

Communications Committee Meeting
January 12, 2017

Present: Deirdre d'Albertis, Laura Schulkind, Joe Phelan, Steve Jensen and Tom Burnell for part of the meeting.

Agenda: 1. Meetings with legislators 2. Meeting with RCSD support groups 3. mobile friendly web site

1. Meetings with legislators.

Tom Burnell joined the committee for this discussion to share ideas on what issues to address with our elected officials. Issues to focus on could include;

- a. *Combined Wealth Ratio* (CWR - income reported+ property wealth) is not an appropriate tool to use in state aid formulas. With the tax cap, the wealth of the community is not relevant. The district is hamstrung by the cap and the requirement for 60% affirmative vote in exceeding the cap, so community wealth is not readily accessible when state aid is insufficient. Perhaps mitigate this unfair use of CWR by eliminating top x wealthy earners, the outliers, to ease the impact of the formula. Alternately, use of the number of free and reduced lunch in place of CWR may be a better measure. RCSD receives very little state aid, but we also have very little room to make up for insufficient funding given the restrictions of the tax cap.
- b. *Address costs of special education in tax levy cap calculations and Excess cost Aid calculations.* We are required to meet the needs of Special Ed students and we are proud of our program. But this is a very costly part of our budget and these costs are not accounted for in the tax cap formula. Also, we receive less state aid than other districts for the same services . Example: a child who goes to a BOCES program receives the same services regardless of what district the student comes from. However, aid for that program, based on the district where the student comes from and using the CWR, is allocated unevenly. This is also true of private placements. Tom will get examples/information on this for our next meeting. Possible solutions: i) account for Special Ed costs in the tax cap formula. ii) do not use CWR in reimbursements for Special Education Students, i.e., in Excess Cost Aid calculations.
- c. *Funding of P-Tech program at Ulster County Community College.* This is a six year program - high school through 2 years at community college. Students end with an Associates Degree. When a student enters this program, the district is responsible for the costs of it for all six years. Thus, the district is paying the costs of an A.D. We have a couple of students in this program and it is a good program, but this funding mechanism is an unfair burden on K-12 school districts.

(Tom left the meeting)

2. Meeting with RCSD support groups regarding maintaining dynamic schools.

This meeting (with RSF, PTSO and CultureConnect) will be held on Friday, February 3 at noon. The purpose of this meeting is to have a dialogue. The committee discussed framing the conversation in terms of a) the breadth and depth of RCSD program offerings and b) the challenges that we face, i.e., tax cap and enrollment trends. Questions that may help get the dialogue going: what is the value of public schools to the health of the community? What do they think of how we should approach

maintaining dynamic schools in the face of these challenges? What do they hear out in the larger community? Would a larger community meeting be useful? Does the district need to promote itself more (for example, create a brochure)? Joe will have the following available for the group: i) a profile of the district ii) a chart of enrollment trends iii) data from Tom about the impact of the tax cap.

3. Mobile friendly web site.

Ed Schindler has been working on this. One of the technical issues that Ed is addressing is that school district web sites need to be ADA compliant. Documents need to be able to be read by software that reads web page content for the visually impaired. The committee can look at the pages in development for the mobile friendly version of the web site and give feedback to Steve by next week. Site can be up and running within a week or two.

Next meeting: Thursday, February 9 at 8am
Submitted by Deirdre Burns