

**HAMPDEN-WILBRAHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
PUBLIC OPEN FORUM
Thursday, February 26, 2015, @ 7:00 p.m.
Wilbraham Middle School Auditorium**

MSTF Members: Sue Bunnell, Lena Buteau, Courtney Derosia, Allison DiGrande, Marc Ducey, John Flynn, Nick Fyntrilakis, Karen Grycel, Marty McQuade, Lisa Morace, Tricia Murphy, Tod O'Brien, Eric Panasci, George Semanie and Sandra Sheehan

MSTF Ex-Officio Members: Ed Cenedella, Tim Connor, Peter Dufresne, Marty O'Shea, Noel Pixley and Beth Regulbuto

Public Open Forum Presentation

Chairman Marc Ducey and Superintendent O'Shea welcomed the group to the Public Open Forum and explained that tonight's focus is on how the HWRSD can best respond to the educational and financial challenges associated with enrollment decline at the middle school level, and that after the presentation audience members will have the opportunity to provide input and ask questions.

Superintendent O'Shea reviewed the presentation entitled, "Public Forum: HWRSD Middle Schooling – February 26, 2015," which included the following titled slides:

MSTF: A Brief History

Directional Recommendations

Add'l Comments: MSTF recommendation made in December; Exploratory stage; Parallel tracks – working with towns and/or MSBA]

Tonight: Purpose and Common Understandings!

Add'l Comments: Duty and obligation to talk to community about these issues; No rush; Need further study - professional study?; Not HWRSD schools – owned by two towns

Enrollment (including historical and projected)

Add'l Comments: Noted the sources of the various enrollment studies; not just a Hampden-Wilbraham issue – throughout much of Massachusetts and New England

Declining Enrollment Challenges

Add'l Comments: Could lose good staff if less than full-time positions

Middle School Team Model

Add'l Comments: Not looking to just solve financial issue – want to achieve middle school team model; Importance of social-emotional wellbeing – not much learning goes on without this

Junior High Model

Wilbraham Middle School 2020-2021

Add'l Comments: Worried that programs and services will decline

TWB 2018-2019 from a student's perspective

Add'l Comments: In certain disciplines, retaining quality teachers due to part-time positions is a concern; we need and want to keep students engaged and busy after school

HWRSD Regional Middle School

Potential Education Benefits

Add'l Comments: Cannot sustain current model

Exhibit(s): Power Point Presentation entitled "Public Forum: HWRSD Middle Schooling – February 26, 2015" and Configuration & Staffing list

The floor was open for questions, answers and Add'l Comments from those in attendance:

