

Restructuring Committee: Instruction and Personnel Meeting #1: June 23rd, 2022

In Attendance:

Daniel Novak, Chairperson
Debbie O'Brien, Board of Education
Patrick O'Donnell, Administrator
Dr. Dana Swarts, Administrator
Danielle Torres, Staff
Sue Nebiker, Staff
Heather Egli, Staff
Shawn Rhinesmith, Staff
Jennifer Lizza, Parent
Cortney Lombardo, Parent
Marcia Kershaw, Parent
Brendan Kenny, Parent
Kelly Stinziano, Parent

Mr. Novak reviewed the handouts (attached) and distributed them. He reviewed the journey of State Aid for the district from 2016-present and the management of the funds. Discussed were the management strategies that have addressed the reduced aid since 2016:

- Retirements
- Programs
- Administrator consolidation
- ESSER Grant funds

Review of the Task for this Committee:

1. Discussion of the question "with the dramatic reductions in State Aide, can WMTPS afford to operate 8 schools plus Highlander Academy?"
2. Do we need to close a school? Discussion revolved around the difference and implications of "closing" vs "repurposing".
3. What are the essentials that we can not cut?

Timetable:

The Committee discussed that the decisions and recommendations will need to be derived by the Nov/Dec time frame to coincide with the Budget Process for the 23/24 school year

Personnel as it Relates to Instruction:

Mr. Novak connected the task of the group to the overarching question to clearly define the purpose of the group is not the "who" of personnel needs/cuts, but to

explore the programs we have, what are essential and what the professional responsibility looks like (ie: certifications, specialities, etc. This led to the defining questions:

Do we find cuts through less services or one less school?

In order to further explore this question, Mr. Novak led a discussion that clearly reviewed the programs offered in the K-5(with pre k) Program Structure (see handout #1) Key factors were explored regarding each program

Gen Ed (Pre-K - 5): enrollment, in general, is two sections of each grade level for each school (K-5) with varied class sizes. IT was discussed that the demographic study and usage study will be essential in defining this for the future. Mr. Novak shared these studies will be available for our next meeting so we can work with tangible data to explore the general education programs. The prediction is approximately 200 students per grade level, which is a general reduction in enrollment.

Learning Unlimited: hosted for districtwide students at PK with one staff member (who has other responsibilities). This program is WM's Gifted and Talented program

ELL: (English Language Learners) this program has a growing enrollment. One staff member services this program. All ELL students attend Apshawa grade K-5.

Special Areas: this area has had staff reductions (due to attrition) over the past few years and is as reduced as possible already. All special area teachers are shared between building and/or Highlander Academy (in the case of PE). This is not an area for further cuts in our current school configuration.

Encore: This is WM's basic skills program, with K-2 in the "Reading Room" setting, services by the Reading Specialists (specialized certificate), Grades 3-5 are addressed through the Encore Program (push-in/pull-out model) with a variety of teacher certifications, but a specialized certificate is not required.

Special Education: Mr. Novak quickly reviewed what the programs are in our District elementary settings, but shared that the Special Education Committee for Restructuring would be looking at the Special Education Programs and the impacts/implications from the budget separately. He reviewed that the CST and Social Worker roles fall under this umbrella and those staff members are shared between buildings.

Other Positions: each was quickly reviewed and how it is staffed.

Office Staff: Quickly reviewed the roles

After reviewing the programs, Mr. Novak reiterated that the programs and staffing will be further affected by additional state aide reduction reduction in the 23/24 school year.

General Discussion by Committee:

Mr. Novak opened the floor for a general discussion of ideas, thoughts, questions and concerns from the group. He shared that some questions may be just questions that would be discussions or answered at future meetings.

Concern: staff still needs to reach and teach all students and large classes will hinder this process.

Discussion: What are the class size maximums, which were defined as K-2 = 25 students and gr 3-5 28 students. The concern was reiterated that this committee member felt students would not receive effective instruction in larger groups as defined by district maximums.

Question: What would be done with a closed building?

Answer and Discussion: Hillcrest was discussed as an example of what not to do with a closed building. It was discussed that the building has to remain “on line” to prevent significant expenses in the case it needs to be used again and that repurposing by moving programs would be beneficial. Mr. Novak shared the structure that he has read about in Warwick, where schools are closed and reopened as needed. He is hoping to share information about their processes and will share at a future meeting if available.

Question: Are we appealing to the State regarding the funding to PCTI?

