

Ripton School District

STATUS REPORT

PREPARED BY HIF CONSULTING

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Report Overview

The following report was constructed within the guidelines and expectations of Vermont's State Board of Education (SBE). It is intended to provide a thorough demonstration of the work conducted by Ripton School District (RSD) and the strategy to successfully launch a new supervisory union unofficially known as the Mountain Supervisory Union (MSU).

Ripton's process of withdrawal and subsequent launch of MSU has been, in many ways, complicated and convoluted. The absence of established precedent has contributed to a slow, uncertain process. Despite challenges, both projected and unexpected, RSD has continued to learn, adapt, and progress. RSD remains committed to their responsibilities bestowed upon them by the community to represent and ensure their children receive high-quality education.

At this time, as this report will reflect, RSD is focused on establishing a system capable of maintaining, honing, and executing effective educational services. The board's actions will ensure the needs and requirements of students are met. They will also consistently review and apply adjustments to guarantee services are provided to meet standards expected and required within the state of Vermont.

The effort to stand-up MSU is ongoing. Steps remain to be taken and decisions remain to be made. However, RSD has established processes and built relationships with counterparts, consultants, and partners needed to launch and operate MSU.

With this report, RSD intends to provide an accurate and realistic status update. It will illustrate a pattern of work-ethic, processes established to engage and mitigate challenges, and the RSD's understanding of known challenges. RSD has always valued consistent evaluation. Understanding the precise state of the process to build an SU increases the effectiveness of mitigating challenges and helping meet critical checkpoints. The report's segments illustrate the comprehensive process RSD follows to address tasks related to exploratory, transitional, and operational phases of the SU.

RSD is composed of a group of dedicated volunteers. While each brings valuable professional and personal experience to their roles, they recognize the importance of retaining and utilizing external experts and organizations. Since the onset of RSD's existence, the group has consistently reached out to the broader community of Vermont to tap into the collective wisdom of those involved, impassioned, and invested in enriching communities through meaningful learning opportunities.

The collective knowledge of experts is an asset. They assist RSD's ability to understand challenges, develop strategies, and make the best decisions possible. Despite the number of people consulted, this report will highlight a select few. This selection is based on relevancy of experts at this time and their willingness to contribute in the public manner requested by the SBE.

While RSD is confident in its strategy to stand-up MSU, the board continues to apply a critical eye to the question of viability. It has never been the intention of RSD to force an outcome that is nonviable or proven to be detrimental to the human development of Ripton students. This document depicts RSD's activities, actions, established plans, and method of addressing questions and concerns still in the process of being answered.

The list of questions and topics identified by the SBE reflect a necessary checklist of essential issues. It has provided a helpful guide to reflect and examine the work being done and the planning of future work linked to launching MSU. Due to the fluid nature of processes directly and peripherally connected to the establishment of MSU, it is likely the questions and issues will shift and be amended over time. Changes will be managed methodically, as RSD has established a process of understanding, deliberation, decision-making, and executing strategic actions.

In many cases, as the report will demonstrate, the actions related to standing-up the SU are based on established best-practices, statues, and guidelines within Vermont. RSD, for the sake of efficiency and continuity, strives to avoid "recreating the wheel". Recommendations of state agencies, successful actions and systems of other districts and supervisory unions, and the effective methods utilized by RES staff and administration are followed as a model and reference.

Every community is different. The needs of students vary. Therefore, RSD is intent on working closely with primary stakeholders (educators, administrators, support staff, and relevant state agencies) to ensure decisions blend state and federal goals with community needs.

The working relationship between the towns of Lincoln and Ripton is a primary driver of the success of MSU. Already, the respective boards of both towns are working together. They have a productive method of engaging, deliberating, delegating, sharing, and advancing the process of standing-up MSU. While it is inevitable that shared costs, compromise, and collaboration must exist between the two towns, it is equally important for each community to retain its individuality.

Both communities are confident in the viability of a small educational system structure. Consolidation of educational entities can create efficiencies, but consolidation that diminishes equity, representation, and recognition of the valuable differences of communities is problematic. Until steps and processes establish consistency in decision making and the voices of smaller communities are secured, the ability for smaller communities to work together to function and guarantee the quality of education for their youngest students is appropriate and necessary. The RSD board believes their current effort represents a positive step in enriching the lives of students and reflecting the vision of the community they represent.

Historical Overview

A result of Vermont's passing of Act 46 was the merger of smaller communities within larger districts. The goal of the mergers was to improve educational opportunities, create a fair and equal environment for students, and streamline management. Despite the well-intentioned Act 46, some communities determined mergers were not in their best interest.

Throughout the state, there have been several examples of communities making the choice to withdraw or attempt to withdraw. Variations of reasoning exist, but common themes persist. They include: disenfranchisement, lack of engagement, inequality of representation, lack of transparency in decision making, and concern regarding policies and procedures related to school closure.

The community of Ripton has wrestled with the conflicting and divisive issue of withdrawing from ACSD. The decision to depart ACSD was not made lightly. After much deliberation, debate, and the execution of democratic process, the town of Ripton voted to withdraw. Although the possibility of Ripton being assigned as its own Supervisory District was deemed unlikely, RSD has embraced the assignment. Creative and exciting, potential outcomes have been developed.

The responsibility of navigating withdrawal and managing the process of standing up a new SU has been, largely, fulfilled by members of the Ripton School Board (RSD). This group of volunteers was elected to represent the Ripton School District (RSD) and the Ripton community. While there continues to be input from members of the town, the original board consisted of: Joanna Doria, Steve Cash, and Molly Witters. Recently, during the May town meeting, the board was expanded. It now includes the additions of two individuals possessing acute understanding of RES's value and resolute commitment to embracing the role of a school within their community: Jane Phinney and Wendy Harlin.

The Ripton School Board is passionate about maintaining a school within Ripton. Not as a political statement, but as a mechanism of enriching the lives of youth and the fabric of the community. However, they are equally committed to making decisions yielding the best possible education for Ripton's students. If, at any time, the board determines withdrawal and establishment of The Mountain SU compromises the education of students, they will take necessary steps to re-engage ACSD or accept whatever assignment the state mandates.

The consequence of the vote to withdraw has been complicated. RSD has found itself in, what has been referred to as, "Uncharted waters," by SBE Chair Oliver Olsen in a memo written on October 31, 2021. Despite the unknowns, RSD members have made every effort to meet the requests and standards set forth by state agencies and legislature.

Ripton's decision to withdraw has reverberated throughout Vermont. Despite the degree of external attention, it was not the intention of RSD, or the town of Ripton, to create a negative impact on other communities. Ripton's decisions were, first and foremost, based on their recognition of the irreplaceable value of having a school that reflects and understands the needs of their community. Additionally, the decision was influenced by larger issues related to equity, lack of transparency in processes directly related to communities within merged districts, and decisions influencing the education of their youngest children. In a time when school security is tragically required, an essential tool in monitoring and preventing violence and negative events at schools is the ability to consistently engage with students on a personal level. This sentiment can be corroborated by RSD's consultant Jeff Valence.

Throughout the fall of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, RSD worked in good faith to try and bridge the divides between Ripton and ACSD that prompted the withdrawal. Despite several attempts to communicate and establish a working relationship to resolve issues, RSD and ACSD were not able to resolve diverging perspectives.

RSD has always known their future as a system of one would not be feasible. However, because the town of Lincoln was already involved in a withdrawal process, Lincoln became an obvious, potential partner to address the challenges of being a one-school-Supervisory District. The future of community-based education in the towns of Ripton and Lincoln hinge upon a mutually beneficial partnership.

For several months, members of both Ripton and Lincoln have engaged in preliminary discussions and informal working groups to consider the implications, feasibility, and requirements of standing up a SU. Once the town of Lincoln formally voted to withdraw from MAUSD and their school board was elected, RSD and LSD began aggressively pursuing measures to meet the official launch date of July 1, 2023.

The future of education in Vermont continues to evolve. Towns and educational bodies are actively engaged in a range of assessments and examinations of structures governing the delivery and oversight of education. The results of these deliberations have been varied and are representative of the dichotomy of community composition and needs within Vermont.

At this time, with the necessary votes counted and the establishment of school boards, Ripton and Lincoln are progressing with their plan to launch MSU. Both communities are acutely aware of the challenges ahead. RSD looks forward to being able to move past the planning and strategic adjustment phase and take actionable steps towards its July 1, 2023, goal.

There is much work to be done. Time is a critical factor. Strategies and elements required to successfully transition, stand-up, and operate the new SU either exist or are being put in place. With adequate and appropriate support and guidance, RSD is confident they will be successful.

Timeline

To effectively articulate the path forward, a timeline of necessary wickets has been constructed. They identify key events and illustrate the stages of standing-up MSU. These wickets include projected dates of completion, which are subject to change.

Timeline Going Forward

- 1) Launch Hiring Committee for Central Office, July 25, 2022**
- 2) Launch Hiring Committee For Principal of RES, August 5, 2022**
- 3) Communicate with town August 17, 2022**
- 4) Hold Vote on School Choice Designation August 31, 2022**
- 5) Submit advertisements for superintendent, executive assistant, SPED director for central office
September 12, 2022**
- 6) Communicate With Staff at RES to Discuss Status September 20, 2022**
- 7) Form SU Board with District Designees, September 28, 2022**
- 8) Submit Advertisement for principal at RES, October 10, 2022**
- 9) Prioritize and Implement Steps to Fulfill Financial Administration and Operations, October 20 -
January 1, 2023**
- 10) Secure Funding Sources For Phase II Transitional Budget, November 5, 2022**
- 11) Coordination and Planning with ACSD personnel around Transportation, Food Services, and**
- 12) Facilities Management November 15, 2022**

- 13) Assess and Identify Positions to be Filled at RES, December 14, 2022**
- 14) Launch transitional period of Mountain SU by January 1, 2023**
- 15) Hire consultants to assist with policy and procedures February 2023**
- 16) Communicate With SBE and AOE to Update on Progress, March 1, 2023**
- 17) Transfer of Insurance Policies June 12, 2023 (coordinate with VISBIT and Bill Mahler)**
- 18) Transfer of Student Records May/June 20, 2023**
- 19) Official Launch of Mountain Supervisory Union July 1, 2023**

Experts and Consultants

Introduction

RSD has engaged and retained several experts and consultants. Each helps navigate the withdrawal and launch of the new SU. As experts, professionals, and organizations with related experience, they provide RSD with insight, clarity, and evaluations assisting the board to make effective decisions.

History of Expert Engagement

Since the earliest stages of RSD's journey, both the exploratory committees and the official school board of Ripton have actively sought external wisdom. This effort continues. The board is constantly reaching out, tapping into various networks within Vermont and New England, and seeking appropriate resources. As a group, RSD is under no illusion that they can unilaterally succeed in standing up the SU. Therefore, the talent, experience, and collective wisdom of consultants, experts, and community volunteers are vital drivers of progress.

Continued Expert Engagement

While significant advances have been made to engage and utilize experts, the work of creating the new SU is not complete. Therefore, the scope and landscape of challenges continues to shift, which will require the board to seek new experts to add to their roster. These new voices and minds will fill gaps in the working knowledge of the respective boards. With targeted application of experts, a better understanding of challenges and development of strategies to make the best decisions possible will be achieved.

RSD has identified areas of necessary external support. As mentioned previously, the board is actively engaging individuals to augment work related to: Curriculum oversight, constructing a functional central office, launching a successful transition period, transitioning roles and responsibilities related to food services, transportation, and facilities management, financial modeling, and ensuring all staffing is in place to provide students with all levels of services and opportunity needed to thrive.

Expert Related Challenges

Despite consistent efforts to acquire experts, RSD has encountered several roadblocks. On multiple occasions, experts have expressed their hesitation to publicly lend their voices due to the divisive and politicized nature of the topic. Their preference has been to continue to support RSD in the background. While this has not minimized the help provided, it does limit their access on a public basis.

Regardless of these obstacles, RSD and their counterparts in Lincoln continue to advance towards designated checkpoints. With thorough planning and organized scheduling, any work not completed this summer will be fulfilled in the fall of 2022 and early winter of 2023.

The Role of Experts and Organizations

Individual experts have been engaged in a variety of formats. These formats include individual conversations/interviews, group discussions conducted during public meetings, email exchanges regarding specific topics. The experts and organizations have been engaged in both volunteer and paid consultancy capacities.

