

TO THE NEWINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT
NEWINGTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Because of the quality of the recording made at the Public Forum on the evening of June 6, 2006, this document is not a complete record of all statements made by the public in attendance that evening.

**EXPLICATION
CLAUSE**

*Asterisks ** have been place at points where the speaker's words were inaudible on the tapes.*

The original tapes are on file at the SAU 50 Office.

On June 6, 2006, at the Newington Public School, the Newington School Board conducted a forum, to which the townspeople were invited to give their input on the future of the Newington Public School.

PRESENT: Jack Anderson, Deirdre Link, Helen Maldini; Newington School Board; George A. Cushing, Superintendent of Schools; James Katkin, Business Administrator; Helen Rist, Principal, Newington Public School; Lyonel Tracy, Commissioner of Education; John Stokel, Principal, Portsmouth Middle School; approximately 100 Newington Citizens.

PRESENT

School Board Chairperson, Helen Maldini, opened the Public Forum at 6:30 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Mrs. Maldini addressed the, approximate, one hundred persons in attendance: She said, on behalf of the school board, I welcome you this evening and thank you for your concern. The school board was approached in April and asked to consider forming a committee to investigate the possibility of tuitioning Newington elementary students to another school, and the possibility of a voucher program for students attending private schools. According to RSA 195, this process could take up to two years. We believe there is a great value in having a community school and we are using tonight's public forum to tell you why. After our presentation, we would like to hear any comments or questions you may have. We feel this process will help inform you, the public, and give us direction before we make a decision.

PRESENTATIONS

Introductions

We have two guest speakers this evening: Dr. Lyonel Tracy, Commissioner of Education for the State of New Hampshire, and Mr. John Stokel, long-time principal of the Portsmouth Middle School.

First I would like to introduce Dr. George Cushing, Superintendent of Schools.

Dr. Cushing said: Thank You Helen. As Helen said, in April, Mr. Mazeau, who is sitting right here, and we are very glad he's here, came to the school board meeting and he presented research that he had done on how cost effective the Newington Public School is. In the back, we have handouts of his presentation; we have handouts of things we will be speaking about tonight. Mr. Mazeau's presentation and research was thorough. His statistics were cited. He used the

**SUPERINTENDENT'S
PRESENTATION**

Department of Education website; he used the SAU 50 Office, so, I had no problems with his research. He did a lot of hard work here. But, in some cases he has drawn conclusions about the numbers that he presented that may not be telling the whole story as to the value of the school. Because, I think, it's more than just numbers. So tonight, as Paul Harvey would say, we'd like to tell you the rest of the story.

Mr. Mazeau's conclusion is that the Newington Public School has nearly the highest cost per pupil in the state and therefore it is not cost effective. It does have one of the highest costs per pupils in the state, we're not arguing that. He believes that, based on the costs, the school should authorize a study to explore delivering a more cost effective education for Newington's elementary age students. The school board and the district school administrators recognize that Mr. Mazeau did his homework and presented a very legitimate request. The school board and the administration have had two work sessions to consider Mr. Mazeau's request, and we reviewed the information and did our own research. It has become clear to us that the questions to be answered are -- "What is a local elementary school education worth?" and "What is the value in keeping the school open?" As we studied these questions, it was obvious to us that quality education can't be measured in dollars alone. There is a lot more that goes into that. Tonight we are going to present our findings and our feelings on this subject.

When we are done we would like the audience to speak. We need as much input as we can get on the value you see in the NPS and we want to know what your opinion is on whether or not the school board should invest the energy, the time, and the public dollars that are going to be required for a comprehensive study. Under state law, the study would be a two year process, and that would be minimum, that would involve a warrant article and a petition to the State Board of Education. It would also involve finding a community; a local community close by, that would accept Newington's students either K – 6 configuration, or K – 8, and accept our student population for the long-term; the law says at least ten years.

Before I begin with a brief overview of the board's position, I would ask that, just to set some rules, you hold any questions or comments until the board finishes its complete presentation.

I will reemphasize that the board recognizes that there are two legitimate sides as to whether or not the Town of Newington should maintain its own elementary school. However you feel about this subject, all dialogue needs to be respectful and not of a personal nature.

If you have feelings and are not comfortable presenting them in this kind of a forum, or if you need more time to think after we've presented some information, tonight, the board is encouraging you to give us written comments, and we'll accept written comments up until June 18th.

And then the plan is to have a school board work session on June 20 to review comments from this evening as well as written comments that come in after tonight's meeting, and then the board will make a decision as to what action (if any) they will take in response to Mr. Mazeau's request.

I would ask that if you picked up the handout on "The Value of the Newington Public School" you take that out please.

We start off with Financial Consideration. The per pupil cost for 2006-2007 is projected at \$21,586. Per pupil cost is a hard thing to understand, so we have here our business administrator, but I'm not going to get into that level of detail, what I will say is that there is a state formula that is used and it tells us what expenses can be used to be considered as operating expense, and once we've determined that, we take that formula and we plug in our numbers, then all we do is divide the number of pupils into that number and we come out with the cost per pupil. So obviously, the larger the population of your school the smaller the cost per pupil. An increase of ten students, for example, would drop the per pupil cost to under \$18,000.

Financial Considerations

Cost Per Pupil

The percentage of the town's spending in 2005-2006, which goes just to the school, is approximately 37.14%. This percentage is anywhere from 60 - 85% of the total town budget. Total budget appropriations for K - 12, over the last eight years, have increased an average of 3.42%.

