

MSAD #58 Board Workshop Minutes
Tuesday, March 5, 2019
6:30P.M.-8:30P.M.
Mt. Abram High School- Cafeteria

Call to order: 6:30P.M.

Supt. Pratt-presentation on trend data from Public Forums

Supt. Pratt presented a power point slide on the trend data. She went over the student demographics of all the schools from year 2008 to present. She discussed the data of resident students in each school, the facilities of all 4 schools and the year they were built, current issues and annual operating cost per school. She went over the budget trend for the past 5 years and the state funding per town and the cost per resident student by town, tuition for non-district students per town, class sizes and school buildings square footage.

Discussion and input on ideas moving forward

Cindy Dixon, of Strong asked if there was a target or a goal that is set on the amount of money that we are looking to save or reduce?

Supt. Pratt said we don't really have a goal as far as percentage or a dollar amount. What we know is last year was one of the hardest budgets that we have had to do. We had to ask our taxpayers for 10% more than the previous years because the cost of doing business continues to rise.

A resident from Kingfield asked if you close one school what will the cost savings look like? For example if Kingfield were to close.

Supt. Pratt said I use the \$55,000 per staff member (salary, benefits, and miscellaneous things) on average. That does not even include the operating cost that we listed, it doesn't include the cost not having to do the repairs, bus drivers, and custodial. If you took the number of Staff members in Kingfield and multiply that by \$55,000 it would be a large number.

Christina Mitman, of Strong asked if you choose to close a school, do all the staff members loose their jobs in that school or do you go on a seniority basis?

Supt. Pratt said we would have to use the contract for seniority basis, because there is language in our contracts that regulate how we would go through that list.

Eric Kinney, of Phillips asked if the high school students are tuitioned out, would the district save a lot of money and how old is Mt. Abram's building?

Supt. Pratt said the cost of tuition varies on where they go. The rate for RSU 74 is roughly \$10,000 per student, RSU 9 is \$7500 per student, and RSU 78's tuition rate is roughly \$14,000 dollars. These rates are set by the state, so it really would depend on where the student went. Mt. Abram's building was built in 1951. Because the school is not well insulated it is very expensive to maintain.

A resident of the district asked Supt Pratt if there had been any talk to Carrabec or Mt. Blue on whether or not they will even accept the high school students?

Supt. Pratt said there have been some preliminary conversations with Mt. Blue in particular because of it being located in a service center. Their numbers are about at max and what I was told is when Mt. Blue was rebuilt it was built with an expansion plan. In order to take 200 students it would have to have that expansion plan instituted, which is likely a three to five-year process.

A resident of the district asked if the students were tuitioned out, would they have to go to either Mt. Blue or Carrabec, or would the Strong students go to Mt. Blue, the Kingfield students go to Carrabec, and Stratton students go to Rangeley? Supt. Pratt explained that this could be determined in a closure process.

Supt. Pratt said, the process of closing a school is not a short process; it is a long process that is at least a year with a best-case scenario but more likely 2 years. If the board voted right now to close a school then that starts a series of applications and forms to the state. You have to get permission first and do analysis each step of the way. Mt Abram High School gets particularly problematic because it does not have a town. Salem TWP is not a town, it is a Township. It is part of the Unorganized Territory, so the first thing that would have to happen if Mt Abram High School were to close is to have legal clarity or perhaps special legislation passed to allow us to close the school. Then we would have to decide who is going to vote on it because all the other communities cannot vote. Only the town that the school is located in gets to vote.

Mr. Smith asked if we would have choice in the decision to close a school?

Supt. Pratt said every community by Statute has to provide for the education of their students K-12.

A resident of the district asked if all the schools have the capacity to make the changes?

Supt. Pratt said, yes, they do have the capacity to make the changes.

A resident from Strong asked if we would have to divide the class that has the largest number of students?

Supt. Pratt said, when looking at class sizes, we looked at that particular class. There will have to be 3 classrooms to accommodate that class. Those 3 classrooms will stay the same but the other classrooms don't have to.

A resident of the district asked how would that work, would you have a fourth grade teacher that would move with them throughout the grades or would you have to hire someone new for each grade they moved to?

Supt. Pratt said, typically what happens is there is change in the grade everybody is teaching, it would be a decision on who was the best fit for that position. We wouldn't necessarily hire anybody; we would use our existing staff.

There was a suggestion made that if you keep Strong, Phillips schools open and close Kingfield then you would have two elementary schools. Why not do a K-4 and a 5-8 and utilize our staff to see how well it goes and see if you can better educate the students and have the high school students tuitioned to Mt. Blue.

A resident from the district asked how long would it take to reconfigure?

Supt. Pratt said it depends on the scope of reconfiguring. For example, if we weren't closing any schools and we just moved grades around say K-4 in a couple of schools, this process could probably happen in a few months. If we are completely reworking all of the grade levels you are talking about space, equipment, bathrooms, which would probably be a year long process.