While individuals have provided context, answers, and perspective, RSD has also sought advice and support from organizations. One such organization, Holistic Impact Foundation (HIF), a New Hampshire based nonprofit, has provided a range of support and services since November 2021. HIF, whose mission is to create scalable impact by empowering people and enriching communities through education, research, consultancy, and media platforms, focuses on supporting rural areas. HIF has provided its consulting platform to deliver a range of services supporting RSD in strategic thinking, facilitation, communication, human development concepts, research, and completion of this status report.

Current Experts and Organizations

Further details about experts and organizations can be found in the attached CVs and documents.

- [Brittany Gilman](#), Education Finance Expert
- [John Everitt](#), Retired Superintendent and Education Expert
- [Tim O'Leary](#), Vermont Educator and Administrator Including MTSS and Technology
- [Jeff Valence](#), NH Based Superintendent and Principal Specializing in Creative Management of Small Schools
- [Jane Phinney](#), Retired, Vermont Educator with 30+ years of Experience as Teacher and Administrator
- [HIF Consulting](#), The Consultancy Platform of Nonprofit Holistic Impact Foundation, They Specialize in Strategic Development, Facilitation, Communication, Human Development, and Research.
- [Jim Warnock](#), Former Assistant Superintendent and Educational Expert

Status

Experts are continually engaged. Their presence and support are vital to RSD's ability to fulfill its roles and responsibilities. RSD will continue to seek and work with individuals and organizations who will empower them to execute their strategy.

Budget For Planning and Transition

Introduction

The following section outlines both the plan and details of budgets constructed to fund activities required to plan, transition, and stand-up Mountain Supervisory Union (MSU) by July 1, 2023. RSD has retained and utilized the services of Brittany Gilman, an education financial expert, to model a fiscal reality.

The specific budget for planning and transition activities, along with all financial modeling, will serve as a significant check regarding viability of MSU. In addition to Brittany's work, RSD has augmented financial modeling with experts in education and administrative best practices. Their insight has helped provide context and test financial projections.

Actions

RSD has undertaken the following actions to develop and construct budgets supporting the fulfillment of responsibilities associated with planning and standing-up MSU by July 1, 2023. These actions include the identification of funding sources and date of actual or planned appropriation of funding consistent with the requirements of 16 V.S.A. 4029.

- Identified consultant to assist with the financial modeling necessary to accurately understand the financial requirements of operating and executing the responsibilities of a district and supervisory union education system. This modeling illustrates specific steps to ensure responsibilities are fulfilled.
- Hired Brittany Gilman as a consultant (See Appendix for CV).
- Developed transition budget, in consultation with Lincoln and other relevant experts with experience in education, administration, and strategic planning.
- Sources of funding were identified that meet financial needs outlined in budget. These funding sources were shared and articulated in the Town Report provided to community of Ripton in March, 2022. The funds approved by the voters for the RSD will be shown as a separate tax rate on the tax bill. It will be calculated within the town's grand list program, and it will print on the bill.

RSD Transition Budget Phase I: Present Until January 1, 2023

Item	Ripton ¹	Lincoln
Business Services	\$8,000	\$6,000
Legal Services	\$10,000	\$12,000
Supervisory Consulting	\$6,000	\$6,000
Curriculum Consulting	\$6,000	\$3,000
SPED Consulting	\$0.00	\$3,000
Job Advertising and Recruiting	\$2,000	\$2,000
Virtual Meeting Subscription	\$250	\$250
Town Office Services	\$2,750	\$2,750
Total	\$35,000	\$35,000

(The above line-item budget was voted on and approved by RSD. It meets the expenses incurred to date and anticipated expenses associated with the planning and transition of the district through December 2023. This budget was then presented to and approved by Ripton voters at the March 2022 town meeting and meets requirements of 16 V.S.A 4029.)

Transition Budget Phase II: January 1, 2023 to July 1, 2023²

RSD utilized a similar process and relied on the same sources of information and guidance to develop the Phase II transitional budget. Phase II Transition Budget supports hiring staff and purchasing essential equipment, services, materials, etc.. To ensure the SU structure is in place and fully operational by July 1, 2023. Board and community members from Ripton and Lincoln are exploring different options to fund this budget, including:

- Requesting appropriated funding from the state legislature

¹ Approved by Ripton voters May 9, 2022

² Information was sourced from SU Budget-Proposed Draft from Brittany Gilman on 5/6/22 except for cost omitted.

- A special tax allocation
- Consideration of potential lending opportunities to bridge the respective fiscal periods.

RSD and LSD have agreed to share the cost of standing up MSU. The following chart outlines the portion of the Phase II Transition Budget falling under RSD’s responsibly. The budget is likely inflated because it represents a full six months of all line items (January – June 2023), while actual expenses will likely be phased over that period. The budget will be adjusted as more information becomes available.

Executive Administration	Fiscal Year 2024 Estimated
Wages and Benefits	\$132,646
Admin Assit/Bookkeeper	\$69,358
Finance Manager	\$27,417
Legal Fees	\$25,000
Fiscal Services	\$10,000
Audit ³	\$20,000
Insurance (W/C, Liability)	\$25,000
Advertising	\$4,000
Supplies	\$3,500
Misc. (Dues and Fees, ect)	\$1,500
Technology	\$17,500
Total (1-Year Cost)	\$315,921
Total (6-Month Cost)⁴	\$157,960

Filling Vacancies

These budgets represent roles that have either been filled or will need to be filled. To successfully acquire talent related to these roles, RSD is deploying a comprehensive strategy combining accessing known networks throughout the state, using professional search platforms, and exploring the use of a talent search specialist.

Status

Phase 1 of the planning and transition budget has been set and approved by voters. The necessary roles have been filled and actionable steps to meet strategic checkpoints are being taken. Phase 2, which includes the transitional team of the central office, has a theoretical budget structured, but is awaiting final approval and notification of designation.

³ This cost is omitted

⁴ The share of 6-Month Cost will be either a 50/50 split or determined by EQP.

Introduction

RSD has formed a relationship with the Lincoln School District (LSD). The respective boards from each town are working to ensure Ripton Elementary School (RES) and Lincoln Elementary Community School (LECS) continue to provide high quality educational experiences while meeting the specific responsibilities associated with operating MSU.

Both communities are proud of the education their students receive. Yet, both recognize the long-term viability of localized education in Ripton and Lincoln is predicated on a governance structure maintaining control in the respective towns. Forming a SU with two small school districts is an appropriate and effective model for RSD and LSD.

The structure of MSU will allow RSD and LSD to maintain their individuality while sharing the cost of the administrative services related to the central office. Furthermore, there are several opportunities resulting in the cooperative and coordinated relationship outlined in MSU's plan. Jeff Valence, a consultant supporting RSD, indicated that difficulties arise when priorities are in direct conflict. As Ripton and Lincoln understand how their priorities align, the SU can embrace the diversity of perspective and composition of the two SDs. It is a sentiment shared by the RSD.

For this venture to be successful, Ripton and Lincoln have developed a plan to efficiently work together. Representatives from Lincoln and Ripton school boards have agreed to a framework and are continuing to refine a process enabling efficient decision-making and resolution of conflicts or differences. Based on the principles of coordination, communication, and collaboration, the SU will balance individual needs and personalities of communities while sharing broader systemic goals and the workload of the SU.

In addition to Lincoln, RSD is maintaining a working relationship with Addison Central School District. Although Ripton voted to withdraw from the larger district, ACSD may still play a role in the educational future of Ripton. Should The Mountain SU prove to be nonviable, RSD and the town of Ripton may elect to return to ACSD.

Defining Working Relationships

The following outlines the steps RSD is taking to have effective working relationships with the two entities it is primarily engaged with. Below are the specific details of how RSD views the working relationship with both Lincoln School Board and Addison Central School District.

- **Lincoln School Board:** The primary partner in the creation, operation, and management of MSU. To ensure a fair, balanced, and effective working relationship, the following have been established:
 - Process of Problem Solving:
 - Disputes
 - Differences of needs
 - Challenges impacting SU or individual schools within SU
 - Method of Establishing Financial Responsibilities
 - Working Groups Tasked With Specific Goals:
 - Filling Vacant roles
 - Constructing and Confirming Budgets
 - Reviewing
- **Addison Central School District:** The role of ACSD in relation to RSD's work is to:
 - Support efficient transfer of student records
 - Provide relevant and necessary information regarding shift of responsibilities from ACSD to MSU regarding services
 - If RSD and LSD determine MSU is nonviable, RSD will work with ACSD to re-enter the district.

Working Relationship

The pillars of an effective and successful working relationship are: Communication, Collaboration, Compromise, and Coordination. RSD and LSD adhere to these pillars to effectively balance and share the responsibility of managing and problem solving known and unforeseen challenges related to operating the SU and maintaining the educational integrity of individual schools.

Problem Solving Process

- Identify challenge, dispute, difference of need
- Communicate with relevant stakeholders to understand causation and related consequences
- Coordinate to form working group with equal representation from both communities to explore, understand, and identify causation of challenge
- Collaborate with stakeholders to identify pathways of solutions and define actionable steps to resolve challenges, disputes, and differences of need
- Compromise to retain balance and remain focused on the shared goal of operating the SU

Method of Establishing Financial Responsibilities

Responsibility for the cost of developing, transitioning, launching, and operating the SU are defined in part by respective members of Ripton and Lincoln, state guidelines, and existing norms utilized by districts and supervisory unions throughout Vermont. Currently, members of RSD and LSD are working on a model, used in other SUs throughout Vermont, in which assessments are divided proportionally based on ADM and SPED assessment. Already, during the process of developing and preparing to enter the transition phase of standing-up MSU, LSD and RSD have discussed and followed a plan to share expenses and allocate funds. This plan will be revisited and adjusted according to the respective phase.⁵

Working Groups

As both school boards are composed of elected volunteers, the use of working groups to fulfill tasks and execute responsibilities is essential and efficient. Currently, RSD and LSD have blended working groups exploring specific topics and engaging with focused intention to generate answers/solutions. The working group model will prove to be an important tool as the SU moves forward.

ACSD Relationship

RSD is also working to establish specific parameters with ACSD regarding the process of returning, should the SU prove to be nonviable. RSD has maintained communication with ACSD board members and individuals within ACSD school system. The goal is to have an efficient transition and guarantee, should it be necessary, that a plan is in place to discuss re-entry. Recent meetings include Dr. Burrows and correspondence with individuals like ACSD business manager Logan Price, Facilities Manager Bruce McIntire, Laura LaVacca Director of Food Services, Nicole Carter District Director of SPED, and Tracey Harrington Current RES Principal. Additionally, a letter is being drafted to be that articulates RSD's intention and an outline of potential actions needed to be taken should a return to ACSD proves necessary. These ongoing discussions will help structure a process avoiding confusion or lapses in educational services.

⁵ Specific plans of funding allocation can be found in the budgets provided in the report

Status

The spirit of collaboration has been present between Ripton and Lincoln for many months. A foundation of communication, collaboration, and trust has been established. While both groups are operating effectively together, an official adoption of productive practices and working norms for the collaborative elements is underway. While dynamics of the working relationship continues to evolve, working groups are actively engaged in tackling issues pertaining to the new SU.

Shared Expense Plan

Introduction

Due to the nature of collaboration between Lincoln and Ripton, shared expenses are inevitable. Although, as mentioned previously, the towns maintain individual schools and a degree of autonomy, they are linked by the SU they have formed. It is the SU they are responsible for funding.

Shared Resources and Services

Effective and seamless engagement between both communities is one of the reasons Ripton and Lincoln are confident they will realize their vision for MSU. Recognizing the value of collaboration and working in tandem, the communities have agreed to share resources of talent, expertise, consultants, and experience existing within Vermont's education system. This is paramount to navigating the consequences of withdrawal and the positive result of standing up a new SU.

Current Shared Resources and Services

The following are the current roster of shared expenses related to the resources and services required to fulfill the actions of standing-up SU.

- Brittany Gilman
- HIF Consulting
- Jeff Valence
- John Everitt

In the future, resources will also be shared at the SU level. This will include the acquisition and use of software, programs, and services needed to execute the role of the Central Office. In addition to individual experts, it is important to note the collective resource that is the individual members of both Lincoln and Ripton communities who attend meetings and contribute.

Plan to Share Future Expenses

RSD and LSD will successfully manage the shared expenses related to the SU. The two entities will use the following process to ensure fair and balanced decision making.