I've added Donor Town under financial considerations because this is the monkey that never gets off our backs. I've been superintendent now, going on my sixth year, and since the day I started I've been fighting this battle of donor towns and the way we fund education. I can remember early on Commissioner Tracy, who was superintendent in Portsmouth at that time, myself, Jack O'Reilly, and selectmen from the other donor towns, went to Concord to testify against donor towns. You sent millions of dollars out over that time to other communities to lower their tax rate, or to support different projects they have in their communities. Representative Hughes from New Castle introduced legislation that allowed donor money to stay in the town as a trigger so that you can use that money if you are a donor community to put toward you own schools, so you don't have to send it out to other communities. Last year, because of the new law, you stopped becoming a donor town; this is the first year you haven't been one but you are very close. New Castle is still a donor town. The receiver towns, when they lost money in the shift with the new law, filed suite and the superior court upheld the receiver towns, which means that they are overthrowing the law where there are no donor towns. The state has now appealed that, and it sits in the state supreme court, and we hope that there will be some kind of resolution and decision in the fall. It is very likely that Newington can go back to being a donor town. I bring this all up, and I know Jack O'Reilly and the selectmen have been staying on top of this because, unless

Donor Towns

you have a school in your community, there is no way you keep the money here instead of sending it out to other communities when you have excess tax.

Currently the enrollment is 49 students this year. Enrollment over the last 20 plus years has ranged from a low of 36 students to a high of 64 students. Some of you who have gone through this school and have been here a long time know that it ranges. Enrollments are fluid. They need to be measured over time.

Enrollment

Newington students are well prepared upon entering the Portsmouth Middle School. John Stokel, here, the principal, is going to speak to the preparation of the students. I taught at Portsmouth Middle School 20 years ago. I taught the Gifted and Talented Program. John Stokel was my boss 20 years ago. This could be interesting. I had some real stars from my few years there: Noseworthy, Lamson, Conner, Rhiner, Haskins, and many more, and I just loved the students that came from Newington, I loved their innocence, I loved their creativity, they thought outside the box. I thought it was very special and I was honored to have taught them.

Educational Considerations

Newington students enjoy a low teacher student ratio assuring more personalized instruction. Newington students have excellent educational resources, including up-to-date textbooks, state-of-the-art technology, and teachers who are dedicated to best practices. You have what you need to perform good education. I would add that you also have one of the very best principals I have ever worked with. We are in the process, and Deirdre sits with me on a committee in Portsmouth, to look for the new high school principal. We keep being told, "You'll know the right one when they walk through the door." We knew she was the right one. You have a very dedicated staff to work with her. They are all "Highly Qualified" by the state, and this school is in a great position to continue to move forward. There are some very good things that are happening.

Over the last five years the SAU, working with each of our schools, has developed a blueprint for curriculum review and evaluation. It's been recognized at the state level through our professional development plan. All of our curriculum is aligned to the state standards. New student assessments are in place. And now, we are doing something is real-time, measuring a kid's fluency; a student's fluency in reading. We are proud of some of those accomplishments.

Curriculum

We have a new teacher professional development and evaluation plan in place that assures the main focus is the student. Anything you are going to do in professional development has to tie back to instruction in the classroom. It is a circle. Goals are set at the SAU level; set at the school level. They are set at the teacher level and they are all aligned, and are squarely focused on meeting the needs of the individual learner in the classroom. Goals, such as differentiated instruction, meeting the student at their own level, and

Professional Development

their own style, you can only do that if you have small class sizes. We also, and this is over the last few years, rigorously and formally evaluated the teachers based on the goals that are set out. We have a new evaluation plan.

I would also like to point to the wall there and have you look at that banner -- NEASC Accreditation. Newington is one of 191 elementary and middle schools throughout all of New England that is accredited. That is a voluntary process that you put yourself through if you think you're good and you are measured against these standards and they are high standards. And this town has done that; they were willing to do that. And you know there are thousands of elementary and middle schools but there are only 191 that can fly that banner.

**NEASC
Accreditation**

We have been selected, in SAU 50, as a Follow the Child SAU, an initiative begun by Commissioner Tracy. Dr. Tracy, when he became Commissioner, took a look at the way "No Child Left Behind" measured student progress. He and I actually had several conversations over five years about how we measure student progress, and the measurement was with a test. You measure one third grade one year, and then the test is taken again the next year by another third grade, and you were measuring two different groups of kids. Dr. Tracy said we need to be measuring individual children; we need to follow the child with personalized education. Dr. Tracy is leading the nation; he has eight other states with him. This is something we talk a lot about here, and we have the ability here, because of our size, to be asked to be one of the pilot schools, and we are. There are going to be fifteen in the state of New Hampshire.

Follow the Child

I wanted to talk about local control. I think this is probably the most obvious part. If you give up a school you give up the local control. There will be people who will speak to that. But, I think tonight's meeting is a good example. If you have an issue you can bring it before the school board and it can be addressed. There are people, your neighbors, that you can call and talk to. I think that's very important. You can dictate the level of educational resources you want in your school. You can say how long you want the school day to be; how big you want your class sized, what policies you want to follow, it goes on and on. Local control really drives the values of your community, and I think it's, along with the library, the heart of the community. The school is the identity of the town. And many of you have shared a common experience because you have gone through the little school, gone to the middle school, and gone on to Portsmouth High School. I think that's great that there's a common experience that we can build from. If you were to tuition to other schools, I've already said this; if you wanted to provide vouchers for parents, if that was a consideration, the school board, because they are a public school, and they represent a public school district, has an obligation to make sure that every student that receives a voucher would have an equal chance to the school that the voucher would be going to. You have to have equitable opportunities to get in a school,

Local Control

and not everybody can get into a Phillips Exeter, or St. Thomas. It must be a level playing field so everybody has the same opportunities. The public school has to accept all the students, so if we were looking for something like that we would be looking at a public school. And, when we talk about vouchers for private and religious school, I cite the New Hampshire Constitution where the Supreme Court has ruled on that and I can get those citations for anyone who wants those. You know, we have those two big obstacles, but I think we also have an obligation to make sure that any students, if they are not going here, are going to be held to the same rigor that we expect with our students. No Child Left Behind has proficiency standards that all public school students must meet, and there are all kinds of sanctions, and so on, to make sure that happens. And we've developed our curriculum, and our testing and our assessments so that we can deal with that. That doesn't happen if you go to a private school. They are not under the same standards that, by law, we are required to follow. I think that there are compelling reasons why we shouldn't entertain a study.

