

**SCHOOL SYSTEM REORGANIZATION NEWS #2
BUCKSPORT, ORLAND, PROSPECT, VERONA**

SEPTEMBER 2007

REMAINING DEADLINES

By 9/14: Commissioner of Education notifies each school system of her response to partnership intentions.

By 12/1: Each partnership files a plan with the Commissioner addressing 13 points specified in the law.

By 12/15: Commissioner notifies school boards of approval with modification suggestions or specific reasons why plan not approved.

January, June, or November 2008: A referendum is held in all towns on the approved plan.

45-60 days after the community vote: The new RSU school board is elected by vote in each town.

July 1: Start-up date for the new RSU. The Plan submitted by December 1 can specify that the start-up date is in either July 1, 2008 or July 1, 2009.

ROLE FOR CITIZENS

Please stay informed about reorganization. These newsletters can help. This will be discussed at all school board meetings. RPC meeting notices will be posted in the schools, on the website, and in local newspapers. When the vote to form the district is announced, it is very important that you vote: a large voter turnout will ensure that the result is the will of the communities.

RPC MEETING SCHEDULED

The first meeting of the RPC for our communities is Monday, September 17th at 6 pm in Bucksport Town Council Chambers. All RPC meetings are open to the public. The meeting will be televised. At that time, future meetings will be scheduled and the dates will be included in the next newsletter.

RPC CONTACT INFORMATION

Bucksport:	Rob Howard, Board	479-5700
	Roger Raymond, Town	469-7368
	Tom Foster, Community	469-7364
MSAD 18:	Roxanne Murrall, Board	469-0800
	Jennifer Reiffler, Town	469-2045
	Laurie Boardman, Community	469-0535
Orland:	Millard Clement, Board	469-3032
	Wayne Ames, Town	469-3186
	Linda Harriman-Frost, Community	469-3813
Superintendent:	Judy Lucarelli	469-7311

Bucksport School Dept: www.bucksportschools.com

Maine Dept of Education: www.maine.gov/education

SCHOOL BOARD MONTHLY MEETINGS

Bucksport:	1 st Wed, in Town Council Chambers
Orland:	2 nd Tues, in Orland Consolidated School
MSAD 18:	2 nd Wed, in Superintendent's Office

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PARTNERSHIP EFFORTS

Before the law was passed, the Department of Education provided a map showing one way that towns could be grouped into a Regional School Unit (RSU). Our 4 towns were grouped with MSAD 56 (Searsport, Stockton Springs, and Frankfort) to make RSU 9. Because the student enrollment for these towns totals less than 2500, additional partners were sought.

We did not consider partnering with a larger school system: Ellsworth, Bangor, or MSAD 22 (Hampden area). Each of these would put us well over 3000 students, and we felt that the identity of our schools and students could be lost in a school system this large.

We sent inquiries about partnering to all other neighboring towns. We held preliminary conversations with MSAD 56, Penobscot, Dedham, and MSAD 63 to share informally what our school systems are like, to state why we think we would be a good partner for them, and to learn why they would be a good partner for us.

For different combinations of towns, we considered data about the cost of education, student performance, enrollment trends, and programs. To assist with this we sought financial information from the Department of Education about the impact on subsidy and cost sharing of 10 different combinations of school systems, but the Department could provide just 4: our 4 towns; the original RSU 9; our 4 towns combined with all of the towns south to Stonington; and our 4 towns with MSAD 63 (Holden, Clifton, & Eddington) and Dedham.

We held televised public forums on June 25th, July 9th, and August 15th in Bucksport Town Council Chambers. We participated in a special Board meeting in Holden on August 22nd. The purpose of these meetings was to provide current information about requirements and data on partner communities.

As we were proceeding, each potential partner was having conversations with other school systems as well. By the end of August, final votes were held by each School Board. MSAD 56 voted to form a district with Belfast (MSAD 34), a community with close links to Searsport. Orrington voted to join Brewer. MSAD 63 and Dedham voted to either join Brewer or form a K-8 RSU of towns in the greater Bangor area. And the towns south of us are joining together with Surry, a collection of similar towns in terms of valuations and programs (mainly K-8, minimum subsidy towns).

The remaining RSU partners are our 3 school systems: Bucksport, Orland, and MSAD 18 (Prospect and Verona). The law allows for such districts when all other possible partners vote to go elsewhere.

PARTNERS IDENTIFIED

On August 30th, following votes of the 3 school boards, the Superintendent submitted Letters of Intent to the Commissioner of Education for Bucksport, Orland, and MSAD 18 to form an RSU. This creates a K-12 school system with 1300 students, which is large enough to provide a variety of programs for students and at the same time maintains a small enough system so all students are known and valued. Currently all students in MSAD 18 attend school in Bucksport. Orland operates a school for grades pre-K through 8, has a tuition contract for a minimum of 60% of high school students to BHS, and choice of high schools for the rest. Over 75% of Orland high school students currently choose BHS.