- **Working Group:** With balanced representation, this working group will be tasked with reviewing all expenses relevant to the shared responsibilities of the SU. This group will also be tasked with making decisions about prioritization and application of funding.

- **Resolving Disputes:** Should disputes arise, the group will present the differing perspectives/opinions/needs. Disputes will be evaluated and resolved through a process of deliberation, adherence to agreed upon norms, and a vote by the blended board representing the interests of the SU.
- **Standard Systems:** Within Vermont's education system a series of values exist that help govern the decisions related to distribution of funds and the process of determining how much involved entities are responsible for paying. These values include:

(RSD and LSD are also looking at models being used by SPED assessment and ADM that have, historically been approved and utilized throughout the state.)

Status

This model is structured, but still in progress awaiting the formal approval by the working group. It will need to be formally adopted once the SU board can be formed. The plan is continuously being refined to reflect and engage with shifting need-sets associated with managing shared-expenses. This plan and expenses can be modified to include additional communities should that become relevant.

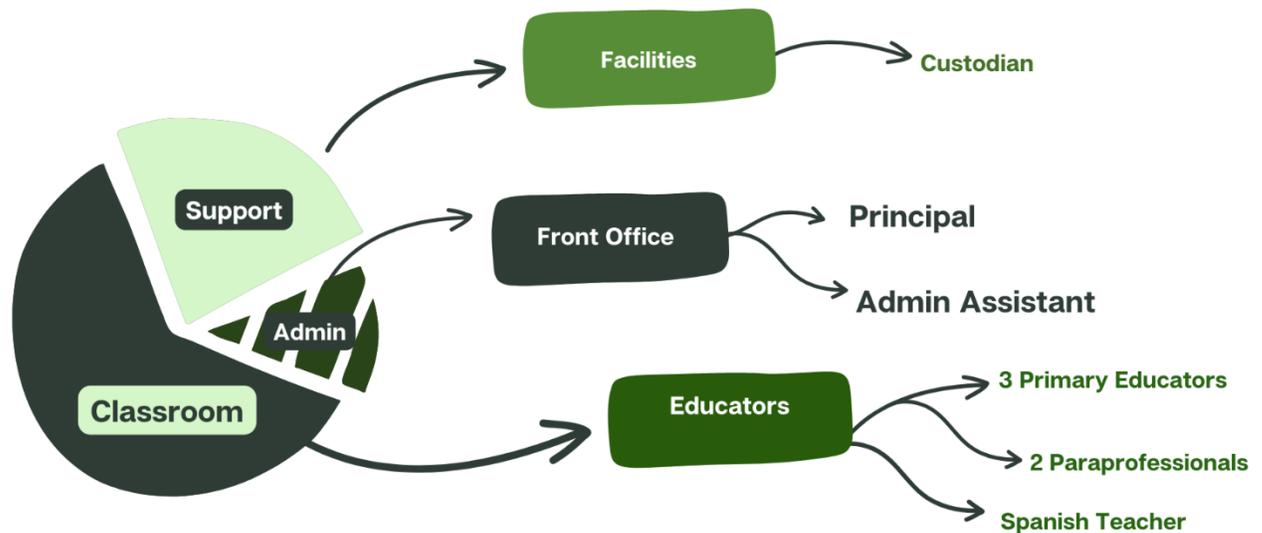
The current model of shared expenses related to the transition budget is equally distributed between two towns. Once the SU is created and functional, Central Office costs will likely be divided proportionally by ADM and/or SPED assessments. The plan is based on a process of communication, collaboration, and coordination. With the shared goal of standing up the SU to maintain community integrity and educational performance, both communities are invested in finding fair and balanced solutions to funding demands.

Introduction

A school's success is predicated on the talent and abilities of educators, administrators, and support staff. RSD is acutely aware of the need to retain, secure, and nurture the individuals who provide students with a high-quality education. To ensure the best possible outcome for students, RSD is currently developing a plan to achieve the following goals:

- Communicate with educators to understand needs, challenges, and areas of strength
- Empower educators
- Review, assess, and evaluate performance to help improve educational experiences
- Provide professional development through trainings
- Establish a format to facilitate active problem-solving of issues identified by educators

RES Staffing Map



Building Relationships

A part of RSD's strategy of maintaining an active working relationship with RES during the planning and transitional phase of standing-up MSU has been to engage the staff. While this is an ongoing process, there have been two important steps already made.

1. On March 14, 2022, RSD held an informal and voluntary meeting with educators, support staff, and administrators. The board provided a status update on the process of withdrawal and standing up the new SU. They also provided time for those present to ask questions and voice any comments or concerns they may have. The meeting was attended by staff both in-person and virtually.
2. In March and April, staff had the opportunity to speak with Dylan Patrick of HIF Consulting. The goal of these meetings was to have confidential and one on one conversations regarding individual roles, concerns, comments. These conversations provided a helpful insight into the day to day and culture of the school. It is the intention of RSD to resume these conversations when educators and support staff return to school.

School Culture

A school possessing a culture of collaboration, communication, and coordination is likely to find success. These pillars encourage cross-disciplinary interaction and support. It also leads to greater efficiencies within the team of educators, administrators, and support staff. Agile roles and cross-disciplined personnel have an even greater value in smaller schools.

Maintaining and enriching school culture is critical to both short-term and long-term performance of both students and staff. When investments in school culture are made, opportunities to mitigate challenges, enhance strengths, and explore new teachable moments are possible.

RSD is prioritizing ways to support educators, administrators, and support staff. Working with relevant consultants (Tim O’Leary, Jeff Valence, and HIF Consulting), RSD will identify areas requiring support and methods of empowering, refining, and supporting all stakeholders within the SU.

School culture is a composition of numerous factors. For the purpose of this report, the following are identified as essential drivers of school culture at RES:

1. Leadership

Leadership is paramount in any profession or circumstance in which individuals must function collectively. While many of the skills and qualities of a leader transcend role or discipline, this section is focused on fundamental elements of leadership within an educational setting.

It is important to identify those opportunities to lead are not reserved for administrators. Leadership must be nurtured, empowered, and encouraged in all stakeholders within a school. Learning when

and how to take initiative, provide guidance, and help the community achieve its goals is an important aspect of the social and cultural development within the school.

As it relates to the designated leadership positions within a school (superintendent, principal, and classroom teachers) RSD intends to focus on strengthening the dynamics between the individual roles. It is the intention of the board to work with leaders in the school to identify challenges, brainstorm solutions, and empower stakeholders to optimize and maximize their talent, tools, and resources.

Qualities of Leadership

Although the following qualities are originally intended for administrative leaders, they can be modified and applied within other roles and positions.

- Serving as instructional leader
- Maintaining a strong, safe, and supportive school climate conducive to learning
- Leading day to day operations within the school
- Maintaining fidelity to the SU action plan, and making decisions with consideration for system priorities and initiatives
- Providing supervision and evaluation of staff, for the purpose of improving teaching and learning
- Using data to inform decision-making based upon what is best for students (as opposed to adults)
- Articulating progress and the well-being of school and students to the school community
- Developing building specific policies and practices that support the educational mission of the school and district

Indicators of Success

- Consistency within the school with respect to instruction, use of data, and expectations
- Intentional development of teacher leadership/leveraging of teaching expertise to improve instruction
- Provision of timely, high-quality feedback and support to all educators
- Climate indicators suggest strong positive school climate, and where data suggests needs, principle directs improvement efforts related to those needs
- Evidence of support for professional learning and collaboration, including use of meting time for focus on improving teaching
- Principals invested in staying in their schools to engage in continuous improvement over time (low levels of turnover)

As it relates to the leadership originating in the central office, it is important that the superintendent or the designee:

- a) Supervise a licensed principal who shall be responsible for the day-to-day leadership of the school

- b) Create a school leadership team consisting of administrators and teachers (and students as appropriate) with compensation either in time or financial reimbursement or a combination of both for all teachers
- c) Create professional learning groups for all teachers that meet during school time at least two hours per month and are facilitated by trained teachers
- d) Coordinate the principal's schedule to enable him/her to engage in student learning, such as:
 - a. Teaching a course or hosting an advisory with students
 - b. Mentoring a group of students in developing their Personalized Learning Plans
 - c. Providing support for students through support services
 - d. Other methods of student engagement as approved by the superintendent
- e) Provide teacher support and evaluation aligned with the guidelines approved by the SBE
- f) Minimize, as much as possible, supervision of non-teaching staff by the principal

2. Staffing

While Ripton Elementary School currently employs a total of 15 teachers and support staff representing a spectrum of FTE. They include educators, support staff, and administrators. Due to the changes related to withdrawal, RSD anticipates change-over. The board is engaged in conversations to accurately account for all positions requiring replacement prior to the July 1, 2023 operational date of The Mountain SU.

RES professional staff are licensed and appropriately endorsed for their assignment. All classroom staff, including educational support personnel, have had adequate academic preparation and training to teach or provide services in the area to which they are assigned. They represent a group of talented, committed, and agile individuals committed to the wellbeing and enrichment of the students in their care.

Along with the classroom and support staff, instructional and administrative staff at RES possess the knowledge and skills to implement the standards in alignment with professional educator standards established by the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators.

When MSU is formally launched, a plan will be in place to ensure that licensed special education staff are employed along with sufficient qualified staff needed to identify students eligible for special education services and to implement each eligible student's Individual Education Program and Section 504 plan.

3. Combined Classrooms

RES has been utilizing a strategy of combined classes. This has provided layers of learning opportunities for students. It has also created an opportunity to successfully manage the relatively small number of students while maintaining a healthy teacher to student ratio. Within this strategy, RSD will ensure that classes in K-3, when taken together, shall average fewer than 20 students per teacher. Likewise, in grades 4&5⁶, when taken together, classes shall average fewer than 25 students per teacher. The total class roll of teachers shall not exceed 100 students, except when the specific nature of the teacher's assignment (such as in certain art, music, or physical education programs) is plainly adaptable to the teaching of greater numbers of students while meeting educational goals of the program.

4. Communication

Since the withdrawal of Ripton from ACSD, considerable speculation about what the future has persisted. RSD recognizes the importance of clear, factual communication. Therefore, they have provided updated information, when possible, to both the broader community of Ripton and staff at RES. They will continue to communicate with transparency to ensure all stakeholders are able to make informed decisions.

5. Educator Culture

While there is great confidence in the educators and support staff at RES, RSD believes there is always room for improvement. In the interest of continuing to hone skills and tap into the varied experience of the collective knowledge of individuals working at RES, the RSD board is in the process of working with experts like Tim O'Leary and Jeff Valence to develop professional development and training opportunities.

Trainings and professional development will include all staff at RES, not only primary classroom educators. Within a small school, it is vital that everyone has a comprehensive understanding of roles, responsibilities, and scheduling to optimize opportunities of agile support, cross-training, and teachable moments. Such conditions will enable, "Small schools' nimbleness and flexibility to respond to universal targeted and intensive needs identified by student assessment data," as Tim O'Leary explained.

⁶ This report does not include grades 6-12, as RES is not directly engage with these age ranges in the classroom.

Educator Qualities

- Maintaining a strong, safe and supportive classroom climate conducive to learning
- Knowing expectations for student learning, and developing and implementing high quality opportunities to learn that engage learners and move all students systematically towards ambitious goals
- Maintaining fidelity to supervisory union action plan, and make decision with consideration to system goals
- Using data to inform teaching and to make teaching responsive to individual needs (personalization), based upon what is best for students (as opposed to adults).

Markers of Educator Success

- Student survey data indicates students feel teachers are invested in their safety and learning
- Students indicate they feel challenged and also supported
- Student outcomes suggest continuous improvement and progress towards goals
- Teachers play a leadership role within schools and across school, sharing expertise and providing mentoring in service of system goals
- Teachers engage in ongoing professional collaboration around improving teaching and learning, both within schools and across schools in the system, and within grade levels and across grade levels
- Teachers implement new curriculum programs with integrity
- Teachers demonstrate knowledge of and use of best practices in teaching

Staffing Needs

RSD is prepared to begin the necessary conversations regarding the staff roster. However, to avoid any confusion or additional changes, it is waiting to complete the administrative and technical process with the state. The plan is to begin engaging staff in September.

While RSD aims to maintain the current configuration at RES, the board anticipates changes to the current staffing roster. One factor anticipated is that educators may decide to depart RES. Despite the possibility of alterations to personnel, RSD is confident they will successfully replace and/or add qualified and enthusiastic personnel. To this end, RSD is taking measures to immediately begin assessing specific staffing needs and launch the hiring process as soon as possible.