Our recommendation is that we maintain an elementary school in the Town of Newington,

**School Board's
Recommendation**

The school could consider developing a special program, that there is a need for. This is done in a lot of districts, usually it's done around special education, but that doesn't have to be. There are other things that we offer, that people will tuition in for it. We want to continue to implement the recommendations that were put forward in the NEASC report. We want to design and be part of the exciting initiative of the Commissioners, to Follow the Child Model of Students Assessment, and want to open up the program to other districts on a tuition basis.

We want to continue to develop and implement personalized educational goals for all Newington students. Continue to monitor the state funding issue and make sure we keep Newington positioned to keep the money in the town that is designated as donor money, improving the school and the community. We can do some things like we could have a state-of-the-art technology program with technology that could belong to the town with money that we might be sending out. There are things that we could do and ways we could brainstorm, but mostly we want to maintain a school that is seen as vital and seen as a "gem" of this community.

The school is moving forward; I think we are poised to continue to do good things. We have the right people in place; the right staff in place, and it is our recommendation that we keep the school open. We are going to talk some more and, of course, no decision has been made. We are going to listen to all input.

At this time I would like to introduce Commissioner Lyonel Tracy, former superintendent of the Portsmouth School District and a good friend.

Commissioner Tracy said: Thanks George. It's nice be home on the seacoast, and be ten minutes from home when I leave here at eleven o'clock. I say eleven o'clock tonight because I want you to know I am an old rural New England boy, so it's especially pleasing to be here and look at this turnout because this is how I grew up. My dad used to bring me to these gatherings when I was a little kid up in Maine, and sometimes I got a littler nervous for my dad. They didn't always come to blows, but he said that that is small town New England politics and you've got to go there and you've got to express yourselves. I hope you don't come to blows, but I know one time, when I was a little kid, we had quite a lively town meeting. It was really lively, it was over an issue similar to this; we were going to, now, have to join five other school districts and close our entire school district, and become a school administrative school district up in Maine. There were some people plugging for that based on costs, and some of the same things you're considering, and my dad and others were trying to maintain their own small town educational system. And, they did have quite a spirited evening to the point that I did think my dad was going to come to blows. They didn't come to physical blows, but they did exchange some words that I hadn't heard around our household. The next morning, it was interesting because, I joined my dad for breakfast. He had quite a habit on Sunday mornings, after a spirited town meeting, to go down to the local restaurant and get together with guys to get coffee and doughnuts, so I decided I would like to go with him, and he said, "Sure, come along." Well, the guy that he was in the fight with, practically, was there, and my dad came in and said, "Harold, how are you?" -- shook his hand and said, "Come on over we have a seat for you." I said, "Dad, what are you doing?" This guy cussed you last night." Dad said, "Son, that was last night. We live here, this is our town." So, when I share with you a few thoughts, and I'm going to share just a few thoughts, it is not to make a recommendation, obviously.

You've got lots to do. You are the ones who have to decide what you value for an education, how much money you want to spend on that education, and where you want your kids to get educated.

My biases are that I grew up in a small town and for many years, in elementary school, I attended a two room schoolhouse in Mount Vernon, Maine. Mrs. Currier taught kindergarten, first, and second in one room, and Mrs. Holt taught third, fourth, and fifth in the other. We had no indoor plumbing; at home or at school. And, I know that's hard for you to believe being the young man that I am standing up here. I'm going to tell you this, I still remember Mrs. Currier and the personalized education that she gave to me, so if my biases come through, believe me they have nothing to do with your consideration of costs, because I would not know what you are deliberating on. I do know as I go all across this state, all I want and all I keep asking for from every single school; for the thirteen students in Landaff all the way to some of the larger schools in the cities of Manchester and

Nashua, I say, "please offer a personalized education for every single student." And, I asked every single school district to please become a Follow the Child designated school district so that we start driving accountability and educating for our kinds the New Hampshire way rather reacting to a federal law. Believe me, in the first year we have had a tremendous response to this initiative, and this SAU is one of them. I love visiting this school; I've been here many, many times. I see students work. I see where it's coming alive with student work. I've been in three schools in just the last four days, and every time I go to schools, I look for student work; I'm looking for teaching and learning when I'm visiting classes. Usually I take a State Board Member with me because they like to visit schools too.

So, here's what I would like to say to you; you need to really decide, and you need to mix-it-up, just like you are doing here, and you need to be heard. I commend the school board for holding this forum. I think it is the right way to do it. I think people should be heard and I hope you all express yourselves. I hope, though, too, that you will remember when you are talking at that mike, that the last person to speak before you, and the one after you, loves kids just as much as you do. So, when you are being very vocal about how you feel, whether it has to do with costs, or whether it has to do with test scores, or whatever you decide to put over that mike, just remember that everybody in this room loves the kids in this town; in this community, just as much as you do.

My dad did teach me a good lesson. I'm glad to be here; I'm glad to be supportive of your children, wherever they go to school, but I do have some biases, no question. I've got a group that has come to see me four times from Surry. What happened in Surry was that they belonged to a cooperative regional school district. And, if you read the RSAs on cooperative school districts, it gets very, very confining. If I were drafting the legislation, I wouldn't allow it, from what I've experienced as Commissioner. Here is what happened in Surry – the Monadnock Cooperative School Board of fourteen members decided to close the little Surry Elementary School. This was the heart of the town for years, and years, and years. You would say, "Well, Surry must have had a voice in that?" They did. Of the fourteen member school board, they had a .89 vote, and that's all they had, that's the only vote that they had, and the rest of that cooperative school board voted to close their school. They came with their senator, they came with people from their town and they said, "What can we do, commissioner, to get back the Surry school?" All I could say to them was, "You've got to convince the Cooperative Board to reverse their decision." They proposed a charter school and they were going to lease the little elementary back to the charter school; the board voted against that. So they got this little elementary school in Surry and they can do absolutely nothing with that little school because they had no control over it. So, when you think of giving up your school, is that the thing you want to do? If you think they can get as good an education somewhere else, and you feel the cost is too high and is

prohibitive, and say this is where I stand, just know this, it is very, very difficult to get it back. Once you give up a school, you very seldom will ever get it back. If that's the decision you make, then we will work with you in whatever process you have. It's likely that once you leave it you will never educate in this community again. Whatever decision you make we will lead you through that at the department. But, please make sure that these kids in Newington get the personalized education that everybody else in this state is getting. Because, that is what we need for every one of our students, and we certainly need it for the ones in our community.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. Maldini introduced Mr. John Stokel, Principal of the Middle School.

