



# ***OLD SAYBROOK PUBLIC SCHOOLS***

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## **Presentation to the Planning and Development Committee Forum on Municipal Shared Services and Regional Efficiencies**

### **Jan G. Perruccio, Superintendent of Schools, Old Saybrook, CT**

Thank you for the opportunity to take part in this conversation about Municipal Shared Services and Regional Efficiencies. As a Superintendent in a small district, I am always working with colleagues both outside and inside of the district to be creative about opportunities to share. Most small districts are entering into one or more shared services contracts, cooperative agreements and/or regional efforts to drive down cost and maintain or grow programs and services. In our region, there have been many examples of attempts to collaborate both informally and formally. They include:

- Shared extra-curricular opportunities such as clubs, teams and special programs for targeted populations
- Shared certified staff between school districts
- Shared non-certified staff between school districts
- Back office collaboratives with other districts (and our own municipalities)
  - Purchasing as a consortium
  - Insurance Cooperatives
- Transportation Cooperatives – There have been attempts sponsored by RESCs or by two or more local LEAs that have not been fully executed and more informal attempts between districts that have met with more success because they are accomplished on a much smaller scale
- A self-insured medical/dental/Rx collaborative administered by the RESC and governed by the members of the municipalities and school districts involved
- There has also been significant discussion about regional programs for expelled students, specialized services for students with special education learning needs, internship programs and summer school programs and enrichment academies
- In Old Saybrook, the Board of Education has formed a demographics study committee to look at all other educational options to include efforts to collaborate or regionalize programming.

I am happy to share the details of any of these examples.

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*"The mission of the Old Saybrook Public Schools is to educate and prepare students to achieve their highest aspirations, care for others and the environment, and contribute to a global society by working in partnership with families and the community, and by engaging each learner in a rigorous, personalized, and meaningful educational program."*

What we have learned from our experiences, is that cooperative and regional efforts between and among districts need to have some very specific components for them to be viable and there are very real impediments that need to be cleared to maximize opportunities:

- Equalization of decision making power – a partnership with equal need and benefit must be created
- Careful development of a structure that requires a long-term relationship and has specific language dedicated to the dissolution of the relationship
- The proposed program must be examined by all parties and be deemed valuable for the individual students involved. Both feasibility and sustainability have to be considered.
- There must be cost efficiency: budget neutral or a savings and there has to be significant evidence that this financially beneficial relationship will continue beyond one fiscal year.
- LEA's who want to create a specialized program have to provide oversight from their Boards of Education which could mean forming a separate Board/Committee comprised of members of Boards of Education from the participating communities or a similar structure. This is cumbersome and potentially hard to manage from an operational position and these significant concerns must be worked out.
- The opportunities must be logistically viable – expense of transportation and amount of time associated with student travel and the amount/type of human resources required to administer the program or cooperative must not be prohibitive
- Efforts to regionalize school districts are impeded by the expense, the process and the need for sustained leadership efforts over a significant period of time as well as the emotionality of the topic at the local level and the lack of exit strategies available to communities
- Less quantifiable but equally important is that the communities have to have significant common ground and established relationships. An example of where we met with success is in the area of shared certified staff. We share two staff members. One is in the teachers' bargaining unit. The two communities shared the same lawyer, teachers' union representative and need. The superintendents enjoy a professional relationship and the schools collaborate on other projects. Because we were looking at two positions at the same time we assigned one to each district for employment purposes and entered into a cooperative agreement. This made the situation equitable and fair and everyone has a vested interest. Sustainability and changing needs may impact this arrangement in the future.

We, in my community, are looking for opportunities to expand these efforts so that we can provide creative, robust and rigorous programs for students at an appropriate price point and would love to see efforts to incentivize these efforts and to remove impediments.