

**The Hamilton Wenham Regional
School Committee Meeting
Public Hearing on School Choice
Wednesday, January 31, 2018 7:00 pm
Buker School Multipurpose Room**

Present:

David Polito
Jeanise Bertrand
Joshua Liebow, Chair
Gene Lee
Michelle Bailey

Also Present:

Michael Harvey, Superintendent
Jeff Sands, Assistant to the Superintendent
James Goudie, Student Government Representative

Joshua Liebow calls the meeting to order at 7:07 pm.

Michael Harvey provides an introduction to the school choice conversation. Hamilton/Wenham Regional High School currently has 46 school choice students enrolled. By statute, the reimbursement is set at \$5,000 per student, and has remained that way since 1993. Dr. Harvey's recommendation would be to continue participating in grades 9-12 school choice. The school district's policy guiding school choice is to not enroll students in so great a number that would cause district burdens.

Joshua Liebow notes the confusion on social media platforms about school choice being a cost burden on the district and towns. Reiterates that there are no additional costs, no additional resources, and no class size increases. School choice is a positive influence and provides money flowing through the revenue of the district budget.

Michelle Bailey asks Dr. Harvey to explain how reimbursement works for IEP students.

Michael Harvey: There is a reimbursement rate for students with IEPs. There is a formula used to determine this amount, and is a percentage of what those child's costs are.

Joshua Liebow opens the floor to public comment.

Jenn Flynn, Miles River Road, Hamilton: How many kids apply?

Michel Harvey & Eric Tracy: 55 last year.

Jenn Flynn: How does the district determine the number of enrolled students (46)?

Michael Harvey: As we receive applications, Michael Harvey, Jeff Sands, and Eric Tracy will determine the ideal number (20 students per class).

Jenn Flynn: Do siblings get first choice?

Michael Harvey: Yes.

Jenn Flynn: After siblings, is this a random enrollment?

Michael Harvey: Yes.

Jenn Flynn: Is the committee's decision to continue school choice made annually?

Michael Harvey: Yes.

Jenn Flynn: And the vote is tonight?

Michael Harvey: Yes.

Jenn Flynn: For clarification purposes; when a choice student is enrolled in Hamilton/Wenham, this causes no additional costs for town payers. The cost to educate a resident student (approximately \$15,000) versus a choice student (\$5,000) are not comparable.

Joshua Liebow: Yes. The \$5,000 actually serves as a subsidy to townspeople.

Jeff Sands states that the district can only enroll students for the seats we have, similar to filling seats on an airplane.

Jenn Flynn: I think this would be a good explanation for those who oppose school choice. Asks about Hamilton/Wenham students who school choice out of district.

Jeff Sands explains that these are completely different topics. Explains that the district has budgeted for 20 incoming school choice students next year, which will provide income of \$265,000, plus any additional money associated with IEPs. This income will be used to offset the district's operating expenses.

Pat Waddell, 5 Great Pond Road, Wenham: Would like to point out that there is always an increase in class size, and that to say otherwise is incorrect. Believes we need extra students in class, and supports school choice program continuing.

John Mulvihill, 40 Arbor St, Wenham: What is the cost per capita per high school student?

Jeff Sands: In FY16 (most recent data calculated by Department of Education), the cost per student was \$16,800. In FY17, the estimate would likely be about \$17,500 per student.

John Mulvihill: Would the school choice \$5,000 per student be on top of that?

Michael Harvey and Jeff Sands clarify that these are two separate issues. The \$5,000 per student is an expense offset.

Jeremy Coffey, 45 Kimball Road, Wenham: Is it the committee's policy to take only freshmen? If so, why is this the policy?

Michael Harvey states that the district enrolls mostly freshman, but upperclassmen are considered on a case-by-case basis depending on space availability. Considering the continuity of the program, it makes more sense to offer preference to freshmen.

Michelle Bailey compares this process to colleges: a certain amount of credits have to be obtained from the institution you'd like the degree from.

Discussion regarding disadvantages of coming to high school as upperclassmen.

Peter Schibli, 188 Main St, Wenham: Supports school choice but would like the committee to consider that from an academic standpoint, junior year is a really valuable time frame for students to come into the school.

David Polito talks about his experience with transferring to Danvers High School in his junior year, coming back to Hamilton Wenham in his senior year, and the difficulties associated with this. Explains that school choice students are considered on a case by case basis.

Joshua Liebow: With no additional questions or comments from the public, the committee will vote on scheduled agenda items, and vote on school choice later in the evening.

Michelle Bailey asks if the school committee might deliberate now as to welcome public comments again, as she has some issues she would like to discuss.

Michael Harvey states that there are two separate meetings the public hearing on school choice from 7:00pm - 7:30pm, and the regular school committee meeting beginning at 7:30 pm.

[public hearing on school choice ends at 7:27 pm]

Respectfully submitted Mahala Lettvin