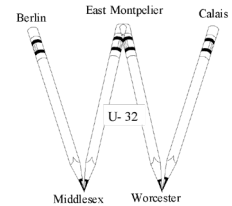


# Washington Central Unified Union School District

*WCUUSD exists to nurture and inspire in all students the passion, creativity and power to contribute to their local and global communities.*

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## WCUUSD Finance/ Configuration Committee Meeting Minutes 7.31.24 5:00-6:45 PM In-Person U-32 Rm 128/131 930 Gallison Hill Rd Montpelier, VT

**Present:** Flor Diaz Smith, Superintendent Dellinger-Pate, Daniel Keeney, Ursula Stanley, Kealy Sloan, Susanne Gann, Chris McVeigh, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Natasha Eckart, Jeanie Phillips, Amelia Contrada, Conrad Gilbert, David Delcore, Allen Gilbert, Jarrod Weiss, Ellen Knoedler, Ania Kehne, Noah Weinsten, Julia, Katrina Kilpatrick, Robert M, Dvora Zipkin, Rubin Bennett, Lila Richardson, Chani Waterhouse, Elizabeth Brown, Nora Duane, Caitlin Howansky

**1. Call to Order:** Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

### 2. Discussion/Action

**2.1. Configuration Study:** Jeanie Phillips, from Great Schools Partnership, introduced herself as facilitator for tonight's meeting, and reviewed the norms for analyzing the data tonight. She explained the protocol that will be used to examine data, and invited those present to consider the data for five minutes before pairing up to compare observations. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked if it is acceptable to consider the raw data versus the summary which was prepared by one person. Ms. Phillips clarified that it is fine to consider the raw data. Those present paired up and shared observations from the data consideration.

### 2.2. Data

**2.2.1. Configuration Conversation Survey Responses**

**2.2.2. 7.2.24 Virtual Forum Notes**

**2.2.3. 6.26.24 Meeting Notes**

**2.2.4. Letter from Worcester**

**2.2.5. Worcester Community Letter**

#### Observations:

- Comments about why “cost” was not a specific criteria
- People want complete information about the shape and nature of the district as it is, and the shape and nature of the district as it would be
- Mention of disagreement with the concept of school as the hub of the community because they are childless and this has not been their experience
- While there was one community with more sharing, all communities participated/ shared
- Very strong comments about the depth of identity with the town school and identifying with the town school and the town community
- Multiple truths within the document, depending on the point of view
- Consensus that the well-being of people/ community, esp. students, is desired
- Continued asking for transparency and more time
- Desire for more cost-benefit analysis and specific financial information about what would be saved, and what schools are costing now
- Desire for more rich dialogue about the implications of the change (i.e. longer bus rides, combined grades, etc.)
- Different ideas around configuration and solution-seeking - different than the ideas that are currently “out there”

#### Inferences:

- We need clarity of communication - a great deal of questions about why we are engaging in the process and where our data is coming from
- Community is very interested in exploring a merger with Montpelier
- Implication that merging with Montpelier would eliminate the need to close elementary schools
- People do not generally understand that a merger with another district will take time
- People seem to see the costs more clearly than the benefits (of the configuration models)
- People have expressed desire to access empirical data; wanting a credible argument for any of the proposals
- People understand not having the status quo, (doing things differently), but what does that look like? It will take time.
- Implication that the community does not feel listened to
- Potential for educational improvements - there is a desire (from both sides) for better opportunities for children
- People define educational equity in different ways - it means different things to different people
- Concern about implications to tax bases and the liability of community related to schools, implication to property value (e.g. due to loss of school)

At this time, Jeanie Phillips reviewed the lists of Observations and Inferences, and she reviewed the guiding objective: *Use data gathered from community focus groups and the configuration survey to clarify the criteria necessary for making an informed decision about configuration.*

Implications regarding the criteria/ objective:

- Impact on students' wellbeing
- Specific criteria around cost savings
- Community identity/ community health and identity, both in towns and in the larger community (e.g. pros and cons list for all scenarios)
- Sustainability and fiscal responsibility
- Financial cost comparison/ detail
- Provide community members with enough information so they feel they have been truly heard and can support a decision even if it is not the one that they wanted
- More specifically answer some of the pointed questions - e.g. one of the answers might be that we have data that is inconclusive and requires a larger discussion
- Considering cost benefits from a well-being perspective, expanding opportunities/ quality of education for everyone