Hiring

Hiring is a top concern for RSD. RES has enjoyed a reputation for long-term retention of staff. The average years of current employment of classroom teachers is 20. RSD is confident they will be able to hire talented, energized educators with a range of experience. The following process will address hiring needs:

- Create working group consisting of: RSD member, Superintendent, Principal, and one current RES educator to manage and facilitate the hiring process
- Develop profiles identifying the qualifications, characteristics, and professional experience relevant to vacant roles
- Write and publish job descriptions for all available positions
- Advertise for available positions on relevant job-search platforms, local and regional newspapers, communicate with universities and colleges with educator programs
- Interviewing, negotiations, and the decision to hire will be conducted by the working group
- Training and onboarding for all new staff will be conducted
- Supervision will be systematic, consistent, and timely

Transitioning Existing Staffing

While The Mountain SU represents a new structure and system, it is the goal of the individual school boards (RSD and LSD) to maintain consistency and continuity within their respective schools. Changes will occur and new dynamics will unfold. Yet, with consistent communication and various training and professional development, both new and existing educators will have an opportunity to integrate and excel.

Existing staff will play an invaluable role. Acting as a bridge between RES prior to withdrawal and RES post launch of MSU, they will help acclimate new staff. Also, existing staff will provide students with the important presence of familiarity.

Curriculum Coordination and Content

Content

As it relates to curriculum content, the SU board will ensure each school creates an environment and leads students through educational experiences that are, as SBE states in section 2120.5 of the Series 2000 Education Quality Standards document, “Rigorous, relevant and comprehensive.” Students should be able to demonstrate proficiency in:

- a) Literacy (including critical thinking, language, reading, speaking and listening, and writing)
- b) Mathematical content and practices (including numbers, operations, and the concepts of algebra and geometry by the end of grade 5 as age appropriate)
- c) Scientific inquiry and content knowledge (including the concepts of life sciences, physical sciences, earth and space sciences and engineering design)
- d) Global citizenship (including the concept of civics, economics, geography, world language, cultural studies and history)
- e) Physical education and health education as defined in 16 V.S.A 131
- f) Artistic expression (including visual, media, and performing arts)
- g) Transferable skills (including communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, inquiry, problem solving and the use of technology)

In addition to the previous education elements, RES students will provide their students (k-5) with at least two physical education classes per week. In addition to PE classes, students will also be granted at least 30 minutes of physical activity within or outside of the school per day. Movement may include recess and movement built into the curriculum. RSD recognizes that this does not replace physical education classes. Each public school in MSU will provide support for students who require additional assistance to succeed or to be challenged in the general education environment. Therefore, the SU and its respective schools will be compliant with 16 VSA 2902.

Due to the holistic nature of effective education, schools must provide an education environment that engages with core disciplines as well as relevant life skills. Therefore, RSD will take measures to ensure that comprehensive elementary and secondary health and physical education learning experiences, including the effects of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs on the human system for all students is provided in order to be compliant with 16 V.S.A. 131 and 906(b)(3).

Working with the team of educators at RES, experts, and board members from both Ripton and Lincoln, each school within MSU will enable their students to access academic and experiential learning opportunities reflecting emerging abilities, interests and aspirations, as outlined in the students' Personalized Learning Plans.

Coordination

As it related to curriculum coordination, the SU board will ensure that each school within its jurisdiction will implement the SU's written and delivered curriculum, which shall be:

- a) Aligned with the standards approved by the STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
- b) Coordinated across all grades to prepare students for graduation
- c) Coordinated across the supervisory union, including sending high schools and technical centers
- d) Informed by ongoing review of new research, changing learning opportunities, and updates to the standards approved by the STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
- e) Designed to enable all students to achieve the graduation requirements
- f) Integrated with technology across all disciplines

Student Enrollment

The presence of students is the primary catalyst of a school's need. Without a sustainable student body, a school's necessity diminishes. Diminished necessity will constitute a decision regarding the relevancy of a school's existence. Currently, Ripton has enjoyed a growth in enrollment numbers. Based on 2020 census, Ripton is the fastest growing town in Addison County.

Despite growth, RSD continues to explore methods of expanding student enrollment. An evaluation of trends regarding enrollment, student population, and community composition will be prepared. Using census data, comparative studies of communities and schools with similar dynamics, and both state and regional trends, the board intends to establish projections of educational necessity.

Evaluating student enrollment and school need requires a nuanced understanding parsing the differences between communities. The primary reason a school should be closed is if a community determines it cannot financially afford its existence or the educational quality diminishes. At this time, RES is not matching either of these criteria. RSD realizes having a community school helps to encourage families to move into the town.

Status

The RES has a history of effective, engaging, and empowering education. Students, educators, and community members are proud of their culture and ability to provide for their youngest learners. At this time, based on performance indicator (SNAPSHOT), RES is meeting its obligations. A concrete plan has been established to operate Ripton Elementary School, but activation of the strategy is delayed until the necessary approvals and designations are complete from the state regarding Ripton and Lincoln.

As an institution of learning, the plan is to maintain the framework and dynamics that have produced success over many generations. While adjustments will be necessary due to staffing changes, they will be utilized as a positive development. No entity remains static. Turnover is inevitable. The shifts to educator and staff population related to the withdrawal of RES from ACSD yield an opportunity to manage these inevitabilities.

Regarding UPK, RSD's intention is to pursue the re-instatement of the successful UPK program once existing at Ripton Elementary School. It should also be noted that RES holds up-to-date certification for CDD preschool and afterschool programs.

Year 1 Financial and Operational Modeling Budget

Introduction

The catalyst of MSU's ability to function is its operational budget. The budget includes all elements needed to meet the academic, operational, and SU needs and requirements. In the interest of providing accurate projections, RSD and its financial consultant are waiting for a more precise figures related to tax projections. Currently, the tax rate is not yet a useful metric due to uncertainties surrounding equalized pupils, the property yield, and special education block grant. It is understood that there is no district in the state that would be willing to put a tax rate calculation out in July. In fact, it is also understood that many business managers would not hazard a guess before EQP is published. And, if they do, they generally use the same EQP as the prior year which RSD does not have the luxury of.

Process of Budget Development

RSD has hired the services of Brittany Gilman to facilitate and construct necessary budgets illustrating the functionality of RES and MSU. The following steps were taken:

- Evaluation and assessment of vital elements
- Decision to hire financial expert
- Brittany Gilman is hired
- Brittany discussed with RSD the needs and vision of the desired model
- Brittany built various models illustrating several financial models
- RSD, in conjunction with LSB, approved a final version of an ideal budget for:
 - Planning of SU
 - Transition and Launch of SU
 - Operating Year 1 of SU

Additional Expert Services

Along with Brittany's financial expertise, RSD has consulted with several educational professionals including retired teachers and administrators and active superintendents and administrators. They have provided RSD with practical, working knowledge of effective education systems. Their insight has enabled RSD to apply best practices and current standards to their planning and evaluation process.

Budget Goals

The RSD intends to create and fulfill budgets that enable RES and the central office of MSU to meet their educational and administrative mandates. Budgets were created to be:

- Streamlined
- Efficient
- Fulfill educational requirements
- Maintain educational integrity
- Avoid redundancies
- Fiscal sustainability
- Provide quality education at a realistic cost for community

Sources of Funding

Securing funds needed to fuel the activities of individual schools and the requirements of the SU are a central focus of RSD. While there are established sources of funding and revenue, and the structure of Act 60 clearly outlines guidelines governing the relationship between funding, communities, schools, and educational services, RSD is also exploring new financial opportunities.

Current Sources of Revenue

Small Schools Grant	\$80,000
Forestry Rev.	\$10,000
Interest Inc.	\$100
Rental	\$2,000
Misc.	\$2,500
Tuition Income	\$119,000
Title I Grant	TBD

PTA Funding Opportunities

The actions and interest of communities has been a central theme in the Ripton journey. An example of the reliable support of community members is the long history of support from Ripton's PTA. The group's bylaws read:

3.1.a. "To support and provide enrichment to enhance educational opportunities at the Ripton Elementary School by facilitating academic programs, extracurricular activities, events, and providing supplies and equipment, to meet the expectations and changing needs of the school;

3.1.b To Engage in, promote and organize fundraising activities, pursue grants, and to receive and administer funds, for enrichment and enhanced educational opportunities;

3.1.c To Build, promote and support a strong Ripton Elementary School community.”

Specifically, it helps fund the augmentation of curriculum at RES through experiences like:

- Artist in Residency
- Composition workshop led by the Vermont Symphony Orchestra
- Field Trips
- Summer Program Materials
- Yoga mats for the 3 – 5th grade
- Gardening supplies

Increasing Funding and Revenue Streams

RSD is currently working on a plan to increase funding and revenue streams. While the school board does not anticipate there will be any magic pill to entirely ease the financial consequence of standing up the SU, it is their intention that a diverse strategy to increase funding will ease the burden upon taxpayers.

The following opportunities are being examined:

- Renting space within RES
- Targeted marketing to new students
- Increase number of tuitioned students who attend RES
- New grants
- Explore launching new programming

Tuitioning Students

RSD plans to function as a 6-12 tuitioning/sending district and has budgeted for all the tuition amounts associated with these grades in an amount not exceeding lesser of the statewide average announced tuition. Other budgeting options are: the per-pupil tuition the district pays to the designated school or the tuition charged by the non-designated school enrolling the student. RSD has also budgeted for all Special Education Excess Costs related to 6-12 students on an education plan. It is understood that RSD will need to take the necessary steps to formulate and communicate the specific designation process in accordance with 16 V.S.A. § 827 and plans to do so at its first regular board meeting in September, 2022.

In 2015, the Legislature expanded § 827 to permit designation of one, two, or three schools and we understand that a district may designate only if the voters first authorize the school board to do so. RSD also understands that it can pay tuition to a non-designated school based upon parental request or if the board in its sole judgment determines it will best serve the student’s interests. The board does not need prior voter authorization to grant parental requests. Ripton parents or guardians of students in grades 6-12 will be able to, either by petition or selection, choose a public, approved independent, or an

independent school meeting education quality standards. RSD is committed to supporting all Ripton students and their educational wellbeing and community support and services will be made available when appropriate to all students originating in Ripton.

Enrollment Growth

RSD is exploring and developing a plan to expand enrollment to the school over the next five years. The aim is to identify what makes RES unique, and to follow a targeted marketing strategy to match the goals and vision of RES with people from around the state and region.

Year 1 Budget

The budget reflects a scenario RSD believes is viable. The goal is to increase financial efficiency without diminishing educational effectiveness. Any further budgetary alterations and adjustments are not a shortcoming, but a necessary response to the continued fluidity of the circumstances surrounding RSD's withdrawal and formation of MSU. Please see attached budget documents.

Status

The financial modeling created and demonstrated in this document is largely agreed upon by the members of RSD and LSD. It illustrates a clear, defined plan to meet the requirements and needs of the educational role. The respective boards are still adjusting and identifying ways to streamline the budgets without compromising educational quality and input reliable and current data. At this time, RSD and LSD are moving forward with this document as their cornerstone.

Central Office Organizational Structure

Introduction

Educational systems, at their best, are an ecosystem of symbiotic elements. Each element influences the effectiveness of the other. In creating MSU, a central office must be staffed and equipped to oversee the effectiveness of schools within its boundaries and ensure the broader goals of state and federal agencies are met. The central office is the central hub of leadership and continuity between Ripton Elementary School, Lincoln Elementary Community School, and the broader influences of Vermont and federal laws and goals.

RSD, along with its counterpart in Lincoln, are closing in on a finalized model for a functional staffing and financial model. With the help of superintendents, educational professionals, and financial experts, a model that applies principles of efficiency, agility, and Vermont's educational standards has been constructed. Once budgets are formally approved, which include funding sources, and the profile of necessary staff are created, MSU intends to officially begin the transitional phase of the MSU central office. In the meantime, the search for superintendent, principal for RES, central office administrative assistant, and business manager are being vigorously prepared.

Financial responsibility for the SU's central office will be shared by the participating communities of Ripton and Lincoln. Allocation of financial responsibilities will be determined through a joint committee of members from both RSD and LSD. Once MSU is fully operational, a joint board will be created to oversee and support the collaborative efforts of the central office.