Per Pupil spending: In 05-06 there were great differences between Bucksport and Orland in some of the spending categories, due in part to the way costs were allocated by each school system. Since MSAD 18 does not operate a school, the state requires all tuition costs to be allocated to instruction, instead of pro-rating the cost across all categories. Recent changes in account coding will increase consistency in budget line item comparisons.

05-06 spent per pupil	Bucksport	Orland	MSAD 18	State
regular instruction	\$3,143	\$5,848	\$6,612	\$4,012
special ed instruction	\$1,773	\$1,048	\$670	\$1,277
CITE instruction	\$3	\$0	\$0	\$176
other instruction	\$312	\$113	\$0	\$193
student /staff support	\$745	\$139	\$8	\$596
system admin	\$316	\$311	\$57	\$372
school admin	\$741	\$389	\$0	\$493
transp	\$567	\$843	\$745	\$504
facilities maint	\$1,422	\$740	\$0	\$1,092
debt service	\$1,425	\$57	\$0	\$598
all other	\$108	\$21	\$0	\$43
totals	\$10,555	\$9,509	\$8,092	\$9,356

Without Debt Service (annual payments on BMS and Miles Lane), total per pupil costs are fairly close across the 3 school systems and clustered near the state average.

Enrollment Trends: In the past decade, enrollments in our towns have declined 300 students, or almost 20%. This trend will be a concern in future years as we work to maintain educational programs.

year	Bucksport	Orland	MSAD 18	total
1996	1026	403	178	1607
1997	1004	418	192	1614
1998	974	400	178	1552
1999	952	391	177	1520
2000	930	375	173	1478
2001	921	356	191	1468
2002	884	340	195	1419
2003	866	323	177	1366
2004	848	315	182	1345
2005	840	286	178	1304

NEXT STEPS

- ✓ The Commissioner of Education will respond on all partnership proposals by September 14th. This could include recommended changes.
- ✓ If the letters of intent are accepted as proposed, the Reorganization Planning Committee (RPC) will immediately begin the task of developing a plan addressing the points required in the law.
- ✓ The RPC will meet in September, October, and November, with information shared with the school boards and citizens during this time.
- ✓ Each School Board will have a special meeting in late November for final approval of the plan, which must be submitted to the Commissioner by December 1st.
- ✓ By December 15th the Commissioner will approve the plan as presented, with recommended revisions, or reject it with reasons specified. If revisions are included, each Board must approve any changes before the plan is resubmitted to the Commissioner.
- ✓ Citizens will vote on the plan no sooner than 30 days after approval by the Commissioner (so absentee ballots can be provided). To be approved, it must pass by a majority vote in Bucksport, in Orland, and in MSAD 18 (Prospect and Verona combined).
- ✓ A monthly newsletter will be mailed to the 5500 households in our 4 towns throughout this period.

INTRODUCE FACILITATOR

The Bucksport School Board decided in July to seek a facilitator from the Department of Education list of 30 facilitators trained to assist with the planning process. Ann Bridge met with the School Board this summer. She moderated the Public Forum on August 15th and will moderate the RPC meeting on September 17th.

Ann has served as Superintendent in Arundel, a K-8 school system in Southern Maine, and in MSAD 68, which is the Dover-Foxcroft area. She has also served as interim superintendent in York, Howland, and Ashland. She is available to continue work with the RPC as long as the committee requests her services. The Department of Education pays for this service.

GRANT TO SUPPORT PLANNING COSTS

The Department of Education will make available a grant in the amount of \$2500 to cover costs of the RPC. This could cover RPC expenses such as travel, copying, materials preparation, and clerical support. As soon as the Commissioner approves the Letters of Intent this grant will be sought.

MORE DETAIL ON 13 STEP PLAN

Each group of school systems forming a Regional School Unit must have a Reorganization Planning Committee (RPC). The RPC must include representatives of school units, municipalities, and the general public. The RPC is advisory to the School Boards in preparing the plan to be submitted to the Commissioner. The RPC must provide opportunities for the public to learn about the proposed plan and provide input. The plan must address 13 points:

