

MSAD #51 PTO

Monthly Informational Meeting Minutes

October 14, 2008

7:00pm

Mabel I Wilson School

Attendees: Vicki Bell, Kelley Craig, Dava Davin, Shari Elder, Heather Giandrea, Tom Gilley, Margo Harrington, Maureen Morrone, Gloria Nicholson, Sara Perfetti, Brenda Pitcher, Deb Regan, Amy Saffian, Kristi Sardi, Bethany Smart, Beth Smith, Ericka Winchester, and several community members

1. Call to Order at 7:05

2. Guest Speakers

Dr. Robert Hasson, MSAD #51 Superintendent

Dr. Hasson thanked us for welcoming him to speak with us again. The PTO and the Superintendent have enjoyed a successful relationship during the 16 years Dr. Hasson has been in the district.

Dr. Hasson began by reminding us of the very important vote coming up on November 4th. Per state consolidation guidelines, MSAD #51, with 2,300 students, is in a category of schools that must consolidate or suffer financial penalties. (The student threshold in our category is 2,500.) The following election outcomes are possible:

- ✓ Optimally, both Falmouth and Cumberland/North Yarmouth vote “yes” on consolidation and the New Casco Bay School District is born.
- ✓ Both communities vote “no”, and incur a penalty in excess of \$400,000.00 per year, per community. (The fine is expected to increase over time.)
- ✓ If Cumberland/North Yarmouth votes “no” and Falmouth votes “yes”, Cumberland/North Yarmouth is penalized \$400,000.00+ yearly and Falmouth is eligible for roughly \$300,000.00 yearly in additional state revenue.
- ✓ If Falmouth votes “no” and Cumberland/North Yarmouth votes “yes”, Falmouth is penalized almost \$500,000.00 yearly and Cumberland/North Yarmouth is eligible for roughly \$300,000.00 yearly in additional state revenue. In this case we file with the state for an Alternative Organizational Structure which gives us time to consider our options. We would most likely pursue one of two avenues:
 1. Look around on November 5th for communities in a situation similar to ours and explore a new consolidation partnership.
 2. Take in tuition students which would add revenue and increase enrollment to a level necessary for sustainability.

In the past few months there seems to have been an increase in negative feelings in Falmouth regarding consolidation. Recently Falmouth School Board voted 4-3 against consolidation and Falmouth Town Council took no position. Our school board has remained unanimously in favor of consolidation throughout the process. We are urging a “yes” vote and are prepared to move forward. If consolidation proceeds, a new 9 member board will be voted in early next year, a Superintendent will be hired, and the consolidated district will be open for business on July 9, 2009. Anyone with questions should contact the Superintendents’ office or the school board.

Questions:

- ❖ “Is all this information regarding consolidation ‘out there?’” – Dr. Hasson Hopes so and believes so. There is no organized group opposing the measure and during the recent public meetings held on consolidation no negative feelings were expressed by the community members in attendance.
- ❖ “Can we be denied the Alternative?” – Dr. Hasson doesn’t believe we’d have a problem, but if we were denied, we would incur the penalty. The Alternative is available to schools with more than 2,000 students and less than 2,500 that have shown due diligence, and have a plan to be financially responsible. We’ve worked hard on this and don’t expect any difficulty in getting the Alternative approved, if necessary.
- ❖ “If we vote ‘no’, when is the penalty due?” – July 1, 2009.
- ❖ “Isn’t there a concerted effort to repeal the consolidation law altogether?” – Assuming enough signatures are gathered, under Maine law, the legislature would get the first opportunity to repeal the law. The new legislature doesn’t begin until January which is after many of our deadlines. Larger communities in the state have nothing to gain by repealing consolidation and they represent roughly 60% of the legislature and would most likely be able to vote down repeal. Additionally, the state is in financial trouble and has to cut costs. At the core of the issue is the fact that everybody wants a good education for our children and you can’t run a good high school with 200 kids. There are 78 high schools in Maine and about 1/3 of them have enrollment under 400. There are 150 school superintendents in Maine for 190,000 students. It can’t continue the way it is.
- ❖ “How does the new school board get voted in?” – There would be an election sometime around January.
- ❖ “Is the \$300,000.00 we would receive by voting ‘yes’ earmarked for any particular budget item?” – No, it just comes in. It will go a long way toward replacing revenue we’ve lost as a result of General Purpose Aid money being frozen for 2 years at the 2008-2009 level, and the Chebeague Secession.
- ❖ “This whole thing seems financially driven with not a lot of academic or culture focus. It seems hard to let all of that go after so many years of work.” – We’ve spent significant time getting things into place and hopefully they’ll survive. Greely High School has a definite advantage as the only school in the area to have an IB program. With a “yes/yes” vote, you’ve got two high schools and double the resources. The educational opportunities are there. And truthfully, most districts are not that different from each other.
- ❖ “How do towns like Cape Elizabeth and Yarmouth (who are not consolidating) fit into the cost saving equation?” – Briefly, Cape already has combined services for the town and the school district – one finance person, one payroll, integrated services, etc. At 4% cost, there is not a lot of room for Cape to demonstrate any savings. Yarmouth has the benefit of commercial tax dollars from the Cousins Island power plant which has been underwriting their school costs for years.
- ❖ “Wouldn’t those two districts benefit from a repeal of the law?” – Yes, but neither town is one of Maine’s larger communities (they don’t have huge influence in the state legislature) and they currently have dispensation to keep doing what they’re doing.
- ❖ “Do you foresee North Yarmouth pushing to go back to having schools of their own?” – It’s not likely. Cumberland and North Yarmouth have a solid relationship. Also, a comprehensive study was done before the site for the new middle school was chosen and at this time North Yarmouth doesn’t have the necessary police, water, or sewage systems.

