

February 14, 2024

To the Staff Members of AOS #93 entities-

I am taking this opportunity to communicate with you regarding the current status of the Strategic Vision: 2025 work that has been happening over the last year. As you know, we were seeking opportunities to find benefits in the areas of education, operations, and municipalities. As the Strategic Vision: 2025 work progressed, it was clear that communities largely want their schools to stay the same. A lot of value and clarity came out of those explorations and conversations. By taking out educational changes, we are now looking at just overarching Central Office operations changes. Several staff and community members suggested that the only changes that should happen are at the Central Office level. Several community members have also expressed that they do not want to spend additional funds on Central Office services. Following that feedback, the Central Office has again been looking at how to restructure the services and operations we provide without changing student experience or staff in schools.

Currently conversations are starting to shape up in regards to GSB becoming one preK-12 district instead of 4 districts, Bristol and South Bristol are exploring conversations regarding options, and Nobleboro and Jefferson are scheduling a joint meeting to discuss potential cost-sharing programs or other possible options in the future. What is clear from the recent SV: 2025 work is that the communities (defined as staff, boards, town officials, and parent/community members) want varying things, which is a complication to the Central Office roles and being able to complete needed services effectively. It was clear that consolidation of districts or schools was less important than local control. That is great for clarity- there are no right or wrong answers here- it is a matter of what works best for each town, and people being informed of the pros and cons of their preferences. Some towns prioritize complete voting control of their dollars and decisions to the immediate town only, some are willing to collaborate with neighboring districts in small capacities, and some are willing to collaborate in a larger capacity. Some of the boards and staff want high levels of Central Office assistance and management across all departments, while others do not, or may want it in some departments and not others. Again, there are no right or wrong answers- just varying preferences. The AOS Interlocal Agreement lays out areas in which our districts are expected to collaborate, such as common calendars, common instructional programming and assessments, common policies, common collective bargaining agreements, etc. If you look at those areas, we are not currently successful at meeting that structural goal, nor does it appear that we would all come to agreement in those areas in the near future. This is a large challenge for the Central Office.

Please note- we are all already separate districts that share all Central Office services through the AOS. That is important to remember as you read through this. That means that our funding from the state, for grants, and for reports, etc is all already separated. An option forward is to decentralize certain Central Office services. Several members could withdraw from the AOS, be their own districts and have their own Superintendent and Student Services personnel. In addition, any or all current members could form an Educational Service Center (ESC) to offer optional services in the areas of Business Office, Nutrition, Adult Ed, and Transportation, and possibly others. **This would not impact school staff or the student educational structure, but would achieve organizational efficiency. The day to day life of schools would not change- just who works at the Central Office for all of our districts and who works just for specific smaller districts.**

At this week's AOS #93 Board meeting, we discussed possibilities. Based on the geographic factor and the preferences of each district, it was discussed that:

- GSB could become its own preK-12 Consolidated School District or RSU with its own Superintendent and Student Services personnel, and still offer school choice to tuition out secondary students. These Superintendent and Student Services personnel could be part time or full time, depending on the needs and preferences of the Boards.
- Bristol and South Bristol could combine to form their own preK-12 district as an RSU with its own Superintendent and Student Services personnel and still offer school choice to tuition out secondary students. These Superintendent and Student Services personnel could be part time or full time, depending on the needs and preferences of the Boards.
- Nobleboro and Jefferson could retain the AOS #93 title and organizational structure, which would allow them to stay as separate K-12 Municipal districts who share Superintendent and Special Education services through the Interlocal Agreement. They would still offer school choice to tuition out secondary students. These Superintendent and Student Services personnel could be part time or full time, depending on the needs and preferences of the Boards.

Instead of each of these entities having other services to themselves, the ESC could form to offer members choice of services in the areas of Business Office, Nutrition, Adult Ed, IT, and Transportation services. Each member must have a minimum of two services but can choose as many above that as they wish. The state does provide subsidy amounts to an ESC based on services and enrollments, but the AOS is not eligible to receive those funds. Bringing in additional subsidies is clearly beneficial to keeping costs down. This aligns with the trends of each district right now and would allow for more attention/efficacy from Central Office administration to the districts. This would mean withdrawal from the AOS for Bristol, South Bristol, Damariscotta, Newcastle, and Bremen, but would not require dissolution of the AOS, thus limiting time and work needed to accomplish this revision.

None of this is my decision- it will be up to the Boards/Committees and communities as necessary. All of this will take time- possibly changes could be phased in, or completed with a target deadline in the future year or two. A visual of the structure that was discussed at the AOS Board meeting this week is also attached, as I know it is often helpful to see it as well as hear it (it certainly helps me!). I hope that you find this update helpful, and I know that I, as well as the Boards/Committees, are happy to have feedback on future aspects of our organizational structures!

Respectfully,  
Lynsey