

# ISLAND EDUCATION REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE

FINAL REPORT SUBMITTED TO:

DEER ISLE AND STONINGTON SELECTMEN

Date submitted: May 25, 2016

## **Submitted by:**

Co-Chairs: Roger Bergen, Bob Dodge. Members: Dick Barnes, Mickie Flores, Loring Kidd, Carla Magoon, Kendall McGuffie, Katy Rinehart, Liz Perez Steele, Todd West, Vicki Zelnick. Evelyn Duncan (Stonington Selectmen representative), Becky Knowlton (Deer Isle Selectmen representative), and Stephen York (School board liaison)

The Deer Isle and Stonington selectmen created the IERC in September 2015. Its mandate was to identify current or potential problems with the DIS school system and make recommendations that will improve our schools and restore community confidence in our school board and school administration. In an effort to use our time efficiently, six subcommittees were formed focusing on the specific major issues confronting the schools- governance, curriculum and discipline, budget, facilities, transportation, and communications/public relations.

In January the committee submitted an interim report in which key issues and problems were identified, background information provided and some general recommendations made. The committee also conducted a town wide survey to get an understanding of where the community at large stood on many of the issues pertaining to the schools and it's board oversight. The survey results will be an addendum to the IERC final report. The issues we identified as the most pressing were:

- Deteriorating and oversized high school and an elementary school that has not been properly maintained.
- Pros and cons for remaining in Union 76
- Attracting a quality superintendent with a dysfunctional and

ineffective school board.

- A broken and confusing school budgeting process.
- Balancing the financial resources of the town while providing for a quality education.
- Providing adequate resources for our large “at risk” DIS student population.

Throughout the winter and Spring each of the subcommittees continued to meet in order to gain a better understanding of the issues needing attention which led to the development of specific recommendations that we believed, if adopted, would make significant improvements in these areas as well as the overall performance of our school system and the way in which it is managed. The changes being recommended within the School Board by the Governance subcommittee are essential if we are to begin rebuilding the trust and credibility of the Board that has been lacking for so long.

We would like to thank the hard working members of the IERC committee for all the many hours they have spent working on this report over the last nine months. We very much hope that the work we have done will be helpful to those who are responsible for managing and overseeing our schools and we will be interested in following their progress in the months and years ahead.

## ATTACHMENTS

- IERC interim report
- School Survey

## I. GOVERNANCE SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Public confidence in the CSD Board, the elected leadership of the Deer Isle-Stonington schools remains very low.** With its commitment to a new configuration, the CSD 13 School Board now has an opportunity to **commit itself to a full “re-set” in its internal and external operations and relationships.** To accomplish this re-set, we put forth the following specific **recommendations**:

1. A new five- or seven-member Board must re-organize its operations in several areas:
  - a. It must create new standing committee assignments for the finance, transportation, curriculum and instruction, facilities, and communications/public relations;
  - b. Insure standing committee credibility by appointing community members with expertise for each committee;
  - c. Each committee chair will prepare and present written reports at the monthly meetings outlining the open issues and progress;
  - d. The current Board Chair should step down and a new Chair with no prior Chair history should be elected. This is essential if the Board is to begin rebuilding constructive relationships with the other CSD Board members, the administration, the other school boards in Union 76, and the community.
  - e. The Board will rotate the chair position annually.
2. Each Board member must publicly commit to reviewing the Maine School Boards Association Handbook for board members and attend one or more orientation sessions for school Board members, which may include a specific workshop offered locally by MSBA staff members.
3. The Board will commit to re-engage in completing a strategic plan over the next school year, using a process that examines the IERC recommendations and involves the superintendent, other administrators, teachers and community members.
4. The Board will support the new school superintendent’s participation in the Maine School Management Association’s workshop for new superintendents.
5. The Board will support a coach for the new superintendent.
6. The Board will support a revision in the CSD charter that changes the term of office for newly elected board members, to allow for an orientation period between the time of election and the time to assume office, preferably two months or more. (See Title 20-A MRSA Sec. 1003.2 for the procedure.)
7. The Board will work proactively and affirmatively to create a healthy collaboration with other Union 76 members, and make every effort to keep the Union together. This includes:
  - a. Finding additional ways to streamline fiscal operations for each school district and avoid needless duplication;
  - b. Fostering clearer communications from the Central Office for all member towns and schools;

- c. Strengthening curriculum and instructional support for the schools from the Central Office;
- d. Assisting DISHS efforts to further increase enrollments from off-Island towns;
- e. Capturing the efficiencies that occur through a sharing of resources;
- f. Ensuring that we can attract and retain a high-quality superintendent of schools through a commitment to all of the above;
- g. Establishing a sub-committee to work with other Union 76 members to study the pros and cons of changing the current Union structure into either an AOS or an RSU.

