



EDUCATION411.ORG

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EDUCATION411
is a volunteer, non-partisan citizen organization. Its mission is to celebrate Westwood's long tradition of educational excellence and to inform residents of key issues facing our public schools today and in the future.

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School Committee Meeting Notes

Submitted by Wendy Lague-Fahey

Superintendent's Report:

John Antonucci acknowledged the winter sports teams for their successes. He included the Girls' Basketball and Boys' Hockey Teams.

He mentioned receiving some feedback about corridor lights in the High School which are always on. There are currently 123 emergency lights permanently wired. NStar assessed the system and are going to reduce it to 26 lights. NStar is going to cover the \$5,500 cost of re-wiring.

Steve Dexter, Asst. Principal is leaving district and has accepted a new job as Dean of Academics of Faculty at an American School in Switzerland.

Update on Thurston Modular Classrooms:

Heath Petracca got approval from Westwood Planning Board. They had special requirements: they requested the addition of a fire access path around modulars to access fields. They sought bids from four major contractors; the low bid came in at \$3.5 million. They awarded the contract to Vanguard Modulars. They will continue to prep sight until June and project will run July and August.

Budget:

This is still in limbo; they haven't voted as a committee. JA originally recommended 0% budget increase to departments. The state aid came in higher than he thought. He recommends waiting to vote until May 3, right before town meeting. They thought they would have 20% reduction of state aid. In reality they lost only \$123,000. The Chapter 70 did not get cut. The town has the difference which is about \$800,000 and it's in limbo. No update on the moment on Westwood Station.

Action Items:

Minutes from December 18 are approved.

Full-Day Kindergarten proposal:

Av Green (AG) recapped how we got to this model. Four of the five days the K students will attend the same hours as grades one through five. Wednesdays will always be short for K students.

Why we are where are? Since 2006 they've been studying different programs.

Benefits: more time on learning, comfortable pace for learning, NOT more curriculum jammed into the time. They can explore topics more in depth. They'll have more time

to provide for kids who are ready to take off academically. They'll have more time for Open Share; make K students a full part of the school.

Factors that led to reassessing Westwood K program: Societal factors would be the increase in the number of preschool programs. 81% of K programs across the state provide full-day K programs.

Research Findings:

Full day model encourages more independent work habits, greater classroom involvement, greater productivity working with peers.

Program Development Committee:

5 Kindergarten teachers

Co-chairs Mary Brown and Carol Craig-O'Brien

Math, Literacy and OT Consultants

University Consultant (Tufts, Lesley and Wheelock)

They will visit sites around the state as well as study recent research. They want to provide professional development, late spring 2009 and next school year. Next year they will have an ongoing review of the program while it's happening.

Communication with Families:

The Superintendent sent FAQ's to parents of all eligible K students; it's on the website, there are ongoing Parent Discussions on School Readiness.

Coming Events for Parents and Students:

Kindergarten registration packets April 13-17, 2009. May 5 is Kindergarten Parent night. May 7-8 kids will visit their school. In June there will be playground visits for each school and the bus info session.

Joseph Jowdy asked if half day K students will miss out if they don't go all day? They will expand on what they started in the a.m. Av Green cannot guarantee that the specials will all happen in the a.m. Children will miss things.

Joseph Jowdy asked how the tuition compares to other districts? Apparently ours is low.

Barbara Delisle(BD) asked how the fees compare to the other districts? The ones with the really high tuitions (\$3,000.00) tend to be on lottery basis. Also, they will ease the children in the same way in September, i.e. two weeks half days.

Ellen Mason (EM) asked if we ever got a sense of what we're saving on eliminating the K bus? JA thinks it's about \$40-\$50,000 and they want to direct that money toward more instructional assistant time.

AG suggested 5.5 hours on the long days vs. 3 hours currently, except for the long Wednesday. BD asked what K teachers will be doing on Wednesdays? AG says it's TBD.

