

**FRANKLIN SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LIBRARY
March 29, 2016
6:00pm**

Present: Tim Magnant, Chairperson, Thomas Gates, Bob Berger. Joyce Hakey, Principal, Winton Goodrich, Superintendent, Becky Hart, Business Manager, Pierrette Bouchard, School Board Secretary

Others present: Community members attended the 7pm Act 46 Public Information. The following community members asked a question or commented at the meeting: Jay Denault, Bob Irish, Steven Plouff, Yvon Dandurand, Ed Rainville, Doug Clark, Jean Richard, George Godin, Nat Worman, Jim Jewett, Peter Magnant, Sue Clark, Clark Hubbard, Mark Racine, Suzanne Hull

AGENDA

Call Meeting to Order- Tim Magnant called the meeting to order at 6:03pm.

- **Agenda Revision**

Visitors from Community and Staff: None

The board reviewed the power point presentation. They reviewed the goals of the Act 46 information meeting. They wanted to present additional information about Act 46, explain where the Board is in the Act 46 process as they work through this complex legislation and listen to the taxpayers input, questions and comments. *The board discussed necessary and advisable*

The board would like to let everyone have an opportunity to speak who wishes. After reviewing the power point, the board recessed the meeting from Room 6 to reconvene in the gym for the Act 46 Informational Meeting.

Act 46 Community Informational Meeting-School Gym

Tim Magnant called the informational meeting to order at 7:05pm. Tim requested that Tom Gates read the presentation to the community.

Tom provided an overview of the following Act 46 Powerpoint presentation.

Act 46 Goals

- Move state towards sustainable education governance models
Encourage local decisions and actions that:
 - Provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of education opportunities
Lead students to meet or exceed state Educational Quality Standards

Maximize operational efficiencies through greater flexibility to manage, share, and transfer resources, with a goal of increasing district-level student-to-staff ratios
Promote transparency and accountability
Are delivered at a cost valued by parents, voters, and taxpayers

Act 46 Legal Requirements

- Academic Achievement
 - Curriculum coordination
 - Proficiency-based learning
 - Local assessment system
 - Full breadth of academic offerings
 - Sound instructional practices
- Personalized Learning
 - Personal Learning Plan development and use
 - Flexible Pathways, connecting school & community Learning
 - Student choice and voice in learning
- Safety & School Climate
 - Activities to prevent student discipline problems
 - Safe physical and emotional learning opportunities
- High Quality Staffing
 - Strong evaluation systems
 - Personnel recruitment and retention practices
 - Systematic and individualized professional development

Voter's Role

- Learn about the complex Act 46 law
 - Ensure school board follows the law
 - Contrast costs and benefits of operating current governance system vs. a merged one
 - Assess the quality of current program offerings vs. a merged district
 - Compare effectiveness of local school board vs. PK-12 unified board

Voter's Authority if Franklin is "Advisable"

- Attend public information meeting(s) and analyze findings
 - Based on Study findings, the school board decides whether to convene public vote to move forward or not.
 - If yes vote, attend community forums in each town
 - If yes vote, before June 30, 2017, participate in public merger vote.

What is Franklin School Board Authority

- Learn about the complexities of the Act 46 law
 - Research and study governance options
 - Present the pros and cons of a merged district to voters
 - Vote to become a member an Act 46/706b Governance Study
 - Select member of the Study Committee

If Franklin is identified as “Advisable” Franklin School Board decides whether to schedule a public vote, upon completion of Study
If no merger, Franklin will present argument to State Board for not merging.

What’s Been Done So Far

- Summer, 2015 – Boards learned about Act 46 law
Fall, 2015
 Submitted \$5,000 study grant
 Boards appointed study committee
December, 2015 – Complete preliminary study
January, 2016 – Received feedback at four community forums

How Will Study Benefit Franklin

- Provide cost/benefit school operations analysis
Compare current program quality and student learning opportunities to possible merged district
Identify accurate information
Collect data for presentation to State Board that supports why Franklin shouldn’t merge

What Influences the Timeline?

- To qualify for the \$20,000 study grant, the Act 46 study must be completed by June 30, 2017
In order to take advantage of tax reduction incentives, a successful merger vote must occur by June 30, 2017
If no support for merger by voters, Franklin must attest to the State Board in November, 2017 why the school shouldn’t be merged

What Would Franklin Be Committing To?