Principal Stokel said: Thank you Helen. Earlier she said, "The long-time principal." I started teaching at Portsmouth Junior High School thirty-two years ago, and I became principal twenty-five years ago. And, it's kind of like my second home. During twenty-five years these students from Newington have been coming to Portsmouth Junior High School, now Portsmouth Middle School, for seventh and eighth grade. During my twenty-five years as principal I have never once had a teacher or a team of teachers come to me concerned about the preparation of the Newington students. If anything, they always talk about how well prepared they were. Students from Newington come to us and may go into our advanced program in English and mathematics. Many will go into international language. Because of that international language program, they can then go onto the second level of international language.

Portsmouth Middle School Principal's Presentation

Many are involved in band and chorus, which meets during the school day. Almost one half of our student population is involved in band or chorus, or both, and we know that programs like that really give the youngsters a connection to their school. Band and chorus, for some youngsters, highlights the success of their day.

We also have students with special needs, some from Portsmouth and some from Newington, and we also have program for special needs students.

I look at the youngsters from Newington, and many are involved in extracurricular activities; some athletics, some Destination Imagination, some in Math Counts, some homework club, and they are able to participate in all these programs, so, again, they come to us very, very well prepared.

I want to share with you some comments from your eighth graders. All too often we adults have all these perceptions, but we need to talk to the kids and ask them what their feelings are, and how they see things. So, talking to some of your eighth graders, they do believe

that making that change in seventh grade is good for them; making that transition to a larger school, which then makes the transition, if they continue on to Portsmouth High School, even smoother. They are able to become part the class, and continue on and graduate four years later from high school. But one thing that they mentioned was how important and how great it was to go to a small elementary school; a school where they knew their teachers and their teachers knew them well. A real personalized education. And, they said at times in seventh and eighth grade, they sometimes thought that maybe it would be better to be back in that smaller situation. Because they were coming from a school of sixty kids to a school of five hundred. They did feel that that change really helped with the transition. And a lot takes place with a transition – opportunities to come and visit, kind of a move-up day, and then during the summer visit the school, find their rooms.

Many have participated in our sixth grade athletic programs. Some years Newington has had enough students to have a basketball program; I remember when Peter McDonald had a basketball team. I mention Peter, because Peter's brother and I went all through St. Pat's together, and we go back many, many years. Peter was younger than us, even though he doesn't look it. But, many students from Newington have been involved in programs in sixth grade, the athletic programs which are open to all the Newington students. This year some of the young ladies came over and played on the field hockey team in sixth, seventh and eighth grade.

Our school is open to all of your students, but I think that has changed over the years because I can remember years ago when the Portsmouth School Board really thought of the "towns" as second class citizens when it came to voting.. They really did not have a voice. When, in fact, now I see the board in Portsmouth open to the thoughts and ideas and concerns of the folks from Newington and the surrounding towns; more than open to those concerns and thoughts. We have fantastic communication with your Superintendent, George Cushing, and with your principal, and with your board members. Helen Maldini is never afraid to pick up the phone and call me when she was concerned about something and I will tell you that ninety-five times out of a hundred she is right. So that communication is there.

What I need to tell you is your youngsters are well prepared. When I look around here this evening, if I can be so presumptions as to give you an opinion, that is, I think the schools are the glue of a community. It's what holds a community together. All the folks that are here this evening about this issue just would be such a loss for your community. People are concerned, they are not just sitting home saying, "let them do it, or they are going to do it anyway." They want to be here and give their thoughts. And I appreciate that because this is impressive. Thank you for letting me speak.

Mrs. Maldini thanked Mr. Stokel and introduced Mrs. Helen Rist, Principal of the Newington Public School.

Principal Rist said: Tonight we want to hear about the value you place on having a small, unique school, as part of this community. For many generations, the Newington Public School has been the hub of the town where families gather and share a common bond. A school is a home to more than books, pencils and paper. The Newington Public School is proud of the close family feel it creates for all of its students and families.

NPS Principal's Presentation

What I have seen at this school is a culture that embraces each child as an individual. The advantage this offers students is countless, but I will try to capture some of what I have observed.

The first and most visible example of this school's benefits has been to watch the number of students who have made tremendous growth academically, emotionally, and socially, despite the number of challenges they brought with them every day. Having spent the first twenty years of my career in large schools, I know that the individual attention, flexibility, and innovative practices that have assisted these students are unique to this school. Teachers and staff intimately know each student; they know what makes them tick, what creates a feeling of success, and what will upset them. The staff all understand the privilege of this relationship with the children.

There are many students here now whose future will be brighter because of the individual planning for their needs. I have seen students who could not face the school day's academic and social challenges with much hope because of learning and behavioral issues. Today those same students are working in their classes on grade level curriculum and can be seen playing at recess with children of all ages, laughing, happy and feeling successful.

For some students it has taken the collective efforts of many at the school to work together to create an environment that allows for the students' ups and downs, starts and stops, difficulties and successes. For example, an upper grade student who becomes upset by the grade received on a math test may need a few minutes away from the pressures of the classroom to regroup. The first and second grade classroom, that has warm memories and a familiar face, may be where this student could go to regain their sense of self-worth. There is nothing like reading to a first grader curled up in your lap to bring you back to what really matters. I didn't see that in a large school.

For other students it only takes finding out that hot lunch is their least favorite meal that day to upset their apple cart. If you haven't had breakfast either, then your day is not off to a good start. Never fear-our cook knows this is not your favorite meal and has saved some of her pancakes from the other day in the freezer just for you. I definitely didn't see that in a large school. And I could go on and on -- ask my friends, I usually do.