David Galin MSAD #51 Curriculum Director

David began his talk by informing us that while this is a year that promises many changes if the consolidation vote is passed, very little time has been spent on consolidation outside of Dr. Hassons' office. While a consolidation would provide tremendous educational opportunities should it come to pass, David and the school board have continued to work toward previously set goals.

Over the last 15-16 years, MSAD #51 has focused intensely on college preparation. 15 years ago 60% of our students went on to post-secondary education. For the last 4 years the number was over 90%. While getting into college is a start, we've also looked at what it takes to be successful once you get there. One discovery was that we don't do enough writing or enough of the right kind of writing. That insight led to the implementation of the *Units of Study* writing program for grades K-5. The progress has been phenomenal. As students enter middle school, with a strong writing foundation, we continue to ask them to demonstrate understanding through writing and we use common assessments to ascertain that. In the high school we have worked very hard to make sure that writing does not only happen in English class but occurs across the curriculum.

We've also identified that while our students are readers, they are not necessarily analytic readers. In school, students spend most of their reading time on literature as opposed to content based text. In professional life, that is flipped. Reading literature is very different from reading varied forms of non-fiction. To be successful students must be able to read and understand essays, newspaper articles, web pages and other forms of informational writing. To add to our students' ability in this area some of the things we'll address are:

- Have analytic reading material available at the K-5 level
- Label the levels and genres of books
- Make our school libraries more inviting and available
- Make sure our K-5 students are reading 30 minutes every day at school
- Extend reading time at school for middle schoolers and make sure reading happens outside of English class
- Provide shorter pieces, with focused text for all students

Since the implementation of Everyday Math 6 years ago we have seen consistent improvements in the MEA, NWEA, and district assessments in math. Our students are getting better at math every year. 6 years ago we also implemented MathScape but have not seen the same success. Currently, we are looking for a better fit, with more support for our students.

At the high school level the most exciting changes involve the International Baccalaureate Program. IB is a 2 year program that allows students to access rigorous academics across 6 broad areas. Our first year offering IB classes will be the 2009-2010 school year. We are hoping initially to have 25 students work toward a full IB diploma and many more take single IB classes. In comparable districts to ours with an established IB program, on average 1/3 of the students will be enrolled in a full IB program and 80% will take at least one IB class during their 4 years of high school. Some of the benefits of bringing IB to MSAD #51 include the professional training our teachers are receiving. It's been shown that this training spills over into non-IB courses and benefits *all* students. In fact, 9th and 10th graders this year are being exposed to some IB concepts in the classroom in preparation for full IB implementation. On December 11th and 12th of this year, the world IB organization is sending a visiting team to the high school. On October 16th we're holding an IB Forum at the high school where an IB Coordinator from a regional high school, recent IB graduates, and a college admissions counselor from Colby College will all be available.

We are also committed to a broad based liberal arts program at Greely High School and are proud to have Art Department now.

As we raise our expectations for all students we realize that we must support the kids and make sure their social and emotional needs are addressed. To that end, we've hired Becky Dilworth as a Behavioral Strategist who also has a background in Social Work.

