

SCHOOL COMMITTEE NOTES 11/16/06

Kathy Wallace Education 411

Superintendent's Report- John Antonucci (JA)

- The HS principal leadership award was received by Kelley Maher. This award is given to a senior who excels in academics, extracurricular activities, sports and community service.
- The sports teams have done very well this season. Kevin O'Connor was named football's defensive player of the year for the Tri Valley League. Boy's soccer reached the quarterfinals under new head coach, Eladio Sanchez.
- Four HS students will be receiving their Eagle Scout achievement.
- WEF- Thanks for all the support that WEF gives to the community and asks residents to donate if they can.
- A school to business partnership has been established with Chyten Test Prep Services. The SC wants to see improved SAT scores. To that end, the HS wants to offer test preparation but that cannot be done in the curriculum. Emily Parks and JA interviewed all the companies and chose Chyten which happens to be a local company. Chyten will offer a 50% discount to Westwood students. The class will be available for \$495 and there will be needs based scholarships.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS (SIP)

Under the Education Reform Act of 1993, School Improvement Plans are required, The site council of each school comprised of the principal, parents, teachers and community members work on the SIP each year. In addition, this statutory group reviews the budget set by the principal.

The SIPs were not made available to the public at the meeting and they were not presented, so this summary is limited. The SC asked questions and will vote to approve the SIP at the next SC meeting.

HIGH SCHOOL

Class size is a significant area for improvement. A question was raised about the letter that the principal is writing to explain why students may not have been able to take certain classes. The impact of this situation on college acceptance is not known at this time. The letter is included as part of the school profile.

Flex program is a partnership between special education and regular education. The Flex program serves 15 students. The program has academic, social and behavioral components.

The Academic Council, also known as the leadership team, meets once each week and is comprised of the department heads, principal and assistant principal.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

There are curriculum goals and an interdisciplinary review is underway. A question was asked about the link between the HS and MS on anti-bullying as the HS has a grant from the Anti-Defamation League. They do exchange information.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Downey and Hanlon are looking into school security. Sheehan has the buzzer system because the office is so far from the door. Deerfield has a buzzer system but it is not used. JA stated that school security is a district priority even in it is not on an individual SIP. Establishing teacher websites is also a priority.

Martha Jones has a parent volunteer math program. This is the second year of the program. A question was asked about offering it at other schools. There are no plans to expand as it is "organic" to Martha Jones.

Sheehan is looking in a proactive way at need for differentiation in classes.

HIGH SCHOOL ACCREDITATION- Emily Parks

Process has 3 steps

1. A 12 month self-study
2. Onsite evaluation in 10/07 by a peer review team
3. Commitment to continuous improvement through required follow-up activities.

Self study has 7 standards: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Leadership and Organization, School resources and community resources.

Onsite visit takes 3 days and there are 14 educators. This process occurs every 10 years. Last year, surveys were conducted of parents, teachers and students. All faculty are on a standard's committee. The School and Community Resource report was written and ratified. Statement of Schools Critical Strengths and Needs. Early Release time devoted to the self-study.

SPECIAL EDUCATION-Linda Chase

The full PowerPoint presentation is available on the website.

www.westwood.k12.ma.us

JA stated that this might seem redundant but it is all worth repeating as there are Special Education budget implications.

The presentation provided information showing that from FY 2000 to FY 2007 there has been a 10.7% annual increase in budget appropriations for Special Needs Services and that during this time the Special Needs budget as a percentage of the total budget has increased from 19.6% to 25.4%. During this same time, the total enrollment for the Westwood Public School rose from 2,507 to 2,950, a 17.7% increase.

Key Issues

Where has all the money gone?

What are the governing laws and mandates?