A resident from Kingfield asked if Kingfield closed would we still go by evaluation per town or is there some sort of replacement to keep Kingfield residents happier, for instance by changing the ratio per student evaluation?

Supt. Pratt said, what you are talking about is a reallocation process and that can happen, but we would need complete approval by all the taxpayers that are residents of the district, because we are still using the original formula that we used back when the district was formed. It has never been changed.

Selena Warren, of Kingfield asked if the scenario was that we keep all four schools open, but one of the elementary schools becomes a 5-8 school, the problem with the decision that is to be made is which school becomes the Middle School? It has been very apparent that Kingfield serves the least amount of resident students and several students are tuitioned in.

Supt. Pratt said some of it is based on space, space analysis, and location of the students (where do they actually live). All 3 elementary schools are very similar in size and in the number of spaces they have per classroom, but are built differently.

Danielle White, of New Portland asked why aren't we looking at our neighboring towns to help us?

Supt. Pratt said, you can only pay the district that you are a member of.

A resident from Kingfield said, on the bottom of the slide it says send high school students to another district on a tuition agreement. Was this a suggestion based on what other schools have done in our situation or demographics?

Supt. Pratt said, it was suggested based on our demographics .

A resident of Salem TWP asked if we consolidated one of the schools to a 5-8 school and our kids are all playing on one sports team instead of the 3 or 4 teams that we have now, who will we be playing against and what about the kids who might miss the opportunity to play, because we would have a larger group and only have the one team? Also would there be more travel?

Supt. Pratt said, we would have to re-invent the program. Typically what happens when you have a middle school you have a 5-6 and a 7-8 team. There are a lot of schools around that we could participate with and yes, there might be more travel, however we do have a fairly local demographic where there are five other schools.

A resident from Salem TWP asked what is the travel range for these five schools?

Supt. Pratt said that the schools are located in Madison, Carrabec, MT. Blue, Rangeley, and Eustis.

A resident of the district thought \$20 to \$30 million sounded like a lot of money for a mega campus if we close the other schools. Would there be a savings overtime, would we get more funding for the mega campus, and would there be more to offer the kids with a mega campus?

Supt. Pratt said as far as saving money, we might close schools, but we might not, because we have to offer the schools back to the towns people first, however there are some savings of closing a school. For instance you are not paying heat and all the upkeep. The belief is if we could build a mega campus for \$20 to \$30 million paid over a 20-year note and with interest being pretty cheap right now, we could benefit on that deal.

A resident from Strong asked isn't there an age gap that you have to be careful of? You can't mix kindergarten kids with 9th and 10th graders. How do you keep them separated?

Supt. Pratt said if the decision were to have a mega campus, you would have wings to separate the grades.

A resident from the district asked, if there had been any conversations with the families whose students are leaving the district and why?

Supt. Pratt said it is her belief that the students who are leaving the district are moving. They are not sending their kids somewhere else and living here. The whole family is moving.

A resident from Kingfield asked, what does the timeline look like for these decisions to be made, what will the process look like, and how will each step of the process be clearly communicated?

Supt. Pratt said, you are asking for a timeline and that is very difficult to do regardless of the process. The Board needs to take all of this data and analyze it and decide when or what process they want to do. They are going to make something for a decision and that decision may be that they are going to do nothing. If they choose a process that is governed by Statute there will be steps that they will need to follow. If they choose a process that they can make they would decide on the timeline. This decision will be posted on their agenda.

Emily Brittelli, of Farmington, asked how any reconfiguring process would work with a new Superintendent coming in?

Supt. Pratt said it is still the same process; it doesn't change because whoever the current Superintendent is signs the paperwork.

A resident from the district asked if it was safe to assume the Board may choose to just leave things for now until there is a new Superintendent in place?

Supt. Pratt said that it would be up to the board to decide that.

A resident from the district suggested that we need to stop looking at the short-term outcome and start looking at the long-term. The mega campus could draw people into our area.

Leah Danala of Strong asked if the decision was to close a school and consolidate the remaining 3 schools, if the board was planning to take what is budgeted for the budget to run the remaining 3 schools or would they give it to the towns to save on their taxes?

Supt. Pratt said that one of the things you would have to do if you were to close a school is to provide for the education of the students K-12, so at least initially the budgeted money would likely stay in the budget.

A Lexington resident said it was mentioned that there are buses that pass each other when bringing the kids to the same school. Are you using full-size buses and wouldn't it cut down on cost if you bought passenger vans?

Supt. Pratt said there are reasons that we sometimes have to transport small groups of children from one school to another. We only have full size buses and the vans are very expensive to purchase and the cost is equally as expensive to maintain, not to mention how poorly they absorb wear and tear.

Mrs. Pratt and Kim Jordan thanked the audience for giving their input.

Adjourned at 8:26P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan A. Pratt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susan" being the most prominent.

Susan A. Pratt

Superintendent of Schools