EM offered public participation on the K issue. Nobody had any questions. BD made motion to accept motion for JA's recommendation. All were in favor of his recommendation.

BD encourages feedback, positive and negative. She really enjoys getting the feedback any which way.

EM suggested public participation for any agenda or non-agenda items.

Q: A parent said she was at the PTO Hanlon meeting where JA presented the budget. She has K and 4th graders who might be in crowded class sizes. She asked if modular classrooms could be used for extra teachers? He will work with teachers to decide whose class merges etc .but does not anticipate having extra teachers to put in said modular.

Q: A parent wrote a letter to School Committee to ask if the K classes could be observed. Ellen Mason and John O'Brien personally attended K classes at Sheehan and Hanlon. They spoke with the children and worked with them. They met with the principals afterwards. EM's impression was that the children were all very much engaged, they were delightful as they welcomed them as visitors. They wanted to share what they were doing; eager to learn. Not to say it's the ideal situation; there were a lot of bodies in there. SC has recommended guidelines for a reason. Having more students does present challenges. It's a very difficult budget situation right now.

We don't know at this point if we'll be able to maintain the budget. EM felt assured today in talking to the principals and how the other adults in the classroom dealt with the large classes - looking ahead for next year and having two adults in the classroom while doing reading/ writing curriculum. It's not just budget/ teachers there's also a space issue. 1) What is the rationale for giving 5th graders 3 classes when the K/1st get the higher class sizes. Class profile is a huge factor. Current configuration is not decided on numbers only. JA says when they look at the class size issue there may be some that have a small number of students but the profile of the students require more adults in the room. When they divide classes they make sure to try to have the right chemistry.

JA thanks Karen for her letter because it gave him the opportunity to see what his job was about. He was pleased with what he saw. He felt the children all paid attention. Also, it was amazing to watch them interact and help each other. He really enjoyed watching the teachers /principals interact.

A parent thanked Ellen and John for going in. What they saw at their visit was very different than what she experienced when she went in for 'Activities'. She said there were reading groups with the teacher, asst. teacher, 4 parents, plus a volunteer retiree who had a teaching background. The classroom was very crowded.

A Kindergarten parent is a psychotherapist and thinks the kids need to be able to communicate properly. How does this affect their self esteem in the long term? She thinks they do a good job; finds they could do better with smaller class sizes.

Beth Herlihy, Principal of Hanlon thanks school committee. She wanted to advocate for the teachers in her building. She wanted to say that they are meeting the needs of the students. She wanted to defend her faculty.

JA says in no uncertain terms that the economic downturn is going to affect Westwood adversely. He welcomes parents to come and rally troops to the FinCom meeting. March 9 is a very important date for the school committee.

A parent wanted to thank the school committee for approving full time K to give the kids more time to share.

Mary Masi-Phelps chairs the education committee on FinCom. The school committee are advocating for the schools to the selectmen all the time! Westwood Station was supposed to give \$1.5 Million and that's not coming.

A parent said that he understands this is a very tough time. We pay a lot of real estate tax, plus the override, how does the money get divided up? He wants to know who we talk to about the budget before school committee? No one sets budget. FinCom makes a recommended budget. SC has to vote on it. Suggests writing letters to Fin Com and our selectmen.

EM made motion to adjourn.

Upcoming School Committee Meeting Dates

Wednesday March 18th 7:30PM, High School Little Theater

Wednesday April 15th 7:30PM, High School Little Theater

Thursday May 14th 7:30PM, High School Little Theater

School Committee Agenda March 18th Meeting

7:30

CALL TO ORDER

A. Pledge of Allegiance

B. Superintendent's Report

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- A. Update on the Science Review – Av Green, Ellen Russell, Tony Cohutt
- B. Ti-Navigator & Ti-NspireTechnology – Steve Ouellette
- C. Budget Update (tentative)

ACTION ITEMS

- A. Approval of Minutes – January 15, 2009

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – Agenda items and non-agenda items and other matter within the Committee’s jurisdiction

ADJOURNMENT