We pride ourselves on meeting the needs of all children -- no matter what they bring to school. No child is shrugged off because we are too busy to care or notice. No child is made to make due because there is not time for them. Everyday, each child has the entire staff looking out for them. I have never seen, in large schools, the degree of cooperative and collaborative problem solving for students that exists at NPS.

The degree of knowledge and accountability each staff member has for each child is a benefit and a responsibility. You have to be a special person to work at this school. You are expected to be available at any time to help any child. We expect each staff member to address the concerns they have about any child. Here, we know that it is not someone else's job; we don't tell ourselves, "another teacher will deal with it," each of us has the desire to assist each child. If you work at NPS, you know this, and it is part of why you love it here.

But caring for children is not enough. We strive to provide high quality educational experiences to all students. To help us evaluate our programs and determine areas that need strengthening, NPS is one of only 191 elementary schools in six New England states that voluntarily participates in the accreditation process provided by the New England Associations of Schools and Colleges. NEASC is the nation's oldest regional accrediting association whose mission is the establishment and maintenance of high standards for all levels of education, from Pre-K through the doctoral level.

It has already been two years since we completed our accreditation process and one year since we received our report from the visiting committee giving us full accreditation. Dr. Cushing, the school board and staff were very pleased with the commendations we received; and the recommendation contained no surprises. We have completed several of the recommendations already and have mapped out our plan to complete the others. This ongoing process of evaluation enables us to stay current with best practices and aim for goals that exceed the minimum state standards.

It would be naïve of me to think that our school is the end all and be all for every student. It is not -- no school is. However, great progress has been made in the last few years to improve our ability to reach students at both ends of the spectrum. We have established choices and curriculum opportunities for students who perform above and beyond their grades curriculum. A student generated and student managed literary magazine is one example of these opportunities. We have also been very fortunate to acquire a master teacher to coordinate and service our special needs population. This has also provided improved and increased monitoring for these students at the middle and high school levels. Ask our parents, they will tell you. These additions have further complemented the highly qualified, master educators that teach at NPS.

In closing tonight, I would like you to know that this school offers highly qualified, certified educators that private schools don't require. This school offers what most children in larger, busier schools are missing today; a sense of belonging, a feeling of family, a network of caring.

Thank you for coming -- thank you for caring.

Mrs. Maldini thanked Mrs. Rist and introduced School Board Member, Deirdre Link.

Mrs. Link said: Let me begin by pointing out a few facts that may or may not have been considered if we tuition our children to another district. The concepts of our school board, as we know it, would radically change. As it stands now, we have, as a board, a community control over school policy, curriculum and technology.

**SCHOOL BOARD
MEMBERS
PRESENTATIONS**

Deirdre Link

As members of the Newington School Board, we sit on the following committees: Secondary School Advisory, PMS Feasibility Study and Technology, Communications, Budget, Policy, Professional Development, Authorized Regional Enrollment Area for Portsmouth High School, Transportation and Bus Contracts, Evaluation of the Superintendent, Facilities, and currently the committee for hiring the Principal and Vice Principal for Portsmouth High School. We would lose all representation in these areas if we tuition our children out-of-town.

We must also calculate the cost of maintaining an empty school building.

If we tuitioned our children to Portsmouth, they would be subjected to a lottery system, with no control over the elementary schools they would attend or guarantee that siblings would stay together. The cost of these losses would be immeasurable. Not only to our children, but the entire community. How can we put a price tag on that?

Mrs. Maldini introduced Jack Anderson.

Mr. Anderson thanked everyone for coming to the forum, saying we, as a board, specify to you that we really appreciate everyone being here this evening and that it was very important to hear your comments.

Jack Anderson

As the school board communications officer there are a few important items concerning our communications program and its policies, which I would like to mention to all of you.

Our Public Communications Program consists of many different vehicles besides this Public Forum tonight.

On a regular basis we have: Articles in the *Newington Neighbor*, which inform the public of current events and works in progress by the school and school board; budget sessions and public hearings where we discuss expenditures in detail and get feedback from concerned citizen, and these meetings are posted publicly and usually occur every year in January and February; Informational articles in the newspapers about what events are taking place at the school, which we invite the papers to report on; school board meetings, which occur every month on the second Tuesday, at 6:30 p.m., at the Newington Public School, unless posted otherwise;

At two board meetings each year we have a Junior School Board Member Program where the board invites parents and students to communicate their concerns about random school issues. This allows us the privilege to exchange new ideas and learn from each other.

Our building administrator holds, "Coffees with the Principal," which allows her time to communicate with parents on a regular basis.

Once a month the Newington School Supporters hold a meeting at the school, which we have a representative attend.

In addition to these communication vehicles we have ways for the public to communicate with us, which are well documented procedurally in our Policy Manual, which is at the school and the SAU 50 Office. The policy, "Public Concerns and Complaints," which we ask all members of the public to abide by, specifically states that the school board will not hear complaints from individual parents until those complaints have first been raised with their child's teacher and principal. We certainly ask you to observe this policy this evening. You and your child's privacy is important to us. If not resolved, those complaints are to be taken up at the SAU Office with the superintendent of school, who will, in turn, bring the complaint to the school board.

As individual school board members, if someone from the public needs to contact us we can be reached at our homes but we prefer you contact us through the SAU Office or at a board meeting so all board members can discuss your concerns as a team.

It is our hope that by explaining our communication efforts to you, you will realize how truly important you are in this process. Communication is a constant work in progress, i.e., we all need to keep working on it. Indeed, it is also a 'two-way street,' so it is vital that we hear your candid comments this evening.

Thank you again for coming tonight we are looking forward to hearing your comments on this very important issue concerning your town and your children's education. Be candid with us tonight, and we appreciate your comments.

Mrs. Maldini thanked Mr. Anderson.

Mrs. Maldini stated that a lot of information has been covered. We have talked about the education our students receive; what we would be losing by tuitioning out-of-town. I feel we have just skimmed the surface on the value of our elementary school to this community; not the cost, but the true value of having our children close by.

