committee's work. He continued that it is important for the Steering Committee to have a sense of an agreed upon decision, even if there is not a consensus.

Ms. Blais replied that the Board had decided not to put the questions [from Articles 15 and 16] on the ballot this year because they felt it was too big and important of a decision to make without having more answers to the questions. They did not want to ask people to go out on a limb without all the information. The Board wanted people to make an informed choice after the Steering Committee completed their work. That is still what she thinks the public needs, but citizens legitimately put the article on the ballot, as is their right. Legally, the Articles are advisory and not binding. But it is tricky. What exactly are people voting on? A "no" vote on closing the Jonathan Daniels School (JD) could mean no to closing JD but yes to closing something else, or no to closing any elementary school, or no because the person voting does not have all the answers to the questions. She will vote yes on both. She thinks a yes vote means the work is worth continuing so people can make an informed choice in a year. A yes vote doesn't mean "Let's get our shovels out and set to work," it means that the work so far is compelling enough to pursue further. It will be really confusing, and she does not know what the impact will be and how people will vote.

Mr. Lounsbury asked if that could be clarified on the ballot. Chair Woolridge replied that at the first session, articles could be amended.

Mr. Panza stated that the topics of Warrant Articles 15 and 16 have been studied for three years, and he does not want there to be paralysis for the sake of more analysis. He continued that even if the Steering Committee answers all of the public's questions, they will just come back with more. If their minds are set, the committee's good data and logic does not work. They have a right to put this on the warrant, but the committee needs to move forward.

Ms. Meyer stated that her frustration is the same as Ms. Blais' - what does the vote actually mean to the public? She continued that she does not think these articles necessarily speak to people's issues. She could not interpret the articles to have any real meaning.

Mr. Harris stated that Warrant Articles 15 and 16 are a distraction from the hard work that needs to be done. He continued that people need to look at what is happening in government in Washington and Concord, and give the Board credit for looking ahead and preparing Keene for declining revenue. Instead of slashing programming or raising taxes, the Board is being responsible and planning for changes. The committee should stay focused on that and let the chips fall where they may in regard to the Warrant Articles.

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4. Review Steering Committee Charge

Chair Woolridge stated that this work is at a mid-point. The timeline thus far has been:

August: The Board voted yes to the Elementary Ad Hoc Advisory Committee's recommendation to close an elementary school and move to a narrow grade span configuration. The Board asked for clarification.

October: Administration presented the clarification.

November: Community Forum was held.

December: The Board agreed to move the process forward and to create the Steering Committee.

January: This is the first meeting of the Steering Committee.

Chair Woolridge stated that there will be several subcommittees, which are necessary due to the level of detail that is needed. At every Steering Committee meeting, the subcommittees will give reports. He continued that sometime soon, maybe in late February, the Steering Committee would decide on the grade span options. Sometime in May, there should be a Public Forum to gather input. In June, they would make a preliminary recommendation to the Board. They would gather more public input in September. In October, they would have to give a detailed plan to the Board, to move forward with the bond. The warrant article would be on the March 2013 ballot. Then there would be two years to get the buildings/construction done. There may be unforeseen obstacles but that is the tentative schedule. The new configuration would start the fall of 2014.

Ms. Blais stated that when the Board last moved this forward, the Board really was supporting the idea of pursuing what it would look like to go with a narrow grade span option. The Board also was aware of a strong feeling in the community that the wide grade span option had not sufficiently been presented. Even though the Board may feel that there will be more advantages to one than the other, the public will have a hard time going with that without clearly seeing both options. The Board felt that they had to get more detail on both options. The Ad Hoc Committee recommended the grade span of K-1, 2-5. The public then expressed strong opinions that a K-3, 4-5 split would be better. This committee needs to figure out which option would be best. Mr. Farkas, of Marinace Architects, hopes to have a draft this week of what the K-3, 4-5 split would look like in the buildings. Then this committee needs to come up with a process by which they determine which option is best. There are examples of both in the State.

Ms. Blais stated that the three options are:

1. Wide grade span, K-5
- 2A. Narrow grade span, K-1 and 2-5
- 2B. Narrow grade span, K-3 and 4-5

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Ms. Blais continued that the Ad Hoc Committee recommended 2A and did not really talk about the other options. The public was strongly vocal about preferring 2B. Chair Woolridge stated that Mr. Farkas's presentation will be the big item on the next agenda.

Mr. Panza asked about Mr. Farkas's opinion on the grade span options. Ms. Blais and Ms. Mitchell replied that Mr. Farkas does not care either way, because his recommendations are about space only. Educational benefits are not his purview.

Mr. Donegan asked if Mr. Farkas will say how much it would cost to keep 5 schools open. Ms. Blais replied that that is already in the report. Mr. Donegan asked if keeping the 5th school open just for Preschool would be an option to consider. Ms. Blais replied yes, that is one of the options, if it costs less to do that than to create an addition elsewhere for Preschool. The committee briefly discussed the logistics of this. Ms. Blais reminded the group to be careful how they talk about the issues when there are so many variables in the air, so they do not spread misinformation and make it possible for rumors to spread. Chair Woolridge agreed and stated that if anyone outside of this committee asks for details, we should remind them the committee is in the formative stage of decision making.

