

# **Final Report of the Mayoral Committee on Designing Franklin's Education for the 21st Century**

**Overview:** In June of 2018, Franklin, NH Mayor Tony Giunta established a Mayoral Study Committee to look at Restructuring Education for the 21st Century for the students in our city. The purpose of the committee was to provide suggestions on ways to restructure the primary (kindergarten through grade 12) education system that has not fully incorporated the societal and technical changes resulting from progression into the 21st century. Continuing reductions in financial assistance from federal and state entities and the increasing burden on the local property tax payer to make up these shortfalls portends an education delivery system that must recognize these challenges and look for innovative ways to streamline the learning process while providing our students the best opportunities for success.

## **Committee Members:**

Chair: Jo Brown, City Council

Chris Kneeland, School Board

Sandra Burney, Retired Teacher/Administrator, Merrimack Valley/Hopkinton School Districts

Carol Hodgdon, Retired Teacher, Franklin High School

Tony Schinella, Director of Communications, NH Dept of Education (Only available for the June and July 2018 Meetings).

The first meeting was held in June 2018 and all members determined a Vision and Mission Statement were needed. The following Vision and Mission Statements were approved:

**Vision:** To prepare all students to become responsible, caring and involved adults and community partners.

**Mission:** To offer the opportunity to every student to develop their innate talents and desires through a structured, supported school curriculum that addresses individual differences and promotes the development of caring adults able to function successfully in the work environment of today and in the future.

**Process:** The team explored current initiatives in Education including, but not limited to, Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO), and assumed responsibility for disseminating information gleaned from the process. Members visited Hinsdale NH School District where the ELO program is firmly established. The Team also sponsored an Education Day at Franklin City Hall with speakers from the NH DOE, Hinsdale School District and the Uncharted Organization from Manchester which offers science and art instruction via a non-traditional, hands-on teaching method. This organization is currently working with the Franklin Recreation Department as part of their after-school program. There was also a presentation by the Franklin CFO about the funding of the city school district and how the Franklin SAU budget is impacted by reduced state funding.

The team goal was to listen to all who were interested in providing feedback on issues and concerns regarding the school currently; items that needed to be addressed and thoughts about the best way to move forward. All meetings, except the first meeting which was a meet and greet for the team members, were open to the public. One of the first groups to provide feedback in the summer of 2018 were teachers representing the elementary, middle and high schools.

**Teachers:** The teachers had several concerns:

- A sense of complacency among staff and administration: if nothing changes, the results from year to year will be the same.
- There was a feeling of lack of support from management; and a concern that underperforming teachers were not dismissed but moved to less visible jobs.
- Teachers also expressed an uneasiness about voicing their concerns to leadership; perhaps a fear of retribution – not clear.

- In 2018, 13 teachers resigned from the High School; 9 from the Middle School.
- The teachers also stressed that it was not about the money but the lack of support and that there was little opportunity for mentorship.
- Promotion of students to the next class appeared in some cases to be based on who knew whom, not necessarily on the academic ability of the student.
- They expressed a need from more support on discipline issues; in a few cases students were not treated the same for the same offense.
- According to the teachers there was no collaboration on the buying of supplies for the 3 school buildings, therefore more money was likely spent on duplicate supplies – money that might have been available for other needs.
- The teachers wanted to see more transparency between the School Board and the City Council - a real willingness to work together for the best of both.
- The consolidation of the city and school Financial and Buildings and Grounds operations should be looked at in an effort to free up money and allow more transparency in the budget process and better utilization of building and grounds support staff for the safety of the students.

**Public Comments:** Below are summarized many of the comments received from the public during our meetings. Comments are available on the DFE website either in the minutes or as attachments.

- There was an extended discussion about the city being able to increase the percentage of tax dollars to the school – recognition that improvement needs to be made in this area. However, breaking the tax cap or modifying the formula is considered by many to be the answer, but it would require a vote by the public and a change to the city charter, both actions that past attempts have shown the majority of City residents do not support.

