

## **Wellesley Middle School March PTO Meeting**

March 21, 2014, 8:45-10:15 AM

WMS Cafeteria

*Minutes of the Meeting*

Dr. David Lussier, Superintendent – Budget Update

- The road map for the Strategic Plan for the next 5 years is complete. Budget is now a key focus in order to implement the goals. The ultimate goal is continuous improvement -- meeting the needs of every child, in every classroom, every day.
- The four components of the strategic plan are: the kids - teachers - curriculum- and resources...built based on feedback from the many public meetings held, and a budget established to support these. Will review some aspects of the budget and q's in the time we have in this meeting.
- District data shows that there is not enough time in a half day of Kindergarten for instruction and structured learning. Data shows that 40% of Wellesley students enter first grade below grade level in numeracy; 20% are below grade level in literacy. These statistics continue into the higher grades. 90% of MA schools have full day Kindergarten, and our Strategic Plan strives to level the playing field for Wellesley schoolchildren. A full day of kindergarten, with TAs in the class with teachers, has been proven to be the best models for Kindergarten students. Therefore this model has been added to the budget, which will equate to a \$50 annual tax increase on average per household, which we believe is well worth it since the benefits are easily justified.
- At WMS: Kids with learning and other issues need better access to afterschool programs run by the district at WMS. The budget includes access to afterschool programs for students with disabilities and a person to coordinate.
- At WHS: We have seen large population growth at the high school and haven't added the personnel to support that growth. We currently have two assistant principals with a population of students over 1,400. This is the same number of Assistant principals from when there were 1,000 students. With the anticipated growth to 1500 students, the budget includes a 3rd assistant principal. High School is a time for high-stress for kids as evidenced in the MetroWest Adolescent Health survey. Providing this critical support will also allow WHS to transition to a house model/structure and provide better support, including guidance counselor support and services, to our students at this critical time in their lives, which is also reflected by the physical design of the school.
- Teachers: In both of the past two years, WPS has hired 50 new teachers, with no formal mentoring program. In the budget we've provided for a mentoring program, which would allow teachers to visit others' classrooms and ensure coverage for their classrooms, in order to develop our educators.
- Compensation – teacher contract negotiations are ongoing. We hope for success before Town Meeting begins. Since competition for teachers is high, particularly for the teaching spots where credentials and experience are highly valued, like math and science, we have set the goal to be in top half of our peer group of 12 schools in terms of compensation. It is in our best interest to recruit and retain high quality teachers, and our compensation plan needs to be attractive in order to accomplish this goal.

- Curriculum: science is being transitioned to physics at grade 9 plus offerings of advanced electives like astronomy at WHS. Earth science will be moved more fully into WMS. There is a plan to reshape and recalibrate science K-12. The budget includes investment in equipment and teaching materials and professional development for these teachers.
- World languages is currently being introduced too late -- imagine if kids started in K how far they would be by 7th grade. The challenge is that there is no big free time block and effective language teaching needs 90 min per week. Planning money is in this budget to examine an effective elementary school program (and 6<sup>th</sup> grade possibly as well). The hope is to have small a pilot in a few schools - K-12 - walk then run -- and only do it if you can do it well.
- The 1:1 initiative – key to this program is not the Ipad itself but that it is one device to one student - Right now all 5th graders have them through their elementary schools. Additionally they are currently piloting 1:1 in 6 grade. Next year they will introduce to the entire 5th grade and they will begin piloting in 7 gr. Thanks to the PTOs and WEF who have paid for support of the program including teacher devices and development. If override doesn't pass, this program would go away.
- Lastly, Buildings – acknowledging the work of School Committee and particularly Wendy Paul – a key partner in endless meetings on facilities. Projects are in the queue – an example at WMS is this summer the Auditorium seats will be replaced and the Donizetti entrance will get waterproofing. WMS is a busy place and fixing these problems shows we value what goes on in our schools. In queue also are Fiske and Schofield work for 2015. Hardy, Hunnewell and Upham are being looked at with partnership with the state for funds hopefully.
- First time budget has included library books – also the IT fees will be put back into the WPS budget. These are basic budget items for WPS and shouldn't be shouldered by parents or PTOs.
- Money -- override portion for the schools is \$2.8 mil - half is level Svc including meeting state mandates. **Were the override not to pass, there would be big cuts to current program** – what would be cut isn't just new programs, the gap list would include serious cuts to current programs. State mandated programs can't be cut.
- Next steps: Town Meeting starts on March 31. TM members vote on town budget - people can make motions so a proposed budget can be amended. Since only 30% residents have kids in public school, people need to get educated and speak to their representatives. Education in Wellesley costs \$15K per child – by comparison in Weston it is \$20K per child. If we move backward or keep at the current level while other towns improve, real estate values can suffer.
- The Town Meeting votes whether to put an Override on the ballot. Board of selectman determines the override language - hopefully single question for the entire override, schools and the rest of the town budgets that are going over the 2.5%. Then, every Wellesley resident votes and every **vote matters** – World languages at the elementary level was cancelled because of a vote that lost by only 17 votes. School Dept can't lobby - others fill that role – particularly Committee 21.
- Questions: What will current 6 graders get from a 1:1 program since they are just ahead of wave? They have access to computer carts and iPads – and possibly at WHS they will be able to be part of a “bring your own” 1:1 program that is being explored. A review of the options was given for incoming 6 graders at 5th grade parent night.
- How can we support Sci Olympiad with their huge accomplishment of 4<sup>th</sup> in the state? There is only 1 teacher with 45 plus kids; also HS science and tech after school e.g. Intel, robotics and Siemens prizes? Possibly PTO monies that had gone to library could go to these types of after school programs?

- Is there funding for the whole 5 year plan – it was determined that since budgets are annual, they'd ask only for FY15 budgeted items.
- A bit of history about Prop 2.5 – while going over 2.5% in spending is often a trigger for a community, the percent chosen when this law passed was somewhat random and going over it isn't because the budgets run wild. There hasn't been an override in 7 years and we have as a result significantly underinvested in our schools.

PTO president Betsy Komjathy referred listeners to the Committee 21 website - has an easy to read overview of items in the gap list, and details behind every segment. Eg, the proposed budget includes funding to support level services (52%), the strategic plan (apx 29%) and other spending & pgms (9%). Details of each component can be reviewed online. It is important to educate ourselves and inform/inspire our neighbors. Write letters of support to Town Meeting members and the newspaper. Advocate the facts and dispel the misinformation. Instead of looking at an override with a negative connotation, it is a positive: we are finally investing in our schools after years of not doing so.

**Dean Blase, Director of Curriculum and Instruction:** Please see the [Powerpoint](#) Dean Blase presented.

Julia dePeyster highlighted April 5th Wellesley Science and Technology Expo, supported by WEF and the district. Geared for all town residents, those who have science backgrounds but also those who do not.

Betsy gave an overview of the upcoming PTO meetings:

- Weds, April 9th, evening presentation by WHS Englis teacher, David Mccullough, Jr, of acclaimed "You are not special" fame. 7:00 pm WMS auditorium.
- Friday, May 16, panel discussion of the book Mindset: the New Psychology of Success, by Carol Dweck. A favorite book of the faculty and recommended ready for all parents. Panel will include Mark Ito, Ast Principals, WMS Psychologists, dept head/s. 8:45am-10:15 am WMS cafeteria.

Meeting Adjourned 10:20 AM

Respectfully Submitted,

Julia Hicks de Peyster, Secretary