Mr. Donegan expressed concerns about the timeline of bringing a plan to the Board in October. Chair Woolridge replied that the next meeting's main focus is facilities/Mr. Farkas's presentation, at the following meeting they will try to choose a grade span configuration. Other decisions can be made later. For example, the Preschool question might not need to be decided in March. They need to get the subcommittees focused. That gives April and May to come to conclusions and get Marinace Architects working on costs, and get input from community. Mr. Harris suggested that once the committee decides on a grade span option, they have another Public Forum. Chair Woolridge replied that there is a little money left for communications, which they could use to help publicize the Public Forum.

Ms. Blais replied that the work on the K-5 piece can begin tomorrow. The committee needs to decide which narrow grade span options they need to work on, and what the primary elements of that option are that need to be addressed. She spoke of how tricky and complicated the narrow grade span configurations are, in terms of optimization, schedules, specials, equity, etc. What are the guiding principles? How do they figure it out and optimize it?

Mr. Lounsbury replied that the Ad Hoc Committee already struggled with the grade span options quite a bit. He continued that it seems redundant to reopen this conversation when they already recommended the narrow grade span. Ms. Yoerger stated that keeping a wide grade span eliminates the need for some of this work, and some questions. Ms. Blais replied that it would bring up other questions.

Enrollment is an area to focus on ASAP. Transportation conversations can begin. He will distribute the questions the Board and administration has received from the public so far, to help the subcommittees with their work.

Ms. Blais stated that she was thinking that by March the committee would know which narrow grade span option (2A or 2B) to consider, but would not yet have chosen narrow grade span or wide grade span. She continued that she thinks the committee could look at 2 options for a while longer, but not 3. [1 and 2A, or 1 and 2B, but not 1 and 2A and 2B].

Ms. Yoerger stated that even though the committee is waiting to hear from Marinace Architects at the Feb. 13 meeting, they could start looking at other things in the meantime. Ms. Blais replied yes, their decision needs to be based not just on facilities, but on which option is best educationally. People can start generating those educational reasonings now. Mr. Donegan reminded everyone to also keep cost issues in the backs of their minds.

5. Establish Steering Committee Meeting Schedule

Chair Woolridge stated that there were scheduling conflicts for the first and third Mondays, so this committee will be meeting on the second and fourth Mondays, which work for most people. Meetings will be from 4 to 6 PM here in Conference Room 100 of the SAU Offices. When members are unable to attend a meeting, they can keep up via the minutes.

6. Establish Representatives to Subcommittees

Chair Woolridge indicated the papers on the wall which listed the subcommittees and their initial members, and a list of people from the community who want to be involved in this work and can be placed into subcommittees. Each subcommittee will have a Chair and can set its own meeting schedule.

The committee discussed which subcommittees they wanted to be a part of, and where to place the interested community members. People can change subcommittee assignments by contacting Mr. Woolridge. The committee also defined the work of each committee.

Curriculum Subcommittee

Work: Designing numeracy/literacy-focused curriculum for the K-1 or K-3 schools if a narrow grade span is chosen, explaining the educational benefits of the narrow grade span to the public, making sure the curriculum stays strong and on track during students' transitions to sister schools

Members: Meredith Cargill, Chair; Maureen Meyer; Bill Gurney; Jennifer Antosiewicz; Carrah Fisk Hennessey; Peter Siegel; John Bass; Jerimiah Miller; Jennifer DeCoste

Transportation, Redistricting, and Enrollment Subcommittee

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Work: determine the bus schedule, look at what amount of time students will be spending on busses, look at redistricting issues/where the Jonathan Daniels population would go if the school closed.

Members: Bill Harris, Chair; Kristin Blais; Misty Martinez-Bohannon; Carl Panza; Bill Gurney; Matt Carey

Transitions Subcommittee

Work: determining where the Jonathan Daniels students would go once that school closed, figuring out how to make the transitions to sister schools as smooth as possible, figuring out the Preschool to Kindergarten transition.

Members: Celia Slason, Chair; Cathy Doane; Becky Russell; Amy Pierce; Mari Fauth; Lucinda Kirk; Amy Strong

Staffing/Scheduling Subcommittee

Work: Figuring out where the Jonathan Daniels staff members go, if that school closes; figuring out how to do specials; making sure staff understands each plan and is involved/engaged; looking at class size policy; looking at numbers of each type of employee and the costs; looking at instructional time guidelines; staggering the start and end times of the school day.

Members: Dick Cate, Chair; Maureen Meyer; Paul Cooper; Paul Huggins; Patty Yoerger; Peg Hartz, Brenda Haenchen

Special Education Subcommittee

Work: How will special education services be delivered under the new model? How will delivery be impacted by a narrow grade span? What will happen with the collaboratives?

Members: Rand Lounsbury, Chair; Cathy Woods; Patty Yoerger; Joanne Mulligan; Mikki Stitham; Christine Mousseau

Facilities Subcommittee

Work: Look at the architectural/facility studies, create a bond that would be eligible for Building Aid, talk about building repurposing for Jonathan Daniels, figure out where Preschool goes.