Leadership

Due to the relationship between the central office and districts within an SU, establishing a leadership culture and model reflecting the goals, needs, and vision of SU is paramount. RSD is looking for a superintendent who possesses a leadership style which balances the support and nurturing of individual school cultures while facilitating management of the SU.

One of the advantages of starting something new is the opportunity to creatively establish a supportive and collaborative leadership model. Always mindful to incorporate best practice governance from the state, RSD includes the following recommendations:

- Engage the community to establish the mission and vision for the district
- Use the mission to guide decision making
- Set performance goals for district
- Establish local polices aligned across the SU/SD consistent with minimum standards established by SBE
- Employ and supervise superintendent
- Empower superintendent to develop a strategy and education work plan needed to achieve district or SU goals.
- Consistently evaluate superintendent
- Negotiate fair contracts with employees

Central Office Goals

It is the perspective of RSD that a central office facilitating the operation and existence of The Mountain SU should possess certain characteristics These characteristics reflect the following goals:

- Agile and Efficient Operation
- Leadership Focused on Empowerment
- Comprehensive Problem Solving
- Balanced Attention Between Communities
- Clear Communication with Stakeholders
- Consistent Application and Management of State and Federal Guidelines

Central Office Projected Staff Map



Primary Checkpoints of Central Office Operation

The following checkpoints represent the necessary steps required to be meet the operational deadline of July 1, 2023. They are guides and subject to change and re-prioritization as events continue to unfold.

- Form Shared SU Board
- Hire All Relevant Positions
- Establish Working Relationship With Relevant Boards
- Apply Superintendent's Philosophy and Relevant Systems and Professional Experience

Central Office Location

Consistent with the current focus on streamlining expenses, MSU members have determined a fixed, permanent location within a separate physical entity is not necessary. We are considering a Central Office that enables staff to combine remote working with office space reserved for superintendent and administrative assistant at both RES and LECS. This will enable central office employees to have a presence within both schools and the option to utilize the option of remote working.

Expected Central Office Personnel Descriptions

The following descriptions illustrate a vision for the individuals being sought to fulfill the roles within the central office. Each description is subject to change as the hiring process unfolds. They also include the part-time and/or subcontracted positions fulfilling necessary responsibilities.

Two specific models based on hiring opportunities are already being explored. They include a superintendent/SPED director combination or a part time superintendent and a SPED Director who also works as a SPED educator within the school.

Superintendent

The superintendent is accountable to the school board and to the state for operating within statute and regulations. As the top leadership role in the SU, the superintendent is responsible for:

- Operational oversight of school system
- Maintaining focus on school board's mission, and developing an education work plan to achieve mission
- Ensuring quality of education and equity of opportunities within the system
- Managing services, programs, and resources, for the quality of learning and for the implementation of the school board's annual district education plan and budget
- Making day to day decisions consistent with the policies set by the school board, and within statute and state regulations
- Employing all non-licensed staff, and recommending one licensed candidate to the board for review and approval for other openings

- Creating a robust comprehensive local assessment system, implemented system wide, that assesses student progress toward proficiency-based graduation and captures evidence of learning with respect to all seven education goals outlined in the EQS and standards adopted by SBE.
- Preparing reports, such as the district strategic plan, district budget, and district fiscal and student learning performance reports that enable the school board to evaluate implementation of its mission and progress towards its goals.

Administrative Assistant

A flexible and agile individual with extensive experience within the field of education is preferable. This individual will be an integral part of the central office's success, as they will wear multiple "hats". Like the superintendent and business administrator, it is imperative the admin assistant is comfortable balancing numerous focal points of activity and tasks based on the needs of the SU. Within the framework of a year, the tasks will be governed by deadlines and checkpoints etched into the academic calendar.

Special Education Director

The SPED Director will, as a baseline, recruit, hire, supervise, and evaluate district-level special education staff. They will maintain a current, functional knowledge of existing and future educational standards related to SPED. SPED Director will also be tasked with working to ensure students qualifying and receiving SPED services are provided learning opportunities meeting all standards and statutes of Vermont and federal government.

Business Administration

RSD is considering this as a subcontracted/parttime position. This individual will be responsible for maintaining all necessary filings, reporting, and fiscal supervision related to the operation of the SU. Within the scope of this work, the business administrator will also facilitate contract negotiation and relationships with individuals and companies responsible for fulfilling the external roles of food services, facilities management, and transportation.

Other

Supplementing the work of the business administrator, RSD expects to hire payroll and HR work through contracted services.

Hiring

The need to hire staff to operate the central office is vital to the first phase of transitioning. Despite documented challenges for hiring in rural areas, Ripton and MSU provide unique opportunities for the right candidate. One of these positive conditions is the ability for a superintendent to work with like-minded communities, which will help reduce the need for conflict resolution. Working with The Mountain SU will enable an educator-first superintendent the bandwidth to focus on the task of enhancing educational capacities and maintaining efficient systems and structures.

Hiring Process

- Create working group consisting of: RSD member(s), Lincoln School District member(s), current educator
 - Identify a lead to manage and facilitate hiring process
 - Develop profiles identifying the qualifications, characteristics, and professional experience relevant to vacant roles
 - Write and publish job descriptions for all available positions
 - Advertise for available positions on relevant job-search platforms, local and regional newspapers, communicate with universities and colleges with educator programs
 - Interviewing, negotiations, and the decision to hire will be conducted by the working group
 - Training and onboarding for all new staff will be conducted
 - Supervision will be provided by relevant boards

SU STAFF Budget Year 1

Position	FTE	Salary	FICA/MEDI %7.65
Superintendent/SPED Director	1.00	\$125,000	\$9,563
Executive Assistant	1.00	\$42,000	\$3,213
Finance Manager	.60	\$39,000	\$2,984
Guidance	.60	\$39,000	\$2,984
Library	.40	\$26,000	\$1,989
Nurse	.60	\$39,000	\$2,984
Art	.40	\$26,000	\$1,989
PE	.60	\$39,000	\$2,984
Music	.40	\$26,000	\$1,989
Special Education	1.00	\$65,000	\$4,973
Paraeducator – Sp. Ed.	1.00	\$21,500	\$1,645

Status

We intend to have a very streamlined central office. The goal of creating an environment in which the individual needs of communities the SU are met while maintaining the necessary roles and responsibilities of the SU. At this time, the organizational structure is mapped out. However, we are awaiting final approval budgets of status of SU.

RSD and LSD are working on developing the relevant job descriptions and profiles needed to begin actively searching for candidates to fulfill Central Office roles. The intended goal is to have primary central office roles fulfilled by January 1, 2023. The superintendent is being prioritized, as they are an important role to have involved in the hiring process of other positions.

Introduction

The responsibility of managing the financial health and corresponding operations of the central office falls upon the business administrator. Along with the individual talent and experience of the administrator are several essential systems, tools, and processes needed to support the financial administration of the SU. Hiring a professional with extensive experience will enable the smooth launch and implementation of industry standards.

Steps to Fulfill Financial Administration and Operations

According to RSD's financial consultant, Brittany Gilman, the following steps will help launch the financial administration and operations segment of SU.

- Create and advertise RFP for accounting software
- Create and advertise RFP for banking
- Create and advertise RFP for auditor
- Create and advertise RFP for short-term financing (tax anticipation note)
- Apply for Federal Tax ID and DUNS number
- Register as an entity eligible to receive federal awards on SAM.gov
- Create chart of accounts (follow uniform chart of accounts from state of Vermont)
- Request long-in information for grants management systems
- Research and apply for applicable grants (winter/spring schedule)
- Create job description and advertise for Business Manager role
- Create budget
- Secure check stock
- Secure appropriate log-in information for IRS/State of Vermont Tax filings

Hiring Process

The ideal candidate will have experience in business administration related to education. It is important that the individual fulfilling this role is current and familiar with standard operating systems and programs related to processing and maintaining accurate accounting. At this time, it is likely the business administrator will be hired as a subcontractor on a part-time basis. A set schedule will be established in coordination with the superintendent, once they are hired.

RSD and LSD members will, in accordance with suggestions from Brittany Gilman, launch a job search campaign at the earliest opportunity. One area the boards are focusing on is the pool of qualified, recently retired individuals seeking part-time employment. Along with other roles and positions, the business manager position will be posted once Ripton, and Lincoln school boards receive official designations from SBE.

Status

RSD and LSD are working to create necessary advertisements and notification of positions on relevant hiring platforms and networks. Based on the recommendations of Brittany Gilman, the group is moving expeditiously to secure this role and begin the process of acquiring relevant programs, software, and systems needed to meet the demands of the role.

Introduction

This section was composed based on the review of relevant statutes, information, and best practices within the state of Vermont. Completion of this section was also assisted by Jim Warnock, who has served in a variety of roles within education in Vermont. His experience includes administrative responsibilities directly managing the elements relevant to this section.

By utilizing the common, standard practices of education systems throughout the state, RSD will ensure employees are fairly compensated and supported. As indicated in the following chart, the current master agreements governing exempt employee (teacher) employment in the Addison Central School District and the Mount Abraham Unified School District are very similar. Developing a joint (Mountain) supervisory union would entail honoring the most favorable provisions of each of these master agreements, pending a thorough analysis of the tax implications and subsequent affordability to taxpayers in each of the communities.

Master Agreements Existing in ACSD and MAUSD

	ACSD	MAUSD
Workdays	187	176 + 10 in-service
Student Days	Up to 180	176
Salary (2012-22)	BA step 1: \$44,599 MA + 30, Step 23: \$91,652	BA Step 1: \$46,682 MA + 30, Step 18: \$88,789
Buyout Option	1500	1000
Life Insurance	30,000 group term	25,000 group term
Sick Leave	18 per year, 90 cap	18 per year, 90 cap
Sick Bank	1 day contribution, up to 2	1 day contribution, up to 2
Sabbatical	7 years service to qualify	4 years service to qualify
Health Insurance	Same for both: The Board shall insurance and related benefits award and the resolution of the on Public School Employees the provisions of 16 V.S.A	Provide teachers health as required by the arbitration negotiations by the Commission Health Benefits pursuant to the 2101-2108.

⁷ Section supported and contributed to by Jim Warnock of Lincoln.

Managing Contracts, Payroll, Benefits, Tax Withholding, Insurance

In periods of transition, there are numerous moving pieces. When possible, it is important to retain consistency. Although the individual responsible for fulfilling the role of managing employee contracts, payroll, benefits, tax withholding, and insurance is yet to be hired, the system to successfully manage employee contracts, payroll, benefits, tax withholding, and insurance will remain. Once again, RSD's decision to implement existing processes with minimal adjustments based on nuances of individuals hired is a recognition of current best practices and a desire to avoid unnecessary fluctuation.

Payroll, Benefits, Tax Withholding, Insurance

These elements will be managed and organized by the business manager with oversight from superintendent and respective boards when necessary.

Essential Actions

The following represents specific actions required to implement systems and processes to manage payroll, benefits, insurance, tax withholding, union dues, voluntary and other deductions, for all employees. As a board, RSD will take steps to:

- Collect relevant quotes, software, and services to fulfill these responsibilities
- Make sure up-to-date credentials are acquired
- Access to all relevant databases is established
- Application for Federal Tax ID and DUNS number is completed
- Registration as an entity eligible to receive federal awards on Sam.gov is completed
- Secure appropriate log-in information for IRS/State of Vermont Tax Filings.

In addition, job descriptions for personnel managing these topics will be created, submitted, and used to hire the appropriate candidate.

Status

RSD and LSD are prepared to launch their search and hiring process to secure the necessary positions to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of the SU and its respective board(s). These entities will be in charge of managing the specifics of the Employee Contracts, Payroll, Benefits, Tax Withholding, and Insurance.

Introduction

Policies and procedures steer and manage the decisions and operations of an organization. They establish the checks and balances ensuring consistency and continuity within the specific organization and larger body of state education. RSD has taken measures to adopt policies and procedures necessary to operate and continue to maintain the statutory responsibilities tied to education and administrative roles. The following section was supported by the expertise of John Everitt, who is acting as a consultant with Ripton School District.

All policies and procedures mandated under state or federal law that are applicable to school districts, supervisory unions, and schools should be identified, together with the actions necessary for the district to develop, review, adopt, and implement them. All other policies and procedures necessary for successful operation of the district, its school, and central office (in compliance with Vermont Education Quality Standards) should be identified, together with the actions necessary for the district to develop, review, adopt, and implement them.

