

**HAMPDEN-WILBRAHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
MIDDLE SCHOOL TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, February 5, 2015, @ 7:00 p.m.
Thornton W. Burgess Middle School Cafetorium**

Members Present: Sue Bunnell, Lena Buteau, Courtney Derosia, Allison DiGrande, Marc Ducey, John Flynn, Nick Fyntrilakis, Marty McQuade, Tricia Murphy, Tod O'Brien (arr 7:55), George Semanie and Sandra Sheehan (arr 7:55).

Members Absent: Karen Grycel, Lisa Morace and Eric Panasci

Ex Officio Members Present: Tim Connor, Peter Dufresne, Marty O'Shea, Noel Pixley and Beth Regulbuto

Ex Officio Members Absent: Ed Cenedella

1) Call to Order

Chairman Ducey called the February 5, 2015, meeting of the Middle School Task Force to order at 7:00 p.m., welcomed those in attendance and explained how this evening's presentation would work during the public forum – first with a presentation, followed by questions and answers. He also mentioned there would be a similar opportunity on February 26, 2016, at Wilbraham Middle School.

Exhibits(s): None

2) Public Forum Presentation

Superintendent O'Shea explained that we are at the stage of gathering input and he hopes to have multiple opportunities, such as tonight, to do so. Mr. O'Shea, Mr. Connor, Mr. Pixley and Mr. Dufresne took turns reviewing their Power Point Presentation - "HWRSD Middle Schools" - which included slides entitled, "*MSTF: Where We've Been; HWRSD Grade 6-8 Historic Enrollment; HWRSD 6-8 Projected Enrollment; WMS and TWB Enrollment; Declining Enrollment Challenges; History of Middle School Movement; Early Adolescent Development 101; Where Does the Middle School Model Fit in Today?; Key Aspects of a Model Middle School; The Exemplary Middle School; Middle Level Curriculum Goals; Critical Components of a High Functioning Middle School; Our Middle Schools Today; Team Concept; Related Arts Programming; Core Instructional Staffing; Support Services; Potential Educational Benefits; Directional Recommendations; Feasibility Considerations; Recommended Next Steps.*" Mr. O'Shea stressed the importance of the team concept for middle schools and the potential educational benefits.

The floor was open for questions, answers and comments from those in attendance:

- Mrs. Sternberg, Hampden, read her prepared comments, "Middle School Regionalization: Input" which focused on four areas: Educational Feasibility, Costs, Health and Safety, and Site Preparations. Mr. O'Shea thanked her for the great list of considerations.
- Mrs. Noel, Hampden, asked why the rush and Mr. O'Shea responded that we believe we can do better and be more cost effective and have more offerings.
- Mrs. Noel, Hampden – why fix it – it's not broken, nice small environment having to move into a larger one. Mr. O'Shea said it would be a supportive environment and would offer expanded related arts.
- Question was asked by John about where is the tipping point and Mr. O'Shea explained we are not at the preferred middle school model.
- Mike commented that Wilbraham is experiencing the same rate of decline (in enrollment)

- Comment was made to read all this information posted online.
- Mrs. Greenwood, Hampden – noted optimal situation vs “it just works” and that the money saved would be put back into the schools with the one-school model middle school and it could alleviate all the Band-Aid fixes. Mr. O’Shea agreed and feels it is actually an exciting opportunity for us. Mr. Ducey mentioned being cost effective and reinvesting the savings in to all the schools.
- Mrs. Penna, Hampden – talked about the small town charm vs trying to understand the educational logic of this. Mr. O’Shea believes you can create a small town feeling in a larger environment.
- Jen – asked how many students per class, what is the projection? Mr. O’Shea said that core instruction classes would be 25 students or less. Mr. Pixley added that 90 to 100 students per grade is optimal.
- A parent talked about important social bonds and trying to keep Hampden kids in classes together. Mr. Connor understands the importance of this, but also mentioned how resilient kids are.
- Question was asked about what effect the casinos coming to Springfield will have on our towns’ populations, and Mr. Ducey responded that unfortunately no one has a crystal ball. Mr. O’Shea explained the enrollment projections are based on current enrollments, birth rates and other factors. (Studies posted online.)
- Comment was made that there should be a plan b – before this goes to a vote, residents will need answers like what will happen to this building? Mr. Ducey explained that the schools are owned by the towns.
- Mrs. Angelica, Hampden – mentioned that the underlying assumption is that TWB will be the school that will be closed. Mr. O’Shea talked about when Memorial School in Wilbraham was closed and that although it was painful to go through, it has worked out well.
- John Flynn, Hampden BOS – talked about the inequitable education and declining enrollment and that this is one way to deal with the issues. We need to inform people what happens if the Regional Agreement is changed and what happens if it is not. We also need to educate people to understand the problem so we have to identify the problem and share the information with them.