- Become a member of a 16 V.S.A 706 Union School Study Committee
If other boards agree, select one Franklin member to serve on the Study Committee with two members from Highgate and four members from Swanton
Committee decide which districts are necessary to the merger and which are advisable
Committee answer questions developed from Act 46 preliminary study and from state law 16 V.S.A. 706b
If agreed, Committee forward Articles of Agreement to State Board for ratification
Upon Study completion, Committee decide whether to convene public votes in each town
School Board decides whether to move forward to vote in advisable town unless petitioned by 10% of voters.

What Would Franklin Be Committing To?

- If Franklin is an Advisable member, Franklin will not merge unless Franklin voters support it following a public vote
If other towns decide to merge, Franklin will still operate an elementary school
Franklin will still have board representation for middle/high school students

If Move Forward, Next Steps

- April, 2016 - Decide whether to convene \$20,000 study when all boards meet
April – December - If two or more boards agree, appoint members of a formal 706b Study Committee and convene a \$20,000 study (paid for with state funds)
706b Committee decides whether sufficient benefits to schedule a community vote

After the power point presentation, Tim Magnant turned to the community members for questions and comments. The following is a summary of the discussion that took place. You may view the full discussion of the Act 46 Public Informational meeting video on the Franklin School Website.

Jay Denault wanted to provide some clarifications about the process of the \$20,000 study. The committee shall be represented in that proportion which the equalized pupils of the district bear to the total equalized pupils of all school districts intending to participate in the committee's study. The people who form the study will be dominated by the majority of the people in Swanton. When a study committee is formed, you are essentially merging your authority to another public body. He quoted the law about the study committee. If the school board decides to proceed forward, the committee will be charged with the final report. According to Title 16 706c, the committee's merger plan will have the final say and the school board will only have an advisory affect and they will not have a choice. The school board will not be in a position to object, to agree or correct something that is not in our best interest. Jay advised the board to move slowly. The committee will have proportional representation and so the citizens of a larger town will have more say. He finds that not acceptable. A new consolidated board will have proportionate representation. He stated that if the merger goes forward, they will purchase the school for one dollar, combine all the debts incurred by all the towns, resulting in Franklin taking on bonds and debts from other schools. The towns will then vote on a combined operational cost of 30 million dollars by Australian ballot and the elimination of the school portion of town meeting day. Forming the committee will place the Franklin School at a great disadvantage as a minority member. The committee decides on necessary and advisable not the local towns. The school board will surrender their statutory authority to a 706 study committee and become advisory in nature.

Bob Berger responded that in subsection 706D any school who is an advisable member is not required to vote on the unified school district unless 10 percent of the voters submit an application to vote on the issue. "The school board of a school district designated as "advisable" in the proposed union school district may choose not to hold a meeting to vote on the question of establishing the union school district; provided, however, it shall warn and conduct the meeting on application of ten percent of the voters in the school district." So if the school board does not like the articles, they can stop it right there. If a school has been

determined necessary, they must vote. However, the town can vote the proposal down.

Clark Hubbard inquired is that 10% of the town of Franklin or the whole area? Bob Berger said that the proposed unified district (if necessary member) goes to the electorate for voting, and any town identified as necessary, it is voted in each town. Not required to vote if our town is designated as an advisable member. So if Franklin was advisable, then the board would have a public information meeting to determine if the town would like to go to vote.

Bob Irish inquired if the vote is done by the town or by total of all three towns? Bob Berger stated that the vote "if all the towns are designated as necessary", will hold the vote in each town so if one town votes not, then it becomes a moot point and the unified district does not go through. If the town is an advisable member, then the school board may choose not to go to vote unless 10% of the voters petition to do so.

Steve Plouff commented Franklin ranks high in academics, why would we send our kids to a school who has been on a seven year improvement plan, plus our taxes would go up because Franklin has a lower per pupil spending cost then the other school districts so we have to do what is best for our kids.

