

**HAMPDEN-WILBRAHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
MIDDLE SCHOOL TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES – OPEN SESSION**

Thursday, November 20, 2014 – 7:00 p.m. – MRHS Information Research Commons/Library

Members Present: Susan Bunnell, Allison Digrande, Marc Ducey, Nick Fyntrilakis, Karen Grycel, Marty McQuade, Lisa Morace, Tricia Murphy, Tod O'Brien, George Semanie, and Sandra Sheehan.

Members Absent: John D. Flynn and Peter Salerno.

Ex officio Members Present: Tim Connor, Courtney Derosia, Peter Dufresne Marty O'Shea, Eric Panasci, and Noel Pixley.

Ex officio Members Absent: Ed Cenedella and Beth Regulbuto.

Others Present: Chris Goudreau, *The Reminder*; Lara Kirk, WMS; Suzanne McLaughlin, *The Republican*; Lisa Simon, WMS; and Tyler Witkop, *The Wilbraham-Hampden Times*.

During the course of the meeting the following exhibit was reviewed with the members of the HWRSD Middle School Task Force members:

- Exhibit 1: The Middle School Model – PowerPoint Presentation by HWRSD Assistant Superintendent, Tim O'Connor; TWB Principal Peter Dufresne; and WMS Principal Noel Pixley.
- Exhibit 2: Educational Snapshot of TWB and WMS – PowerPoint Presentation by TWB Principal Peter Dufresne and WMS Principal Noel Pixley.

1. Call to Order

Marc Ducey, Chairman of the HWRSD Middle School Task Force, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Information Research Commons/Library at MRHS recognizing that there was a quorum of at least 7 voting members present. Note: There were 11 voting members present at 7:00 p.m.

Marc Ducey stated that the meeting would begin with a presentation on the ideal middle school, a review of the existing educational programs at TWB and WMS, and touch upon enrollment patterns. Mr. Ducey announced that future meetings would take place on Thursday, December 4, 2014, and Thursday, December 11, 2014. He said that after that, the Task Force would break until the first of the year.

Mr. Ducey reported that at the next meeting (on December 4, 2014) we would review fiscal concerns—the financial side of this issue. He said that these meetings would provide the Task Force members with a good foundation to generate dialog, with the ultimate goal of making a general recommendation to the HWRSD School Committee in January 2015.

Tod O'Brien suggested that the Task Force brainstorm criteria (e.g., technology, security of the building) in terms of broader categories to achieve structure. He suggested that, as we have the dialog, we keep a list of the categories of things to consider. Mr. O'Brien agreed to help Marc Ducey and Marty O'Shea sketch out a structure to organize the important things to prioritize.

Marc Ducey stated that at some point we will need to recommend to the School Committee that the expertise of structural engineers is necessary. Mr. Ducey said that a goal of the Task Force is to give options to the School Committee, so we need to explore all of the options and think about what options we have.

Susan Bunnell stated that categories of things the Task Force needs to consider include: technology, physical plant, budget considerations.

Tod O'Brien questioned what the big, broad items are that we need to keep in mind regarding the ideal educational program.

Marty O’Shea said that with MRHS, questions were, “What do we have? Where do we want to be? and What do we need to do to get there?” He said that with the Middle Schools, the options are more scattered. He suggested (regarding the Middle School model) what to strive for and where to go from here.

Marc Ducey made the following sketch to begin to organize the data.

	Enrollment	Technology	Facility
Do Nothing			
1 School			
2 Schools			

Tim Connor questioned what the decision process is, noting that we are getting so much information and we need a method of collecting the data. He said, “How do we collect this data to get the committee up to speed.”

Marty O’Shea said that even if we weren’t sitting here as a committee, what are our ultimate goals. He said that one goal of tonight’s meeting is to give the committee a snapshot as to where we are in terms of programming, staffing.

Marc Ducey said that we are going to hit a point where we need to bring in experts and this will take a significant amount of money and time. He wants to be comfortable in making a recommendation to the School Committee.

