

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

Thursday, December 4, 2014 – 7:00 p.m. – MRHS Information Research Commons/Library

Members Present: Susan Bunnell, Marc Ducey, John D. Flynn, Nick Fyntrilakis, Karen Grycel, Marty McQuade, Lisa Morace, Tricia Murphy, Tod O'Brien (7:30 p.m.), Peter Salerno, George Semanie, and Sandra Sheehan.

Members Absent: Allison Digrande.

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

Ex officio Members Absent: Ed Cenedella and Noel Pixley.

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

During the course of the meeting the following exhibits were reviewed with the members of the HWRSD Middle School Task Force members:

- Exhibit 1: NESDEC HWRSD Historical Enrollment – 10-22-2013.
- Exhibit 2: Current Operating Costs of Middle Schools.

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 9 voting members present at 7:00 p.m.

2. Minutes Acceptance – November 20, 2014 – Open Session

Tricia Murphy made a motion to approve the Minutes of the November 20, 2014, HWRSD Middle School Task Force Meeting – Open Session. George Semanie seconded the motion. Vote: Unanimous. Peter Salerno and John D. Flynn abstained.

3. Discussion of Enrollment Trends

Marty O'Shea distributed and reviewed Exhibit 1: NESDEC HWRSD Historical Enrollment – 10-22-2013. He answered questions relating to enrollment.

A discussion took place regarding School Choice within the HWRSD. It was reported that there are currently 125 School Choice students throughout the District.

Marc Ducey stated that School Choice slots are determined at the discretion of the HWRSD School Committee.

Mr. O'Shea noted that School Choice is important; it is a revenue source for the District. He said that there is a good balance right now, and when these students come into the District they become Hampden-Wilbraham kids. He also reported that the District participates (Hampden) in METCO—a racial balancing program.

George Semanie questioned whether having 125 School Choice students is standard for the other area school districts.

Marty O'Shea responded that successful districts like Hampden-Wilbraham are very popular, and most School Choice students come from Springfield and some from Palmer/Monson.

Eric Panasci questioned why we wait until middle school to take in School Choice students.

Marty O'Shea responded that the District is reluctant to take in School Choice students in the K-5 grades.

Marc Ducey noted that School Choice makes our school district more diverse and it allows us to fill slots that otherwise would be vacant. A problem is that once we take them early on, we must keep them.

Lisa Morace said that we take in School Choice students as we find them. She added that a special needs student could end up costing the District more.

Beth Regulbuto noted that the District receives additional funding for costs associated with School Choice students with special needs.

At this point, Marty O'Shea reviewed the NESDEC HWRSD Historical Enrollment data dated October 22, 2013.

Peter Salerno noted that there is a lot of information in the NESDEC report and that it is a comprehensive, well-thought-out study.

Marc Ducey noted that, as a point of reference, the MSBA allowed 1,250 students for Minnechaug.

Marty O'Shea continued his presentation on enrollment trends by stating that there are currently 173 total kindergarten students in the HWRSD. He reviewed slides of the various NESDEC enrollment charts that depicted Hampden and Wilbraham historical enrollment by grade level. He also reviewed NESDEC information that showed that in both Hampden and Wilbraham the median age is much higher than the median age in communities across the state and country. He reviewed slides depicting housing growth. The bottom line is that the slides all tell the same story in different ways.

A review of enrollment trends for Grades 6-8 took place. It was reported that in 2003-2004 there were 915 Grades 6-8 students and in 2014-2015 there are 735 Grades 6-8 students.

Mr. O'Shea reviewed slides depicting the HWRSD Grades 6-8 projected enrollment by NESDEC.

Marc Ducey asked the MSTF members if they had any questions or concerns on the material presented by Mr. O'Shea. There were none. He said that it is a pretty consistent story and he wanted to make sure that all MSTF members were pretty clear on the data, noting that this is a very key element.