### **Rationale for the above recommendations**

The new five- or seven-member configuration is but the first step in rebuilding public confidence in the leadership of our schools. Over the past several years, actions by the Board have seriously damaged public trust in its ability to guide and support effective educational programs in a fiscally prudent manner. With the hiring of a new superintendent of schools, the Board has an opportunity to signal a new willingness to work effectively, including:

- Supporting the new superintendent of schools and school leaders in any reasonable reorganization of the central office or school staff that permits them to effectively lead, manage and support the schools;
- Supporting a Board commitment and the new superintendent's ability to improve trust and communication with the community and with the students and staff of our schools;
- Affirming its desire to work as a collaborative member of School Union 76, the Union Board and the school committees and towns of Brooklin and Sedgwick.

The recent community survey compiled by the IERC earlier this year, clearly demonstrated that the residents of Deer Isle and Stonington wish for the CSD to

- Remain a member of School Union 76;
- Continue to maintain a K-12 (or pre-K-12) school programs;
- Improve public communications with the community;
- Support strong educational programs and improve and maintain a healthy educational climate to support all students;
- Do all of the above in a fiscally sound and prudent manner.

**To date, the CSD Board has failed to demonstrate that it can lead in a manner that will insure any of the above needs and desires of the public or the educators who work in our schools.** Although the current CSD Board, with the help of an interim superintendent, took an admirable step in presenting a proposed 2016-17 school budget with no significant tax increase and has improved financial accounting in the short term, there is strong evidence that it continues to damage its long term effectiveness in guiding the schools and restoring public confidence both on the Island and with our fellow member towns in Union 76. The abrupt resignation of the interim superintendent of schools, and the renewed calls in Brooklin for withdrawal from the Union due to the actions of the CSD Board over its failure to support the superintendent and its perceived

unwillingness to work in concert with its fellow Union board members calls into question its ability to accomplish the above goals.

The CSD and Union 76 have made a strong step in hiring a new superintendent with the skills needed to restore confidence the sound leadership for all three school systems. However, much more needs to happen. Our CSD Board needs to adopt the recommendations above **starting now, and continue with them in the years ahead.**

## **II. CURRICULUM AND DISCIPLINE SUBCOMMITTEE FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The community and the student survey identified the strong sense of community in our schools as a clear source of strength. The majority of parents and students believe that teachers and staff members know and care about their students and will go the extra mile to help them succeed. Community members from all walks of life support the education of island youth through their attendance at athletic events and their involvement in such programs as Ready by 21 mentoring, college coaches and Senior X projects. Students also benefit from the many offerings at the Reach Performing Arts Center, the Opera House and Haystack Mountain School of Crafts. At the same time, there is widespread concern about discipline and behavior issues at both schools and about a climate of disrespect that too often disrupts or undermines the educational process. This subcommittee's recommendations are aimed at promoting student achievement and cultivating a culture of respect in the schools. These will in turn enhance the sense of order, safety, and purpose necessary for students to fulfill their potential, We recommend that the school administrators:

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Reduce the number of Ed Tech positions and hire a licensed behavior specialist to mitigate the discipline problem in both schools. This professional will work with students and families directly and also provide training for school staff in working with at-risk students (Proposed in the 2016-17 school budget).
2. Create a cohesive K-12 curriculum consistent with the Common Core and aligned to college and career readiness standards. This curriculum should guide teaching and learning decisions at the classroom, school, and district level and include yearly benchmarks to measure progress in its implementation.
3. Develop a timetable for implementation for state-mandated proficiency learning. Concurrently, the School Board and superintendent should mount a

communication effort to better explain to parents and community members the educational benefits of proficiency-based standards.

4. Restructure the instructional assignment in grades 3-8 so that teachers are providing instruction in the subject area of their strength. (Currently in process)
5. Create more opportunity for student input into the educational and extracurricular offerings at the high school. To promote student leadership and respectful audience behavior, establish a weekly all-school meeting at which students announce upcoming events, highlight peers achievements and promote involvement in organizations and activities.
6. Explore ways to expand the project-based learning in the high school and elementary school. Both the Marine Pathways and Arts Pathways programs rely significantly on this approach and have proven very effective in meeting the needs of our diverse student population.
7. Investigate the impact of reducing course offerings in foreign languages.
8. Reduce the librarian positions to one, providing coverage at both schools. Students seldom use the library for research thanks to Internet resources; providing all-day coverage at both schools is no longer cost effective. (Proposed in the 2016-17 school budget).
9. Overhaul the school lunch program to provide fresher, healthier and more appetizing meals.
10. Convene a committee of students, faculty and administrators to reexamine the policy for use of electronic devices in school. Access to technology is critical to student's success, but students frequently use cell phones or iPads to access social media, watch videos and send text messages throughout the school day. A clear set of rules and consequences and/or a more consistent enforcement of existing policies will promote a more scholarly atmosphere and enhance academic achievement.

