

Orange Windsor Supervisory Union

3590 VT Route 14
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Superintendent's Report for the Year Ending December 31, 2013

As I began to write the superintendent's report for 2013, I re-read my messages in town reports over the past 6 years and discovered a wide array of topics. They ranged from the viability of rural schools in a global society (2007), to providing equity and access in a single school, the 'First Branch Academy' (2008), to increased cooperation to enhance students' education in a broader world (2009), to increased cross-district student activities such as the annual OWSU Music Festival (2010), to changes within OWSU required by legislative mandates (2011) and, to welcoming 4 new principals in one year: South Royalton, Chelsea, Strafford, and Tunbridge (2012)!

This year's report acknowledges past progress and highlights several opportunities for the future. All district boards have developed and published their visions of education for the future (vision statements). They will use them to plan strategies for the future. OWSU and member districts have embarked on integrating the national Common Core Curriculum standards into our educational programs and are getting ready for new learning assessments (testing). All five communities and the SU are bargaining collaboratively with the teachers associations to develop a single document (contract) and salary schedule to cover all teachers. And finally, the Vermont State Board of Education (BOE) will likely assign two additional communities from Windsor Northwest Supervisory Union (Bethel and Rochester) to be administered under the OWSU banner.

Purpose and Vision:

Over the past two or three years all town school district boards have undertaken the seemingly simple task of developing a statement of purpose or mission. I call it "seemingly simple," but board members and administrators can testify about how complex and difficult it can become to reduce to writing everyone's sense about what a good, progressive education looks like in each town, for each school. For example, OWSU's mission statement says:

The mission of the Orange Windsor Supervisory Union is to promote education as a vital service to its member towns and to promote development of curriculum and instruction for the education of all. Relying on common interests and resources, OWSU strives to enhance the education of students residing in or attending public schools within its boundaries.

Goals:

- 1. To create a broader educational community**
- 2. To keep our schools local**
- 3. To develop a coordinated, articulated, and rigorous curriculum**
- 4. To promote instructional strategies to meet the varied needs of all students**
- 5. To engage parents and community members in promoting OWSU's Mission**
- 6. To promote public education as vital to healthy participation in the democracy**

Each of the boards, Chelsea, Royalton, Sharon, Strafford, Tunbridge and OWSU will use their mission statement to establish goals and to plan strategies to implement the plans to provide meaningful education to all students. It is a task that will carry the boards through the next several years.

Common Core:

One of the areas where state statute and 'best educational practice' effectively meet is the development of common curricula. Five years ago, in exchange for accepting federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the Vermont State Board of Education (BOE) agreed to implement the nationally promoted Common Core Curriculum (Common Core). In reality, implementing the Common Core means that each school must work to align its curriculum with these national Common Core standards. Meanwhile, state statute reads,

[Each supervisory union shall] establish a supervisory union-wide curriculum, by either developing the curriculum or assisting the member districts to develop it jointly, and ensure implementation of the curriculum. The curriculum shall meet the requirements adopted by the state board under subdivision 165(a)(3)(B) of this title; (16 VSA § 261a)]

OWSU's Director of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment and Technology Integration, is in the perfect position to work with the principals and teachers to bring all curricula together, outline common elements and to prepare students and teachers for the new 'Smarter Balanced' achievement test (SBAC) which will replace the NECAPs for Vermont's state-wide student achievement tests in 2015. OWSU students will be as prepared for the the Common Core and SBAC as they could be.

Collaborative Bargaining

Again, in response to legislation requiring boards and unions to create single contracts across all SU school districts, boards and teachers from all five communities and the SU have been bargaining *collaboratively* with each other for the past year to develop a single document (contract) and salary schedule to cover teachers in all communities. However, OWSU and the local boards decided to build upon the good experience between the boards and the teachers in Sharon and Royalton. They decided to try a different approach to issues which sometimes divided rather than engage them. As a result, they used the Federal Mediation and Conciliation

Service which had trained OWSU board members and Association leaders in this new approach when special education was centralized two years ago.

This collaborative approach or Interest-Based Bargaining (IBB) is different from traditional or positional bargaining. In traditional negotiations each party takes a position on an issue. They then work to develop an acceptable outcome or compromise, often a position half-way between the two sides' initial positions. IBB asks the participants to discuss their interest in a topic and, once they agree that both have a sufficient interest to discuss the issue, they then try to reach a consensus about what it would look like to meet the needs of both employees and management.

Here is a hypothetical example: Positional bargaining might see union leaders stating that they wanted 4-weeks of paid vacation for employees. Management might declare that they cannot afford pay for any vacation time. Positional bargaining says that the two sides would make offers and counter-offers until they reached an agreement, perhaps 2 weeks of paid vacation or 2 weeks at half pay.

Using IBB union and management might discuss costs and benefits of rest. Perhaps they would talk about the need to have working conditions that would be attractive to hiring and keeping employees. Because many people receive some paid vacation, it might be in both labor's and management's best interest include some paid vacation time to attract and retain employees. However, they would also discuss economic conditions and the fact that budgets must receive voter approval, so any settlement which appeared so generous that it violated community norms might be rejected by the voters. This form of discussion can result in agreements which reflect the interests of all parties without the rancor that sometimes attends positional bargaining. OWSU teachers and boards have used this approach getting the 22 people working on the teachers' contract to commit to completing the task before they begin working on a similar process for educational support staff, in 2014.

Assigning Additional Communities

One issue with big implications for life within OWSU is the pending dissolution of Windsor Northwest Supervisory Union (WNWSU) and the reassignment of its member towns to nearby supervisory unions. Under the proposal for BOE action in June 2014, the Rochester and Bethel School Districts will be assigned to OWSU. For community members who have followed the discussion in the Valley News, The Herald or on WCAX, you are aware of the emotional issues that it creates for the residents of WNWSU towns as well as for the SUs who are slated to oversee the operation of the additional school districts which will be reassigned.

Early in the discussions, the OWSU Executive Committee made it clear to me that, although the move might create an inconvenience for us, it will also present opportunities, such as a bigger pool of students to provide support and to learn from each other, and exploring the opportunities to create a Regional Education District (RED) among the four K-12 school districts, Chelsea Bethel, Rochester, and Royalton. In this light, it might make governance of a 'New OWSU'

comprised of a K-12 RED, and Sharon, Strafford, and Tunbridge school districts seem manageable. In other words, the BOE action in June will open the door for developing a new sense of community, new configurations for our schools, and new opportunities for our students.

Last year I concluded by writing:

..., progress is being made in OWSU's little corner of the world. We have welcomed new administrators, celebrated 100 years in a single building, provided children with art and food-preparation activities, and rededicated our attention to teaching and learning in classrooms. We have positioned ourselves to address new national education standards, and the tests which will report on our progress. All is positioned well to see a fruitful and prosperous new year.

I repeat those sentiments again this year and add a welcoming note for students, parents, community members and educational leaders from Rochester and Bethel to create a new, inclusive sense of community within which all can prosper and thrive.

David C. Bickford Ed. D., Superintendent