Marty O'Shea stated that there is more detailed information on the shared folder on line.

4. Middle School Operating and Staffing

Beth Regulbuto distributed and reviewed Exhibit 2: Current Operating Costs of Middle Schools, a financial and operating picture with numbers based on FY15 budget numbers/bottom line costs. She stated that grant funds, food service operations, benefit costs, and transportation costs are not included in the analysis. She noted that the District tries to look at everything from a regional standpoint. She said that Exhibit 2 has two categories: 1) salary costs, and 2) non-salary costs associated with the general operations of the buildings. Mrs. Regulbuto reported that it costs \$6,943 to educate one student at WMA and \$8,256 to educate one student at TWB.

Susan Bunnell noted that there are more District programs at TWB.

Beth Regulbuto and Marty O'Shea reviewed the District programs at both TWB and WMS.

Beth Regulbuto reported that currently there are 561 students at WMS with 47 F.T.E. licensed staff and 278 students at TWB with 22 F.T.E. licensed staff. She also reported that costs for utilities, maintenance of building/grounds, copier/lease purchase, general school supplies, insurance, custodial supplies, professional development, and internet/web hosting amount to approximately \$319,000 for WMS and \$252,000 for TWB. She reported that the total operating budget is \$44,095,108 for both WMS and TWB. She said that the facts presented to the MSTF through Exhibit 2 were to paint a picture, and she stressed that the numbers change annually.

Marty O'Shea reiterated the fact that the District is a single unit and the variables (of each building) change with each passing year.

A discussion took place on the ideal number of students in a team to make a model middle school.

It was reported that ideally, 90 to 125 students per team with four core subjects (math, science, social studies, and English/reading) would be true to the model.

Marc Ducey said that we want students to have a common experience (whether at WMS or TWB).

Marty O'Shea agreed that this is critical and said that it was a driving force when the elementary schools were reorganized.

Marty O'Shea reviewed current staffing at both TWB and WMS. He reported that he broke out grade 5 staff from TWB to do an apples-to-apples comparison of grades 6,7, and 8 at both middle schools. Marty presented three slides depicting staffing at TWB, WMS, and a combined middle school. The first slide showed the current staffing at TWB and WMS with District totals; the second slide showed the current staffing at TWB, WMS, District totals, and model staffing configurations; and the third slide showed a scenario where the two buildings (TWB and WMS) were combined to create level staffing. The third slide depicted a middle school with 750 students and 80 total personnel. This was a reduction in staff of 22 FTE personnel. Mr. O'Shea noted that the third slide was short of the model middle school and represented \$1.2 million in savings.

Marc Ducey commented that slide three gives an apples-to-apples comparison.

Tod O'Brien questioned whether these slides would be available in the online shared folder. He also requested that the MSTF members be provided with definitions of the educational terms being used (e.g., level service, etc.)

Mr. O'Brien questioned who makes the staffing decisions in the individual schools.

Peter Dufresne noted that he has been a principal for 12 years and he has cut his budget in 11 out of those 12 years. He said that he makes budget decisions each spring and schedules are built hand-in-hand with the budget with "A priority" and "B priority", etc. What has happened at TWB is that he has 38 percent of his teachers teaching other subjects. He said that he can't rely on the fact that his teachers will be happy to teach a certain percentage outside of their certification (for example, an English teacher teaching geography).

The answer to Mr. O'Brien's question is that the administration will ultimately decide on the specific programming.

Mr. O'Shea presented a fourth slide depicting a model middle school, which would net a savings of \$675,000. This slide showed a school with 750 total students, grades 6-8, with 22-24 average students per core class and specials classes slightly lower in size.

Marc Ducey stated that (based upon enrollment projections) in the next several years the total number of students decreases, and it is safe to say that as the population continues to decline it will be much harder to maintain the two-school model as cost-efficient. He added that the HWRSD School Committee is trying to provide some level of equity between the two middle schools.