Answer and Discussion: As a County group an appeal was filed and approx. \$200 per student was refunded, which is not significant.

Question: What is the cost of running Highlander Academy out of Queen of Peace?

Answer and Discussion: It costs approximately \$100,000 per year for the facility and usage. Follow up: Can these students attend school in the current high school setting? The program used to be within the HS setting, the question was then left for future meetings, can it be moved and housed internally and where?

Concern: Class Size (revisited) There may be a significant impact on reading in younger grades.

Discussion: One member felt strongly that the class size should be maximum of 20 for the teaching of reading in the younger setting, not 26. Discussion continued that the county average class size is 22 per class in elementary schools.

Concern: twelve teachers will be losing their jobs and that if Highlander Academy could utilize the closed building the facility maintenance and staffing would have to be maintained, and would that really save any money?

Discussion: Could other programs join Highlander Academy in the repurposed building, such as preschool and continuing education programs. Someone suggested moving the ELL and LU in with Highlander Academy in a repurposed building.

Question: What would be saved when “closing” a building?

Discussion: What are the actual facility costs and its maintenance. There was continued discussion of the idea that the building would need to be brought to current code when reopened and that is expensive.

Concern: Committee member shared that there would be a significant staff reduction if a school were to be closed.

Discussion: The teachers would be needed in other buildings, but yes several would lose their jobs which would be done with certifications, years of services and many other factors to make decisions. This would also yield the loss of a Principal, Secretary, Building Aide, Nurse and possible custodial adjustment (depending on the building purpose or repurpose vs closure)

Question: What will happen if a school is closed and there is a population influx and students cannot be housed?

Discussion: this question was briefly discussed and would be better addressed with demographic study data

Question: What is the formula process to determine the State Aid?

Discussion: There is a formula that has a primary factor of enrollment. Mr. Novak will be sharing some information to the group about the process.

Question: Transportation: Could the cost of transportation actually increase with restructuring?

Discussion: This is something to seek answers from the Transportation redistricting committee.

Question: Where does everyone go?

Discussion: Redistricting was discussed. Discussion further continued with how the district was districted in the past and how redistricting has occurred previously. It is anticipated that staff and students would be redistricted - district wide.

Concern: Fiscal Responsibility and Implications

Discussion: Concerns regarding the widespread district responsibility fiscally of closing what is now neighborhood schools. There was discussion of the potential for property value loss if neighborhood schools did not exist.

Question: If we redistrict, would school choice be eliminated?

Discussion: If a parent selects school choice, transportation is not provided. That would require parents to drive their students to the choice of school. It was discussed that while typically honored, school choice is not always approved. It is based on the current enrollment and can be denied.

Question: Will we be looking at the actual footprint of a school, its layout and the facility as a whole, to determine what school will be closed?

Discussion: The actual facility footprint may not play a role. This was tabled for the utilization study data.

Question: What are the options to cut if we do not close a school?

Discussion: Programs such as LU? Encore? Reading Specialists?

Question: How many students are heading to private schools for the current 8th grade class?

Discussion: We have 100 students at PCTI in grade 9-12 this year. Actual 8th grade to private school (not PCTI) data will be gathered and brought to the next meeting. The discussion continued about PCTI and how we pay tuition and bussing to these schools. The county formula was discussed. Our declining enrollment and the other towns are getting the aid who have a higher enrollment. A suggestion was made to look at the Bergen Academies structure that the high school runs to keep their students.

Question: Can we close cafeteria kitchens?

Discussion: We are considered a Title District with free and reduced lunch programs therefore we have to have kitchen services.

Question: Who decides the funding?

Discussion: The State Legislature decides the funding formula. Mr. Novak will send out a link to information regarding the funding formulas.

Question: What does the funding look like beyond the spreadsheet, for 2024?

Discussion: This year is supposed to be the worst of the cuts. It looks like 2024 will still have cuts, but anticipated to be less dramatic because the plan is to level out the funding to “fair” rates.

Question: Who pays for SACC? Can that be cut?

Discussion: The SACC staff is paid by the district, but families are charged a rate and registration fee. The Facility is covered by the District. It is a revenue based program and typically breaks even.

NEXT MEETING: Mr. Novak will send out some dates to the group for early August to ensure all study data is accessible. The next meeting thereafter is projected for late August. A recommendation was made that all Committees meet together at the end to present their discussions and recommendations prior to the public.

Link Handouts: [Agenda](#)
[Enrollment](#)
[State Aid and Tax Levy Comparison](#)