

## Legislative Council Study Committee on Shared Services

### Request for Additional Information – Mike Beighley

1. Identify any barriers to the successful implementation of shared services by your school districts (*examples could include – statutory barriers, financial uncertainty, community relationships*)?
  - A. The lack of an overall statewide vision for public education (stated openly) may well be the single greatest barrier we face. The unknowns and manufactured perceptions create major fear and look too much like politics to achieve buy-in from communities that could create real structural change. Openly stating what the state needs its public education system to look like would help greatly.
  - B. Financial uncertainty runs a very close second in preventing change. Fear and anger prevent common sense thought. I honestly believe many people understand that major shifts are necessary in terms of structure, but when we are left on our own in a climate that continues to vilify most/all things public, people are skeptical. Real facts and real numbers would help to alleviate some of the challenges. In essence, due to politics, all the true hard decisions are left to local folks but created by our legislature / governor. School funding is at the top of this list.
  
2. In your experience, have you tried to share services that proved not to be beneficial, if so please explain?
  - A. We have found very few limits to what works or could work other than emotional responses to fear of change or reactionary thinking based in political frustration. We have shared teachers, moved students, streamlined curriculums, but any kind of major structural changes don't move on as people think we will simply be okay or are left to view this type of change as a takeover and/or loss of community as opposed to visionary future based leadership.
  
3. Can you identify any solutions that could address barriers to or incentivize greater use of shared services?
  - A. A clearly communicated vision would give us the necessary rationale for sharing services and finding efficiencies while avoiding community destroying consolidation.
  - B. **IF** consolidation is a real goal/need in our state, it needs to be stated directly. Financially starving districts to force change locally hurts kids and families. Incentives like equalization aid increases (tax relief) or categorical aid (revenue) would help soften the blow, but if we have enough funds to create incentives, why do we not simply fund schools appropriately? We need to start operating with a long term plan as opposed to budget cycle to budget cycle / election cycle to election cycle.
  - C. It seems to always come back to money, but our ability to force people to do what we need them to do is gone for the foreseeable future, so we need to be able to

pay enough to keep people while building new systems. That takes money at least until we are able to create efficiencies with the very changes we are trying to make.

4. Provide examples of barriers that currently prevent school districts from moving forward with consolidation?
  - A. We live in a rural area that supports multiple global employers so all of our communities are necessary to overall regional success. Consolidation seems to all too often punctuate the death of a rural town unless “new models” are used to maintain schools in communities but under a new governance structure. This alone stops most discussions before we can get to anything structural or meaningful.
  
5. In what ways could the state incentivize school district consolidation:
  - A. Major tax savings and some degree of transitional revenue to fill short term gaps.
  - B. Incentivise models that keep all current (or a majority of) school buildings in use ... community survival as well as avoidance of more building costs to blend schools/districts under consolidation should be valued and recognized.
  - C. Stacking incentives to encourage multiple districts to look at working together would be an interesting approach to consider or clarify. \$150/kid turns to \$300/kid if three districts work together ... \$450/kid for four districts.