

ANDROSCOGGIN VALLEY COMMUNITY FORUMS
FALL, 2011
KEY EDUCATIONAL QUESTIONS

Community Forum Questions to be answered:

- 1. What happens to federal money in different cases, combining High Schools/Middle Schools?-** Federal dollars are tied to students, student achievement, poverty level and disabilities. It would be logical to assume that the Federal dollars currently received would continue at current levels. The Adequate Education Grant is based on the district average daily membership in residence. In short, monies stay with the town in which the student resides no matter if the schools are combined. That being said, the Federal Government has reduced most grant areas to States and thus to school districts. We, both SAU 20 and 3, are receiving less money now from Federal Grants compared to five years ago. The burden of cost has been shifted done to the State and Local areas in the recent past.
- 2. How do we balance costs with quality?-**The object of the discussion taking place is to provide the most quality to ALL our students while utilizing the current resources that we have. One example would be if a Calculus class has 20 students as opposed to 10 enrolled, the per pupil costs will be lowered. When your student populations decrease so much that you have one or two students in one class with one teacher do you continue to offer that class, say advanced placement biology? If we combine our efforts will we be able to continue offering programs that may have to be eliminated due to lack of student enrollment? That is the idea.
- 3. Is there a cost savings to consolidate?-**Cost savings is a distinct possibility but would be directly tied to the loss of jobs. If the schools were combined how many chemistry, english, biology, music, administrators, world language teachers, administrative assistants, custodians, bus drivers...would be needed? If the enrollment is down in both districts and only one staff member is needed to be retained who would be laid off? That was a concern at the forums. Many participants were opposed to looking at consolidating if it meant that more people would lose their jobs. Schools are a people business and the only way to deeply cut costs is to reduce staff.
- 4. The future is uncertain re: jobs, will the mill and the prison provide more jobs?-** This question is impossible to answer unless we had a crystal ball. In addition to the question as to the mill, prisons, other jobs, who would have predicted the Issacson Structural Steel Company closing and other local businesses going bankrupt? We budget and staff our schools based on incoming students and current enrollments. Many would ask, is it time to make changes based on the uncertainty of the future? But, no one knows what the future holds. At times we have to make the best decision based on the information that we have at the time.
- 5. What effect does each scenario have on jobs?-**See number 3. above.
- 6. What does it mean to SINI (School In Need of Improvement) and DINI (District In Need of Improvement) status?-**Schools that have not made adequate yearly progress based on testing results are placed in SINI or DINI status. These schools/districts remain in this status until they make Adequate Yearly Progress, AYP, two years in a row. Then they are removed from the SINI/DINI roles. In two years an entirely new test will be implemented, statewide, that will affect any schools/districts that are currently in SINI/DINI status. It is yet to be determined how this new test will impact the Adequate Yearly Progress determination.

- 7. What does the research say is the best school size?** This question cannot be answered easily. Research could be cited that said a school of 1000 students was best, other research may say 500. But, that being said, most research on school size consistently reports that smaller is better. A school that has an enrollment which allows for a personal relationship, connection, with a student and at least one staff member is ideal. Personal relationships are a key component to any successful school.
- 8. What are the specific benefits and adverse effects for each situation?** Combining the SAU 20 and 3 Offices would have no effect on any school throughout the Valley. SAU Office staff would have to be reduced due to duplication of positions. Benefits for combining schools may be increased instructional programming and co curricular opportunities for students and retention of current programs. Classes would not have to be eliminated due to decreasing enrollment. Adverse effects may be larger class sizes, reducing staff/teachers due to duplication of positions.
- 9. What does the data say about the kids in both towns in relation to drop out rates, drug use, and pregnancy rates, etc?** Drop Out Rate Berlin School District for the 2010-2011 school year: 2.10%. Drop Out Rate Gorham Randolph Shelburne Cooperative School District for the 2010-2011 school year: 0.00%. Pregnancy rate Berlin School District for the 2010-2011 school year: less than 1%. Pregnancy rate Gorham Randolph Shelburne Cooperative School District for the 2010-2011 school year: Less than 2%. Drug and alcohol use in Coos County Schools cannot be determined easily as it is constantly changing. Students take the Youth Risk Behavior Survey which gives data that is used by administrators and staff to help educate students about the dangers of drug and alcohol use and hopefully reduce the use of drugs and alcohol in schools.
- 10. What is the tax impact?** Due to possible expansion of the tax base, reevaluation of property and reduction in revenues, the tax impact is a moving target. If a study of consolidation of school districts were to occur the figures would be determined based on the most current data at the time of the study.
- 11. How would the facilities be used?** The most likely scenario, if schools were to be combined, would be to send the Gorham High School Students to the Berlin High School since the facility is larger than the Gorham Middle High School. If this was to occur and if it was agreed that the two middle schools were to be combined the Berlin Middle School Students would attend school in Gorham. If the two SAU Offices were combined into one SAU one or the other current offices would be eliminated and all SAU office staff would be housed in one office complex.
- 12. Are there other options? Create our own SAU? Charter schools?** Other options are always a possibility. But, this document and the survey that is currently being made available online are based on the information that was generated by the Community Forums throughout the Valley held in the fall of 2011. If the public would give us direction as to how to proceed with a study of consolidation of schools then other options would have to be reviewed and researched during the study.