Members: Gwen Mitchell, Chair; Neil Donegan; Rich Beard; Tom Remillard; Bill Gurney; Chris Coates

7. Review Previously Raised Questions and Issues

Chair Woolridge stated that members of the community had many questions in the following categories: curriculum, transportation and redistricting, facilities, enrollment, Special Education, building repurposing, and staffing/scheduling. He distributed a handout with all of the questions, broken up into categories, and asked for feedback.

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Feedback was as follows:

Curriculum:

Question 1 belongs in “Transitions.” Question 2 belongs in “Transportation.” Question 3 should ask, “How will specials *time* be affected,” and it should be placed to both Curriculum and Staffing subcommittees. Move question 4 to “Staffing/Scheduling.” Question 6 is basically the same as question 5.

Transportation and Redistricting:

Question 5, about Keene students’ demographics, can refer either to students’ geographical locations or their socio-economic status/participation in the free and reduced lunch program. Sensitivity is required, but socioeconomics cannot be ignored, because it means ignoring equity. The socioeconomic disparity needs to be addressed, otherwise it will be perpetuated. When the schools are reconfigured, and the socioeconomic mix is a little better, kids and teachers all benefit. It is public knowledge that 2 elementary schools are becoming Title One schools. Having a narrow grade span would separates/mix those schools. The Transportation and Redistricting Subcommittee will need to look at the free and reduced lunch ratios that are created in each option (1, 2A, 2B). They can look at subsidized housing, data that is public. It should be done as anonymously as possible, with broad generalizations. The committee might see identifying addresses, but no one else needs that level of detail.

Facilities:

Question 11 is more of a Board conversation. Move question 17 to the Redistricting Subcommittee. Move question 18 to the Enrollment Subcommittee. Delete question 19.

Enrollment:

Question 4 has already been dealt with and is off the table, but the Facilities Subcommittee can do the financials and give the cost of this to explain why it is off the table.

Special Education:

There are many questions from Preschool staff. They have concerns with not just the classrooms and a continuously increasing population, but also their substandard working spaces. Special Education and Preschool conversations go together.

Building Repurposing:

The answer to question 2 is about a million dollars annually. That is a conservative number based on the current plan. Some people mistakenly thought it would be a one-time savings, but it is annual. Other people are skeptical that the annual savings will be a million dollars, but Mr. Farkas’ work on this was very thorough. He has enormous Excel spreadsheets with every single position in the district. Once the Steering Committee can get down to 2 options, those Excel

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spreadsheets can be used at a much finer level of detail. Then a number will be much more specific. The savings will not be less than a million dollars per year.

The committee discussed class size policy. Ms. Blais stated that teachers' fears are that the current policy – of aiming for “up to 25” students in grades 4 and 5 – means that a narrow grade span configuration will result in classes of maybe even 26 or 27 kids. She continued that she brought this up at a recent Board meeting and stated that that was not the Board's intention, and that it was an issue, and they need to figure out if they can enact this plan, which is about efficiencies and equity, not large class sizes. When Mr. Farkas did his documents, he built in capacity of 10%. He divided 4th and 5th graders by approximately 22.5, and divided Kindergarteners through third graders by 18. The question is how to find a better balance that will help people feel better about 22 or 23 4th and 5th graders, versus 27. The current policy technically allows for 27 but that really concerns people, thinking that maybe a future Board would suggest that 27 kids in 5th grade is fine. People want assurance that that is not the point. It needs to be talked about somewhere, along with an awareness of the facilities implication. So a policy could come in that says to strive for 23 instead of 25, although she does not know exactly how to do it.

Mr. Donegan agreed. He stated that some classrooms built at Symonds and Fuller might be larger than normal, so if it is necessary to have classes of 26 or 27 they would at least be in bigger classrooms. Ms. Yoerger stated that the JD classrooms are sometimes much smaller than others. She continued that the goal is increased efficiency, and closing the gap between the classes with 14 students and 25 students, without increasing the class size beyond 25. People like the current class size guidelines. Ms. Blais clarified that she was suggesting reducing the class sizes, actually, not increasing them.

8. Future Agenda Items

a. Reports from Subcommittees

Chair Woolridge stated that the Marinace Architects study, and the pros and cons to various grade span models, will be on the next meeting's agenda. He continued that there will also be reports from any subcommittees that have done something, if any are up and running by then. Subcommittees do not need to keep meeting minutes, but the subcommittee Chairs should have someone at least take notes. Chair Woolridge continued that he will soon email everyone the subcommittee lists along with members' contact information.

Mr. Panza asked what the Chairs' responsibilities are. Chair Woolridge replied that the Chairs should schedule subcommittee meetings, chair the subcommittee meetings and report out at the steering committee meetings. Mr. Harris added that what worked well with the Ad Hoc Committee was establishing at the outset if there are any absolute rules you have to apply to your work. He continued that an example of a rule might be “Work loads of art teachers should be

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comparable at schools.” Mr. Lounsbury added that subcommittees should think of guiding principles.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:08 PM.

Respectfully Submitted by,
Britta Reida, Stenographer

APPROVED: 2/13/12