Members of the Addison Central School District (ACSD) from the town of Ripton have participated in the development of policies and procedures for the ACSD. These policies as well as the Model Policies of the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) will serve as the building blocks for the Ripton School District (RSD) in their work to build their set of policies for July 1, 2023. During the months September 2022 to April 2023, the Board will develop, review, and adopt the 31 policies required by Vermont and Federal Law. Any necessary procedures for implementation will be developed at the same time.

During the Spring of 2023, the Board will coordinate with the other aspects of this transition and planning process to identify, develop, review, and adopt other policies and procedures that, while may not be required, are important to the successful development of the educational environment for students, parents, teachers, and staff as well as the efficient and equitable operation of the school district. The developed policies and procedures will be followed as they are adopted and will be ready for full implementation on July 1, 2023.

⁸ Section was developed and contributed to by John Everitt.

Status

Once the approval of the SU formation is granted, members of the RSD and LSD will officially launch the hiring process concerning the new SU's central office and staffing vacancies within RES. With these individuals in place, the formal adoption and management of policies and procedures will take place. Currently, RSD is considering the use of John Everitt as a consultant working on policy development.

Introduction

The transfer of responsibility for the maintenance and management of the physical plant of Ripton Elementary School is a significant side-effect of Ripton's withdrawal from ACSD. RSD has developed a plan to maintain the integrity of the physical plant and achieve a seamless transition without interruption of services.

To avoid redundancies or complications, RSD is communicating with the current ACSD facilities manager Bruce MacIntire. Bruce will provide RSD with a list of contractors responsible for fulfilling necessary services. We intend to review contracts to determine which best serve the needs of RES and the town of Ripton.

Additionally, RSD will utilize the current schedule followed by ACSD regarding the upkeep, maintenance, and testing related to RES. These are primarily related to HVAC maintenance, water testing, safety and security, and the seasonal demands associated with the physical property surrounding and consisting of RES.

Ownership of Physical Plant

Currently, the process of transitioning ownership of building from ACSD to the town of Ripton, Vermont is ongoing. Despite the ownership of the school by the town, budgetary responsibility of the school will remain the task of Ripton School Board. The only exception, at this time, is the maintenance and management of all civil emergency elements by the town.

Facilities Management Team

In order to ensure the stages of responsibility are met, the following team will be constructed. It will include:

- **Facilities Manager**

Functioning at the SU level, the facilities manager will oversee both Lincoln and Ripton elementary schools. At this time, the responsibilities of facilities manager will be conducted by the business administrator at the central office. Their specific tasks will include:

- Constructing and governing budgets
- Negotiating and fulfilling necessary contracts for subcontractors needed to provide specialist services such as: electrical, plumbing,
- Organizing

- **On-Site Maintenance**

Janitorial services and regular groundskeeping will be provided by an individual

Contracts For Services

Once ACSD has supplied RSD and relevant RES staff with the list of current contractors, the responsible parties within RSD and The Mountain SU will begin the process of reviewing, negotiating and contracting PS with:

- Subcontractors
- Full and Part Time Staff
- Best practices to manage the individual site of RES and LECS

Schedule of Testing

In the course of a year, it is necessary to schedule regular testing and upkeep of specific services like water testing and changing and inspection of HVAC filters. The specific schedule of testing will be adopted by the ACSD facilities manager. This will ensure there is no lapse in maintenance nor compromise of function.

Technology Assessment and Development

Using the experience of educators familiar with technology, like Tim O’Leary, RSD will evaluate and audit the current technology capabilities of RES. The goal is to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the current systems, platforms, programs, and capacity of RES technology department. RSD desires to establish, in detail, the status of technology within the school, which includes bandwidth, internet access, computer servicing and access, the upkeep of servers and firewalls, and enhancement and implementation of relevant digital learning plans.

Whoever assumes the role of managing technology for RES and/or the districts within MSU will be tasked with ensuring schools are current, up to date, and capable of meeting the demands of 21st century education. Regular reports and updates will be made available to administration, which will assist in relevant decision making and prioritization of funding related to technology. To support this effort, existing digital learning plans from ACSD and Champlain Valley School District will be reviewed as a guide in RES’s assessment of their own digital learning plan.

Insurance Policies

Members of RSD have engaged in conversations with counterparts at ACSD to gather relevant information regarding insurance policies. The process is ongoing, but RSD will ensure all relevant policies are current, maintained, and renewed within the appropriate schedule. At this time, RSD members have identified

VISBIT as the carrier and Bill Wahler as the primary contact for insurance within ACSD to help complete the transition and fulfillment of policies.

Instructional Materials and Education Supplies

Assessments of materials and education supplies will be conducted throughout the 2022-2023 academic year. This will be cross-referenced with the current schedules followed by the current RES administration. Communication between current and future administration will aid planning regarding the acquisition and distribution of instructional materials and education supplies. Additionally, ACSD has said that what is in the building at the time of the SU's operational date will stay within the building. When the new principal is hired, they will review and discuss with educators what changes and updates are required.

According to a conversation with Tracey Harrington, current principal of Ripton Elementary School, "Supplies under the General Fund, are spent at the discretion of the principal. I approve purchase requisitions based on priorities and goals for the school year. Usually, I take 50% of the line for 'General School Supplies' that are in the supply closet, then each teacher gets upward of 15%, plus some for the single subject teachers. Rarely does our supply line cover costs of books/texts."

Managing Capital Projects

Although there are reported backlogs of capital projects in the state, Ripton Elementary School is not currently under pressure to conduct any major capital projects. Despite the challenges of increased costs of materials and scarcity of labor, capital projects inevitably arise. The evaluation of priorities is an important role of those managing the facilities. The board is planning time within their 2023 meeting schedule to better understand funding strategies, which meet guidelines of Act 60, to effectively prepare for larger capital projects.

Status

RSD is continuing their dialogue with Bruce MacIntire and Tim O'Leary to methodically review and understand all the facilities work, including technology, ACSD has done. This will allow the RSD to have a current and thorough understanding of the facility and its needs and facilitate a successful changing of the guard. The goal is to compile all relevant information, contacts, contractors, schedules, and the facility's evaluation so the future business manager, superintendent, and other stakeholders of The Mountain SU and RSD can make accurate decisions.

Food Service and Free and Reduced Lunch

Introduction

Food services and the free and reduced lunch programs are critical benefits provided by a school. Not only do they provide the function of sustenance, but they are, for some students, a critical source of nourishment. The following section outlines the organization and implementation process RSD is following to provide this important element of Ripton Elementary School.

Responsibility of Food Service

RSD will ensure RES students are offered access to food services that meet all state and federal standards pursuant. Using the models currently utilized by ACSD, meals meeting nutritional guidelines will be provided daily. When the central office is established, this will fall under the jurisdiction of the business administrator. It should also be noted that, once again, the influence of community support is a component of food services. Historically, the community organization FORS, has provided afternoon snacks for students.

Free and Reduced Lunch Policy

Students at RES will benefit from the continued application of all rules, guidelines, and standards set by both state and federal law. For students who qualify, a free and reduced lunch policy will be followed. We hope that the state universal meal program remains in place. We will include in all enrollment packages forms necessary to apply for federal funding for meal related services.

Management and Provision of Lunch Services

At this time, RSD has established a working relationship with ACSD to maintain the current process of preparing meals. The primary point person RSD board members have spoken with is Laura La Vacca. Laura is the head of food services, and she has indicated the ability for ACSD to continue preparing meals is possible.

In addition to speaking with Laura La Vacca, RSD has engaged Conor Floyd, who is with Child Nutrition Process at the state. He explained that out of 3 school lunch programs, RSD would fall under the third option: Vended Meals. Conor also indicated this is the simplest process. It doesn't require state approval.

He relayed that it occurs on a smaller scale with some frequency. The SU would still be responsible as the school food authority, which means SU would need to count meals and submit for reimbursement.

The administrative responsibilities of food services will be fulfilled by the central office business manager. At this time, the delivery of food to RES and the serving of food to students must be organized and facilitated by RSD. Currently, RSD is also exploring the use of volunteers managed by the future RES Volunteer Network to augment the delivery and food service responsibilities.

Additionally, RSD members have organized and compiled all necessary forms, contracts, and filing information needed to maintain accurate records regarding food service. They are taking steps to ensure all categories of food service are reviewed, maintained, and met. This includes the meal requirements established by USDA and other resources such as:

- Procurement for School Meals Program
- Informal Procurement Method
- Formal Procurement Method
- Equipment
- Buy American Provision
- Paid Lunch Equity
- Professional Standards
- On-Site Monitoring Form
- Smart Snacks
- Local School Wellness Policy
- Food Safety
- Share Tables
- Non Co-Mingled Pre-K

Additional Learning Opportunity

RSD sees potential for learning experiences surrounding food services. An exploratory effort is underway to develop a program to augment classroom learning and broader human development goals. It is the intention to develop a program that can be built into the daily routine and utilize existing personnel. The goal of the program will be to:

- Illustrate practical knowledge of food generation and values of nutrition and healthy lifestyles
- Provide early engagement with concepts of work, responsibility, and teamwork
- Opportunity to fuse practical application of core academic subjects of math and reading

Status

It is the intention of RSD to procure meals from ACSD. It is still being determined whether the delivery and service will be provided by contracted ACSD employees. If that is not the case, RSD will implement a

system to fulfill delivery and service. In addition, RSD is eager to look for opportunities to build partnerships with local food outlets and growers that meet state and federal guidelines regarding health and safety.

Introduction

In rural communities, the question of transportation is particularly important. Due to geographic factors in states like Vermont, it is vital that an agile transportation system exists. One of the challenges of transportation is the ability to create efficiency of both logistics and cost. However, the stakeholders of The Mountain SU are exploring several approaches to the transportation question.

Transportation Models

Due to the state of flux surrounding the withdrawal, transition, and launch of MSU, RSD believes it is prudent to consider multiple options. At this time, board members are weighing the merits of several transportation models. These models include:

- **Contracting Services** with BETCHA to continue using their services for transportation of both RES and tuitioned students.]
- **Driver Stipends** for parents who meet the qualifications and safety requirements associated with transporting students. This plan would ultimately fulfill the role of bussing students to and from school. The plan would also account for the hiring of busses for field trips if necessary.
- **Purchase of Vehicle** to transport students. The use of larger bus services may represent a significant inefficiency both financially and environmentally due to the limited number of students.

Status

At this time, contracts with BETCHA will require renewal. RSD has submitted requests for all relevant costs and figures that will enable the board to determine whether they wish to pursue a contract with BETCHA. Whatever decision is made regarding transportation logistics, the organization of schedules, vehicles, and necessary supervision will meet the needs of RES students, tuitioned students, and any students requiring ECSE services.

In addition to the direct role of providing transportation for students to and from school, RSD includes the necessity of facilitating driver education opportunities. We have had conversations with the head of the driver education school has explained in clear detail that the process of facilitating drivers' education is

rovided at the high school level. It has been indicated that some parents may also choose to hire private driver education classes.

Transfer of Students IEPs and Records

Introduction

The protection and maintenance of student records is paramount. It is a fact RSD is acutely aware of. The following section demonstrates the use of standard operating procedures related to IEP and student records. It is the goal of RSD to follow the best practices and standard operating procedures utilized by SUs and SDs in Vermont.

IEP and Records Plan

- RSD will review all plans and procedures related to IEP and student records to ensure that forms related to FERPA are made available and accessible.
- RSD will maintain and follow the guidelines and policies currently utilized by ACSD and VSBA to ensure continuity and integrity of the broader system. VSBA's model policy reads as follows:
"A cornerstone of policies regarding IEP and Student Records, held by both RSD and The Mountain SU, is VSARA. The RSD will comply with FERPA and VSARA based on the two policies, VSAB C1 and the State's School Record Retention Policy and 1 VSA 317a."

The following will be adopted within board policy in order to support the goals of VSARA:

1. The public has access to authentic and reliable records for as long as needed to protect interests and to assure government accountability
2. Public agencies have the tools and resources necessary to manage their records and information in an effective and efficient manner
3. Records of continuing value are preserved and accessible to current and future generations
4. Low-cost, secure repositories for public records, regardless of format, are available at an enterprise and statewide level

Adopt VSBA Model Policy C1

RSD recognizes the importance of keeping accurate and appropriate education records for students as part of a sound educational program and is committed to act as trustee of this information and to maintain these records for educational purposes to serve the best interest of its students.

