

## **State Board of Education Ripton Status Report Committee**

### **Draft Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Place: Virtual Teams Meeting/Video/Teleconference**

**Call in #: 1-802-828-7667, Conference ID: 868 125 84#**

**Date: August 3, 2022**

**Present:**

**State Board of Education (SBE) Subcommittee Members:** Oliver Olsen - Chair, Tammy Kolbe, Kim Gleason, Jenna O'Farrell, Lyle Jepson

**Agency of Education (AOE):** Secretary Dan French, Maureen Gaidys, Ron Ryan, Suzanne Sprague, Emily Simmons, Betty Roy

**Others:** Several callers, none of whom introduced themselves.

#### **Call to Order, Roll Call, Amendments to the Agenda**

The meeting was called to order at 1:02 p.m. The roll call was taken. There were no amendments to the agenda.

#### **Approval of Meeting Minutes from July 29, 2022**

Kim Gleason made a motion to approve the minutes from July 29, 2022. The motion was seconded by Tammy Kolbe and passed unanimously. Kim Gleason asked that the attachment from Erin Maguire be included. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **Public to be Heard**

There were no members of the public who wished to be heard.

#### **Committee Discussion of Materials Received and Testimony Heard to Date**

Oliver Olsen indicated that Donarae Dawson provided a document to be posted for public review. A link back to all minutes and documents offered will be created on the website so that people following the conversation can refer to them.

Oliver Olsen requested that the committee focus comments and opinion on three items.

1. Ripton's preparedness to take on the responsibilities as a supervisory district by July 1, 2023
2. Ripton's preparedness to stand up a new supervisory union by July 1, 2023
3. Ripton's preparedness to become its own school district by July 1, 2023

Based upon information received and testimony heard there is consensus that the committee did not hear clear evidence of a plan to put the organizational structure and staffing in place by July 1, 2023.

Tammy pointed out that, based upon the report provided by Ripton, Ripton indicated that they did not feel that they would be able or prepared to undertake the responsibilities of being a supervisory district. The committee agreed that question one has been answered. It is the opinion of the committee that Ripton is not prepared to be a supervisory district. Hence, Ripton's work with Lincoln to create a unified structure between Ripton and Lincoln.

The second question about Ripton's ability to create a new supervisory union by July 1, 2023, does not appear to be in a state of readiness. In his final comments at the previous meeting, Mr. Cash indicated that Ripton would need 30-60 days to create a scope of work for planning purposes, often referred to as "the plan-to-plan." Tammy Kolbe found the timeframe problematic, pointing out that it is difficult to provide a favorable opinion in the absence of a plan. In addition, Oliver suggested that not having a plan-to-plan shows that they are not ready. Kim Gleason indicated that expert testimony highlighted that planning was a mandatory component that appears to be not fully in place. Jenna O'Farrell suggested that planning with specific involvement of those working in the school was missing. Oliver Olsen suggested that the status report was aspirational and did not point out the steps necessary to demonstrate the actions that would be taken. Tammy Kolbe suggested that the experts that spoke did not appear to be those that would continue to provide support, and most were not well versed in the Vermont Standards. She believes that Ripton will not have the capacity to accomplish the expected outcomes of the Education Quality Standards (EQS). Evidence of this was the fact that Ripton appeared to have a difficult time finding the experts necessary to accomplish the goals, such as a process for implementing Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Kim Gleason added that the report lacked specificity in relation to the expectations provided by Oliver Olsen to Ripton in his memo to them in May of 2022. That request included a list of items that Ripton needed to successfully address. Oliver Olsen suggested that there was no indication of the "effort" i.e., the projected time that would be necessary, for the completion of the necessary tasks.

Tammy Kolbe suggested that it was not unexpected that Ripton is at the point that they are in the process because it takes a long time, and they have chosen a very difficult timeline. They might reach their goals if more time was taken to do so. Oliver Olsen reminded the committee that Ripton's "go live" date was 11 months away and that there is no school budget in place. There is a process that needs to be undertaken to allow them to secure and expend funding in support of their work.