Helen Maldini

Every day from the classroom to the playground, in grades K through six, the values of respect, courtesy, and cooperation are obvious. It's rewarding to watch the students interact with the Newington Fire Department, Newington Police Department, and Mrs. Marks at the Langdon Library. An additional value is the history of this school, and the generations of families that have been through these doors.

The school board feels that our school is the heart of our community, and at this time it would not be in the best interest of our elementary children to be tuitioned out of Newington.

Now we would like to open this meeting to you for any questions or comments you may have.

Mike Mazeau was recognized. He spoke about population numbers, and next year's population being 42 students. Mrs. Maldini said that there were two additional students for kindergarten, we there may be 42 to 46 students for next school year.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS
AND DISCUSSION**

Mr. Mazeau asked about the cost per pupil for next school year with additional students. Mrs. Maldini asked SAU 50 Business Administrator, Jim Katkin, to explain. Mr. Katkin explained that he looked at three different enrollment projections; basically the same way but looking at different data. One came up with 46 for next year, one came up with 50 for next year, and one came up with 54. By taking the average of the three, it works out at 50, to which you apply the budget that was approved by the budget committee, ultimately the town, and dividing it by 50 that's what my average was using the cohort survival method, that's when I came up with the \$21,000. Mr. Katkin, in answer to Mr. Mazeau's question about possible per pupil cost, said, because you have such a small sample, the accuracy varies with that small sample. Mrs. Rist is telling us that we have 42 to 46 now, you may or may not have some move in before that October 1st timeline.

Mr. Mazeau said that based on 42 students, that is \$25,200. If we reach 50 students it is \$21,000, right now we are at 44 which puts it at \$23,000 of \$24,000. **

Mrs. Maldini said we had five new students; walk in on the first day of school. As of today, from October 1, with the census, with the cohort, we have six additional children under the age of five; two will go to

kindergarten next year.

Mr. Mazeau spoke of Newington's large industrial base and the \$2,000,000 **

Mr. Mazeau mentioned his comment in April about New Castle having five students and spending \$11,800 per student. He said that he was told by the school board and Dr. Cushing that New Castle was a donor town; there were three towns that were going to be donor towns, and then an amendment to the law was passed. He said he spoke with the State Representative for New Castle, Dan Hughes, and New Castle is not a donor town. They were going to be a donor town there were going to be three donor towns but an amendment was passed to the law, and there are no donor towns. He asked if we did tuition all our students out-of-town I would guess we would pay Portsmouth \$12 to \$13 thousand per student. Would not that money count as a school expense even though we are not operating a building?

Dr. Cushing commented that if you are a donor town, there is a state tax assessed based on your property values and when you have excess money, that is the money sent out to the receiver towns. Dr. Cushing remarked on the New Castle comment saying that at the budget committee meeting, this year; at the town meeting, there were motions made to keep the money in the town, and he asked Mr. Katkin the amount kept in the town.

Mr. Katkin said \$54,000. He then explained that what Mr. Hughes was telling you was about House Bill 100 that was passed by both the house and the senate, there were three towns, one of them was New Castle, one of them was Hebern and one of them was, I think, Jackson, and when they applied the formula on the state level they found that those towns still were donor towns under this definition. So they came back in New Castle, primarily through Mr. Hughes's work, and had an amendment to HB 100 that HB 100 said in essence is "You are going to pay that \$54,000 to the state to be used some other place if you can't find how you are going to use it in your own town, in your own school district. We went back through it and we happened to have some serious special education issues that dealt with peanut allergies so we had to petition the Department of Education, through the Commissioner of Education, to be able to use that excess funding on that particular issue. If we had been denied either by the DOE or the DRA we would have had to actually pay from the Town of New Castle that \$54,000. That's when we got the budget committee involved to make sure that they approved what we were doing; we had them signoff an amendment to allow that to go; got Mr. Hughes involved so that we could have his backing and also get it through the state, otherwise they would have had to pay, but did not because of how we asked for it and because of the need we had to demonstrate. Now it's my understanding – and I will stand corrected by anybody – that if you do not have a school in your town, and you are a donor

town – which you are not right now but may be – then it can only be used in your town – it can not be used for tuition, facilities, i.e., you couldn't put gymnasium on; it's fairly restrictive as to how you are going to use it.

Mr. Mazeau asked about tuition paid for middle school and high school and the donor status.

Mr. Katkin answered that – primarily what you are doing is you are basing it upon what your enrollment is at the school, because it takes into account your percentages of the older formula that took into account your percentage of free and reduced students, it took into account your special education, the number of students that actually had an IEP, let's say, all items like that goes into the formula and that's how they finally came up with it. Right now you are not a donor town – that doesn't mean that you will not be at future times – you have to realize the most important thing to you as Newington is some of the larger districts such as Nashua, Derry, Manchester – they lost money – how did they loose money? – because they are not getting it from the donor status, i.e., Portsmouth, Rye, New Castle, Newington, etc. Now they have gone back to court to try to restore some of this to be able to get that back because now they are making it up on their own taxation thing. Mr. Mazeau said he was, "Now thoroughly confused." Mr. Mazeau commented that, "Nobody knows what the state education funding law was going to look like next year or future years."

Paul Downey spoke saying, he moved to Newington in the year 2000; he has two little boys, one in kindergarten and one in second grade. He said he really looked at this issue. He has biases having kids at the school. He said the issue, to him, seemed to be how much money to spend on education; that he was in favor of limits put on spending; and that he does have biases having kids in the school. He spoke of tuitioning Newington students to Portsmouth or to Greenland. He asked for a show of hands of how many want the school, then a show of hands of people who were concerned with the costs. He mentioned reading in the *Portsmouth Times* newspaper that a Newington instructor won Teacher of the Year award, and also read in that newspaper an article that said that the Portsmouth City Council says school budget "won't fly," saying that their budget is going up 10% per year, and his thought was -- How much is it going to be, realistically, for our kids to go to Portsmouth? He said once we close this school we can't get it back. He spoke of Portsmouth's rising costs, 10% per year, roughly, and with our kids going to Portsmouth we are not going to have a whole lot to say about the tuition.