Bob Berger stated that nobody on the board would disagree with the voters, that we need to do what is best for our kids. Bob commented that Act 46 is a law. So we are bound by the law to abide by the goals that need to be accomplished. The choices are to volunteer to merge, or an acceptable alternative preferred structure like what we have now. No one in the Town of Franklin including the board seems to be in favor nor thinks consolidating is a good choice. The issue is the school or schools have to present their case by November 30 2017 to the State Board of Education on how and why we meet every one of those goals under the existing structure. If we are going to defend our school and make a case, it will be very beneficial to the board to bring as much data and solid facts as we can to present to the board. We don't think that merging is good for Franklin and that is why we need data from the 706b study.

Yvon Dandurand stated that it seems that the Franklin voters and the board seemed to agree that Franklin is one of the best schools around and we are not in favor of merger. As far as having one chance to present to the State, we have data from many years and we don't need the study.

Doug Clark explained that he has been around for a long time and sees how the State of Vermont works, and our legislators in their infinite wisdom want to tell us how to think. His concern that in 2017, the State could still make the decision that we will merge.

Tim Magnant stated that this is understanding and that if they are going against the board of education, they will need evidence to defend the Franklin School.

Jim Jewett stated that all the information you are talking about to present to the Dept of Education, we already have because we only need to defend Franklin School. However after researching other states consolidations, this is what he has discovered, Act 46 says it saves money and it does not, Act 46 is for the children, it is not for children, not about closing schools, but schools have closed, reduces citizen and parent involvement, it is not about good education but centralized control. One of the most important things for a successful school is parents need to be involved in education. The Superintendents are in favor of Act 46. Not about saving a school money but redistributing government functions. He researched other states who have consolidated. He found the following: in the districts in question the consolidated districts spent more per pupil, a decline in an enrollment 300 schools were closed and an increase in administration. Larger entities do not save money. Our students' education is remaining in the balance. Our school has outstanding teachers, an outstanding principal and a community who supports them. Act 46 was based on a Picus Study- a road map on how to proceed after Act 46 that leaves taxpayers, teachers and students out of the road map. Act 46 is a rushed and flawed law. There will be unintended consequences of a flawed law. He will do everything he can to stop consolidation. Our school is one of the best performing in the state at a lower per pupil spending cost.

Sue Clark inquired who determines which school is advisable and which is necessary? Bob Berger that the determination is the responsibility of the 706 committee. If we look at St. Albans, each town went in was able to designate whether they were necessary or advisable and the committee respected their decision. In Washington West Supervisory Union completed their study in January, every town went into the study as advisable- they were advised by legal counsel to go in as advisable.

Bridgette Favreau: If you don't go through the \$20,000 study, where do you get this information to go to the State Board to defend the school? Bob's concern is that you have to have proof on how we can do it better than the structure we currently have. He feels that going through the study as a fact finding study is to best way to defend our desire not to consolidate.

Ed Rainville: He questioned the committee representation displayed on the power point. Tim Magnant replied he believes Swanton will have 4 not 3. Ed Rainville continued: so if we go into this, the 706 committee will determine who is necessary and or advisable. It appears that Swanton will be the deciding factor with the majority of the committee members. Bob Berger stated that they sit with SU representatives from Swanton and Highgate and the board's committees have respected other town's wishes with respect to negotiations and the \$5,000 study and with this precedence going forward, that the other towns will respect

our wishes. Ed Rainville feels Swanton can't go it alone so once you enter the 706b study, there is no turning back. So, we would become liable for all the debts of the neighboring other school districts. Tim Magnant stated that the board is only contemplating the study, no decisions have been made. The only reason we want to move forward, we just want all the data, all the research, all the fact finding information so we can to defend the school. The State Board of Education has not come up with the target/rules we are supposed to hit. They do not want the state to declare us unified in 2018 because we did not do our due diligence and didn't get all the information. Ed Rainville stated that none of the other 706 studies answered all the \$5,000 study questions. What is the proposed tax cost savings? He cautioned to be very aware of the other side of the scale before entering the study. If the committee decides who is necessary and advisable, Swanton will want probably want to include Franklin as necessary to help spread costs and save money. Is there a vote by the 706 committee on who is necessary?

Bob Berger: Yes the vote could happen that the committee could designate Franklin as necessary. He asked why would Swanton want to force our school in a necessary role because if Swanton wanted consolidation, Franklin will be a spoiler. If the town of Franklin votes down the merger, then Franklin would be a spoiler and the consolidation will not take place.

