

Better Together for Public Education
Exploring School District Unification in Marin

DRAFT Meeting Minutes
September 27, 2021

I. Call to Order

Sheri Mowbray called to order the regular meeting of the Better Together Coalition at 12:00 on September 27, 2021 on Zoom.

II. Roll call

The following members were present: Sheri Mowbray, Sloan Bailey, Laura Anderson, Catherine Way, Ruth Dell, Shelley Hamilton, Valorie Pitt, and Mark Burton.

III. Minutes from August 16, 2021 meeting not approved

IV. Open issues: Discussion with Mary Jane Burke – Marin County Superintendent of Schools.

- Believes that a good relationship between schools and districts leads to good things for kids, parents, and the community.
- Need to find support from all stakeholders, especially the school boards countywide. They are elected by the communities and advocate for their local kids and beyond. What do they think of this idea? What are their issues? If local school boards “lean in” then more info can be attained and success greater. If members of the trustee communities asked for help to combine districts or study the issue she would be supportive. Unanimous support is not necessary but consider asking some to join this group.
- Service consolidation is actually happening already in the 17 districts. Used to have 68 school districts in Marin.
- MJB will provide a list of shared services to this group. COVID is an example of how the many districts worked together to provide student programs for kids with special needs. We also work together to write grants. This work is student centered.
- People like “their school” and “their school districts”. Hard to push back on the perceived local control.
- Relationships are extremely important in order to consolidate. Incentives also help.
- Possible scenario for Marin is 5 Superintendents countywide with multiple local school boards which focus on the local community. The right people in positions of leadership can manage multiple school boards.
- Larger districts are not always the answer. For instance, they need larger staffs to manage the work.
- There have been attempts to merge school districts such as many of the smaller districts in West Marin (Bolinas, Shoreline, Lagunitas, etc.) but those fell through after lots of public process.
- As superintendent she would rather spend time on collaboration since there appears to be no political will from the trustees to focus on other things.
- Remember that staff and faculty have a huge influence on this issue. Concerns for jobs, unions, and salaries are important factors to consider.
- Census is showing us that there is declining enrollment of students across the county.
- Maybe ask a local Marin group that is examining tax policies to help. COST comes to mind.

Questions by Sheri: The challenge we are facing is that we need to get the data to support some of our thoughts. We can only guess better outcomes such as financial savings if we can provide the data. We

need to say “Why” with data to support. Would you help us with this? Is there any way that the MCOE would provide us money for a study?

Question by Sloan: The number one issue we are finding is an emotional response. We need to approach this discussion with objective data.

Mary Jane Burke – Marin County Superintendent of Schools Continued

- Won’t provide money for a study unless the costs are shared with the school districts that are collecting information about consolidation and/or mergers. Must have “buy in” from the district leadership. 46% of the seats will be up next year.
- Data would have to come from the community and the trustees.
- Grand Jury might be helpful in collecting information such as: what are the programs that kids would receive? Is there a right size for a school district? What’s the right geographic “fit” for a district?
- Have you considered a public forum where this can be discussed, and additional questions provided?

V. Additional Discussion

1. Shelly will provide the document of the State of California’s factors for consolidation approval.
2. General discussion about “basic aid districts”, financial constraints, and transitional kindergarten.
3. Defined quorum for this group as “The Majority of the group has to be present plus 1”
4. Future agenda items: have a presentation by a Trustee of the Palo Alto District.

VI: Adjournment

Sheri adjourned the meeting at 1:00 pm. Next meeting October 11, 2021.

DRAFT Minutes Submitted by: Catherine Way