He said when people look at moving into the town one thing they look are the schools. He said people want good schools. He said he contacted realtors, and checked on communities that got rid of their school and what happened to their property values, and he was told

that since Newington goes up to grade six, even though it does not go all the way to grade 12, property value would not drop too badly. But they said over, about, a ten year time period, our property values would slide down 7% or 8%, and he suggested that a home worth \$500,000 in that time period would be worth \$35,000 less. He spoke of people wanting personalized attention for their students. He spoke of his experience in New York state where small towns near larger urban towns, to save money, allow the larger towns to accept their social services, accept their students, or municipalities, ** incorporated into the larger community, losing its status as a town. He said "Once you lose your status as a town, it's gone."

Will Gilbert spoke. He said he was on the Newington School Board from 1993 to 1999. ** He said there were parents who wanted to send their students to Newington, and parents would provide the transportation. In the board's discussion of accepting tuition students, the other board members got hung up on per pupil cost. He said his challenge to the board, and to any perspective planning committee that might be formed, would be don't look at per pupil cost, and to think of it as marketing. He said "If we bring in 10 kids at \$11,000 that's \$110,000 off our backs. This is really what we are talking about to lower the cost of the school to the citizens. Simple math. ** Just don't get hung up on that per pupil cost because it jumps all over the place.

Jack O'Reilly spoke. He said he was on the Board of Selectmen and that he spent 17 years on the Budget Committee. He said there were two issues: the welfare of the town and the costs of the town and that it was a balancing act.

He said there is still a state-wide property tax – you still pay it – they give it back – it's based on your total property values – if you've raised more than you spend, you send the excess to Concord. He said that when seven of the ten richest per-capita income towns, were receiver towns, he fought that and testified in Concord. He talked about class size. He said he teaches high school science in Portsmouth, and taught many Newington kids, and in his ten years teaching, he's never had a problem with one of them. He said that he has an average class size of 20 to 22, and with that size, it is hard to give a student individual education. He said that his son went through Newington, through the Portsmouth School System and on to college. He said his grandson is now receiving a very specific education. When his son was at Newington, the principal, at that time, took the kids to the Y and jumped in the pool with them, and you don't see this in a larger school. ** Teachers are in loco parentis; in place of the parent, and it's pretty hard to parent 20 or 22 kids at a time. Class size is very important ** Teachers here are highly qualified; and this just isn't a term, it is a requirement of No Child Left Behind. All teachers have to achieve a highly qualified status. Teachers in public schools are required to become certified by the state, we have to recertify every three years, which means a minimum of 75 hours of training every

three years. I know with most teachers, when their three years is up, their cycle is probably in the 200 to 300 hour range. So, vote with your pocketbook; vote with your heart, vote for what you think is right.

Sally Staude spoke. She said her two children do not attend Newington Public School and the child she is adopting will not go there; ** She said, counter to some thoughts ** we are spending \$25,000 a student; Greenland school has higher test scores than we do and they spend \$9,100 tuition. I don't know what we are getting for all this money. ** What do you charge somebody for tuitioning in? We are spending \$25,000 per student, and they pay \$11,000; I don't think I like that. The enrollment is down to 42, and there were a lot of children who do not go to this school. ** She said that her daughter was in kindergarten here, **

Mrs. Maldini said we can't discuss personal issues. ** It's not fair. We can't comment.

Mrs. Staude: ** budget numbers .** we have a lot of kids who are not going to this school, we have a lot ** spending extra money but they feel strongly **

Dot Noseworthy spoke and said: I've lived in this town for 40 years I've put four children through this school. They had an excellent education here, and I don't know ** one of the things that stuck me listening to this is that ** I was asked by the then school board to do ** looking at the past years enrollment, and I went back and I went back many, many, many years and the one thing that jumped out at me as I ** studying the Newington School System back through the years is that during the Depression, when everything was being cut, the school was not touched. They would not touch teacher salaries. They did not cut **. The school was sacred and that's what I think it should remain.

Lane Wood spoke, and said: The question that Mike has presented is the cost per student. ** speaker had an excellent idea of offering \$11,000. The school's operating at 50% capacity. if you were running a business you wouldn't stay in business very long unless you explored other opportunities. I don't understand why we can't have 7th and 8th grades here. Why do we tuition out when we have the school operating at 50% capacity.

Mrs. Maldini said it's the wide range of classes. ** We don't have a music room, they have a full band and choir, they have foreign languages they have home economics. It's the curriculum in itself.

** I know that there are probably issues here but I'm just saying, this is something to explore, I'm just looking at it from ** If you have something that's not operating and at half capacity and what can you do to avoid that. And in all honesty, ** my son never got to go here even though I wanted him to ** But his idea was the best; everybody

else is supporting the school; I think everybody wants that, but I think that we really have to answer the question that Mike asked; we are spending a lot of money for a child to go to school here. And that's the question. It's not the quality of Newington elementary ** not to keep it open ** the question is the cost per student. And that's what we should be addressing ** 7th and 8th grades, I don't know, something along those lines ** but that is the question that we need to get the answer to. I think this is a wonderful school.

Candace Cantalupo spoke and said: This discussion has been on the table for a while. Referring to an earlier speaker, she said she came from Bridgeport Connecticut, which a very large city, and those things do happen and if you are from this small area you don't believe it will happen ** don't give up our community here. I think my thought all along ** bring the population up at the school, and how to market it. The two things that I thought of were holding kindergarten, that might be a big attraction for some people, give them a year to check out the school they might want stay on. ** Now the thing with technology, I think honors looking at a media center, ** and I think since this is a small school we have a lot of opportunity to bring technology to each and every student so that's another thing we can market with technology that larger school can not afford to do. So between those two things ** offset per pupil costs. Because it doesn't cost any more to bring 10 or 20 more kids in here.