Software

For student service documentation, the RSD Director of Special Education, who has not yet been hired, will accept all record transfers through the software, EdPlan. This software will allow fluid and confidential communication regarding all IEPs and 504 plans.

Following the recommendations of Nicole Carter, a student services software management system for ACSD to transfer records into. Due to the regions decision to utilize EdPlan, it is likely RSD will adopt that software management system as well. However, should a different software be adopted, ACSD will print pdfs and scan relevant documents to be uploaded into Ripton’s management system.

Points of Contact

On June 2, Joanna Doria emailed Nicole Carter (ACSD’s Director of Special Ed) and Tracey Harrington (ACSD’s new rural elementary school SP. Ed Director) for their thoughts about transition of information. She also cc’d Amy Pyfrom – the Special Educator at RES. Collaborating with these individuals will create an efficient, thorough transfer of records and information. It is also an important reference point for the collaborative work that will need to continue as individual entities sharing the common goal of providing high quality, empowering education for the youth of Vermont.

Records

Due to regulations governing the duration in which records must be kept, the board anticipates a blend of electronic and physical records. Those records not uploaded into the management software will be boxed and housed onsite at RES.

RSD will take measures to ensure that MSU shall develop a system and ensure that all schools within it implement the system, that maintains student records. This system will, “Align with AOE statewide data collections; which enables accurate and timely reporting in connection with state and federal data collection requirements; and ensures the accuracy, relevancy, and confidentiality thereof, and accessibility thereto; and which is in compliance with the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974(P.L. 95-380).”⁹

Status

RSD has a clear understanding of its responsibility and are in ongoing conversations with ACSD to ensure the transfer of IEP and student records according to state guidelines. Exploring potential software options to assist the protection and transfer of IEP and student records.

In closing, the Ripton School Board would like to highlight the ongoing communication with Nicole Carter, ACSD District Director of Special Education; Tracey Harrington, Ripton Elementary School Principal and

⁹ P. 2 Vermont State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices. Series 2000 Education Quality Standards.

Director of Special Education for Rural ACSD Schools, and Amy Pyfrom, Ripton's current special educator to ensure a smooth transition for all students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 services.

This transition process will include planning at the district level, transparent communication with families regarding the transition process, and individual transition meetings for each student on an IEP and 504 Plan. Additionally, the individual transition meetings will include the student's current level of progress and highlight the progress monitoring tools to be used in the future to measure student success. These steps in conjunction with those outlined in this document will protect student records and ensure all services, accommodations, and modifications currently in place will be continued as students transition to the MSU.

Review and Verify Compliance With EQS

Introduction

Vermont's EQS helps define pathways of education success and the actions required by an education system. Compiled and structured to ensure students receive high quality, equitable education, EQS are designed to offer consistency of evaluation and educational experience. Understanding areas of need and success are helpful in managing application of talent, resources, and time. Furthermore, such consistent metrics are an important tool gauging educators, systems, and identification of specific areas requiring improvement.

RSD is committed to ensuring the actions taken by RES and the future MSU meet EQS goals, as outlined in 16 V.S.A 165(a)(2). It is clear to the board such standards establish a foundation and framework by which the quality of education within Vermont is established.

If the goal of education is human development in such a way that people will be able to thrive as individuals and members of society, then EQS is a helpful tool ensure the comprehensive approach to education. In many instances, especially in schools like Ripton where educators have a long history of providing thorough, holistic education, the EQS wickets established by the state help define and refine evaluation.

Utilizing AOE-Led Education Initiatives

The AOE and SBE are essential resources in Vermont's education system. RSD relies on their stated guidelines to fulfill the statutory, regulatory, and educational functionality mandated by their roles and responsibilities. RSD is taking measures to ensure that the SU is designed in such a way that it uses the standards outlined by the SBE as the primary tool when developing and selecting curriculum, methods of instruction, developing local assessments, and managing and overseeing the content and skills taught and learned in school.

RSD recognizes the importance of Vermont's Education Quality Standards, or EQS, which, as described on Vermont's official state website, define, and describe what high-quality education should look like for students attending Vermont's public schools. The current rules are an update to the 1997's School Quality Standards and were approved by Vermont State Board of Education in 2013.

In constructing The Mountain SU, the group agrees that it is important to ensure those responsible for operating the SU board will participate in the Integrated Field Review (IFR) process. It is a process,

according to AOE, that, “Each Vermont supervisory union or school district has taken part in,” since 2016. The IFR has five primary objectives that will serve the delivery and evaluation of educational services:

- To understand continuous improvement efforts and local decisions regarding EQS implementation
- To recognize the full range of outcomes we expect schools to deliver
- To identify promising practices to share with other school systems
- To create networking opportunities among geographically proximate school systems
- To build a collective responsibility for all students in Vermont

Meeting the flexible and personalized pathways emphasis detailed in Act 77 and EQS is an important aspect of educational systems in Vermont. To this end, RSD is committed to helping empower educators and administrators to follow the Proficiency Based Learning guidelines that state, “Vermont public schools must provide students with flexible and personalized pathways for progressing through grade levels and to graduation. These resources can help educators and families understand some of the changes that are taking place in Vermont.”

Evaluation of Educational Performance

Effectiveness of actions determines outcomes. As such, RSD is examining current evaluation models and ensuring that there are consistent, thorough documentation and assessment of student performance. To this end, the group relies on two external tools (Vermont Comprehensive Assessment System and SNAPSHOT) and are in the process of developing a framework of evaluation to deploy within RES. The later will be established as an outline to be influenced and amended by relevant stakeholders (admin, educators, support staff, superintendent).

Vermont Assessment Tool Summary

Comprehensive Assessment System

- This statewide tool is composed of multiple elements:
- Common Core State Standards
- Next Generation Science Standards
- CCSS Essential Elements
- English Language Development Standards

SNAPSHOT Overview

The annual quantitative look at school quality measuring performance for schools, SU and SD and the state provides a clear indication of a school’s effectiveness in the areas of:

Academic Proficiency	Personalization	Safe, Healthy Schools	High Quality Staffing	Investment Priorities
How well do our schools provide students with opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge to be career and college ready?	How well do our schools provide students with authentic engagement and opportunities to shape their own learning?	How well do our schools provide environments where students feel healthy, safe, and supported in achieving their goals?	How well do our schools employ educators who are well trained and qualified to meet the needs of all students?	How well do our schools provide quality experiences at a price that the community believes is appropriate?

Ripton’s Categories of EQS¹⁰

Academic Proficiency

Overview	ELA 44%	Science 15%	Math 44%	State
Meeting	Meeting	Exceeding	Approaching	

Personalization

N/A According to SNAPSHOT webpage.

Safe, Healthy Schools

Overview	Current Performance	Current Equity Index
Exceeding	Exceeding	Exceeding

(Disciplinary exclusion refers to amount of schools days missed as a result of in-school or out-of-school suspension relative to number of students enrolled during school year selected.)

High Quality Staffing

Overview	Properly Licensed Teachers	Educator Retention
Exceeding	Exceeding	Exceeding

Investment Priorities

¹⁰ Information sourced from AOE’s webpage(s) regarding SNAPSHOT statistics for RES for 2020-2021 academic year.

Overview	EQS Staff. Ratio	Principals	School Counselor	School Librarian	Nurses	Per Pupil Spending
Exceeding	RES: Exceeding	Exceeding	Approaching	Not Meeting	Approaching	RES \$14,380
						VT \$24,133

EQS Transferable Skills and Recommended Performance Indicators

While every community has a unique student profile and learning opportunities based on the experiences and backgrounds of educators, RSD has decided to incorporate elements of Vermont’s Agency of Education’s recommendations regarding EQS assessment and performance. While RES students are years away from graduation, they are within the process ultimately leading them the culmination of their initial phase of education. Therefore, RSD believes it is helpful to identify the EQS transferable Skills identified by the AOE. While RSD is confident the transferable skills are already being developed at RES, identifying these specific skills will help evaluate and maintain an education experience that is relevant and in line with goals of the state.

Transferable Skills

- Communication
 - Demonstrate organized and purposeful communication
 - Use evidence and logic appropriately in communication
 - Adjust communication based on the audience, context, and purpose
 - Demonstrate effective, expressive, and receptive communication, including oral, written, multi-media, and performance
 - Use technology to further enhance and disseminate communication
- Collaboration
 - Identify opportunities for collaboration
 - Collaborate effectively and respectfully
 - Collaborate as needed to advance learning
 - Participate in and contribute to the enhancement of community life
 - Demonstrate a commitment to personal and community health and wellness
- Creativity
 - Identify, manage, and assess new opportunities related to learning goals
 - Apply knowledge in familiar and new contexts
 - Demonstrate initiative and responsibility for learning
 - Demonstrate flexibility, including the ability to learn, unlearn, and relearn
- Innovation
 - Identify opportunities for innovation
 - Apply knowledge in familiar and new contexts
 - Integrate information gathered from active speaking and listening

- Analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources to build on knowledge
- Integrate knowledge from a variety of sources to set goals and make informed decisions
- Inquiry
 - Use evidence and reasoning to justify claims
 - Observe and evaluate situations in order to define problems
 - Analyze the accuracy, bias, and usefulness of information
 - Persevere in challenging situations.
 - Apply systems thinking to understand the interaction and influence of related parts on each other, and on outcomes
- Problem Solving
 - Frame questions, make predictions, and design data collection and analysis strategies
 - Identify patterns, trends, and relationships that apply to solutions
 - Generate a variety of solutions, use evidence to build a case for best responses, critically evaluate the effectiveness of responses, and repeat the process to generate alternate solutions
 - Persist in solving challenging problems and learn from failure
 - Apply knowledge from various disciplines and contexts to real life situations.
 - Develop and use models to explain phenomena
- Use of Technology
 - Practice responsible digital citizenship
 - Use technology to support and enhance the critical thinking process
 - Use a range of tools, including technology, to solve problems
 - Use technology and digital media strategically and capably

Evaluating and Addressing Areas of Need

While no system is perfect, RSD and RES are committed to effectively reviewing student, educator, and administrator performance within the scope of EQS. When areas of need are identified, stakeholders related to the area of need will work together to develop a holistic plan consisting of:

- Identification of root cause of deficiency
- Development of understanding regarding student(s) patterns of performance
- Collaboration and communication regarding potential solutions
- Development of a plan to improve performance
- Conversation and explanation of plan with relevant stakeholders to ensure commitment and invested interest

During the 2022-2023 academic year, it is the current plan to create a working group of HIF Consulting and relevant education experts to launch a comprehensive assessment and targeted enhancement strategy to support students, educators, and administrators. While RSD is incredibly proud of the long history of high-quality education at RES, they also recognize there is always room for improvement.

The pillars of the plan already being developed include:

- Communication with educators
- Assessment Activities
- Working groups to troubleshoot areas of need

Maintaining EQS

Beyond the specific categories defined by the state, the quality of education provided by schools and their respective staff is paramount. While much attention is given to promoted goals and categorical assessment, the foundational role of a school and educators is to develop humans. The ability for a person to maximize their potential and thrive as both individuals and members of the community is often shaped by the education system they mature within. To this end, “For excellence and equity in learning, students and their families need to be engaged in all aspects of the school community and involved in Place Based Education,” as Jane Phinney, the former principal of RES who has 30 + years of experience in education, stated.

At RES, a diverse strategy of education has evolved. Enrichment activities - Field trips, artists in residence, events in the community, students from the college as guests and mentors- are provided. School wide thematic units of study are deployed, which creates an opportunity for younger students to learn from older students and educators to coordinate and blend disciplines.

While much of the work of education occurs within a school, RES does not overlook the relationship forged between a school and its broader community. It is critical that families are reached out to and included in the process of human development. Whether in the form of volunteer opportunities, consistent communication regarding students, or support through SPED and EST programs, welcoming families into the fabric of a school bolsters performance of students and enriches the broader community.

The list of educational philosophy and programs applied with the goal of bolstering educator and student performance is lengthy. RES has applied concepts from the UVM Inclusive Classroom Program, Social Skills Instruction, PBIS and IB learning. In addition, the early stages of collaboration with HIF’s human development model of Engage, Think, Act is underway. Additional ways to empower the RES community are also being explored by the collaborative effort of Jeff Valence and HIF.

Recommendations for following EQS involves communication and coordination between administration, educators, and support systems. It is important to have consistent documentation of student

performance, educator methods, and the application of additional experts and support staff such as specialists, guidance, and interventionists. Sustainable education systems require symbiotic relationships between all stakeholders.

