

## **Newry Withdrawal Committee Report 2015**

On September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014 the Town of Newry voted to form a committee to develop a new education plan for its students. The reasons for doing this are many but the poor quality of education at the middle and high school levels is our big concern. One would think that with Newry's huge financial contribution our school district would excel in all aspects of education. Instead we see money spent on school administration 25% above the state average and below average spending on instruction. Simply put, Newry is not getting it's money's worth.

70% of the taxes raised in Newry now go to the SAD 44 school district. Newry has 4% of the vote on the school board. Newry is paying well over \$110,000 per student while the state average is about \$10,000. The other towns in the district are paying well below the state average. Back in 2005 the state changed the way schools are funded from real estate valuation to student population but SAD 44 was made an exception to this state-wide law. This deal happened without any debate, discussion, or vote in Newry.

By state law our withdrawal plan must be approved by SAD 44 before the town can vote to accept or reject it. Over the last 15 months the Withdrawal Committee has negotiated with SAD 44 to try to complete this task. We have diligently followed the legal negotiating steps required by the state to accomplish this task but we have been met with obstruction, delay, and deception by the school district negotiators.

### **History of the negotiations:**

We had 4 negotiating sessions 2 with a mediator and 2 without a mediator.

Session #1 Newry offered: A 10 year "Stabilization Fund" of gradually decreasing payments to ease the transition of the eventual loss of Newry school funding. The decreasing funds from Newry would be offset by increased funding from the other towns in the district. In addition Newry offered an unspecified amount of "Targeted Grants". This money would be given to SAD 44 to enhance the quality of education.

SAD 44 counter-proposal: The counter was a requirement that Newry continue to pay indefinitely an amount to the school district much more than the amount it currently pays in addition to paying for the town's own educational costs.

Session #2 Newry offered: An increased amount of stabilization funds in addition to the targeted funds.

SAD 44 counter-proposal: To send a letter to the D.O.E. Commissioner ask that he stop Newry's withdrawal efforts.

Session #3 Newry offered: Again Newry increased the amounts of the transition funds to SAD 44 after withdrawal.

SAD 44 counter-proposal: Again another letter to the commissioner saying that Newry's negotiating team did not have a quorum so they could not negotiate with us.

Session #4 Newry resubmitted it's previous offer asking for a response by January 21, 2016.

SAD 44 counter-proposal: A letter back to our committee saying that the money which would be lost if Newry leaves the district is too important to allow Newry to withdraw. Therefore they will not negotiate. Without an agreement Newry could not vote to withdraw. This tactic effectively ended negotiations.

### **Where we are now:**

The district negotiators know that without an agreement Newry citizens cannot even bring the withdrawal question to a vote. We are now at an impasse. There have been recent suggestions to propose binding arbitration to the school district or risk legal action if they don't agree.

January 26, 2016 The school board passed a resolution that a district wide committee to revise the funding formula would be started once the Newry selectmen post a warrant article that asks Newry voters to “terminate” the Newry Withdrawal Committee.

February 1, 2016 The Newry Withdrawal Committee responded by voting to recommend to the selectmen to change the word “terminate” to the word “pause” in that ballot question.

February 2, 2016 The Newry Selectmen voted to hold this referendum vote on June 14, 2016 with the word “terminate” left in but they did require that the SAD 44 school board first start the funding formula committee. **As they deliberated all the Newry Selectmen made it very clear that if the school board did not start the funding formula committee before June 14<sup>th</sup> that they would remove the NWC termination question from the ballot.**

### **The Future:**

The NWC **will not** be asking for more operational money from the town. We have enough left in our account to pay the outstanding bills and continue to meet at least a few more times before June 14<sup>th</sup>. What we **will do** is continue to find a way to bring withdrawal to a vote so that the town of Newry gets back control of 70% of it's tax revenues. If this were to happen we could provide a much better education for its students. When the other towns in the district step up and accept the responsibility of paying their fair share, and this new revenue is added to grants from an independent Newry, the whole district will benefit.

