Final Report of Litchfield BOE Ad Hoc Committee on Collaboration


Ad Hoc Committee Purpose: To explore opportunities for LPS to work in a collaborative manner with other school districts and other municipal entities to identify ways to maximize the efficient and effective use of LPS resources to support our district’s mission and goal.

Actions: The Committee met thirteen times during 2018 including 4 joint meetings with the Region 6 Long Term Planning Committee (R6-LTPC).

Results:

- The most visible result was the initiation of course collaboration between LPS and Wamogo. Five courses (Latin IV, AP Biology, Calculus Honors, and Anatomy/Physiology) were hosted at LHS for a total of six Wamogo students. One course was hosted at Wamogo (AP Psychology) for two LHS students. The details of the course collaboration for the 2018/2019 school year were not finalized until late in the spring by which time most students had already selected their classes. That said, the process of planning for the courses brought the LHS and Wamogo staffs together for multiple meetings during 2018 and have laid the groundwork for further collaboration during the 2019/2020 school year. Three collaboration courses are being offered at LHS (Latin III, US History Honors, and Calculus Honors), and four courses are being offered at Wamogo (AP Music Theory, Game Development, UCONN ECE Economics, and ASVAB). The courses will be listed in the initial course selection sheets and will be highlighted during course sign ups.

- Litchfield students were invited to participate in the Region 6 fall production of The Wizard of Oz. Twelve Litchfield students participated in the production. Wamogo students have been invited to participate in the LHS spring production of West Side Story, and three Wamogo students have been cast so far.

- A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was established between LPS and Region 6 which set out the terms which govern the conduct of the shared classes. The initial MOA covered school year 2018/2019. That agreement has been updated and extended to the end of the 2020/2021 school year.

- Discussions between the Ad Hoc Committee and the Region 6 Long Term Planning Committee on the possibility of combining portions of the two schools have established the following:
  1. There is no interest in either district to combine respective elementary schools.
  2. The Wamogo Ag-Sci program is totally integrated with the Wamogo High School, and the Ag-Sci building can only be used by Ag-Sci students. Therefore, any high school combination between Wamogo and LHS may require the high school to be on the Wamogo campus.
3. There is not sufficient space on the Wamogo campus to add the LHS students unless the Wamogo middle school students are removed from the Wamogo campus.
4. Therefore the two committees have agreed that any possible combination of the two schools would involve LHS students at the Wamogo campus and Wamogo middle school students at the Litchfield campus.
5. There remain many issues to be discussed and negotiated before any combination of the middle schools and high schools can be achieved. Among the most significant are the type of model to be used, governance, curriculum, contracts, policies, and allocation of costs.
6. The negotiations will necessitate the inclusion of administrators, board members and ultimately, stakeholders from both districts, as we determine the optimal way for our two districts to enter into a combination of their middle and high schools.

In addition to the discussions with Region 6, the following opportunities were pursued and achieved:

- S. Turner and G. Carr met with the Torrington Superintendent and the Torrington Board chair. They decided to pursue collaboration on professional development and the possibility of course sharing. High school principals were to meet in July, but that did not occur due to the departure of the Torrington Superintendent. It is hoped that this proposal can be brought up with the new Torrington Superintendent.
- S. Turner investigated the possibility of collaborating with other districts on curriculum writing. It was decided that it was difficult to collaborate in this area because of differing philosophies.
- A $9,838 grant from the Seherr-Thoss Foundation originally received with the purpose of conducting an analysis of how LPS and Region 6 could best deal with declining enrollment was repurposed to pay for logistical expenses associated with the class sharing between LPS and Region 6. $9,000 was appropriated from the grant to pay half the cost of the driver of the shuttle van that transports students between the two high schools.
- J. Tenney helped facilitate the sharing of a Spanish teacher between Litchfield and Region 10.
- J. Morosani contacted the Northwest Council of Governments to see if there were collaboration/sharing opportunities with multiple districts/municipal entities. It was agreed that while there have been some successes (joint fuel purchases, etc.), the majority of town departments were reluctant to participate in joint purchasing activities because the cost savings were not offset by the perceived loss of control.
- D. Fiorillo reported the following subjects were investigated:
  1. Expanded the fuel joint bidding consortium to include the Town of Morris.
  2. Aligned dismissal times and weather delay timing with Region 6. By combining the Ag-Sci and the course collaboration students coming back to LHS and transporting them all on the existing bus routes, we have saved approximately $20K by not having to transport the Ag Sci students separately.
  3. Examined the possibility of combining health insurance with Region 6.
4. Agreed to share a diving coach with Region 6.
5. Managed Region 6’s withdrawal from the Food Service Management consortium, keeping the deal intact with Region 1 and Plymouth.
6. Explored shared support staff opportunities with Region 6.
8. Explored sharing facilities manager and procurement bidding with Region 6.
9. Clarified with the BOE’s attorney questions related to Town charters and the possibility of combining with other districts.
10. Improved the relationship and communication with the Region 6 business office and superintendent’s office.

Conclusion:

The Ad Hoc Committee on Collaboration (AHCC) has had success in the last year in exploring collaboration opportunities with other districts and entities and particularly in engaging with Region 6. Discussions between LPS and Region 6 held over the years have often been inconclusive, but the meetings in this last twelve months have produced relationships between the two districts at the board level, at the administrator level, at the student-teacher level, and at the cultural level. We have restarted a class sharing program, initiated sharing of cultural activities, and explored ways to share a coach.

While we need to continue to be cognizant of ways to share resources with other districts and entities, we have likely already taken advantage of the most available opportunities. Our attention needs to be focused on nurturing the relationship that has been built with Region 6 over the last year.

The AHCC would like to thank the administrators, guidance counselors, theater program staff, and all of the participants from both districts who worked to bring the two districts closer together.

The AHCC has achieved its initial goals, and the acceptance of this report by the Litchfield BOE will complete the work of its initial mission.

The AHCC and the R6-LTPC both agree that the primary goal of combining the middle and high schools is to improve the opportunities for education for the students while decreasing the burden on the taxpayers.

There is still a significant amount of work to be done before the two districts can realistically create any sort of combined school operation. Both districts need to agree on the way a combined entity would be governed. We need to decide how to combine our curriculums. We will each need to examine the contracts that each school has with its unions and determine how any issues with those contracts can be resolved. We need to examine bus routes to optimize a combined bus schedule. We need to determine how each district would account for the costs associated with the use and maintenance of the buildings that each district provides.
When LPS and the R6-LTPC agree that we have enough information to know what a possible combination would mean to our two communities in terms of an improvement in the quality of education and on the costs of running a combined school, we will need to coordinate a discussion with our stakeholders to inform them of the benefits and costs of consolidating the two districts’ middle and high schools and seek their support in going forward.

The discussion of these issues will require input from administrators and from board members from both districts as well as from the communities. There have been several instances during our joint meetings with the R6-LTPC when they have asked us how our board felt about one issue or another. With only one full elected board member on the AHCC, it was difficult to answer the question with fidelity. Further discussions and negotiations would be made easier if there were additional full Litchfield board members on the negotiating teams.

**Recommendations:**

We need to replace the AHCC with a standing committee to be called the Long Term Planning Committee whose charge is to address the long term needs of the district with respect to the quality of educational opportunities and the cost of education given the demographic shifts affecting our district.

We recommend that it consist of at least three board members and that there be representation from multiple key subcommittees. It should also include a representative from the community at large, the Superintendent, the Director of Business Operations as well as the Chair on an ex-officio basis.

Respectfully submitted,

John Morosani
Chair
Ad Hoc Collaboration Committee