

MEMORANDUM

TO: Crown Point-Ticonderoga Merger Study Advisory Committee
FROM: Alan Pole and Jessica Cohen
RE: Meeting Notes-Meeting of August 21, 2013
DATE: August 26, 2013

Attendance:

Committee Members: Seth Celotti, Mike Cherubini, Joyce Cooper, John Donohue, Dave Iuliano, Tom Fish, Brian Kiely, Agatha Mace, James Major, Peggy Patnode, Seanna Porter, Lynne Reale, Tara Spaulding, and Michelle Young

Consultants: Alan Pole and Jessica Cohen

Superintendent Advisors: Shari Brannock and John McDonald

Observers: Katherine DeBrobander, Mary Hope McGinness, Donna Clarke, June Glebus, Warren Spaulding, Bette Pertak, Tracey L. Cross-Baker, Tracy Bush, Torri Potter, Jon Landry, Bonnie Landry, Judy Stock, Lisa Harrington

Location: Crown Point School

- 1. Welcome and housekeeping items:** Jessica Cohen welcomed everyone to the seventh meeting of the Merger Advisory Committee. She reviewed the process that would be used at the meeting to include a presentation to the committee and committee discussion followed by questions from the audience.
- 2. Additions and corrections to the July 23, 2013 meeting notes:** There were none.
- 3. Review of draft report:** Alan highlighted the findings and recommendations found in the report beginning with an overview of the merger process and the background of the districts. He reminded everyone that the report is a study of the merger of two districts through centralization. It is unlike the annexation process that occurred between Hague and Ticonderoga that resulted in the dissolution of the Hague District into the existing Ticonderoga district. In the case of merger through centralization, both districts would be dissolved and a new district would be formed.

Both districts are very similar in the type of students that attend when measures like poverty (free and reduced lunch rates), ethnicity, and attendance rates are examined. The differences are found in the size of the districts with Ticonderoga's enrollment being almost three times as large as Crown Point. The other difference is in the district wealth

(as measured by property and income wealth). Ticonderoga has a higher combined wealth ratio that means that the state provides less state aid to Ticonderoga. As a poorer district in wealth, Crown Point receives more state aid.

Enrollment. While both districts have experienced enrollment declines over the past six years, projections for the next six years are that the combined enrollment will be stabilized.

Academic Program. Curriculum work would have to be done with the merged district's faculties to develop a consistent academic program across the elementary, middle, and secondary levels. Some work would also have to be done to equalize the offerings in special programs like art, music, and technology. All of the courses now available in both high schools could continue to be offered, more courses could be added and some staff efficiencies could be realized.

Extra-Curricular Program. All athletic and extra-curricular activities currently available in both districts could be offered and additional sports and activities could be added. Efficiencies and savings in coaching stipends could be realized. However, there will be more competition for meaningful playing time for students.

Facilities. Based on the enrollment projections, it is recommended that each district will continue to keep its elementary schools in the existing buildings for Pre-K to Grade 5. The current middle school in Ticonderoga will serve as the merged district's middle school and the secondary school in Ticonderoga will served as the merged district's high school.

Transportation. There would be few changes to the transportation system. A single trip busing system would be maintained with Pre-K to 12th grade students on the same bus. No trip for students would be longer than 60 minutes. K-12 Crown Point students would be transported to the Crown Point school; 6th – 12th graders would then be shuttled to the middle school and high school in Ticonderoga. This extra shuttle would be three to four buses and would cost approximately \$5,000 a year after transportation aid. To ensure access for students to athletics and extra-curricular activities, a late bus run would be established. This would cost approximately \$60,000. Based on the needs of the transportation system, it is recommended that both bus garages should be maintained to facilitate efficient routing and maintenance.

Staffing. The labor contracts in the two districts are fairly similar although the salary schedules differ. If the two districts were to merge, the cost to level up salaries and related benefits for teachers and teaching assistants would be \$328,958. The cost to level up support staff salary and benefits would be \$76,645. There is the potential for saving from 4.6 fewer administrative positions of \$202,694. Potential saving from the

merger of coaching positions would be \$24,628. The net staffing cost increase in a merger would be \$178,281.