### **III. BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Generating a detailed and well-constructed budget was a matter of routine under the Bob Webster administration, but in recent years both the subsequent Superintendent and the CSD school board have fallen short in both the development and management of the school budget. Cost overruns and inadequate reporting have led to a growing lack of trust

within the community in the CSD board's ability to build and manage a transparent school budget that provided the funds to support a strong and efficient educational program. This lack of trust culminated last year when the town rejected several attempts by the board to pass a budget that was deemed too high and a much lower budget was adopted. Thanks to the return of Bob Webster as interim Superintendent the 2016 and 2017 budgeting process has improved significantly and presented a budget, which is supported by the IERC and hopefully approved by the towns in June. However, it is imperative that the School Board and administration, when presenting the budget, give careful and clear explanations for the rationale behind each of the warrants being presented to the towns to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding for why the budgeted number is what it is. The budget committee's following recommendations are intended to improve the overall process for developing a school and building back the trust and support of the community at large.

#### **A. BUDGET DEVELOPMENT**

1. School Board to create a budget subcommittee that includes at least one selectman or designated community member from each town and that meets regularly to follow the progress of the current budget and the development of the new one.
2. Board should conduct workshops for each of the budget categories so they fully understand the content and its impact.
3. Board should consider long range needs and goals so that savings accounts can be established to insure these goals are met.
4. Board should study cost trends of the budget categories over the last six years to determine the future needs or cuts in the category.
5. Auditor concerns or comments from prior year must be addressed.

#### **B. BUDGET MANAGEMENT**

1. Develop a monthly budget summary report that presents and categorizes the numbers by warrant article
  - Include year to date budget vs. year to date actual.
  - Compare the percentage spent year-to-date vs. total budget
  - Include explanation for any variances vs. budget
  - Include plan for getting budget back to plan including a spending freeze.
2. Review the bidding process for heat and electric to insure we are getting the best price.
3. All capital projects must have multiple bids.

### **C. BUDGET APPROVAL PROCESS**

1. Prior to the town budget meeting hold an informal information meeting to present the proposed budget to town officials and interested citizens to explain the rationale behind each warrant line item and answer questions.
2. Budget should be presented at the town meeting by the superintendent, with support from the principals and school board.

### **IV. FACILITIES SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

We currently maintain two building that were originally built to house a total of 700+ students with a current enrollment of around 350. The high school is old and need of significant repairs because of a lack of maintenance over the years. A recent engineering study on the condition of the two DIS schools has determined that in order to get the schools to meet the health and safety standards the towns will need to spend a significant sum of money over the next five years. The study did not look at the structural elements of the schools and this may require further work. The 2016-2017 budget includes the funds needed to meet the state safety and health standards but a great deal more will be needed to bring the buildings up to the condition that they can be properly maintained.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

##### **SHORT TERM**

Create a detailed and prioritized 10-year maintenance plan, including estimated annual expenditures and sources of funding.

##### **LONG TERM**

The school board, working with an outside consultant, will conduct a comprehensive study to determine the following:

- What are facility requirement for DIS over the next 10 years.
- How best to utilize our existing structures
- If the two schools to be consolidated into one, what it will cost.
- The potential sources of funding.

### **V. TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Transportation for DIS is one of the most expensive line items in our annual school budget. It is complicated to manage and the most frequently off target. Clearly we need to look for better ways to improve the efficiency of our use of buses and the accuracy of budgeting. We also need to do a better job of negotiating our busing contracts to insure

we are getting the best deal we can.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **School Board transportation subcommittee to spend the fall of 2016 to determine our actual transportation needs before we negotiate the next contract.**
- **Set up a monthly reporting system to track the miles used by month and year to date and show the balance of miles available for the remainder of the year.**

## **VI. COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT**

As a publicly funded organization, the School District has an obligation to the community to develop and manage a comprehensive communication program. The public distrust and lack of confidence in the manner by which the school is governed and administered is frequently the result of poor communication. The school board and the superintendent's office must address this without delay. A concerted effort must be made to open all lines of communications with all who have a stake in the Island's educational system.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. A regularly updated district wide website for the CSD and Union 76 must be developed and maintained.
2. School Board meeting schedules and agendas should be announced and posted in a timely manner.
3. Plans and actions voted on and agreed to at the board meetings should be noted and, if appropriate, progress updates posted on a regular basis until completed. Postings should include follow-ups on unanswered questions at the meetings by other board members and the public.
4. Both Elementary and High School websites should to be used to announce meetings and/or meeting changes.
5. The REACH sign should continue to be used for announcements.
6. Other outreach and information to the community regarding school progress, budget workshops, etc. should be included on the website, social media and printed media.