Marty suggested developing a problem statement, adding that the District could probably solve the enrollment issue by using the existing facilities.

Allison Digrande questioned if we have a problem, are there other funding sources.

Susan Bunnell charged Tod O’Brien to make up his list of issues of consideration and keep a running list for the Task Force.

2. Minutes Acceptance – November 13, 2014 – Open Session

Susan Bunnell made a motion to approve the Minutes of the November 13, 2014, HWRSD Middle School Task Force Meeting – Open Session. Tod O’Brien seconded the motion. Vote: Unanimous.

3. Review Characteristics of a High-Performing Middle School – Tim Connor

HWRSD Assistant Superintendent Tim Connor; TWB Principal Peter Dufresne; and WMS Principal Noel Pixley reviewed a PowerPoint presentation on the “Middle School Model.” Mr. Connor reviewed the history of the middle school movement, which was founded by Professor William Alexander, George Peabody College in 1963 for 11-to-14-year old students. He reviewed the differences between the junior high school model and the middle school model. Please refer to Exhibit 1: The Middle School Model – PowerPoint Presentation by HWRSD Assistant Superintendent, Tim O’Connor; TWB Principal Peter Dufresne; and WMS Principal Noel Pixley. He reviewed the characteristics of a middle school, as follows: student-orientated; emphasis is on cognitive and affective development; organizes teachers and students in interdisciplinary teams; experiential approaches to instructions; allows for block and flexible scheduling; provides exploratory, academic, and nonacademic classes; offers advisor/advisee, teacher/student opportunities; and tem classrooms in close proximity. Mr. O’Connor reviewed the early adolescent development as it pertains to emotional/social changes and the thinking and learning characteristics of middle school students. He stressed that we are trying to create an environment in the middle schools that have as many positive adult role models as possible. He then reviewed where the middle school model fits in today. He noted that the HWRSD is committed to this model and said that it is critical to have as many adult eyes on our kids as possible. He reported that there is an increase in the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, and this shows that families are struggling financially, parents are working more hours, and students are spending more time alone as a result of these issues.

Mr. Connor reviewed the key aspects of a model middle school. He stated that it takes a special person to be a middle school teacher, and as accountability rises for teachers, principals, and superintendents we need to devote time to the social/emotional components as well as the academics.

Marty O'Shea interjected that the HWRSD has made a commitment to safety and wellness in an effort to take care of the whole child.

Peter Dufresne, Principal of TWB, noted that part of that social/emotional component is addressing the fact that middle school students are most at risk from 2 to 4 p.m. He stated that at TWB they put a great deal of thought to afterschool activities. He noted that Eric Panasci (MSTF member and TWB teacher) runs eight clubs at TWB himself. Mr. Dufresne said that anything going forward needs to focus on this piece (afterschool activities).

Marty O'Shea added that we need to do more afterschool programming and that this is an area in the District that needs improvement.

Tim O'Connor stated that it is not due to a lack of interest—teachers have expressed interest; however, successful afterschool programming takes planning, thought, marketing, and parent involvement.

Marc Ducey stated that one important factor is that we need parents to be able to pick their kids up; bussing is currently available on Tuesdays and Thursdays—afterschool days.

Noel Pixley, Principal of WMS, reported that the WMS School Council is reviewing afterschool programming issues as part of their School Improvement Plan and exploring ideas (possibly using grant funding). Mr. Pixley noted that at WMS Tuesdays and Thursdays are academic support days with bussing available, and WMS would require the support of parents to pick up kids on Mondays and Wednesdays. He also said that the hours between 2 to 4 p.m. are the most vulnerable time of the day of middle school students and we would like to keep them in school.

Mr. Panasci stated that afterschool programming has to be school supported and when it is school sponsored the kids come.

Noel Pixley reviewed the characteristics of an exemplary middle school, noting that the National Middle School Association (NMSA) as well as the New England League of Middle Schools (an affiliate of NMSA) offers guidance and resources for middle school administrators. He said that the NMSA identifies five key components of an exemplary middle school: interdisciplinary teaming, advisory programs, varied instruction, exploratory programs, and transition programs.