Finance. Both districts have communities that have historically supported the schools as measured by the positive budget votes. An analysis of the districts’ balance sheets indicates that both districts have limited reserves and fund balances.

A merged district would receive a significant amount of incentive aid over a 14-year period (\$12,353,599). In addition, if a merger were to occur, the current capital debt in Ticonderoga would generate an additional \$9,794,586 in building aid.

If a merger were to occur, it is suggested that approximately 25% of the incentive aid should be used to pay for transition costs, 25% should be used for reserves to ensure long term financial stability for the merged district and 50% should be used to reduce the local tax levy. Using this approach, because of cost savings and additional state revenues, taxes on full value would go down in a merged district 19.4% in Crown Point and 8.1% in Ticonderoga.

4. Committee Discussion. Committee members were asked to consider the advantages and disadvantages of a merger. The advantages and disadvantages identified by the committee are summarized in the table below.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leveling up salaries • More sports • More courses and electives • Expanded arts and music programs • Additional building aid • Reduced property taxes • Increased reserves • Merge under our terms and not forced by NYS • \$12 million in additional state aid over fourteen years • Increased job stability for teachers and staff • Learn from both districts • Students who have opportunities to interact in larger settings will be more successful in college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased transportation time for Crown Point students • Crown Point students will have to move to a middle school at 5th grade • Financial assumptions may not be correct • Loss of local control/board representation • Loss of school as community center • Crown Point will assume debt • Loss of family atmosphere, school identity and personal connections • More competition; less playing time • Change is difficult • Loss of coaching & administrative positions • Larger class sizes • Vacant space in Crown Point bld.

5. Audience questions: Members of the audience were given an opportunity to ask questions. Questions were asked regarding clarification of issues relating to the total amount of incentive aid each year, calculations of tax rates, transportation changes, and contract negotiations. In response to a question regarding the transportation of students who live the furthest from the Crown Point school to Ticonderoga, information was provided that indicated that one bus run was developed that would transport that group of students directly to Ticonderoga without stopping at Crown Point to ensure that the length of the trip was 60 minutes or less.

6. Next steps: Alan reminded everyone that this is the last meeting of the merger advisory committee. He requested that committee members review the draft report and contact us if there are any revisions or changes needed. We will make the appropriate changes and send the draft report to the New York State Education Department for their review. When the draft report is accepted as complete by the State Education Department, we will work with the superintendents to schedule a presentation to a joint meeting of the Crown Point and Ticonderoga boards of education. We anticipate that the meeting should be sometime in October or November. Once the presentation to the joint meeting of the boards of education is completed, the study phase of the process ends.

There have been some changes in the timeline for the voting phase of the merger process. Initially, it was thought that the merger study process would begin in the spring of 2012. Because the grant was not awarded for the study process until late fall, the process was not able to begin until early in 2013. As a result, the State Education Department is recommending that the timeline call for votes that will result in a potential merger occurring effective July 1, 2015.

Each board of education will decide whether an advisory vote of the community should be held. If both boards pass resolutions to hold a vote, then an advisory vote in each community will be scheduled and organized by the State Education Department. The vote occurs on the same day in both communities. If one board does not pass a resolution to hold a vote, then no vote is held in either community. The advisory vote must pass in each community for a final vote to occur.

Prior to the advisory vote, both boards of education provide information on the merger through community forums, meetings, and written information.

If both communities vote to approve a merger in the advisory vote, then the State Education Department schedules a final vote. Once again, the vote is held in both communities on the same day and must pass in each community. If it passes in both communities, then the merger will take place on July 1, 2015.

7. Closing thoughts: Alan ended the meeting by reminding everyone that the decision regarding merger is a complex decision that rests solely with the two communities. He

urged people to carefully consider the information and to approach the discussions with respect and civility.

He concluded with thanks to the public for attending the meetings, to the advisory committee for their time, involvement, and commitment, and to the superintendents and their staff for all of their time and counsel in providing the information to be used in the study.

8. We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on August 21. If you have questions with these notes, please feel free to contact us. Please remember to contact us by August 30 if there are any suggested revisions to the report.

Thank you for all of your interest, involvement, and advice.

C: Shari Brannock
John McDonald
Craig King
Suzanne Spear
Jay O'Connor
Sean Maguire