



West Virginia School Board Association

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Letter signed by Sam P. Sentelle, Ed.D., WVSBA President, addressed to each Legislator

March 7, 2017

Dear,

The West Virginia School Board Association has requested our executive director Howard M. O’Cull, Ed.D., provide correspondence regarding Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs).

That correspondence follows.

It is hoped you will read the entirety of the correspondence.

Guide to discussion of RESAs

We have provided the following as a “guide” to some of the RESA-related statutes. Also included is a desired listing of outcomes for any RESA-inspired legislation:

We begin with §18-4-4 which states, “The Public education system will provide equitable education opportunity to all students.”

We then move to §18-2-26, noting RESAs are to “...provide for high quality, cost-effective education programs and services to students, schools and school systems...”

Additionally, that same section of Code directs RESAs to “...provide technical assistance to low performing schools, to provide staff development, to facilitate coordination and cooperation among county boards within their respective regions, to install and maintain/repair educational technology equipment and software, to obtain and administer grants.

Again, §18-2-26 provides guidance by stating RESAs are to “...continually (explore) possibilities for the delivery of services on a regional basis...permit the delivery of high quality educational programs at a lower per student cost...strengthen cost effectiveness of educational funding, reduce administrative and operational cost including the consolidation of administrative, coordinating and other county functions into regional level functions...

“...technical, operational, programmatic or professional services are among the types of services appropriate for delivery on a regional basis. Nothing prohibits RESAs from cooperating, sharing or combining services or programs with each other at their discretion to further the purpose of providing a thorough and efficient education to the students of West Virginia.”

The charge to RESAs is well-positioned in Code. RESAs are accomplishing much of the statutory objectives in ways that prove cost-effective, especially with regard to staffing flexibility in response to the shifting needs of counties and the students they serve – a very important economic consideration.

WHAT IS NEEDED?

An increase in accountability to the counties and regions they serve by strengthening the direct reporting relationships between RESAs and the elected county boards of education members and county superintendents the agencies serve.

How can this be accomplished?

- Consider realigning RESA regions to better fit the counties served, based on efficiency, financial and geographic considerations.
- Configure RESA governance so the agencies report directly to their “customer” to enhance service alignment, resources and accountability. As we note with our correspondence, the state Board of Education or, more particularly, the state Superintendent of Schools/state Department of Education can serve a facilitative role in this process.
- Use the legislated focus assigned in Code to RESAs as the basis for accountability and performance measures developed collectively by the RESA Regional Councils (comprised on county board member and one county superintendent for each of the school boards in the RESA region.)
- Measure RESAs’ success on the basis of how well the agencies serve counties in their respective regions. Thus, the entities will be afforded stability as they plan for the very services RESA Regional Councils want or expect, including ways to measure the efficacy of these endeavors. We observe that if the governor and legislature support more local decision-making and accountability at the county school district level, this is an excellent place to begin.

Note: Detail attached.

I am sincerely,



Sam P. “Doc” Sentelle, president
West Virginia School Board Association

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2 West Virginia School Board Association:

3 Considerations regarding Regional Education Service

4 Agencies (RESAs)

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7 On behalf of the West Virginia School Board Association (WVSBA), an organization comprised of the

8 state’s 55 county boards of education and 275 elected county board members, we are sharing this

9 correspondence which details WVSBA’s thoughts concerning Regional Education Service Agencies

10 (RESAs).

11 We realize legislation has been introduced to eliminate RESAs by striking the enacting section of law

12 creating the entities, §18-2-26; through omitted funding within the governor’s proposed budget; and

13 through restructuring the agencies, placing the successor entities, it would appear, within the domain of

14 county superintendents – Senate Bill 420/House Bill 2711.

15 Our intent is not one of detailing the pros or cons of the proposals. Rather we would like to point out

16 major ways in which RESAs assist our counties.

17 It is regretful most discussions regarding the viability of RESAs center largely on cost-savings to county

18 boards. That approach has merit. This approach, however, lumps RESA services in the abstract, negating

19 how the eight RESAs provide value and enhancement in meeting the academic or health and wellness

20 needs of students, high quality professional learning for our educators and administrators, and

21 regionally-delivered training for service personnel. To ply the RESA cost-savings discussion as strictly

22 monetary sequesters meaningful discussion into a “numbers” equation, ignoring the fact that RESAs

23 serve our students, our teachers, our administrators, and our school service personnel. Moreover, the

24 “monetary approach” is open to varied interpretation – again, often obscuring the real people in our

25 state who the agencies touch through programing, which admittedly varies by RESA region.

26 Thus, consider these factors which illustrate the value and importance of RESAs:

27 • Shared regional services, of course, can be secured through individual arrangements between
28 two or more county boards, particularly administrative services. In fact, a 1989 statute, §18A-4-
29 8d, allows such. Several difficulties emerge with this approach, however. First, RESAs have
30 economies of scale for shared services which counties, working together, could not achieve.
31 Secondly, RESAs foster shared services across the entirety of the agency's operating region or,
32 in case of a purchasing program, the entire state. Third, counties, given school personnel laws,
33 find jointly-derived arrangements problematic. Indeed, no specific statutory guides exist to
34 address personnel aspects regarding sharing services, especially employment flexibility which
35 would allow counties to adjust the number and roles of personnel based on counties' specific
36 and changing needs. A paramount consideration relates to the state's persistent student
37 enrollment declines.

