

# Town of Harpswell Maine

OFFICE OF  
SELECTMEN, ASSESSORS, & OVERSEERS OF THE POOR  
P.O. BOX 139 • SOUTH HARPSWELL, ME 04079

## LETTER TO THE CITIZENS OF HARPSWELL

Telephone  
207-833-5771

October 18, 1993

Dear Friends:

For the past year, we have been charged with overseeing the second phase of a long-term study of educating the children of Harpswell. While the first phase focused on State subsidies and the cost-sharing formula, the focus in this second phase has been the arrangement for delivery of their education. Does the community feel that it is satisfactory and still meets its needs, or is there another arrangement or other arrangements that might be better?

To assist in this study, a Consultant, Roy Loux (former Superintendent of School in Auburn), was hired. An excerpt from his final report to the Committee on Educational Arrangements follows. We would also like to note that the complete report is available at the Town Offices to read, or to be copied at your expense.

The consultant found that although there seemed to be general satisfaction with the educational program in SAD 75, that for various reasons, the community would like to consider the option of building a Middle School in Harpswell, educating our own children K-8, and tuitioning our high school students.

The results of this analysis, which is attached, show that this is feasible. This apparently presents us with an option. We may either participate with the SAD and share in building a 6-8 Middle School in Topsham (at some future date) or we may build a 5-8 Middle School here in Town, and also alleviate the overcrowding at Harpswell Islands School more quickly.

The intent of the original study was to see if building a Middle School in-town, and running our own K-8 system was feasible - not necessarily to answer every question, nor to determine whether or not it is desirable. It does, however, show that it offers advantages that are worthy of further consideration. Although there are other questions that must be definitively answered before a final vote on withdrawal can be taken, such as:

What State Aid Will be available for our construction costs?

Can we deliver a good educational program for all of our students?

What about an Interscholastic Sports Program at the Middle School?

How can we ensure keeping all of our Staff and meeting their needs?

Is this a better option than remaining in the SAD?

Now, you have to decide whether or not to start the third phase, drawing up the withdrawal plan to answer these questions, and funding its completion. This vote will be taken on November 2nd.

If the ballot carries, a Withdrawal Committee will be appointed. The earliest time frame in which its work can be completed would be by this Spring, and it may take longer. This plan would then be brought back to you for a second, and final vote.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your encouragement and support during this study and hope that this report, the Public Hearing on October 18th at the West Harpswell School, subsequent play-backs on Channel 3, and coverage in the press will help you to make up your mind on this issue. However, if you have any further questions or comments, please contact us.

Thank you for an interesting year and we hope we have made a worthwhile contribution to our Town.

Sincerely,

The Committee on  
Educational Arrangements  
William Logan, Chairperson  
Gilbert Grimes  
Henrietta Hubbard  
Clara Hulburt  
Deborah Wright  
Jane Roy

FINAL REPORT

for

COMMITTEE ON

EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

HARPSWELL, MAINE

JULY 1993

NEP NEW ENGLAND PARTNERSHIP, INC.

1441 HOTEL ROAD \* AUBURN, MAINE 04210

## SUMMARY .

During the 1992 town meeting, the Town of Harpswell established and funded the Committee on Educational Arrangements to research and report back to the community the options available to educate students in Harpswell. The committee selected New England Partnership, Inc. of Auburn, Maine to assist in this process.

The study by New England Partnership was conducted in three phases: Collection of Information, Analysis of Options, and Selection of the Most Appropriate Option.

During Phase I, information was collected through the review of written information and meetings with staff, community, and students. The following written information was reviewed:

The current program in SAD #75, with emphasis on the schools in Harpswell and the Middle School.

Enrollment projections prepared for SAD #75.

Costs in districts of similar size to Harpswell.

SAD #75 budgets, including specific costs allocated to Harpswell.

Existing facility plans, needs, and projected plans.

