

School District Boundary Task Force

First Meeting
May 20, 2015

Tea Area Educational Center
Tea Area School District

Wednesday, May 20, 2015

The first meeting of the School District Boundary Task Force was called to order by Tamara Darnall at 4:01 p.m. in the Tea Area Educational Center, Tea, South Dakota.

The following members were present: Senator Deb Peters, Senator Ernie Otten, Representative Jim Bolin, Representative Herman Otten, Representative Karen Soli, Superintendent Jennifer Lowery, Superintendent Tom Oster and Superintendent Mike Lodmel.

Department of Education staff present included: Tamara Darnall, Susan Woodmansey and Bobbi Leiferman. Michael Houdyshell was also present representing the Department of Revenue.

Audience members present were Gerry Kaufman with ASBSD, Steve Dick, West Central School District school board president and Mark Lee with the Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce.

NOTE: For the purposes of continuity, the following minutes are not necessarily in chronological order.

Selection of Chair Person

The first agenda item was to select a chair person for this task force. Tamara Darnall asked for nominations, Representative Soli nominated Senator Peters, seconded by Senator Ernie Otten. Representative Bolin moved to cease nominations and cast unanimous vote in favor of Senator Peters, seconded by Representative Soli. The motion prevailed on a voice vote.

Review of Current Related Statutes

Senator Peters invited Tamara Darnall to review for all task force members the current applicable statutes relating to school boundary changes. (Document #1)

Representative Bolin informed the committee of a 1987 statute change that removed a requirement that kept all land area of municipality in one school district. This statute was changed to negate impact on surrounding school districts.

Superintendent Oster discussed how the implementation of open enrollment, new funding formula and allowance to opt out all changed the dynamics of issues on school boundaries.

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Review Current School District Boundary Map

When reviewing the current state-wide map of all public school districts, the task force members commented on the irregular school boundaries for a majority of school districts throughout the state. There was discussion and examples of both contiguous and non-contiguous boundary land areas.

Representative Bolin informed the members of the mass reorganization and elimination of common schools in the late 1960s that forced land owners to close schools and join independent K-12 school districts. This was a very difficult and emotional issue for many districts and patrons.

Superintendent Oster informed the committee that during that mass school district reorganization that the number of school districts was significantly reduced and irregular boundaries and island were established due to land owner requests. Understanding the history of these changes would need to be researched before considering any possible adjustments or changes to current school district boundaries.

Representative Bolin also cautioned the committee that any changes considered for specific area of the state could result in negative consequences for other areas of the state.

Discussion Items for This Task Force

Many of the current issues regarding school boundaries are centralized around the Sioux Falls and surrounding school districts.

Senator Peters requested that DOE and DRR research information about how other metropolitan areas in other states, such as Minneapolis and Omaha, handle school boundary changes and keep surrounding school districts viable.

Superintendent Oster posed a question about the possibility to remove the current allowance for land owner petition for boundary changes and limit school district to school district boundary changes to a "swap" of land of comparable values. Oster also mentioned that these types of board decisions may limit the option of patrons to "refer" these decisions to court or a vote.

Steve Dick, West Central school board president, outlined for the task force the present situation and recent vote in his district regarding the revenue sharing agreement with the Sioux Falls school district. The vote upheld the decision of the West Central school board to allow students residing in the Cherry Lake development area to attend the Sioux Falls school district and for Sioux Falls to share a portion of the tax revenues with West Central for a specified period of time.

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Assignments for the Next Meeting

Senator Peters asked for the following information to be researched and presented at the next School District Boundary Task Force meeting.

- 1) Research how other states and metro areas handle minor boundary requests.
- 2) Draft for discussion purposes proposed legislation that may eliminate the petition by an individual patron to request minor boundary changes.
- 3) To provide a district to district land area exchange only when approved by both school districts; if one district does not approve the exchange may not move forward.
- 4) Research and assist local school boards to establish criteria or standards by which they may approve or deny requests for boundary changes and prevent courts from overturning their decisions.
- 5) Focus on boundary issues of school districts in the following counties; Minnehaha, Lincoln and Turner. Research the non-contiguous land areas and if possible to help "clean up" their boundaries and eliminate them.

The next meeting for this task force will be scheduled for Thursday, July 9th at the West Central administration building in Hartford, SD. Meeting will be scheduled from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. CDT.

Motion to adjourn by Representative Herman Otten, seconded by Representative Jim Bolin.
Meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.