Marc Ducey made reference to other financial struggles in the HWRSD such as, keeping library aides in the elementary schools as just one of the challenges the District is faced with. He said that there are budget cuts coming down the pike, noting the slashing of regional transportation funding. He said these are some of the huge challenges we face that are happening right now.

Marty O'Shea asked the MSTF members if they had any further questions or concerns.

Tod O'Brien stated that he finds the information presented to be very helpful.

Marc Ducey reviewed what he hopes the MSTF will accomplish/decide to recommend that the School Committee: 1) do nothing; 2) keep two schools but change it up a little bit; or 3) go to one middle school.

Marty O'Shea pointed out that the middle school model will also affect the high school, as these enrollment numbers will also affect the educational programming at the high school. Mr. O'Shea noted that when he rolls these numbers into the high school, he doesn't think of the high school floor. He said that electives may need to be altered and it will be felt. He said that running a high school with less than 750 students would be tough. He added that one problem at the high school is that kids work up to a certain class (e.g., an AP class) and it is tough to cut those classes due to enrollment issues.

Tod O'Brien questioned the process of how towns join (school districts) together and questioned whether that potential would be considered.

Marty O'Shea noted that this is a long, political process.

Marc Ducey stated that he doesn't know if we are at that point.

Tim Connor added that the regional model is under attack due to the regional transportation issues.

Marty O'Shea noted a positive in the regional school system in that we avoid the duplication of a lot of departments (maintenance, special education, etc.).

Nick Fyntrilakis voiced a question around the process. He asked whether the thought is that the MSTF would agree to one of the scenarios presented. He said that it makes sense to arrive at a recommendation or an option and then determine the capital conversation.

Marc Ducey said that he would suggest that we have the Superintendent make a presentation to the Committee on what he recommends that we do and from there we can forge ahead. He questioned whether the members of the Committee are agreeable to have Marty O'Shea present his proposed solution at the next MSTF meeting.

Susan Bunnell questioned whether we looked at how we could fill both buildings. She said that if we were trying to run two programs, and we needed more students at TWB from Wilbraham, we would have to change the Town agreements to have children go to school in another town. She said that she wanted this scenario thrown into the mix of possible solutions.

Marc Ducey said that this additional scenario could be to reconfigure the two school issue.

Susan Bunnell stated that one of the pieces of this puzzle that is missing is that there is a huge integration issue with Hampden and Wilbraham students coming together in Grade 9 at MRHS.

Marc Ducey said that we can discuss several approaches or we can get the recommendation of the Superintendent.

Sandra Sheehan said that we need to have the ideal plan and then a “Plan B” as a back-up, noting that this situation is not going to change. She added that the whole point of the MSTF getting together is to make things better for the children.

Marc Ducey said that once the MSTF decides on a plan to recommend to the HWRSD School Committee, we will need the entire Task Force to get behind it.

Sandra Sheehan said that she has spoken with a few parents and a lot of them are in favor of merging the kids earlier. She said that Grade 9 is harder and lonelier for the Hampden kids at MRHS. She thinks that it is a good idea to mix the middle school students earlier.

Marty O’Shea said it is a good idea to get the message out to the community, and he is interested in their comments.

Marc Ducey said that he knows another Hampden mother who agrees that mixing middle school students earlier is preferred.

John D. Flynn stated that there are 10,000 voters, and, ultimately they will decide based on clear, true, black and white facts. He said that the community did a great job with MRHS and we can do a great job again.

Susan Bunnell stated that the community members need to know and understand the facts.

Marc Ducey said that items on the agenda for the next MSTF meeting will include budget issues and the Superintendent’s model/idea.

5. Adjournment

Sandra Sheehan made a motion to adjourn the December 4, 2014, HWRSD Middle School Task Force Meeting. Tod O’Brien seconded the motion. Vote: Unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Next Meeting: Thursday, December 11, 2014, 7 p.m., Information Research Commons/Library, MRHS