Top 10 district costs

Cost mitigation examples

Next steps

Federal and State Law

IDEA 2004 Individuals with Disability Education Act covers IEPs

Federal Rehab Act Section 504 Provides equal opportunity and access for all

people with disabilities
Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 mandates for anti-discrimination

Mass law goes beyond these Federal laws in MA Pub Ed Law Section 28.00

Disability categories

Autism
Developmental Delay (age 3-9)
Intellectual Impairment
Sensory Impairment Hearing, Vision, Deaf
Neurological Impairment- traumatic brain injury
Emotional Impairment
Communication Impairment
Physical Impairment
Health Impairment
Specific Learning Disability

Residential component- we may be asked to cover this component. JA stated that there is a fine line between hospitalization and education and this is a global problem.

Westwood is obligated to educate this population until age 22. The circuit breaker funding has a \$33,000 threshold but it is only funding 30% of special ed costs in all of Mass.

Out of district tuition

FY 2000 \$1,140,180 no offsets

FY 2007 \$2,353,850 less offsets of \$967,000

Unilateral placements- we litigate about 3 per year. Parents place in special needs private schools and come to Westwood for payment. These litigations are tricky because if the town does not prevail, then we owe their legal costs as well.

Special Needs Transportation

Some students require a monitor on the van and they make \$13,000 a year. In FY 07, the cost was \$609,000 to transport 45 students, mostly out of district. Compare this to the yellow buses transporting all other Westwood kids for \$430,000. We do collaborate with other towns and look to share vans to bring costs down. If parents transport their own child, it is 40 cents a mile.

Savings and Cost Reduction Efforts

-Medicaid reimbursements- we have a PT secretary who knows her Medicaid rules and brought in \$300,000.

-Circuit Breaker

-Settlement Agreements

-Bureau of Special Ed Appeals

-In-house programs: full day preschool, NECC program, STAR program (Downey), Flex program (HS)

Top Tuitions for Westwood

Melmark Home residential \$197,000

Amego residential \$192,000
Perkins School residential \$190,000
May Institute residential \$177,000 (2 students)

SC Question: Do we do our own testing on out of district placements to see if the student has progressed and can be served in district? Yes

NECC is an in house program that serves 10 students and costs \$622,000, this is a savings to the town of \$138,000 versus out of district placement. However, when the student needs to go to Middle School, there is no space and they may have to go out of district. Flex is an in house program serving 15 students, total cost is \$215,000 a savings of \$228,000

Cost avoidance plans

STAR serves 8 students at Downey for a cost of \$132,000. Savings of \$161,000
Integrated Preschool serving 32 general ed kids and 28 special ed kids. The general ed kids pay tuition and this actually netted the town \$22,000.

NEXT STEPS

Conduct, review and analyze all out of district placements and track programmatic and financial changes.

Meet with principals and student services and department heads to review current service delivery models and caseloads.

Review referral analysis

JA commented that he is often asked if we are a magnet for special education cases. He said there is no data that suggests that and this presentation could be done in any school district. The issues are the same everywhere.

SC question: How has the number of students changed over the years as a percent of the student body. They will get back to SC with that.

PUBLIC COMMENT

A parent asked if we don't pass an override. What will be the next cut?

JA said it will be classroom teachers as they have cut everything else. Class sizes would rise dramatically. A class of 23 could go to 33.

A parent asked that since it is past 10/31, is the HS construction done?

Answer: It is essentially done. Vertex is still working on a punch list. and will do landscaping and seeding and sprinkler systems in the spring. The track is available to the public. The Rec Dept is working on the fitness center opening..

A parent asked if we are providing more than peer towns to average special needs students. Are we a magnet?

Answer: Any community where education is valued provides the same level service that we do.

A comment was made that teacher to student ratios in learning centers are absolutely lower than state average.

It all gets back to what kind of district do we want to be.

A parent asked if the enrollment projections are done. JA said this was originally scheduled for 11/16 but that the consultant was not ready for prime time. It will be at the December SC meeting.

A parent asked if there is any correlation between class size and special ed referrals as the shift is back to the classroom for inclusion. Is any Professional Development time used to cover general education classrooms with special ed students. Answer: Special Ed and General Ed teachers collaborate during the day.