

Win-PAC Board Meeting Minutes
February 7, 2018
10 – 11 am

Summary: Members of the Winchester Special Education-Parent Advisory Council (Win-PAC) met on February 7, 2018 to discuss several issues including the recent decision to pursue hiring an Out of District Coordinator; finalize comments to the School Committee regarding the WPS Strategic Visioning Initiative; discuss formation of a legislative committee; and plan for upcoming events, including the “Basic Rights Workshop” and Special Education Staff Appreciation Day. The meeting began at 10:00 am and was held at the WPS Administrative Building (Parkhurst School).

Win-PAC Attendees: Stacey Irizarry, Co-Chair; Kathy Matrundola, Treasurer and Web Master; Zeina Marchant, Events Chair; and Colette Desmarais, Secretary.

Other Attendees: Pam Girouard, WPS Special Education Administrator; Michelle Dubs Bergstrom, Winchester School Committee Member and Win-PAC Liaison to the School Committee

Not Present: Branda Wilhoite, Win-PAC Co-Chair

Discussion Topics

Out of District Coordinator: Pam Girouard offered background information on out of district placements. Through November 2017, there were 53 out of district placements; however, the number can fluctuate due to extended evaluations with the caseload typically between 50 to 60 students. At present, each school has a special education staff person (supervisor) assigned to serve as the out of district coordinator for students placed out of the school. A dedicated Out of District Coordinator will afford parents greater consistency when children transition between grade levels and allow current supervisors to focus on special education programming and curriculum. Pam explained that the role and responsibilities of an out of district coordinator are a full-time, year-round job. The Out of District Coordinator also will help WPS identify needs for in-district programming. Win-PAC members discussed the importance of having a dedicated Out of District Coordinator and agreed to express support for funding the position in correspondence and other communications with members of Winchester’s Finance Committee, School Committee and Town Meeting, as well as the Town Manager. The Board also agreed to encourage parents to voice their support for the position.

Comments on Strategic Visioning Initiative: In November 2017, School Committee Member Cindy Bohne attended a Win-PAC meeting to inform attendees about the WPS Strategic Visioning Initiative. Cindy invited Win-PAC to provide written feedback to the School Committee. Win-PAC Co-Chair Stacy Irizarry drafted and distributed the response prior to the Board meeting. After discussing and approving minor line edits, the Board approved the letter, which is briefly summarized below.

- With respect to the Vision’s “Individuals Pathways for Success” beacon, Win-PAC expressed that the extent to which students achieve mastery of work skills and other practical life skills could be a measure of the district’s success and that metacognitive strategies and development also should also highlighted.

- With respect to the “Communities of Collaboration” beacon, Win-PAC encouraged the School Committee to revise language to ensure that it affirmatively captures the special education community.
- With respect to all beacons, Win-PAC offered that project-based learning and a refined homework policy should be considered.
- With respect to the “Healthy Balance and Wellness” beacon, Win-PAC suggested that developing advocacy and self-advocacy skills should be a measure of success and that an anti-bullying curriculum, refined bullying policy, and positive intervention should be a cornerstone.

Formation of Legislative Committee: Co-Chair Stacey Irizarry opened the discussion about the idea to form a Legislative Committee, which stemmed from a conversation she had with State Representative Michael Day about funding for the state’s Special Education Circuit Breaker program. The Circuit Breaker program reimburses school districts for a portion of their costs for educating high-needs special education students with disabilities through both in-district and out-of-district placements. Due to program underfunding, Winchester is expected to have a shortfall in excess of \$100,000. Representative Day encouraged Win-PAC and parents/guardians of children with special needs to weigh in with the members of the Massachusetts Legislature to ensure an adequate program funding level.

To ensure that Win-PAC has a formal structure to keep apprised of, and respond to, legislative activity affecting special education, Stacey suggested forming a Win-PAC legislative committee dedicated to that task. The Board unanimously agreed that participating in such activities is a vital aspect of Win-PAC’s role and agreed to move forward. In doing so, the Board agreed to inform the School Committee members and other town officials about the decision to establish a legislative committee. Sending a letter regarding Circuit Breaker funding will be among the new Committee’s priorities.

Basic Rights Workshop: The Board discussed planning for the annual Basic Rights Workshop, noting that last year’s speaker was well received by attendees. Given the challenge of accommodating parents’/guardians’ schedules, Michelle suggested polling parents about preferred days of the week and times, which Kathy agreed to do. Pam said that she would reach out to the Federation of Children with Special Needs, which provides the workshop presenters.

Special Education Staff Appreciation/Fundraising: Pam started the discussion about holding a Special Education Staff Appreciation event, which the Board unanimously agreed was a great idea. As part of the discussion, Kathy inquired about sending an invoice to the Parents Inter-School Council (PISC), which agreed to make a contribution to support Win-PAC activities/events (e.g., speaker fees, meeting refreshments). The Board discussed other groups that may consider making a donation including EnKa and the John and Mary Murphy Education Foundation. Pam suggested reaching out the Federation to get guidance on how to structure the receipt of donations. The group discussed initial ideas for the staff appreciation event including timing (June) and location (high school cafeteria).

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:00 am.