

## **Themes from ACT 46 Conversations in Cabot, Danville & Twinfield January 2017**

### **BACKGROUND**

The three school boards of Cabot, Danville and Twinfield each voted to join a Committee to explore whether the three districts can come together in a way that will benefit the students and residents of all three communities, meeting the goals of Act 46.

In January of 2017 approximately 150 community members from Cabot, Danville and Twinfield participated in a conversation in their community to learn about and discuss several options being considered by the Act 46 Study Committee. The purpose of these conversations was to gather input from all communities to inform the work of the study committee. Following the conversations, several people from each of the communities came together to debrief the process and review the comments that were collected. This group identified a set of key themes that emerged across communities. These themes are listed below along with several recommendations for the committee's consideration.

### **THEMES**

#### **1. Cost is a key consideration.**

- People hope for cost savings
- They are worried that costs could go up

#### **2. There is a hope that students will have more options.**

- More academic options for high school students, including a variety of learning opportunities that work for students with different learning styles
- Expanded extracurricular options
- Broader social network and diversity of peer group.

#### **3. Community members express concern about change and the unknown.**

- Would this really increase opportunities?
  - How would offerings be distinctive enough to offer students diverse options?
- Could this stabilize the system over time, allowing our high schools to be viable?
- Impact of statewide policy on budgets and other district issues

#### **4. There is concern about the loss of town identity and voice.**

- What would the impact be on our civic life?
- Right now there is competition and misperceptions across schools.
- How would decisions be made moving forward?

#### **5. Transportation is a key concern and people need more information about it.**

- Distances, and visualization of the distance
- Costs
- Implications for the length of the school day

### **Themes related to specific options**

### Option 1

Benefits	Trade-offs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keeps prek-8 in all schools</li> <li>Helps keep Danville + Twinfield stay afloat</li> <li>Increase in student options</li> <li>Could be the cheapest option</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabot loses its high school</li> <li>Difficult for students to switch each semester</li> <li>Transportation</li> </ul>

### Option 2\*

Benefits	Trade-offs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keeps high school students at Cabot</li> <li>Increase in student opportunities (social, academic, sports)</li> <li>Creates increased Project Based Learning opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transportation--possible cost increase</li> <li>Loss of local control and lack of savings (including debt, bond)</li> <li>Concern about student relationships with primary adults</li> </ul>

*\*In general, attendees at the Cabot forum preferred option 2.*

### Option 3

Benefits	Trade-offs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintains current structures for the time being and provides more time to come up with solutions.</li> <li>Maintains local control, local school boards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doesn't address enrollment issues.</li> <li>Could potentially lead to even less local control.</li> <li>Limits student opportunities through narrower curriculum and smaller student populations.</li> </ul>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Incorporate feedback from student discussions into the committee's decision-making**
  - a. these have been held or are in the works at each of the high schools.
2. **Articulate a clear vision for each of the high schools in the new district.**
  - a. It will be important for community members to understand what each school will offer, and how these offerings will complement each other, and result in the expanded learning opportunities people are hoping to achieve in a merged system.
3. **Provide detailed information so community members can make an informed decision.**
  - a. This information should be shared in a variety of ways in order to reach the broadest possible number of community members (i.e. newspaper, social media, community forums)
  - b. If the committee decides to hold a community forum, it would be helpful if this forum could bring people (including students) together across towns so they can begin to get to know each other, and begin to envision what a shared identity across districts could look like.

4. **Share the themes from the community conversations widely, and be explicit about how these themes informed the committee's decision-making process and/or the specifics of whatever option they recommend.**
  
5. **The structure of the conversations worked well and should be replicated for future community conversations about Act 46 (as well as other public topics that may arise)**
  - a. Student participation and leadership was an important asset
  - b. Trained student/adult facilitator teams worked well
  - c. The process worked well, even for those community members who often have difficulty with traditional town meetings.