

Easton school told by

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Commissioner to 'wait and see'

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EASTON — The Easton School Department has been told by Education Commissioner Susan A. Gendron to "wait and see" what the Maine Legislature will do in terms of amending LD1932, the school reorganization law, before taking any further action.

"We are waiting to hear from the Commissioner and the Legislature to see what they will do as far as amendments," said Superintendent Frank Keenan. "I had a conversation with the Commissioner and she indicated that there was very likely to be an amendment to the bill submitted that would allow for a lower number of students to make for a viable district within the law, and if approved, she would be able to approve them down to that new number."

"My understanding is that the latest

bill that's been put in would lower it to 1,000 students, which would be down from 1,200 students," he said. "However, there was a caveat on that which would require a minimum of three school districts to join. That would work for us as long as all the districts that we submitted the last plan with — Washburn [SAD 45], Mars Hill [SAD 42], and Bridgewater — were part of the district that was attempting to consolidate."

Keenan said the possible amendment would create "an opportunity to have a conversation, an opportunity to develop a plan, and an opportunity to take something to the community if something like that were to pass."

"[The problem is] if you start out above 1,000 students and ultimately come up with a plan that the individual community reorganization planning

committees (RPCs) take back for a vote," he said, "and one or any of the communities vote it down and the resulting number of students that are left with those whose communities voted for it are less than 1,000, that school system would still have a penalty."

Keenan said current enrollment figures show that Easton, Washburn, Mars Hill and Bridgewater combined have about 1,186 students.

"If we do that same group and the figure is amended to 1,000," he said, "we're OK if it goes through and all communities say, 'Yes.' If we or any other district says 'No,' those that are left would immediately be below 1,000 students and everyone would be issued a penalty."

"I can't speak for those communities, but my sense is that since they submitted the plan with us in late November," said Keenan, "they're still ready to work with

us if the amendment is approved."

Calling the reorganization steps a "frustrating process," Keenan said the Easton School Committee will just sit back and see what happens next.

"The amendments have come out of the Education Committee, but have not been voted on the floor of the Legislature and I don't think they're going to be for a while," he said. "There are a lot of issues to be ironed out, and I don't know when it will ever come out on the floor."

Though Maine resident Skip Greenlaw was unsuccessful in obtaining enough signatures to force the consolidation law to a referendum, Keenan is still optimistic that a statewide petition could happen.

"He's confident and I'm confident that we'll get the 55,000 signatures," said Keenan. "The problem is, if we get the

needed signatures and they have subsequently done significant amendments, then it comes down to whether the repeal petition was on a law that no longer exists, and that becomes a legal issue back and forth.

"I don't think there's any question that there's enough people out there willing to sign the petition if we could just get it into their hands," he said. "It was such a short period of time and a grassroots effort, there wasn't a real structure in place which kind of kept us from getting the numbers that we wanted in the time-frame that we needed."

Keenan said the Easton school committee will follow Gendron's instructions and "wait and see."

"Until the Legislature makes a decision regarding the amendments," he said, "we're kind of at a standstill, so we'll see what happens."