The committee has heard from experts and the Agency of Education that staffing in general is difficult across the state, and the issue is specifically difficult as evidenced by vacancies in districts that are in close proximity to Ripton. The current labor market creates risk. In the absence of an organization chart of responsibilities, there is added risk. Retention of the current teaching staff and the certainty of filling positions is not assured.

Kim Gleason suggested that areas within the proposed budget did not appear to align with the potential need. She reminded the committee that Brittany Gilman had suggested that a supervisory union of Ripton's size would be less efficient than a larger supervisory union, which would translate into an added tax burden. Kim Gleason asked Secretary French if a definitive determination regarding the

disposition of the Small Schools Grant had been made concerning Ripton. He indicated that he would need to research an answer.

To determine if Ripton's preparedness to be its own school district, distinct unto itself, topics of concern included:

- No capital reserve fund has been included in the budget.
- There is no provision to transfer Addison Central School District (ACSD) reserve funds to Ripton.
- A comprehensive facilities report outlined deferred maintenance issues and costs associated, which have not been acknowledged in the budget.
- There is no guarantee that income from tuition students will continue as a revenue source.
- Grade 6-12 tuitioning provides for uncertainty. Town school districts have been known to respond to unexpected tuition costs by freezing budgets to pay for unanticipated expenses.
- Secretary French suggested that, in his experience as a superintendent, he had a tuition history to rely upon. Ripton lacks a track record upon which they can rely.

Kim Gleason suggested that, even if there was evidence of a capacity to raise and expend funding, planning has not been adequate to provide for assurance that Ripton is prepared for July 1, 2023.

Oliver Olsen acknowledged the dedication and passion displayed by the individuals working on behalf of Ripton's community of students. Yet, the current path may create greater risk for closure, when compared to the option they left, which was continued unification with ACSD. He believes that Ripton's concerns have been heard by the communities within ACSD and that they should feel a level of assurance moving forward. The evidence is the composition of the ACSD school board, which resulted from a recent election cycle. Newly elected members appear to hear the desire of small communities to keep their schools open.

Returning to the specific charge of the committee, Tammy Kolbe suggested that it is not a question of can Ripton accomplish their goal, it is a question of whether or not they can do so by July 1, 2023. She does not see a path forward by July 1, 2023.

Jenna O'Farrell pointed out that new questions continue arise that need to be answered.

Kim Gleason agreed and noted that all the committee had as a guide was the status report. She does not feel Ripton is ready by July 1, 2023. She reserves her opinion on whether they could be ready by July 1, 2024. Kim Gleason hopes that Ripton will continue to have conversations with the organization from which they withdrew.

Oliver Olsen suggested that, if they continue forward, finding the right people who can work to make it happen, people with the appropriate expertise to provide guidance, will be a critical component to success.

All committee members agreed that Ripton is not prepared to move forward with any of the options noted in the three questions above given the implementation date of July 1, 2023.

Oliver Olsen indicated that he and Tammy Kolbe will create a draft opinion and circulate it to the committee for consideration in preparation for a meeting to be scheduled for next week, prior to the next State Board of Education meeting.

Oliver provided Secretary French with the opportunity to offer his thoughts. Secretary French pointed out that it was an interesting process and had been a great deal of work on the part of all involved. He recognized that it is difficult it is for small schools to function independently. The system within which small schools operate need people who understand the complexities of operating a public school. It is a complex, highly regulated system, charged with using public funds and providing for all civil rights functions. The Ripton situation is difficult, given all of the “moving parts” currently underway in the region. Local solutions are being sought and he is committed to helping to facilitate a positive result.

### **Public To Be Heard**

There were no public to be heard.

### **Adjournment**

Kim Gleason moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Jenna O’Farrell and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 2:19 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Lyle Jepson

