

To: Orange Southwest Supervisory Union RED Committee

From: John Everitt



Date: October 18, 2011

Re: Initial report of forum findings

As your next meeting is soon, I will make these initial comments in a list format for efficiency.

1. Attendance at the forums varied from no citizens at the Randolph meeting, to four at Braintree, to thirteen at Brookfield with one citizen attending both.
2. Concerning the question, "What do you most value about your schools?" there were several points in common.
 - a. School size is optimal for a safe and caring climate where students feel "known" and receive individual attention and parents feel welcome to volunteer.
 - b. There is a close connection between the schools and the local community.
 - c. Each school has a unique culture that the citizens appreciate.
 - d. There is some concern about the size of the school restricting some opportunities that students in larger schools have – sports, after school programs, second language instruction, etc ...
 - e. There was little discussion about schooling beyond the local elementary school.
3. Concerning the question, "How do our schools ensure students are prepared for success in the next stage of their lives?" again there was some commonality, but there was also a variety of individual ideas.
 - a. Keep a focus on basic academic skills while also working on social-emotional learning and higher order thinking skills and life-long learning.
 - b. Use a hands-on or project approach to learning to stimulate interest.
 - c. Several citizens focused on opportunities beyond elementary school – including internships, support for college entrance, mentoring, and technical training.
 - d. Some citizens recalled the work done on "Ends Policy" development and referred the RED Committee to that work.

4. At the Brookfield forum, there was a strong sense that the students are responding well, in a variety of ways, to the opportunities offered at the school.
5. Notable for its absence was the use of technology in education. There was one mention of one-to-one laptops at one session, but the idea did not capture the attention of the group.
6. Concerning the RED process, there were many questions about why this study is under way in the first place. Given the progress in appropriate centralization of services, most citizens saw little reason to consider the idea of eliminating town-based boards for their elementary schools. Several called for the RED Committee to make a strong case in terms of student benefit, more than in terms of economics or efficiency, before moving the process too far down the road. Several citizens were quite concerned that some governance structure, other than the citizens in a town, could close their school. There is also no expectation that a new governance structure could save enough money to make a difference.

Although there is further detail in the sixteen pages of citizens' comments from the forums, it is quite a small sample to draw any conclusions that the RED Committee could take to the bank. After you discuss the information in this report, please let me know if you would like any further analysis or other assistance I might offer.