Meetings were held with school staff at Harpswell Islands School, West Harpswell School, and Mt. Ararat Middle School. A limited number of students in grades 7-12 attending Mt. Ararat from Harpswell were interviewed, and three town meetings were held. As a result of these meetings the following general information was gathered:

- Staff was strongly supportive of remaining with SAD #75 because it provides a broad range of services and provides greater opportunity for professional interaction (an underlying concern was the impact on their job status).
- . \* Students interviewed expressed satisfaction with attending Mt. Ararat and felt the new team approach at the middle school helped make the adjustment to a larger school easier.
- . \* Community members expressed general satisfaction with the program, offered in. SAD #75.
- Community members expressed concern about!
  - •The distance and travel time to Mt. Ararat for both student and parental involvement.
  - Overcrowding at the secondary level.
  - The mix of grades 7-12.
  - The cost sharing formula.
- Community members felt the current use of the elementary facilities in Harpswell is appropriate and there is no interest in using one school for K-2 and the other school for 3-6.
- Community members felt costs were important but not the most important basis for a decision.
- There was no interest in an SAD or Union with any other district.

Based on this information, the Committee determined that a comparison of Harpswell operating its own system or remaining with SAD #75 should be the only options analyzed in the second phase.

During Phase II, these two options were compared in relation to educational program, facilities, costs, and control. The

impact of these issues at the elementary, middle, and secondary level were completed and presented to the Committee on February 8, 1993 and reviewed on March 8, 1993.

The analysis was based on the development of a budget for the operation of the schools in Harpswell, findings in Phase I, experience in other school systems, current construction costs and state requirements, and personal experience in education.

A summary of that analysis follows, with a more detailed analysis appearing in Progress Report #2 included herein.

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

### ELEMENTARY LEVEL

#### Perceptions of the Current K-6 Program

Parents and staff are in agreement that the current K-6 ' program has many strengths. The small schools provide for a close relationship between parents, students and teachers that produces a nurturing, caring environment. The location of the schools allows for easy parental involvement and reduces student time on the bus. The options available at Harpswell sch000ls and the site-based management that gives individual schools flexibility in organization and programs was also cited as positive. Concerns expressed included overcrowding and the need for more support services. Lack of flexibility at West Harpswell because of a single class at each grade level was also mentioned as a constraint.

In general, everyone seemed reasonably satisfied with the current K-6 program. Since that time, some parents have raised concerns about the educational program at Harpswell Islands School.

#### Educational Impact

There would be little impact on the educational program at the elementary level, since both options continue the current small, neighborhood schools that provide for parental involvement, and a close relationship between staff, students and parents.

The advantages of remaining with SAD #75 are the opportunity for staff and students to share resources with the district, and continued eligibility for Chapter I services.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

#### Perceptions of the Current 7-12 Program

There is a wide range of opinion in the 7-12 program, however, there is general agreement on the fact that the diversity of both academic and extracurricular programs offered at Mt. Ararat is a positive aspect. There was also general agreement that the time required for transportation and having grades 7-12 in the same building is a negative. There was a difference of opinion on how students adjusted to the move, with students and staff at Mt. Ararat feeling that this was not a problem, and most students expressing the opinion that they were ready for a broader range of activities and friends.' Parents of elementary students expressed some concern about children ready for this exposure in the 7th grade. All agreed that overcrowding is a problem.

#### Educational Impact

The educational impact at the middle school level is the most significant. However, the potential advantages depend on your philosophical perspective. Continuing with SAD #75 provides a larger student base that can

lead to a diversity of programs and activities, while Harpswell operating its own middle school allows children to be in a smaller environment and closer to home, where parents may be more involved. One clear disadvantage to remaining with SAD #75 is a longer bus ride.

## SECONDARY LEVEL

### Educational Impact

The educational impact of tuitioning students in grades 9-12 is the opportunity for individual students to select a high school that can best meet their needs.

## **FACILITIES**

### Use of Existing Facilities

All groups felt that the current use of existing facilities is appropriate. There was no interest and much negative feeling about using one current school for primary and one for intermediate grades. Travel time was cited as the major reason. The current facilities being utilized as K-5 schools are adequate for the classroom spaces needed but do not provide sufficient space for support services. Removal of the 5th grade would create more space. One of the considerations that surfaced during the comparison was that a 5-8 middle school might be better for Harpswell than the more traditional 6-8 middle school, should Harpswell decide to operate its own system. A 5-8 middle school would offer the following advantages:

1. By removing the 5th grade from the two elementary schools, it would provide enough space for students and program without any additions or portable classrooms.
2. It would provide for better utilization of special staff such as art, music, and physical education at both the elementary and middle schools.
3. It could result in reduced administrative costs by utilizing one administrator at the elementary level and one administrator for the middle school and superintendency.

