



# Watertown School Committee

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## Curriculum Subcommittee, June 21, 2017: 6 PM

Present: Eileen Hsu-Balzer, Chair; Candace Miller, Liz Yusem, Sub-Committee members; John Portz, School Committee; John Brackett, Theresa McGuinness, Mary Delai, Beth Sahakian, Chris Hart, Kathleen Maney, Rita Foglia, Members of the Public.

Re: NESDEC Extended Day Program Review

Hsu-Balzer stated that the focus of the meeting would be to unpack the information in the report, and discuss the action plan for the program.

McGuinness gave an introduction. See attached slides for her presentation.

The goal for next year is to enhance family engagement.

Maney, who manages WPS' early childhood grants, explained the ranking system used by the State in assessing afterschool and out-of-school time quality indicators (QRIS).

- Level 1 is, "...if you are breathing."
- Level 2 adds 22 criteria including staff training, safety guidelines, etc.
- Level 3 includes 28 additional criteria, including that every teacher must have 5 college-level classes in particular areas.
- Level 4 contains 71 criteria.

Out of 1500 afterschool programs in Massachusetts, there is one level 3 Program, a for-profit program in central Massachusetts. There are no Level 4 programs in the state. Watertown has a QRIS of Level 2. McGuinness added that our integrated preschool is one of only 6 in the Commonwealth achieving Level 3.

Grants: At the current time, government grants we had received in previous years are all allotted by the government to infant and toddler programs. WPS continues to look at all possibilities.

## Issues:

- Finding the right balance among homework, free time and educational supplementation. Parent and student responses fail to indicate consensus on the desired allocation of time to these three areas.
- Additional training for afterschool staff in de-escalation of problematic behavioral situations. The staff would benefit from professional development in this area, particularly those members who are not trained educators, such as artists and high school students, but the extended day program requires staff attendance during District-wide professional development half-days. Some de-escalation training could be offered during the orientation program before the school year begins. Miller later emphasized that the high school students who are sometimes part of the program staff need to be well trained.
- Miller felt that the program has weaknesses that do not appear in the report. She mentioned evaluation of staff, staff spending time on personal phones, professional development for coordinators, and alignment of the extended day program with school programs, to enhance continuity with the regular school day. She was “surprised to see a glowing staff report” in the NESDEC document.
- Brackett stated that in analyzing the responses to the questionnaires outlined in the NESDEC report, the program recruited some help from Karen Trenholm, the statistics teacher at the high school, to try to understand the data better. Issues raised included whether the young students had had any experience with answering surveys, and what is the context for the data? We must move forward and see if we can move the needle.
- Finances: Delai stated that the program takes in between \$800-900K annually. The vast proportion of expense comes from personnel. Some of the income is used to subsidize other projects, such as the preschool playground at the Phillips, which is mutually beneficial to both programs. She stated that in many cases our need level doesn't rise to the grant level in the competitive market. The program is very affordable for families. For those who use extended day for 70 hours a month (full-time) at \$340/mo., the pro-rated price is \$4.86 an hour. WPS also takes state vouchers. No additional cost is assessed for the extra hours offered during early release days. There is also a sibling discount. However, we could consider a sliding scale, which would benefit those whose income falls slightly above the voucher income cut-off.
- Outreach: materials, including information about vouchers and sibling discounts, should be available in languages other than English. The program does have translators from the regular school day available to the staff.
- Hsu-Balzer raised the need for the staff to develop an agreement on the philosophical underpinning of the extended day program. That brought back the conundrum of the distribution of programming time among homework versus free play versus educational enrichment.
- Miller stated that in the past checks were not cashed for several months. Delai stated that that has not happened this year, and Miller agreed. Currently the preschool and pre-kindergarten allow online payments. The intent is for WPS to go further in that direction. This fall we will launch online lunch payments, which will have the additional benefit of allowing parents to see what their child has purchased.
- The website is in the process of being re-done starting this summer.
- Staff salaries were increased 2.25% this year, after a period of no pay increases from 2011-2015.
- Exit interviews show a wide variety of reasons for staff turnover, such as leaving the state, obtaining a full-time job, going to graduate school.
- Parents made some remarks. One raised grant questions. Another stated that she was a public school teacher, and was impressed by the report. She felt that communication with her as a parent was very good, she liked that staff seemed happy, and she liked staff

benefits such as free tuition for courses at Bunker Hill Community College. She did not consider the program an expansion of the school day, and appreciated that the program embodied both structure and flexibility. Another parent said that things have improved this year, and asked if we have adequate staff, and whether the standards in the handbook are being met. Another parent noted that we pay our staff \$2.50/hr. less than do surrounding towns.

- Hiring occurs in July, based on prospective enrollment. Conversation about changing that model ensued, with emphasis on the need for parents to have certainty about their children's plans. Currently, waiting list decisions are not made until October 1. The Cunniff already has a waiting list. Brackett suggested we look to our staffing model to eliminate the wait list, and it was agreed to add this as a bullet to the action plan (slide 10). He stated that the goal should be that all who want to attend the extended day program could do so. There was discussion around providing parents on the waiting list with an update by a date in August (maybe the 15<sup>th</sup>) pending successful hiring of personnel to run the program.
- Maney added that a District directive around extended day's use of space in the elementary buildings would be helpful in ensuring that the allotted spaces meet standards.

It was agreed to follow-up on progress through a Curriculum sub-committee meeting in FY18.

Meeting adjourned.