

Pre-K - 8 School Withdrawal Study Committee Notes  
6/12/24

**Present:** Jo Cowgill, Jean Kobeski, Chas Street, Steve Varone, Tom Ronning, Carolyn Vose  
(Selectboard Liaison)

**Absent:** Diana Petrie (Chair), Stan Hutchings

**Visitors:** Cheryl Mayberry (Director of Finance, Winchester School District; Walpole  
Selectboard), Katy Haas (Civic Documentor, *Keene Sentinel*)

The meeting commenced at 6:34 p.m. in Town Hall.

Cheryl Mayberry was invited to speak about the Winchester School District, which is its own school district and SAU 94. She described their self-management model. Their SAU administrative office consists of a part-time superintendent, full-time business administrator, part-time payroll person, superintendent assistant (split - halftime supports the superintendent and handles HR and halftime works with the Special Ed director), Full-time Special Education and Facilities Directors. Administrators meet weekly with the principal to discuss what they need to administratively manage.

Winchester's budget is roughly \$12,764,000, down \$300,000 from last year. They have 32 teachers, 6 SPED teachers, and 15 paras. Their budget is "upside down" - the majority of the budget is earmarked for SPED. The Special Ed director is working to lower special ed costs. They are redoing IEPs, according to what SPED law states should and shouldn't be in those IEPs. They want to focus on what needs to be in the IEP versus what should be a 504 plan. They want to make sure student educational needs are met but they are looking at their high number of out-of-district placements to determine if they are really needed. They are following SEL initiatives and may add a part-time autism specialist.

Winchester has its own Pre-K - 8 program and tuitions the high school students to Keene High. They have a budget committee that works with administrators to keep costs down. Winchester outsources transportation and partners with Hinsdale to share a social worker and adjustment counselor. Each town hires one of those teachers full time then reimburses the other for the days they are shared. They outsource a school psychologist and IT. They have three Title I interventionists, one of which is split between Title I and regular ed. 504 management was discussed.

The group asked about cost/student. Further discussion focused on high school, but the group was reminded that our committee will only report on Pre-K - 8.

It was suggested that it might be time to revisit and change the Fall Mountain Articles of Agreement. Cheryl stated that was tried but got nowhere. The FM Board and representatives from all towns are required to participate, which was done. It was noted that if Walpole leaves the district, it would create a hardship in the other towns. That might provide the incentive needed to revisit and renegotiate the Articles.

Once again, we were reminded that our charge is to consider Walpole students and how we move forward. How would our students benefit from our withdrawal? This charge is our town and our students.

It was also suggested that we could take SAU 60 down to a cooperative high school with each town being its own district.

Committee members presented their research/action item for the week.

**Benefits and Disadvantages for Walpole Staying/or Leaving SAU 60:** Tom distributed copies of his preliminary list of the pros and cons of each scenario and briefly discussed them.

**Tax Information:** Jo reports that Avitar has incorrect tax information and she reported it to Sarah Downing.

**Greater Potential for Civic Involvement:** Chas distributed copies of his report on how the community can become even more involved in our school. Presently we are hindered by the "sameness" policy of the SAU administration.

Jean has started interviewing teachers and staff but will consolidate their comments and make one report when meetings have concluded.

Cheryl and Carolyn clarified that this committee is to make a recommendation to the selectboard based on the pros and cons they have gathered.

The meeting concluded at 8:10 p.m. The next meeting will be June 19, 6:30 p.m., in Town Hall.