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Danforth challenges school consolidation plan

By Elizabeth Gartley
Special to the Pioneer Times

DANFORTH — In a special town meeting on Dec. 17, town selectmen approved a measure to appropriate \$25,000 from surplus funds to seek legal advice and file action in court to challenge the legality of Governor Baldacci's school consolidation plan.

The Danforth proposal is modeled after a similar action recently approved by selectmen in East Machias, which has also raised significant funds to fight school consolidation. The proposal claims that the school consolidation plan illegally interferes with Danforth's right to municipality control, or the town's "Home Rule Authority," by altering municipal school administration and funding procedures.

"The first thing that would go would be the school board, so you lose total control. We'd lose control of SAD 14 totally, because it'd be a 'super board,'" said chairman Terry Barnes.

The town also hoped that their action might inspire other small

municipalities to fight the consolidation plan as well.

"Maybe these other small towns will be able to say, 'Hey, small town Danforth, 600 people, if they can raise that much money, maybe we can raise \$2,500 or \$3,000,'" Barnes explained, "That's basically what we want to do."

Although consolidation doesn't necessarily mean that the East Grand School in Danforth would close, the loss of influence and control is worrisome to local residents.

"It wouldn't be good for any town, but in a town this size, the school is one of the biggest employers in the area," Barnes said.

Danforth town manager, Tammy Bonner, also reflected concerns of local residents.

"They're afraid of our school closing. We would have no local control, because it would be just one 'super board' up in [RSU 4]," Bonner said.

Under the current proposal for
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Danforth

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reorganization, the East Grand School in Danforth would be included in the Southern Aroostook-Houlton Region (RSU 4), which includes 27

towns in five school administrative districts: Houlton area schools (SAD 29), Hodgdon area schools (SAD 70), Katahdin Middle and High School (SAD 25), and the Southern Aroostook Community School (CSD 9).