Questions:

- In response to a question regarding whether or not there has been an increase in behavioral problems, Dr. Hasson explains the increase has occurred in two areas: the rise of Asperger Syndrome in not just ours, but all communities; and an increase in kids acting out.
- A member commented on IB: what a parent of a high school student hears from the administration regarding IB and what they hear from their student might be two very different things - the kids still need to be sold on the idea of IB. The short answer is that there are going to be some pioneers. In districts of similar size and demographic it takes two full 4-year cycles for the program to mature. Our unofficial goal is 5 years. In the meantime we are investing in and hoping that guidance and teachers can fill the void.
- Regarding our approach to increased analytic reading our intent is not to purchase a dedicated analytic reading educational program but rather to clearly define our objectives and balance reading material and instruction.
- "Do we test too much?", was a question raised by one member. David reviewed the different assessments the children take in each grade and explained that as the demands on the district change we need to change what we do. We don't want to over assess and believe we have the right balance. It's something we will continue to watch.
- There was some discussion regarding long bus routes. Anyone with a specific concern can call Scott Poulin, Director of Finance, HR and Operations in the Superintendents' Office. Becky Dilworth is also available to counsel drivers and others if there are behavior problems associated with the long rides. The reality is that moving forward, as budgets tighten, resources will be redirected from areas like custodial and transportation in favor of teaching.

3. Mission Moment

We've been contacted by several out of state PTO Boards who were impressed by our organization and requested a copy of our by-laws so they might emulate us. Also, one of our Co-Chairs was interviewed by *PTO Today* and quoted in a recent edition of that publication. This kind of attention is a nice validation of what we do here.

4. Approval of September Minutes

Sara Perfetti motions to approve, Erica Winchester seconds, and the minutes are approved without discussion.

5. Old & New Business

- On the agenda, but not present, Mrs. Locker will be invited to speak at a future meeting.
- We are thrilled to have found an attorney who will work with us on a pro bono basis to fulfill the requirements taking us from a 501c4 to a 501c3 non-profit organization. The major distinction between the two being that a 501c3 (what we will become) has the ability to accept contributions and donations that are tax deductible to the donor. Other benefits include the ability to apply for grants and the public legitimacy that comes from being recognized by the IRS.

- The results of the Teacher and Parent/Guardian Surveys have been compiled and are ready for analysis. Unfortunately, only 6% of the teachers responded and 8% (84 out of 1000) of the families. With these numbers so low, one of the first questions we must ask is if the small data sampling will provide us accurate feedback. Initially some of the results appear contradictory. What is clear however is that as an organization we must improve communication with both of these groups to ensure the PTOs' function is clear. For example, 40% of the teachers responded they didn't understand the "approval process for enrichment funds". For now, PTO members are going to review and reflect on the surveys and we will open this topic up for discussion at our next meeting. In the meantime, Ruth's Recyclables, which we were hoping to have a decision on, is on hold.

6. Committee Reports

- a) Treasurer – Kelley Craig provided a Balance Sheet and Budget Worksheet for review. There has been very little activity so far. The Sally Foster deposit will be made shortly as it was turned over to Kelley this evening by the Fundraising Co-Chairs.
- b) Enrichment – There's been a little confusion about whether enrichment will be handled on "grade levels" or "wing levels". We hope to have that resolved shortly. Amy Saffian was looking for the go ahead to purchase tickets to TheaterWorks but as Sally Foster sales appear lower than projected, Heather and Gloria have asked for a day to reanalyze the budget and adjust the per-student-enrichment-dollar-figure before any funds are spent.
- c) Events – **Staff Appreciation Day** is scheduled for **October 21, 2008**. Brenda Pitcher and Sara Perfetti are lining up the necessary bakers through e-mails and paper flyers. **November 3, 2008** is the first **Family Night Out** which will be advertised on the PTO website, as well as via e-mails and paper flyers.
- d) Fundraising – The Fundraising Committee had just completed the Sally Foster tally and the initial number is \$32,000.00 gross. 50% of that amount will go to our budget. It is expected that additional sales will come in from the internet throughout the year. On Friday, November 7, 2008, when the Sally Foster products are delivered, 20 volunteers will be needed to unload the orders and sort them for pick up that afternoon and the following Saturday.
- e) Volunteer – No report.
- f) Publicity – Due to a resignation, we had an opening on this committee which was filled by Tom Gilley.
- g) Secretary – No report.

- h) Co-Chairs – Just a few quick notes: North Yarmouth Memorial School is looking for some garden work and to freshen up the playground; Mabel Wilson is considering using recess volunteers on a regular basis because there was such a positive response from teachers, children and parents to the volunteers during last years' *No Name Calling Week*; GMS would like to investigate a United Way program to support health and wellness ("Kids in the Kitchen", a nutrition program for children, was suggested as a possibility also).

7. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:14pm.

Respectfully Submitted: Maureen Morrone, Co- Secretary, October 22, 2008

Attached documents: 2008-2009 Budget Worksheet
Balance Sheet dated October 14, 2008

