

THINK TANK
Meeting Minutes
October 9, 2008
7 PM MS NLibrary

In attendance: Sarah Abrahamsen, Christina Bennani, Debbie Bermudez, Dennis Blair, Berta Erickson, Jay Prager, Barbara St. Jean, Kevin Welch

1. Reviewed minutes from 9/29 meeting and handed out committee contact list. Added new members to contact list.
2. Set schedule of meetings. Next two meetings are 10/16 and 11/6. Then meetings will be held first Thursday of every month ongoing.
3. Berta opened with question to group "Where do you think the district is?"

RESPONSES:

- Feels district is in good shape financially. We need to have ongoing mindset of efficiency. Taxes won't save us.
 - We should look at funding formula for State Aid. Do we have opportunity to lobby for more state aid.
 - We need to look at budget which goes up each year higher than cost of living increases. Need to look at labor costs, which account for over 70% of budget. We need to look at cooperative initiatives with other districts (virtual classrooms).
4. Dr. G attended meeting and led discussion on understanding funding formula (based on population, community wealth, property values). Informed group that every time we lose a child, we lose about \$12K in funding. Ideally town should pay 50% of cost to fund district and State should pay 50%. This is not the current split in Groton. We are losing funding year over year and also losing population...a double hit.
 5. Our average class size is now about 25-26..although some classes, especially in HS run with smaller numbers.
 6. Some problems we face as "wealthier" community: no Title I, no/little free reduced meals, no/little bilingual population.
 7. Dr G. further explained funding sources and aid categories on budget revenue lines (transportation reimbursement, Chapter 70, breaker relief (SPED)).
 8. He gave some examples of things that can alter budget..EX. due to influx of more SPED children, 8.4 Paraprofessionals had to be added to district staff that were unbudgeted.
 9. Group discussed topic of virtual teaching/cooperative education initiatives with other districts.
 10. Discussed "what is this group's mandate?"...To look at district finances from 30,000 feet..think out of box..try to look for big/innovative/creative solutions. EX: districts decision to close Prescott.
 11. Group decided to start as one group instead of two sub groups to brainstorm ideas and then assess merit. We should assume the School Committee/Finance Committee has already scrubbed budget clean..so don't overspend time on budget cleanup.
 12. We decided to email Jay our thoughts/ideas before next meeting.