Status

RSD is actively working with educators and external consultants to establish a system to oversee and maintain EQS. The current goal is to have a comprehensive understanding of the current state of RES students. Once the principal, staff, and superintendent are hired, RSD will communicate the data they have collected. At such point, when relevant individuals are in place, decisions will be made to execute a strategy to improve areas of need and continue to refine areas of success.

Introduction

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), which was formerly known as Early Essential Education services, are an important aspect of a school system. Looking at education in a holistic fashion, the ability to provide meaningful education experiences to a community's youngest members drives success and enhanced learning capability at later stages. As RES will not initially offer pre-K education, ECSE services required will be provided by local pre-k programs offered in the area.

Differences of K-12 SPED and Pre-K SPED

Meg Baker, who managed the Act 166 UPK funds for our three local districts, has assisted RSD in identifying the key differences between K-12 and Pre-K SPED. These differences include the terms of service delivery and paperwork. To ensure there are no gaps in service, and based on her recommendation, RSD is taking steps to set up meetings with Nicole Carter and Tracey Harrington to discuss the specific difference and requirements related to the two groups of students.

Early Childhood SPED

Due to the ages of students at RES, the district will ensure that students receive holistic support of their social and emotional development, physical development, language and communication, cognitive development, and adaptive skills/self-care learning- as opposed to a more "academic" focus in the k-12 world. RSD will oversee and maintain the goals of early childhood SPED in RES, which align with the Vermont Early Learning Standards.

Students with SEL and self-care often require the provision of group services and may also involve classroom or home-based services. It is important that placement be in the least restrictive environment and support natural, routine-based learning across a variety of developmental domains, so inclusive pre-school classrooms are best when possible- especially if SEL skills are being supported.

RSD is exploring whether a preschool program must be offered to meet the needs of its students and fulfill the guidelines related to ECSE. At this time, despite high interest, RSD has decided to wait to reinstate UPK program for a projected year 2 start. With the task of standing-up the new SU, it is the boards intention to avoid overextending capacities. However, should students require the services specifically outlined in Act 166 of 2014, RSD is working to identify other programs and services outside of the district

or methods that will support FAPE in other ways. This may include providing transportation and offering outreach special education services on-site. RSD is aware of the challenges associated with serving children with significant disabilities in private programs (e.g. lack of nursing support, staffing ratios and experience, accessibility of buildings), and will take all necessary measures.

Should RSD provide its own UPK program or identify external service providers, all services will be delivered by an early childhood special educator licensed for birth to third grade or preschool to third grade. It will also be identified whether students require PT, OT, or SLP.

The quality of assessment is critical to achieve consistent, relevant care for students. It is particularly important when working with students requiring SPED services. RSD has been made aware of the differentiation between assessment procedures and family engagement/teaming for young children and older children. The following will be followed:

- Authentic engagement and assessment
- Occur over time and in a variety of natural contexts
- Use a variety of sources including family reports and observations

Additionally, a district process for managing referrals, screening, conducting evaluations and re-evaluations, and determining eligibility for children with suspected disability will be established.

Maintaining communication and engagement with families enhances the quality of support provided. With younger children, family engagement and teaming are usually more intensive and intentional, especially when thinking about goals related to self-care and routines. It is also true for communication and coaching strategies with families on interventions. RSD will follow requirements embedded in ECSE process and those established as best practice. RSD will also maintain Child Find, which is intentional outreach to identify children with possible developmental delays, and Child Count, which reports to the Agency of Education on Special Education Services.

RSD will ensure that Act 166 requirements for Universal Pre-K are followed. RSD is responsible tuition for preschoolers to attend prequalified preschool programs for 10 hours/week, 35 weeks/year. The state's UPK program reimburses districts for those 10 hours. Meg Baker is providing guidance on how to fulfill these obligations, but RSD is also in communication with Nicole Carter.

Status

The Ripton School Board and the eventual SU Board will follow all guidelines and statutes related to ECSE. The mechanisms of maintaining and meeting these standards are in place, and should flaws in process and planning be identified, the board will take direct action to remedy challenges as quickly as possible.

Identification of Risks and Issues Impacting Successful Transition

Introduction

Projecting and identifying risks, issues, and challenges leads to successful strategic planning. To this end, RSD has taken steps to methodically examine the elements composing the effort to stand-up The Mountain SU. This includes reviewing and assessing the activities and processes composing the individual entity of Ripton Elementary School and the broader process of establishing a central office.

This section details the process of identifying and mitigating risks. While several risks and challenges have been identified, RSD recognizes the likelihood of additional issues arising. Therefore, creating a framework by which they engage, process, and make decisions enables them to provide agile, accurate, and efficient responses.

Holistic Approach

Problem solving is, ultimately, a combination of understanding, processing information, and making decisions. It is a collaborative process. A balance of identifying risks, establishing causation, isolating consequences and corresponding drivers of solutions, and creation of actionable steps is essential.

The act of problem solving, with the intention of achieving a sustainable solution, requires a holistic approach. Challenges are rarely one dimensional, therefore problem solving should avoid unilateral, one-dimensional responses. The following steps are effective markers guiding the process:

- Established Desired Outcome
- Deconstruct Desired Outcome to Identify Challenge
- Deconstruct Challenge to Identify Root Causation
- Establish Drivers of Solutions Linking Causation with Desired Outcome

Risk Identification

Breaking down known actions, current obstacles, and projected scenarios associated with standing-up The Mountain SU yields an identification of several risks and challenges.

- Work backwards from the desired outcome to the point of current activity
- Identify areas of resistance and/or known Obstacles
- Deconstruct areas of resistance/obstacles to identify as many negative outcomes as possible
- Consult experts to evaluate established plans to flush out areas of weakness or probability of complication and/or failure

Risk Evaluation

The goal of risk evaluation is to understand the causation of the challenge and any primary, secondary, or tertiary consequences if they exist. Challenges and obstacles continuously arise in a variety of formats. Therefore, prioritization is critical in managing resources and engaging with risks/challenges.

To successfully manage risks, a process of evaluation must be deployed. The following steps will help in that effort:

- Identify consequences of risks
- Weigh consequences and rank in order of severity
- Identify stakeholders impacted by risks
- Isolate drivers of causation and solutions to risk

Risk Mitigation

Risk mitigation requires a balance between actionable steps and consistent evaluation. Establishing a plan to successfully and sustainably address risks is paramount.

Process

- Prioritize Risks
- Make Decisions Related to Actionable Steps
- Evaluate Actions and Corresponding Results/Consequences
- Make Changes to Action Plan When Necessary

Charting Known and Projected Risks

This list represents an ongoing, perpetual process. It continues to evolve and be amended as needed. Risks will be necessary, and it is important to be aware and have process.

Risk	Causation	Solution
Staffing Shortage	Failure to attract candidates	Maintain and nurture a school culture that supports, empowers, and compensates educators fairly.
	Failure to act fast enough to meet deadlines	Implement an aggressive timeline to advertise, hire, and sign contracts
	Failure to find candidates meeting RES's needs	Tap into as many relevant networks as possible. Speak with universities.

Insufficient Funding	Lack of coordination with Lincoln	By coordinating with LECS, it is possible to reduce redundancies and lower costs.
	Top heavy staff roster	Balancing experience with new personnel will help lower costs.
	Poor prioritization	Follow diligent process of evaluating educational needs, areas of emphasis
	Inability to produce additional revenue	Continue seeking guidance and exploring potential pathways of funding within boundaries of Act 60.
	Reinstatement of excess funding threshold.	TBD
Lack of Contingency Planning	Poor coordination with ACSD	Clear communication with ACSD both in planning and approval of a process to facilitate the re-entry of RES.
	Lack of support from SBE	Clear communication and established commitment to have functional working relationship
Lack of Consistency From State Agencies	The continuous changes of requirements, expectations, and conditions.	Advocate. Communicate. Collaborate.
Enrollment	Decline in community growth.	Direct marketing to students based on a profile that will help people match RES as a place where their student's needs are met
	Absence of economic drivers to attract new families	Work with town to establish opportunities for community growth
Retention of Staff	Remote location	Establish the advantages and

		opportunities for unique education.
	Inability to match higher salary/benefits scale	Shift focus to new educators looking for an opportunity to begin their career.
Community Support	Should tax burden increase too much, community support will wane	Clearly communicate reasons, costs, and methods of improving situation
	Canceling of programs and education experiences important to community	Clearly communicate decision making process, methods of improving situation
Tuitioned Students	Inability to attract new students who are tuitioned	Ensure RES culture and educational output is
	Cost of tuitioning the higher ed. Students and SPED students	TBD

Contingency Plan

Introduction

While RSD is confident in its effort to stand-up the new Mountain SU, a part of the board's responsibility is to objectively evaluate and determine viability. Despite some characterizations of the RSD and the broader community of Ripton as forcing an issue with little hope of success, RSD is, first and foremost, dedicated to the wellbeing and education of its students. Therefore, in the interest of thorough preparation, RSD has a contingency plan should RSD determine The Mountain SU to be nonviable.

Determining Nonviability

There are several factors RSD will consider in terms of nonviability. They include the following:

- Inability to define clear answers and solutions to risks, challenges, and obstacles within the timeframe punctuated by July 2023 start-date
- Identification of realistic financial infeasibility
- Town of Ripton votes to halt the process of standing-up SU and return to ACSD
- Evidence that quality of education and standards of education will be detrimentally impacted

Checkpoints

Within the parameters established by the operational launch date of July 2023, RSD has several pivotal checkpoints pacing the board's decision-making regarding viability:

- SBE Report Due July 2022
- August Town Meeting to Discuss Report of the process to stand up MSU
- Offramp October 2022
- Hire and Begin Transitional Central Office January 2023
- Operational Date July 2023

Contingency Plan

Should RSD determine their plan to stand up The Mountain SU is nonviable, one or a collection of the following steps will be taken to ensure no disruption of educational services occurs:

- Deconstruct The Mountain SU board
- Cancel and close all related banking, accounts, and contracts related to operating SU
- Communicate with SBE and AOE to inform them of the decision to not move forward with
- Communicate with ACSD and follow steps outlined in agreement with ACSD board regarding the process of re-entering the district.
- Close school and become a full choice town
- Re-Engage SBE about being assigned to an existing or future SU

Status

At this time, RSD has created several potential contingency plans. However, due to their confidence in their strategy and an absence of evidence that failure is imminent, they remain focused on the task of standing-up the Mountain Supervisory Union.

Conclusion

The Ripton School Board (RSB) is well positioned to fulfill the necessary stages of launching the Mountain Supervisory Union. While the process is ongoing, and there are several challenges remaining, both the members of RSB and their counterparts in Lincoln remain committed and confident in the strategy they have assembled. The plans associated with the strategy are projected to successfully launch MSU and ensure educational services are neither disrupted nor undermined.

RSD is committed to process, which enables the board to function with agility, adapt without losing the initiative, and producing effective decision making. The leadership and collective commitment of board members is the catalyst of RSD's advancement. The group has generated a track record of continuously learning, diligently working, and rising to the occasion of obstacles both expected and unexpected. A group of volunteers, the board of RSD sustains a profound belief in the value and necessity of the educational services originating in their community school: Ripton Elementary School.

Predicting the preparedness of RSD to reach the July 1, 2023 operational date for MUS is a prognostication. There are numerous outstanding factors that are vital to a comprehensive understanding of its viability and sustainability. What can be determined, at this time, with certainty is the RSD and its board members have put into place systems, experts, and processes empowering them to develop and execute both short and long-term strategies. Variables consistently change, but well-prepared processes and fundamentals of decision making and problem solving make successful outcomes possible.

Currently, RSD looks forward to having all relevant pieces in place to execute its strategy. Only then, will RSD be able to assess the viability and capability of RSD and the town of Ripton to launch and maintain MSU. Despite the confidence of the group, their primary responsibility remains focused on ensuring students receive high quality education enabling them to thrive as individuals and members of society. If the process or outcome of standing-up MSU is revealed to undermine or diminish the educational experience of students, RSD members will willingly and assertively abort the process within the steps arranged with relevant parties like ACSD.

RSD hopes to forge a productive and forward-looking working relationship with SBE, AOE, and ACSD members. The goals of equity and high-quality education for students in Vermont is shared. If RSD is provided an opportunity to focus on the task of fulfilling its obligations and the elements necessary to launch the SU are provided (granting of Lincoln approval), the group looks forward to executing its strategy.