

## **REPORT OF THE PITTSFIELD HIGH SCHOOL TUITION STUDY COMMITTEE**

**I- PURPOSE:** In response to numerous citizen requests for a study to examine the feasibility of educating Pittsfield High School students 'out-of-district' and to determine if this would be a worthwhile money saving approach to help control the overall taxes borne by Pittsfield taxpayers, to be conducted by a committee outside the school district, the Board of Selectmen created the High School Tuition Study Committee ("Committee").

The Committee was made up of seven members, all with an open-minded approach to determining the total cost to educate all Pittsfield school children from pre-school to Grade 12, if the high school students were tuitioned out-of-district. This approach differed from that presented by the school itself, which focused on cost comparisons for high school students only.

The Committee felt that cost comparison to educate Pittsfield's entire student body should be derived from the proposed 2017-18 School budget. The Committee felt this would represent the changes in insurance costs, personnel and special needs for the upcoming year that would be most prudent to use for comparison.

**II- POSSIBLE RECEIVING SCHOOLS:** The first order of business was to determine which area High Schools would be willing and able to absorb 180 to 200 PHS students, and the cost thereof. We contacted six schools, and received favorable responses from four of them. Merrimack Valley, Pembroke Academy, Concord High School and Coe-Brown/Northwood Academy were willing, able and anxious to educate Pittsfield students, with all but the latter agreeing they would take our entire population of high school students. In order to properly assess the financial viability of such a change, we established a baseline using Concord High School, for a number of reasons. Pittsfield has been sending buses to Concord High for approximately 35 years in order to provide our students with Vocational Technical training that is available there; Concord is approximately 15 miles from PHS and is therefore what we would consider a reasonable travel distance; Concord High offers a wide range of courses of study to its approximately 1200 students; Concord is one of the highest overall rated schools that we had inquired to; and Concord's tuition was the lowest of the four.

**III- TRANSPORTATION CONSIDERATIONS:** Due to the fact that essentially 'double' routes would have to be run due to starting and ending school days, combined with a state requirement that students spend no more than an hour on a bus getting to or from school, additional transportation was a big consideration. H.A. Marston, Inc. provided us with the numbers we needed to be confident that we gave ample consideration to this element of the equation. Their bus company has served Pittsfield with cooperation, dependability and competitive prices since 1937. Our transportation cost would rise \$144,296 after eliminating the present two Concord buses and Pittsfield High School extra-curricular/sports trips from the total cost of adding the needed five buses daily to Concord.

**IV- BUILDING REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE:** One of the main considerations of

the study was the cost to operate a remaining school to educate grades pre-school through eight. Keeping two schools open if the high school were to be tuitioned out-of-district would not be an option; nor would moving middle school children to the current elementary school due to lack of room (as well as the reported short remaining life of the heating system). Therefore, our committee focused on the costs of operating the current school building, with the elementary school children moved to that location.

State requirements for accommodating pre-school and kindergarten children in the physical structure were minimal; and included in-room bathrooms for kindergarten and slightly larger classrooms (that already exist). Additionally, a state established school rehab program which has never been funded is a stronger possibility this year, according to the NH DOE. Demand for funds will be high, however consolidation of school buildings moves applicant towns to the top of the list.

By moving the elementary school children to the high school, the town would then have a building at its disposal for either use by the town or for sale. The Committee did not consider the future of that building as either an asset or a liability as its ultimate fate would be purely speculative.

The Committee concluded that reducing the two schools to one in the present Middle/High School would save approximately \$371,000 per year.

**PERSONNEL:** The Committee arrived at a reduced cost for teachers and support staff of approximately \$2,559,561. To arrive at this figure the Committee extracted the positions identified as high school related educators that would no longer be necessary if those students were tuitioned out-of-district. There was no reduction in SAU operating costs, as there was no evidence a savings would occur. One could argue that there should be a reduction in staff, therefore a cost savings, but the school would have the option to continue to operate the SAU as is. Principal's office figures were reduced by the costs associated with the present high school as well, which would leave one principal's office for grades pre-school through 8.

**TUITION COSTS:** Concord High School's quoted \$11,500 cost per student was the lowest of all the potential receiving schools. Pittsfield grades 9-12 are projected to be as high as 188 students next year. Given the number of presently home schooled children there may be now in Pittsfield (the state no longer requires up to date records for home schooling) that could potentially re-enter the system, this figure could increase if parents chose to send their children to Concord High. The Committee used the state average attrition rate for high school students, arriving at an estimated group of 184 students total, grades 9-12 for next year. Tuition cost therefore, at regular student rates, would be \$2,116,000.

The largest unknown is the additional cost charged by the receiving school for students with special needs that can be educated alongside regular students. Because the needs can vary greatly, the actual costs are hard to predict. In discussions with the Concord School Superintendant., the most relevant projection seemed to be a comparison with the town of Deerfield. Deerfield has been sending its 175-200 high school students to Concord for many years, including 27 special needs coded students this year. Pittsfield presently has 28 such students. According to the Concord Superintendant, Deerfield pays approximately \$500,000 additional per year to educate special needs

students that attend Concord. By adding an estimated \$500,000 to our base tuition cost, a total of \$2,616,000 is our projected tuition estimate.

The cost to educate special needs students attending regular high school should not be confused with the cost of special education students from Pittsfield that are educated outside the district now, to facilities that can accommodate their specific needs. Those costs were left in place as they show in the proposed school budget for 2017-18, as the Committee could not predict a change.

**CONCLUSION:** The Committee concluded that the cost to educate the entire student population of Pittsfield would be reduced by \$170,265 from the School's proposed 2017-18 budget of \$10,230,732. The bottom line effect on the amount that would be raised by assessment cannot be determined as grant figures for the upcoming year remain partially in limbo, as well as the potential loss of certain grant money that we presently receive due to having our own high school. The Committee's research was exhaustive and complete, and we unanimously agree that our figures are as comprehensive as they can be.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Committee was evenly split on the vote to recommend a change in high schools for Pittsfield students. The argument that student-based learning being practiced at Pittsfield schools would be either superior or inferior to the dramatically wider range of course studies available at Concord High School was not part of our research. We simply make note that Concord High School does offer considerably more courses than Pittsfield and is ranked much higher than Pittsfield in virtually every category ranked by the NH DOE, however, the Committee's study focused on the cost to educate our children, and the impact that has on our struggling tax base. While the Committee had initially expected a significant savings if high school students were tuitioned out of district, the Committee decided that the verifiable savings and the impact of variables outside our control to be too close to recommend that Pittsfield make such a change based on finances. If, at some point in the future, tuitioning students outside the district were to be reconsidered, it would have to be based on costs or revenue information that this committee does not have at its disposal, or because the town decides a different path to an adequate education should be pursued.

Respectfully, the High School Tuition Study Committee

Carl Anderson, Chairman  
Jennifer Mika, Vice-Chair  
William Miskoe  
Dan Green  
Ray Ramsey  
Nicholas Hayes  
J. Brandon Giuda