- Tina Doran (H)– concerned that there is not really any burning need to regionalize, don't see anything "broken," if this is necessary why can't we wait until a school is built?
- Superintendent O'Shea explained that enrollment will begin to top off in 16-17 – with only about 200 students in 5-8 @ TWB so not able to achieve economy of scale and run the programs we want and we could do much more, mentioned partnering with MSBA but that is a long process (looking at 2021; 2022)
- Tina Doran – talked about reduced programming already happening, splitting teachers within District (tech) – why can't we continue doing this until we can have a school?
- Principal Dufresne explained why shared teachers are not the preferred way to go.
- Tina Doran (H) – concerned about kids being disjointed at this sensitive age. There are after-school activities several days a week so she doesn't think this is lacking
- Superintendent O'Shea explained that the problems we are discussing will be happening in 2016-2017, including reducing Related Arts teachers
- Tina Doran (H) – wondered about current real estate sales, increasing home sales, families moving in to town and the possible hiring by the casinos in Springfield and the new country club in Hampden
- Mr. O'Shea referenced UMASS Donahue Institute report, which is very recent, and the declining enrollment trends
- Lisa Sternberg (H) – discussed concerns about due diligence responsibilities of the MSTF; collaboration with MSTF and the communities; importance of communications; all that is being asked of stakeholders who will be paying for a new police station while still paying for the new high school; declining enrollments may be a fact, but future enrollments based on current enrollment do not take into consideration move-ins, economic recovery of the area, upswing in the housing market, and older population leaving the area.
- Superintendent O'Shea talked about collaboration and that is why we are all here tonight – it is ultimately the communities' decision and you will have that opportunity at town meeting. Regarding enrollment trends, he cited the NESDEC and other studies from "notably reliable" sources. He will continue to dig deeper but asked that if people have information to share with us, please do so.
- Mary Ellen Glover (H) – as a former School Committee member involved in the regionalization many years ago, Mrs. Glover provided the group with a little history, noting the issue of not transporting students across town lines was a major concern back then. She talked about the emotional and fiscal issues, noting there are many ways to think creatively to solve such problems.
- Dale Desmarais (H) – commented on his respect for professional educators, rumors about the new golf course interest in TWB and that anyone with a personal conflict of interest should be removed
- Superintendent O'Shea noted that the school buildings are owned by the towns.
- Matt Villamaino (W) – commented on declining enrollment trends in the Northeast, which are not new, and the need to research and learn what other communities have done. He is concerned with rushing such a big decision. He also noted the push for a new roof at WMS that was not approved and now we want a new school?
- Sue Bunnell, member of Wilbraham Board of Selectmen and MSTF, talked about the ongoing budget issues and some of this history associated with that and the opportunity that the District brought to the Town to work with the MSBA and get a 53% reimbursement for needed capital improvements to WMS and SRS that did not pass with the voters
- Carolyn Garete (W) – concerned about the transportation time for children, lack of detailed plans, working with the MSBA toward a new school, and all the budget cuts.
- Superintendent O'Shea responded that the MSTF is proceeding at a slow and deliberate pace and is not rushing this. He stressed that it is very early in the discussions. Chairman Ducey added that we are not applying for a new school - but we would be interested in working with the MSBA to explore options. He also mentioned the possible use of modular units.
- John (unknown) (H) – asked about other options, such as sharing teachers, and leaving TWB as is. He moved to Hampden for the schools and is concerned what will happen when he goes to sell his house in the future.

- *Superintendent O'Shea explained that alternate configurations may solve the fiscal issues but not the educational ones. He also noted that the administration would not be doing their job if they did not bring these issues to the public's attention*
- Kelly Weinberg (H) – concerned about this not being in children's best interest and why this issue was not raised before now if enrollment has been declining.
- *Superintendent O'Shea explained that in addition to school administrators, there are a people serving on the MSTF with experience working with children. He noted that the District has been talking about declining enrollment for some time now and that part of the solution was building the new high school, and then in 2010 Wilbraham closed a school and reconfigured the K-5 elementary program, and now the next focus is on the middle schools.*
- Waverly Weinberg (H) – noted that much of this makes sense but he is looking for solutions and he questioned exactly what he would be voting on when it comes time to vote?
- *Allison DiGrande, MSTF member, took a moment to remind people that the MSTF members are all volunteers taking the time to learn about the issues, and she stressed that we all have shared concerns over these issues so people's anger is not going to help – we need to work together in order to be productive.*
- Karen (?) (H) – asked about more information being available before being asked to vote?
- *Superintendent O'Shea explained that there is much that still needs to be determined and that there needs to be a feasibility study done of both TWB and WMS facilities.*
- Joanna Strange (W) – asked about the use of modulars – for what grades?
- *Superintendent O'Shea explained that we don't know those specifics yet and that is what the professionals would be looking into. He further explained that the term "modular" refers to the type of construction, which is done off site.*
- Serenity Greenwood (H) – talked about using some creativity when it comes to TWB, such as a STEM middle school or a tuition STEM program or a Baccalaureate middle school?
- Ann Marie Noel (H) – also talked about a STEM school and drawing people to this community. If TWB is closed, probably even fewer people would move here.
- Mary Ellen Glover (H) – concerned that MSBA is difficult and slow, mentioned renting space, and then thanked MSTF members for volunteering their time.
- Tina Doran (H) – talked about the middle school team model, not totally against that, but feels that this is being rushed for 2016, suggests keeping things separate until there is a long-term solution.
- *John Flynn, Member of Hampden Board of Selectmen and MSTF – thanked Mrs. Glover for the historic background to the regionalization. He noted that nothing will happen without both Hampden and Wilbraham voters agreeing to the change.*

Chairman Ducey and Superintendent O'Shea thanked everyone for attending and mentioned that there will be additional public meetings like this in the future.

Respectfully submitted,
 Karen W. Belsky
 Recording Secretary