Jay Denault: The designation is totally a 706 committee designation. Will Franklin assume to be an advisory status? Franklin will be a minority and at a big disadvantage with the Articles of Agreement and the merger plan. He recommends that Franklin engage in an independent study. There are too many strings attached in the \$20,000 study. He feels it is too risky. We could direct the direction of our study. He understands that Sheldon is pursuing an independent study. In an independent study, Franklin will get an unbiased accurate information. He is not convinced that this study will be unbiased.

Peter Magnant believes that we are in a no win situation no matter what we do whether advisable or necessary. If Swanton and Highgate unite, then we will have one representative on the MVU board. I know that you as a school board are trying to do the best for the community but we are in a bad situation.

Bob Irish thank Tim for being moderator, Tom for the presentation and Bob for responding to the questions. Can the board provide him with the timeline between presenting in 2017 and 2019 date. Bob Berger explained that by Nov 30, 2017, we present to the board our case for not merging. In 2018, they will issue a preliminary report on what the state will do with re-aligning schools who do not merge and allow some review and comment period. In 2019, the State will make a final decision.

Clark Hubbard went out to North Dakota where they did a mandatory consolidation. Children were travelling 1 to 1.5 hours to schools so small towns

would close because they would move closer to the schools. The same can happen to Franklin.

Jim Jewett if the three towns merge, with Franklin having the best tax rate, Franklin's tax rate will increase, maybe raise the teacher/student ratio. Swanton will want to merge to distribute evenly the tax rate across the towns. Bob Berger responded that again, Franklin can vote the merger proposal down and if we were made necessary, the merger will not happen. Jim stated that we can get the information without the study, he was able to get the tax rate through the State. He feels we can get the information without the study. Bob responded but not sure if we accurately get combined facility operations, projected savings, efficiencies or cost with out a \$20,000 grant. This could be a several month long process, look at several cost value analysis needed, we don't know what we need to look forward to make this comparison, feels we need the facilitator to lead us and point us in the right direction of sources to obtain the research needed and where to get the information along with the funding.

Nat Worman – If we don't do the study are we out of the whirlpool? Tim said no, because we still have to complete the presentation to the State in November 2017. Nat said we have such a wonderful school because of the people in the school and the town.

Jean Richard: We don't know what the State questions are. If we don't know the questions, how can the study answer them. Bob stated that the goals of the Act 46 are what we will have to answer. The quality education standards are what we don't know the questions or the answers.

George Godin: How often will we have to show that we meet the Act 46 goals? Bob thinks that it will be an ongoing process.

Jay Denault: The reason the State does not have the questions is because of the new Every Student Succeeds Act. The State still has to fully analyze the new law.

Mark Racine: Will the 706 study committee answering the questions be pro merger or not? It depends on how they feel about merging will dictate how the committee will answer the question.

Tim Magnant: Tim feels like the other boards are leaning in the direction of not wanting to merge. He asked Connie Beyor and Denis Boucher who can only anticipate that the other boards are not pro merger.

Sue Hull-Parent: She agrees Bob that you have to cover all your basis but she feels you can accomplish this through an independent study instead of a 706 study. Tim Magnant asked Sue if she will share their 706 study when they receive it. Sue agreed to share the study when she received the results. She

feels that nothing Franklin Northeast received that gave them all this data. Tim Magnant said that they intend to have the school board present to the board of education. If you have information to help our board, please share this with us.

Doug Clark: With the State dangling the promise of the reduction of taxes in front of them, will non parents vote for the merger? Tim said is there really a savings? Doug thinks it is probably not legal to dangle the carrot in front of taxpayers. Tim felt that Doug needed to direct that to the Legislators.

Jay Denault: We are lowest spending school in 105 schools in the State of Vermont. He believes per pupil cost will increase. Jay has no confidence in Montpelier. He recommends an independent study.

Steve Ploof: He commended the board for the information provided.

Bob Irish: Who will be presenting? Bob stated that Franklin Board will represent Franklin.

The board adjourned at 9:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas Gates,
School Board Clerk by
Pierrette Bouchard School Board Secretary