Exhibit(s): Power Point Presentation – “HWRSD Middle Schools” and Lisa Sternberg’s “Middle School Regionalization: Input”

The Public Forum Presentation concluded so that the Middle School Task Force meeting could begin. The Middle School Task Force meeting convened at 8:20 p.m.

3) Public Comment

See above.

Exhibits(s): None

4) Long Term Facility Options

Mr. O’Shea reviewed the Power Point Presentation – Middle School Task Force, February 5, 2015 – with slides entitled, “*Long Term Recommendation – December 2014; TWB Capital Projects; WMS Capital Projects; HWRSD Grade 6-8 Enrollment; The MSBA’S Grant Program; MSBA Building Process; and Potential Timeline.*” He pointed out that there are significant facility needs in both buildings. The “best solution” would be to collaboratively work with the MSBA. Mrs. DiGrande asked for more information on the MSBA process and Mr. O’Shea explained that the MSBA would match the facility solution to our educational program. He cautioned that the timeline shown is only a model timeline and that with or without the MSBA’s involvement, it is a lengthy process. Mr. Fyntrilakis talked about the lengthy process

and the population trends and how people seem comfortable with the status quo today. He is concerned that if we wait to take action there will be a precipitous decline in educational services and the educational experiences of our students will definitely decline. There was general discussion about model middle school teams and social and emotional considerations for middle school students. Mr. Fyntrilakis thinks the best case scenario is working with the MSBA, but the reality is this is optimistic and at some point a decision needs to be made and the longer that takes, the farther out the timeline will be. Mr. O'Shea said that neither TWB nor WMS are in the shape that Minnechaug was and then he talked about MSBA's Core Program and their Accelerated Repair Program. Mr. Ducey believes that a plan b needs to be developed but he's not sure that is the charge for this group. Mrs. DiGrande wondered if we can get the two towns to agree to regionalize. Mr. O'Shea asked if this group thinks that we should submit a Statement of Interest to the MSBA? There is not a clear answer as to what the MSBA would decide, but they would look more favorably on our educational program if we were working toward combining our two middle schools. Mr. Fyntrilakis asked about having to amend the Regional Agreement since the HWRSB is already a regional K-12 school district. Ms. Bunnell provided a little history of how the two towns came to regionalize in the early 1990's.

Mr. O'Shea then discussed the financial situation, noting that there are more mid-year cuts to revenues and rising costs making it more and more of a challenge on our budget. Mr. Ducey added that the budget as currently constructed cannot be supported in the future - it is simply not sustainable. Ms. Bunnell is concerned about the probability of being successful with the MSBA for a middle school project since last year they only selected 15 projects out of 108 submissions, plus the fact that we just completed a high school project with them. Mr. O'Shea believes we have to keep our eyes on the future and consider submitting a Statement of Interest to the MSBA. Mr. Flynn is concerned about what happens if the towns don't agree to amend the Regional Agreement, how will we provide the best educational opportunity then, what is plan b? He believes we need to plan for different options simultaneously. Mr. O'Shea talked about presenting the various options and alternatives at the February 26th public forum and responding to the notion of just keeping the status quo. Mrs. Sheehan expressed concern that most parents don't realize what is happening, they don't know that there is any problem. Mr. O'Shea feels that we can do better, even if we were able to maintain everything as is, we can do better! Mr. O'Brien asked what is involved in submitting a Statement of Interest to the MSBA and Mr. O'Shea explained that although there is no obligation, it is a very comprehensive application process. Mrs. DiGrande thinks it is an important point to communicate to the two towns that there is no commitment to this, we are not obligating anyone to do anything as a result of submitting the SOI. **Mr. O'Brien made a motion that the Middle Task Force recommend to the School Committee to pursue a Statement of Interest with the MSBA. Mrs. Sheehan seconded the motion, there was no further discussion and it was unanimously approved.**

Exhibits(s): Power Point Presentation – Middle School Task Force, February 5, 2015

5) **Adjournment**

Mr. Ducey asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. O'Brien so moved, Ms. Bunnell seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen W. Belsky
Middle School Task Force

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