

School consolidation subcommittee reviews plan before August deadline

By Elizabeth Deprey

FRENCHVILLE – Members of the group planning the school consolidation met July 15 to go over the proposed plan before submitting it to the Maine Department of Education.

The St. John Valley Alternative Organization Structure will go to the voters in November, leaving the group until August 25 to submit a plan to the commissioner's office.

Members of a subcommittee met to go over the entire proposed plan so that Facilitator Diane Tilton could submit it to the commissioner's staff for comments. The comments should let the group know if it is on the right track and if any changes need to be made. Tilton said she plans to have the comments back in time for the next subcommittee meeting, which occurred last night, Tuesday, July 22.

The AOS plan includes a description of the 13-member governing body, made up of members of the local school boards. It outlines the duties of the AOS board and district school boards, which Tilton will also describe in chart form as part of the plan. It will also include a transition plan, including the "virtual" central office, which the committee created to reduce costs associated

with building and staffing a physical central office for the region.

The subcommittee spent a good portion of the meeting debating whether to have the AOS be the employer for all of the central office staff or to have the AOS only employ the superintendent and contract other central office functions out to the school units.

SAD 24 Superintendent Clayton Belanger favored the latter system, saying he wants to avoid adding costs. He said that Fern Jandreau's example of New Brunswick's central office in Edmundston showed that a central office involved hiring personnel that the Valley does not currently have, which would add costs.

Some other members said it will be difficult for the superintendent to be in charge of central office employees if they are not employed by the AOS.

Tilton said she has worked in systems of both types, and said, "Contracting is a nightmare."

Tilton said she will submit both plans to the DOE for comments.

The subcommittee will give a completed plan to the entire Reorganization Planning Committee for approval and changes on July 29.

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