We want to have good boards with good people who can handle all that ** We have a good board, we have good ** staff and they can handle all that, and we can grow in this community.

Mrs. Maldini, commenting on Will Gilbert's ideas on tuition, said she thought it was a good idea and that the school board would certainly use its energy to look into tuitioning students into this school, than tuition students out. She then asked if there was anyone who wished to speak further with comments or questions.

** Mrs. Maldini, responding to a speaker's question of who would pay the tuition, and how the students would be chosen, answered that it would be the parents who pay the tuition; and that there would be an application process put in place.

** There were comments in favor of soliciting tuitions.

Lulu Pickering spoke of the need for the district to have a forward looking plan. She said that her kids went through the Newington School **

** Mr. Katkin, responding to a speaker's question of the comparison of per pupil costs of the New Castle School District, i.e. similar size, as opposed to the Newington School District, said, that New Castle actually has, roughly 60 students so their divisor is a little bit more; with more students in a small population the per pupil cost will drop.

But there are some significant differences, also, between the New Castle School District and Newington. One on them is that the New Castle School District doesn't have a food service program. It doesn't sound like much, but that food service program is worth about \$16,000 and you can translate that back talking someplace between \$300 to \$350 per student. The New Castle School District does not have a bus system for its elementary school. What that means to you is that's about \$35,000 Newington has to pay and that's about another \$700, give or take. When you look at the overall staffing there, the staffing is a little bit less than what you have in Newington. They don't have the facility size that you have. They don't have a gymnasium, they go to the Commons Building, which has a gymnasium. So heating and lights intrinsic to that square footage is a little different as well. That's primarily the reason why there is a difference in cost. The teacher salaries are fairly similar. Per pupil cost moves all over the place, especially with small numbers. With the budget, moving two or three students, you would be surprised at how much it changes. It has already been said; you can take on ten students here and you probable won't increase costs \$1,000, depending on how they were dispersed. New Castle once got down to 14 students, and I sat back in 1983 / 1984, and they looked at the same thing you did, closing the Trefethen School in New Castle. Twenty years later they have 60 students. It was an issue that divided New Castle for a long time because it becomes very personal to you. Whether you were for the school or whether you were against the school in New Castle, it was very personal. Those are primarily the difference in costs.

Paul Downey Spoke. He asked -- Are we being shortsighted? ** He spoke about generations going through the school, saying, there will always be people here and there will always be a need for school.

Mrs. Maldini, referring to Ms. Pickering's comments, said that the school is accredited with NEASC, the districts are in a Follow The Child SAU, we are active in Professional Development, and in twenty years we have changed a lot. No Child Left Behind brought many changes, but the Newington school was already involved in many of the NCLB initiatives. She said our teachers were accredited, and we are always working at the SAU to bring things to the next level.

Male voice **

Female voice. ** volunteer at the Newington School. The teachers in this school are phenomenal. Not only the teachers, but the other ** staff people. The children get so much individual attention. I see kids and I see the teachers work with those kids and I see those children grow. I have been able to work individually with some of the children. Teacher work individually with students. If they need help there is always help for them. I don't think you can put a figure on the quality of education. ** The foundation that our children get here in this school is very important, and makes it possible when they go to other district's schools to become successful.

Helen Maldini addressed the Portsmouth High School and Portsmouth Middle School, saying: I have Dr. Lister and Mr. Stokel on speed dial, and also Dr. Cushing. Mrs. Rist interacts with middle school and high school students, almost like a guidance counselor. We also have someone who goes in to middle school and high school and rechecks the tests scores of the Newington children and breaks it down for us. We get the test scores and we get the averages, no names, we also have the Secondary School Advisory Committee, where we sit with the Portsmouth High School principal, Superintendent, Bob Lister, and school board representatives and we meet every two to three month. Deirdre Link sits on the AREA Committee four times a year with the SAU and the Portsmouth administration. Tomorrow, I will be representing the SAU when the Portsmouth School Board presents its budget to the City Council. We are involved at the middle School and at the high school.

Mrs. Maldini spoke of the school building saying: Prior to two or three years ago, there was minimal maintenance. This gym had not been painted in nine years. You couldn't clean the ** We remodeled and put in a nice kitchen, the orange counter tops are gone, we now have stain. The NPS had been written up because of the kitchen; this is the first year we passed. Mr. Katkin and I have been working the last few years on the facility and have gone through the classrooms, and the exterior of the building and now that things are being complete, we are putting down dates to chronicle when things are done, and we can go back and look at what is completed. The original section of the building has never been re-pointed in 45 years. We are working at trying to knock off a few of these things.

Female voice: She said she has two children who have gone through the school and her oldest entered high school this year. When she first came to town she was impressed with the school, but questioned the standard of the academics. She spoke about taking in tuition students. Would we have to raise the standards of the academics because we would be offering them a private school tuition? Would we have to offer them something incredibly special to say you are going to send your child to Newington and pay tuition for the year? Would the criteria for our curriculum change within that scope? Would we have to follow the specific curriculum that all public schools have to follow?

Dr. Cushing answered that we are currently following that curriculum. We are very much involved in curriculum development, and are working very diligently on curriculum. A lot of things have happened over the last five to six years; much of it driven by No Child Left Behind, and some of it driven by our view on where we want to go; some of it is driven by the NEASC accreditation.

Mr. Downey spoke, saying: The consensus I get from the room is that we love the school, but we want to keep costs down. He asked for a

response from the audience, a show of hands of those interested in keeping the school, but keeping the costs down. **

Scott ** spoke of his child's experience in a neighboring larger school district, in comparison to his experience in Newington, and said you can not put a price on that, **

Mrs. Maldini, on behalf of the school board, thanked all for taking the time out of their busy schedules to attend the meeting, and for giving their input, which will help us in making a decision. You've come up with some complex ideas and we are going to have a workshop on June 20, 2006, to reflect on all the information gathered. If anyone would like to make their comments in writing, please submit them to SAU 50, prior to the June 20th workshop.

Thank you again.

The public forum ended at 8:35 p.m.

ADJOURN

School Board Secretary