1. Specify school systems to be included in the RSU: this has been determined by the school boards to be Bucksport, Orland, and MSAD 18.
2. RSU School Board size, composition and apportionment across the towns: Bucksport and Orland currently have 5 school board members each, and Prospect and Verona have 3 school board members each. The RPC can recommend any size Board that seems to work for the 4 towns, and to identify the number of members for each town.
3. Method for voting by RSU Board: the voting on the board must maintain one person/one vote based on the 2000 census for each town. This can be done by one of 4 methods:
 - Arranging the 4 towns into voting districts with the same population and electing 1 board member per voting district;
 - Electing 1 member for each town with relative voting power based on the 2000 census;
 - Electing all members at large to serve all 4 towns;
 - Some other developed locally. This could include a combination of the above options, such as electing different numbers of members based on the size of the town, and assigning weighted votes so the representation aligns with the census.
4. Composition, powers, and duties of any local school committees to be created: In addition to the School Board, local school committees can be elected with specified powers over local schools.
5. Disposition of real and personal school property: All property of the separate school systems (in this case just Bucksport and Orland) can be taken over by the RSU, unless some items are better left with the towns. The first step in addressing this item will be an inventory of all property.
6. Disposition of existing indebtedness and lease-purchase obligations: The first step here will also be a listing of all obligations. This includes debt service such as the annual payments Bucksport makes for

the Middle School, as well as relatively small items such as annual payments for photocopiers.

7. Assignment of school personnel contracts, school collective bargaining agreements, and other school contractual obligations: The RPC will examine all contracts to determine which require attention. For example, a contract that expires before the new school system begins is not relevant. If collective bargaining agreements expire in different years the RPC can recommend a plan for transition to a single Agreement. The transportation contracts with Laidlaw will also be part of the discussion.
8. Disposition of existing school funds and financial obligations, including undesignated fund balances, trust funds, reserve funds, and other funds appropriated for school purposes: This item will be addressed once the audits are complete for the 06-07 school year. A trust fund for a specific purpose such as a scholarship can continue with just a change in the school system designation. However, it may be more complex to decide what should happen to reserve accounts kept for specific purposes, such as fluctuations in tuition students.
9. Transition plan that addresses the development of the first annual budget for the RSU and interim personnel policies: if the new RSU begins in July 2008, the process for budget development will have to be specified in detail very soon. There are also a number of policies that need to be in place when the new school system begins. The RPC will not develop the policies, but will recommend a timeline and a process for addressing this.
10. Documentation of the public meeting(s) held to prepare or review the reorganization plan: We will maintain a record of meetings with agendas and minutes, as well as public notice of meetings.
11. Explanation of how the school systems that approve the plan will proceed if not all involved school systems approve the plan: The RPC will recommend how Bucksport and Orland might proceed if MSAD 18 voted down the plan, for example. However, it is not clear whether the Commissioner will approve the new RSU unless all three school systems support it.
12. Estimate of the cost savings to be achieved and how these savings will be achieved: The RPC will examine the budgets of the three school systems and identify possible cost savings. There may be advantages in purchasing certain items due to the school system being larger, for example.
13. Other matters that the current boards find necessary: One additional item might be the RPC

recommendation on the start-up date for the RSU: 2008 or 2009. Other items will arise as the RPC meets and hears from citizens and school personnel about the new school system.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SMALL SYSTEMS

Because our RSU will have fewer than 2500 students, there will be additional requirements to be met in developing a plan for the Commissioner's approval:

- A. Demonstrate that Bucksport, Orland, and MSAD 18 school boards "performed due diligence" to develop a regional plan with 2500 students but neighboring school systems voted to partner with others [we can demonstrate this based on the number of letters and meetings held with neighboring school systems];
- B. Plan provides comprehensive programming K-12 with at least 1 publicly supported high school [our 4 towns will continue to meet this requirement];
- C. Plan is consistent with specified policies in statute [we can document that all these policies are met];
- D. Plan does not displace students or teachers or close any schools [this will be part of the RPC plan]; and
- E. Reorganizes administrative functions, duties, and non-instructional personnel so the projected expenditures of the RSU for 08-09 in system administration, transportation, special education, and facilities & maintenance will not have an adverse impact on the instructional program.

We anticipate no difficulty meeting items A-D. However, it is not yet clear what is meant by section E.

OTHER AREAS OF CONCERN

The three C's that are raising concerns in our 4 towns and statewide about this reorganization process are Choice of high schools, Closure of elementary schools, and Cost sharing.

School Choice: High school students living in Orland will continue to have choice with the cost paid by the Town of Orland. It is not yet clear how the cost will be determined by the state and approved by citizens. It may be subject to the current contract with Bucksport that requires at least 60% of students attend BHS.

School Closure: It will require a 2/3 vote by the RSU Board to close an elementary school, and citizens will have the opportunity to vote to keep a school open with the added cost of doing so paid by the town.

Cost Sharing: Most of the local cost of operating the RSU will be shared by our 4 towns based on the state assessed valuation of the towns. Exceptions to this could include tuition costs to maintain high school choice, additional costs relating to school closure, and any debt service existing before the RSU begins.