

## **Strategic Planning Committee**

### **Meeting Summary (3-6-07)**

The committee convened at 7:30 pm. Mayor Burnett and Dennis Oblack were excused. The President of the Lebanon Township BOE, their CSA, and their BA joined us for this meeting. The focus of this meeting was to explore shared services and any possible areas where our two districts could work together to cut costs or improve education.

#### **Part time teaching positions.**

Sometimes small and medium sized districts have difficulty attracting and retaining part time teachers especially in areas like music, art, technology, and world language. We asked if LT had many .4, or .6, or .8 positions that could be matched up with Califon positions that require a .2, .4 or .6 position. It turns out that LT actually has very, very few positions that are not full time. Among the very few that are part-time, some of them are staffed by people who want to be part-time, and one is already “shared” with Califon (our computer repair person works on an hourly basis for both districts).

#### **Shared services.**

Califon currently has a Child Study Team which comes in 1 day/week. L.T. has a full time CST. We asked if their CST could handle our case load without increasing their staff. They stated that their CST was basically at close to their caseload capacity, so taking on our special ed caseload would not be possible without increasing their staffing (which would defeat the purpose).

We asked what they thought about sharing the Business Administration function. They stated that to take care of Califon’s business function, they would have to hire 1.5 additional people to assist their BA. The salary and benefits of those assistants would roughly equal the current cost of staffing and running our business office independently. Once again the lack of cost savings would defeat the purpose of sharing the business function. In terms of saving money on joint purchasing their BA pointed out that many items like fuel, insurance, transportation, and supplies are already purchased through cooperative purchasing programs that Califon and LT are already utilizing.

Regarding sharing a Chief School Administrator, they pointed out that even though Califon would only have 1 out of 7 of the combined number of students in the shared service area, and only 1 of the 3 schools in the shared service area, it would nevertheless comprise 1 of the 2 districts that the CSA would be responsible for. Consequently, half of the CSA’s Board meetings would be Califon Board meetings. Half of the state reports, and half of the budgets that they needed to prepare would be for Califon. If they charged 30-40% of the LT CSA’s cost to Califon, and Califon still needed to have a Principal in the building, the cost of the shared CSA arrangement would exceed what Califon is currently paying for a Principal/CSA. Meanwhile, in the shared arrangement neither district would receive the person’s full attention.

## **Consolidation**

We asked the three elected and appointed officials from LT if they felt there was any interest on the part of LT citizens to consolidate with Califon. They did not detect any interest in doing this, nor did they see any advantages to it. Unlike the demographic study done by the high school, their demographer shows fairly flat enrollment for the foreseeable future. If that is true, they believe they can house all of their students for the foreseeable future without new construction. If Califon School were to close as part of the consolidation, they would need to build additions onto both of their schools. Regarding the option of Califon School housing the combined 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades, they believe their parents would not see any advantages to that arrangement.

## **Political Aspects**

We had a brief discussion about how consolidation may not save very much money, and local citizens and parents may think the disadvantages outweigh the advantages, however, it may still make sense from the standpoint of the state department of education. Several members of our committee reported that when someone from Trenton meets with a group of local administrators or school board members, the person from the State Dept of Ed is often barraged with complaints about insufficient state aid to our local districts, or about the negative effect on education of some new state regulations and mandates. The outspoken-ness of their complaints speaks to the fact that they are strong advocates for their local constituencies. Compare that with meetings in the future, if county-wide consolidation were to take place. Executive county superintendents meeting with people from Trenton are going to be much less inclined to “push-back” against Trenton, because they are appointed and employed by people in Trenton, not by local citizens.

## **Califon Elementary School vs. Califon Middle School**

At the end of the meeting, our LT guests asked if those of us from Califon felt that our parent community would favor consolidation. Several members of our committee felt that parents tended to be very happy with Califon School during the elementary school years, and that parents would not favor putting their children on a bus to Valley View. On the other hand, the feeling among middle school parents would be more mixed. Some like the individual attention, small class sizes, the virtual guarantee of making the team & being in the school play, etc. Others probably feel that a larger middle school would offer more extracurricular options, more academic tracking options for bright children, more social options, etc. We asked what LT did in terms of sports & tracking options. We were surprised to learn that they offered only 6 sports for their 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders (vs. 7 sports, incl. cheerleading, for our 6-8<sup>th</sup> graders). They only track math in their middle school, the other classes & grade levels are not tracked (same as Califon). In terms of curricular and extra-curricular options, we were surprised that a small school like Califon had essentially the same curricular and extracurricular options, and if anything, every Califon student wishing to do so was able to take advantage of the options offered, whereas in LT, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade students had to try-out for the school teams, and 6<sup>th</sup> graders were ineligible.

We thanked our guests for coming and adjourned at 8:50 pm.