- There was concern about students reaching middle and high school with limited reading ability as well as the high turnover of teachers.
- A suggestion was made that there should be consideration of using contract teachers to fill curriculum gaps versus hiring a full- time teacher with full benefits – and realize potential cost savings that way.
- One member felt that the use of a “math interventionist” to assist students struggling with understanding math could help the teacher situation. This is apparently under study at Winnisquam High School.
- Better use of the Huot Career and Technical Center in Laconia by our Franklin students was favored by the public. Limited enrollment at Huot may preclude students in some programs).
- Similar to the teacher comment there was a desire for more accountability – do not pass on students who are not ready to move up to the next grade - make sure students entering middle school are able to read and do math close to grade level.
- A suggestion was made to look at contracting out of Food Service vis-à-vis the action taken in Conway; are there any savings to be made?
- Again, echoing the suggestions of the teachers, look at any opportunities that exist within the City and School District to consolidate functions and work together to simplify operations such as: finances, payroll, buying of school and office supplies, buildings and grounds maintenance, lawn care and snow removal, single medical plan for city and school employees where higher numbers of eligible professionals might provide savings and keep an equal and consistent system for all employees.
- Feedback received from our email suggested looking at eliminating the SAU office, freeing up administrative resources to provide funding for direct teaching tasks.
- Along the same line an email also suggested looking at consolidating our SAU with the one at Winnisquam, again to free up monies for direct teaching duties. Both of these suggestions likely also reflect the continuing loss of students in the SAU.
- There was also discussion about the LEAN process that all the City departments, the City Council and the School will be undergoing in the coming months. It is

hoped that there will be opportunities to refine and consolidate redundant practices and thereby free up needed funding for school priorities.

**Current State:** Since these comments have been gathered, there has been positive forward movement in the school system especially at the elementary school and that movement reflects the committee's vision and mission for our students. At Paul Smith School the Leveled Literacy Intervention program for the Title One students is yielding positive results. Testing of students has shown measurable growth in their reading ability. The reorganization of the school into four houses each made up of grades K-3, with one encompassing the Preschool program, and adopting the No Grade, No Grade philosophy is helping to develop best teaching practices throughout all grades. Teachers and staff work to personalize the education of every student to help them be successful. This will positively impact their ability to be good students going forward and help them develop the skills to be valuable and contributing members of the community. It is key that our youngest students are given every opportunity to learn in the best way that fits them, and in a caring, family environment. These changes at the elementary school are laying the groundwork for a better prepared, emotionally more stable student coming through the Franklin education system.

At the Middle School Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) is being enforced to encourage students to show respect, act responsibly and to be safe. Through diagnostic results provided by the i-Ready Program, measurable growth in Math and Reading is being realized. Also there has been a lot of attention in recognizing and publishing Students of the Week and trying to instill a positive self-image in all the students.

In the High School a partnership with Colby-Sawyer students is giving participating students a view of college requirements and life as a college student. The Robotics team is showing great promise and proving to be an opportunity for comradery and true team building both locally and at the State Robotic Competitions. However, students while improving, are still below state mean averages on SAT scores.

**Recommendations:** The Franklin School System has struggled for many years. The cut in Federal and State funding to property poor communities like Franklin, where the

burden of making up that difference falls to the tax payer has taken its toll. Recent movement in the state legislature shows some promise of fund restoration, but may not happen anytime soon. However, the school does receive significant special program aid from the State based on the demographics of our student population, and this money must be reflected in the annual school budget to show a true funding picture. Therefore, it is incumbent on both the city and the school to find ways to become more efficient, streamlined and zealous in their desire to make sure that all city and school monies are spent in the very best way possible. The current LEAN waste reduction effort being led by Richard Ellert is a very big step in that direction, but the participants on all sides must be willing to drop old defenses and listen to positive solutions that can move the city and school forward. Therefore, the committee recommends:

1. Serious consideration of the consolidation of the City and School financial operations and Buildings and Grounds support. This feedback was given by **both** the teachers and those who attended our public hearings.
2. Look at ways to streamline the SAU office – utilize current staff to support both city and school functions and free up the Superintendent to spend more time on academic endeavors.
3. Take teachers seriously – don't make them the funding source for budget shortfalls – look to non-academic areas first for cuts before removing the most important individual in the school system – a trained and valued teacher.
4. Consider using part- time or contract teachers to teach special areas of interest where a full-time teacher with benefits may not be essential.
5. Have a transparent budget that shows how much is being spent on every line item in both the City and School budget.
6. Administrative support to include time for professional development of staff.