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39 Moreover, organizations representing school employees likely oppose many aspects of shared
40 personnel services, provoking county boards to deploy full-time employees. The approach
41 proves to be a costlier and less effective proposition - absent specific guidelines for inter-
42 county shared services. (The aforementioned §18A-4-8d is largely minus any clarifying
43 language in this regard.) Moreover, job-sharing, while recognized by statute (§18A-1-1), is
44 limited to intra-county arrangements. An operative statutory provision states, "Job-sharing
45 arrangement' means a formal, written agreement voluntarily entered into by a county board
46 with two or more of its employees who wish to divide between them the duties and
47 responsibilities of one authorized full-time position."

48
49 We note, of course, the state Supreme Court has sanctioned RESA deployment of personnel to
50 county boards. There is some interpretation as to statewide application of this ruling, which
51 originated in Monongalia County and involved RESA 7. The decision, however, stands. Finally,
52 county boards, given these parameters, often turn to RESAs for shared services which involve
53 education employees.

54 • RESAs serve students – the oft forgotten component in these discussions – in many ways,
55 including providing services related to high-cost, low-incidence needs such as contracting for
56 specialized staff, including hearing, vision and mobility teachers as well as certified behavioral
57 therapists who provide services as needed for autism and behavioral students. One also must

58 consider the various types of therapies students may require and the itinerant teachers who
59 assist homebound students that RESAs deploy. These vital services may be best provided at a
60 regional level and, in fact, allow the agencies to deploy highly-qualified professionals to work
61 with students. This is not so much a cost-savings proposition as it is one of truly assisting
62 students in ways county boards would find difficult in terms of resources. Of course, these
63 high-cost, low-incidence services are customized, based on county needs and RESA Regional
64 Council requests, varying per agency.

65 A corollary emphasis are the array of adult basic education services many RESAs provide.

- 66 • RESAs assist educators in the 55 counties through providing meaningful, effective professional
67 development programs, meaning our educators do not have to travel great distances to
68 receive training. Moreover, RESAs provide assistance – and programming – to aid in curricular
69 and academic pursuits. While each RESA differs in terms of needs, RESAs are able to customize
70 programs and services to professional educators and, thus, to assist in bolstering academic
71 achievement within the region. Again, programming varies based largely on RESA Regional
72 Council requests. Customization, however, is of optimal value. For instance, one RESA has
73 established a program whereby teachers are being trained in research-based reading strategies
74 for struggling readers including students with disabilities. This program is grant-funded and
75 involves a nationally-recognized university in a nearby state.
- 76 • RESAs assist county boards through administering Medicaid reimbursement efforts, through
77 provision of legal services to counties in the region, through bus operator training, through
78 providing technical expertise for the state’s educational information system, and through a
79 host of ways which not only relieve counties of these duties but, through scale, provide high
80 quality services. It should be noted these services are often determined by the RESA Regional
81 Councils and thus differ between and among the RESAs.
- 82 • While much is made of the RESAs providing services to emergency first responders, we note
83 these services are provided in proximity to these valued personnel. Finally, we know of few
84 agencies having stepped forward to offer these services.
- 85 • In terms of funding for services, counties within the RESA area usually agree to a funding
86 method for services that allocates costs primarily based on the amount of time and effort for
87 each county. Of course, fee structure particulars vary per RESA as determined by agencies’
88 Regional Councils.

- 89 • RESAs work with external agencies to augment their services, including Family Resource
90 Networks (FRNs), substance abuse task forces, suicide prevention councils as well as long-
91 established linkages with the state Department of Health and Human Resources, the state
92 Division of Rehabilitation Services, WorkForce WV Career Centers, Community & Technical
93 Colleges / Universities, and public libraries. Again, RESAs vary in this approach, based on
94 direction from the RESA Regional Councils.
- 95 • In terms of distinct student programming efforts, RESAs may assist in dropout prevention
96 programs or similar programming.
- 97
- 98 • RESAs often procure external funding through grants which aid all counties within the region.
99 County boards do not have this capacity in terms of personnel.
- 100 • Lastly, in terms of purchasing, a statewide RESA program has proven to be quite successful,
101 saving counties millions of dollars. Admittedly, RESAs could and should be more active in terms
102 of statewide programming.

103 Of course, one could argue other entities could provide the services. In some instances, that was the
104 case. It also could be argued that the services RESAs provide could be secured through county boards
105 working together to this end; and that the “market,” meaning private and quasi-public entities could
106 assist counties in this way. At his volition, with the knowledge of the WVSBA Executive Board, our
107 executive director has explored the “market” approach. Although having merits, as he posits, we ask
108 whether our public educational services, including personnel services, should be procured through
109 “market” competition.

110 When all is said and done, the RESA structure, both in terms of longevity and in terms of programming
111 accessible to county boards works best for shared services benefitting our state’s 272,689 public school
112 students, our teachers, our administrators and service personnel.

113 There obviously are ways to improve the RESA structure, including reshaping RESA regions to make
114 them more workable with similar counties in the area or counties who share like characteristics.

115 If RESA leadership were to become more Regional Council-based, state Board of Education oversight
116 becomes of lesser importance except for the State Board or, more particularly the state superintendent
117 of schools/state Department of Education, which could provide facilitative oversight, allowing RESA
118 Regional Councils to select their directors, provide direction for their regions and promote
119 accountability. In this regard, State Board/State Department of Education collaboration and linkage with

120 the West Virginia School Board Association can be of considerable benefit. In terms of RESAs (and other
121 legislative proposals), WVSBA opposes efforts which seem to promote centralization of public education
122 policy at a time the governor and Legislature seem to be embracing such.

123 Please note our considerations if or when placing RESA legislation before your committees.

124 Also, please feel free to contact county board members about RESA-provided services.

125 When all is said and done, proposals to eliminate or greatly recast RESA structures will prove of ill
126 service to county boards, to professional educators and, most importantly, to our students.

127 On behalf of WVSBA, we thank you for your time and consideration of our ideas concerning RESAs.