

Jane Phinney Written Testimony

A former educator and administrator in the state of Vermont, Jane is also a member of the Ripton School Board. Her experiences provide a reserve of understanding regarding the application, operation, and management of education related systems in the state.

MTSS AT RES

The purpose of the following statements is to illustrate that RES is not being built from scratch. RSD must, in cooperation with administration and staff, maintain and improve on existing practices and activities at RES. RSD has taken measures to identify and engage with professionals providing both practical and conceptual knowledge.

The major changes related to RES, RSD, and the future Mountain Supervisory Union are linked to the establishment and operation of central office. Education practices within RES and oversight of tuitioned students will be delivered by trained, qualified, experienced professionals who understand the roles and responsibilities necessary to meet standards and students' needs. The Central office responsibilities and impact are well within the realm of possibility should RSD and LSD be empowered to work together, which will trigger the hiring of necessary personnel and implementation of policy.

Social/Emotional and Academic Support

To address the social/emotional needs of the students at RES, the school began with the implementation, after professional development, of UVM's Inclusive Classroom. This program then morphed into PBIS. RES was one of the first schools to implement PBIS and Responsive Classroom. They still are in use today. Eventually, a Social Skills curriculum was adopted under the direction of the Guidance Counselor. Further augmenting the educational practices offered at RES continued with the adoption of International Baccalaureate program, which also has a social/emotional skills component.

The Multi Tiered System of Support at RES was implemented around 2005. It was under the direction of the Guidance Counselor at the time because she had had professional development and training in MTSS. This was useful for both SPED and RES's EST system. Our school board plans on reviewing and assessing the state of MTSS at RES, and will use a combination of engagement with current staff and external support from educators fluent in MTSS, such as Tim O'Leary.

As far as I know, RES has had strong SPED teachers since the school was built. I had personal experience with four of them. The present SPED teacher has experience in grades k-8. The SPED program for RES was supervised by the SPED director of the SU and later the UD. I personally worked with two of them.

The RES SPED program was, based on my experience in education, consistent, vigorous, supportive, and met both State and Federal Standards. Qualified individuals contracted from the Counseling Service of Addison County do evaluations.

The RES 504 Program was administered by the Principal and followed Federal Guidelines for meetings. The team for 504 students was the same as for our EST system. Please see below.

The RES EST system was also consistent, present, and effective. Each team often met several times during the school year. Any student receiving services from a specialized teacher (guidance, OT, SLP, nurse etc.) who did not have an IEP had an EST plan. The team consisted of (when possible) the principal, parents, sending teacher and receiving teacher, involved para educators, specialized teachers and any other faculty member who had input to offer

At times RES worked closely with the local DCF office and also the Counseling Service of Addison County to ensure students whose basic needs were not being met and/or were not safe in their own homes. Additionally, RES has successfully worked with students with Autism, Dyslexia, Downs Syndrome, ODD, ADHD, and Explosive Children, and Deregulated Children. These large teams facilitated brainstorming and complete wrap around services for students. This system was possible in large part because of the size of the school. It is my understanding that these meetings now only happen at the CO of UD. They no longer happen in the local school.

PK

We were the first school in the district to offer a free, public PK to 4 year olds. I consider this part of our support system for students. It meant that families who could not afford PK at any level were able to have their children in a PK program. Providing such services to families with economic and other challenges is a significant way to bolster the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children.

The program, at the time, ran 4 full days. The PK students were then able to enter kindergarten without the usual transition issues. They knew the teacher (multi-age PK/K), they knew the school routines and personnel, and they had been exposed to the K curriculum. It is an opportunity to construct a solid foundation of habits, familiarity, and the processes of learning on which further education is built.

Several years ago, the UD pulled the PK program without any opportunity of input from RES or community. This was at the same time the 6th graders began to attend MUMS to fulfill the IB Middle Years Program. This allowed the UD to reassign a Ripton teacher thus saving money. Also, now, the current principal is only in the building for 2 hours/4 days per week. As a result of these changes, directly linked with the fall-out of consolidation, I believe the school has become a skeleton of its former self.

Staffing

We will not know which teachers and staff would like to stay until we begin the hiring process. Which, as stated in the status report, cannot begin until we have clear approval from the SBE to work with Lincoln to stand-up MSU. In the interest of stability and fairness to our educators, we will begin discussing and working with educators to understand the next stages of the process once the state's determination is clear. However, we have heard informally that some of the faculty and staff plan on staying.

Curriculum

RES has a math curriculum and a literacy curriculum for the primary grades. The teachers have participated in professional development in "Time for Teachers" from the Stern Center in Burlington. Science and Social Studies are taught in thematic units following the IB Curriculum. We will ensure that curriculum coordination and review of curriculum is conducted to ensure needs are met and any challenge areas are addressed.

Assessment

The Bridges Math Program includes regular assessments and intervention materials. The IB curriculum includes authentic assessments. Other assessment tools such as the FAST have been used. In addition, we will make sure that all assessment tools available both at a state and community level are utilized to maintain an accurate and consistent pool of data.

Facility

The RES building is the second newest in the district and was built in 1989 under current state and federal guidelines. Some of the facility upgrades proposed by the ACSD facility plan are not immediately

necessary such as paving the parking lot. The school board has, as indicated in the status report, begun conversations with current facilities management personnel to ensure all responsibilities are met and maintenance and capital project schedules are maintained.