Mr. Pixley stated that interdisciplinary teams of teachers really get to know their kids, share concerns, and everybody on the team supports each other.

A discussion took place regarding the number of students in the ideal team as well as ideal class sizes.

Mr. Pixley continued to review the characteristics of an exemplary middle school, stating that teams of students are self-contained; and, therefore, teams can switch around their individual schedules. He said that in middle school, we are teaching students how to learn. He touched upon transitioning programs: from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school being done in a seamless way.

It was noted that middle schools are student centered and high schools are content centered.

Mr. Dufresne noted the importance of having space for teams of teachers to meet.

Mr. Dufresne noted that the social/emotional piece is 50 percent of what we do, adding that the team concept is important in that it allows teachers time to sit and talk. He added that teachers strive to reach kids who are struggling

(keep them engaged) and challenge the high performers (keep them moving forward) all while creating a positive school climate.

A discussion took place regarding grouping the students academically. Noel Pixley stated that research shows that due to the social/emotional issues, it is better to keep teams heterogeneously balanced. He did note, however, that in eighth grade, due to Algebra I, Part I, students who are enrolled in that class are grouped together for scheduling purposes.

4. Review TWB and WMS Educational Programs – Peter Dufresne and Noel Pixley

TWB Principal Peter Dufresne and WMS Principal Noel Pixley reviewed Exhibit 2: PowerPoint Presentation - Educational Snapshot of TWB and WMS.

Mr. Dufresne and Mr. Pixley reviewed the team concept at each school. Both schools have a 20-minute advisory and one related arts period daily. At TWB, nearly 40 percent of the faculty is not team pure. At WMS 2 out of 6 teams have to teach an additional prep. Both principals reviewed their schools' schedule, related arts programming, core instructional staffing, and support services. It was noted that TWB has 50-minute academic blocks and a 30-minute tutorial block and WMS has 55-minute academic blocks.

Marc Ducey stated that the many similarities in the two schools is a result of careful planning, adding that the School Committee wants the two schools to be similar as the students eventually come together at MRHS.

It was reported that the related arts piece is the most glaring difference between the two schools.

Noel Pixley stated that for many kids, the related arts part of the day is the most important part of the day—noting that these classes are where kids shine.

Peter Dufresne noted that because the students attend TWB from grade 5, by grade 7 they are tired of taking the same related arts classes.

Marty O'Shea questioned whether there is some redundancy in the related arts classes.

Noel Pixley stated that the teachers are able to ramp it up each year; there is redundancy, but they know how to expand the curriculum.

Peter Dufresne added that the teachers do a good job and that the depth of the programming is less of a concern than the breadth.

A slide was presented on the class sizes at both TWB and WMS.

A question arose as to whether the HWRSD is committed to the middle school model.

Marc Ducey stated that the HWRSD School Committee has not voiced any issue of changing the middle school model.

Tim Connor stated that we are still in the middle school model, but we are moving closer to the junior high model because of reduced enrollment.

Peter Dufresne noted that we are still a middle school, but every time we chip away we lose something.

Marty McQuade commended the administrators in keeping the middle school model alive. He said that not a lot of parents have the understanding of all of this—the theory behind this is for the well-being of the students.

Tim Connor stated that it is pay now or pay later—same with middle school kids and social/emotional issues. There is a cost to that. He stressed the importance of getting the message out to everyone.

Marc Ducey said that we need to come up with the best, most sensible program we can based on three factors: best program, fiscally responsible, is it sellable.

Marc Ducey stated that at the December 4, 2014, MSTF meeting operational costs/fiscal issues as well as enrollment trends will be presented.

5. Adjournment

Sandra Sheehan made a motion to adjourn the November 20, 2014, HWRSD Middle School Task Force Meeting. Susan Bunnell seconded the motion. Vote: Unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Next Meeting: Thursday, December 4, 2014, 7 p.m., Information Research Commons/Library, MRHS