Open conversation: popcorn style

- Are we being asked whether there are additional priorities? What is resonating is the number of times we have seen "how did you come up with these priorities?" The amount of time that this work takes and what it takes to come to an "a-ha" moment
- How do we communicate the process and the timeline of the work we have been doing?
- Where is the space to hear changes to the priorities, from all that we have heard?
- Does the resulting configuration set us up well to go into a conversation with other districts?
- What is the significant impact that a closure will have on towns?
- We need to be aware of how we are talking about this and how we are presenting information
- We should not dismiss voices that are not the loudest, or voices that are not available to be present at the meeting
- Criteria around balance: who is being expected to experience longer bus rides?
- Potential travel time for parents
- The more clarity that we can provide as to benefits, the better off we will all be (e.g., these are the changes, but these are the specifics as to benefits)
- People are done with "generic terms" and want specifics
- Importance of using empirical data to answer questions - e.g. developmental impact of sixth graders being at the middle school - the difficulty of middle school years. Looking at data helps shed light on nuances

What are your thoughts about this process?

- Good to have a structure to help engage around such a depth of information; however it brings up even more questions
- Would it be helpful to ask the community - was this helpful?
- Structure keeps us from going down rabbit holes - on the other hand having some "back and forth" can be important for richness in discussion
- Feel that the use of protocols is a white supremacist construct; do not feel that walking away any closer to where we want to be; still as frustrated as when we walked into the meeting. We are down to only 18 minutes to whittle down to the purpose of the meeting.

Flor Diaz Smith stated:

The point of tonight's meeting was to come up with criteria; she reviewed highlights from tonight's meeting to share with the board and invited input from others:

- engaged in an exercise to talk about criteria
- need to come up with a process to create the next iteration of criteria
- group what we can; come up with specific actions/ criteria
- cost (financial) modeling needs to be as detailed as possible; benefits (educational) modeling needs to be as detailed as possible
- tension: all of us are busy; however this work is critical and needs quick attention
- great deal of support for looking at working together with Montpelier

Amelia Contrada suggested that we adopt the norms for equitable data analysis.

Flor Diaz Smith acknowledged Natasha's frustration and asked, if something needs to be different, let's work together to do it differently. Natasha Eckart expressed frustration about the timeline - the original date to meet was July 17th and this changed; we are now moving into August - when are we going to make time to do this work? She had shared this concern in May and June - that it feels rushed; this same concern has been communicated in the surveys. She does not feel this has been a fair process; has not provided time to consider other options. Natasha Eckart asked to have Mckalyn Leclerc's email be part of public record. Next meeting date: (this could be a zoom meeting). Natasha is concerned that Worcester will have no representation in an August meeting. Would like to have a meeting to appoint a Worcester representative in advance of the next Configuration Meeting. Suggestion to have Board Retreat begin an hour early to include interview of interested candidates for Worcester Board representative, and select/ appoint a representative.

**Public Comment:** Katrina Kilpatrick: had sent a letter to the board. She read it aloud. She expressed concerns about 6th grade moving to U-32; she stated that this cohort of students experienced COVID-19 in kindergarten. She asked the board to consider a resolution, which does not move the 6th grade group. Lila Richardson: acknowledges that there were many questions from the community - still is hearing no discussion as to how the questions will be answered (as well as a timeline) - there is a desire for a lot more financial information. Suggestion to look at Act 168 and see what implications this might have. She reminded the board that this is a public meeting and there should always be "Public Comment" as part of the agenda. Rubin Bennett: acknowledges the hard work of the board and the tidal wave of data and information that has come forward. This is an impossible task with an impossible timeline; he appreciates the board providing the space to continue to wrestle with this. Flor Diaz Smith invited final comments from board members: Zach Sullivan asked, do we want to ask for more information to consider early education center at Berlin School?

### **3. Future Agenda Items**

**4. Adjourn: Chris McVeigh moved to adjourn at 6:40 p.m. Seconded by Zach Sullivan. The meeting adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Lisa Grace, Committee Recording Secretary