## **COSTS**

### ELEMENTARY LEVEL

The analysis indicated that costs at the elementary level would not change drastically, even though it may cost more to operate a smaller school, because Harpswell is currently paying more than the average cost per student in SAD #75.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

The analysis indicated that costs would be higher at this level because of the need for new facilities, and a smaller student population to utilize the special subject staff.

### SECONDARY LEVEL

Current costs at the secondary level are higher because of the cost sharing formula, so secondary costs would be reduced somewhat because tuition costs are controlled by the state and can be no higher than the state average.

## **CONTROL**

### **ELEMENTARY LEVEL**

As long as SAD #75 maintains a philosophy of site-based management which allows the principal and staff to work with the community to develop programs and allocate resources for that school, there would be little change in control as it affects program.

The advantage to Harpswell operating its own system would be the opportunity to address facility needs without the need to fit them into the system's long range plan and the need for the entire district to approve any new facilities.

### **MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL**

Clearly, this would be an area that would provide for more control over, program, facilities and costs if Harpswell operates its own program.

### **SECONDARY LEVEL**

When you tuition students, you have no control over program, and are subject to continued acceptance on the part of the receiving district.

## **GENERAL**

The ability to address needs such as educational program, elementary facilities, and budget reductions without the requirement of the entire district's approval brings the control closer to the community.

During Phase III the information developed was presented on the local public access channel and a public hearing was held to determine community sentiment on this issue. At the conclusion of the public hearing, attended by approximately 70 citizens, a straw poll gave a clear indication that the issue needs to be pursued and that more information is desired.

## 5-8 MIDDLE SCHOOL

The building of a 5-8 middle school would offer the community of Harpswell several advantages over the more traditional 6-8 middle school. They include:

1. By removing the 5th grade from the two elementary schools, it would provide enough space for students and program without any additions or portable classrooms.
2. It would provide for better utilization of special staff such as art, music, and physical education at both the elementary and middle schools.
3. It could result in reduced administrative costs by utilizing one administrator at the elementary level and one administrator for the middle school and superintendency.

Projecting 225 students in grades 5-8 would require a facility with the following square footage:

12 Classrooms @ 800 s.f.	9,600	s.f.
2 Special Education Classrooms @ 800 s.f.	1,600	
1 Art 1	1,200	
1 Music	1,000	
1 Technology	3,000	
1 Home Economics	1,260	
Multi-purpose (62 x 96)	5,952	
Locker/Shower	1,800	
Administration	2,000	
Media Center	2,042	
Conference (6 @ 250)	1,500	
	<hr/>	
	30,954	
Service Areas (20%)	6,190	
	<hr/>	
	37,144.	s.f

Based on current construction costs of approximately \$100-\$110 per square foot, the cost of the new facility would be approximately \$3,714,400, plus land costs.

This cost compares with \$3,265,400 for a 6-8 school. The difference of \$449,000 is basically for four additional classrooms. The proposed facility would provide a student-teacher ratio of 19:1 based on projected enrollments. Should enrollments be greater than anticipated, there is room for growth.

The difference in annual costs the first year is approximately \$50,000. This could probably be saved in operating costs through more efficient use of staff.

## **BUDGET SUMMARY**

<u>Account</u>	<u>K-5.</u>	<u>6-8 Central Office</u>		<u>Total</u>
Academics	920,294	463,738		1,384,032
Administration	115,996	38,989	96,065	251,050
Buildings & Grounds	151,958	65,009	5,000	221,967
Guidance	42,715	21,358		64,073
Health (1/2 Nurse)	12,350	6,175		18,525
Library	32,117	16,059		48,176
Food Services	14,185	7,093		21,278
Special Education	135,652	69,592	157,085*	362,329
Athletics		17,930		17,930
Co-Curricular	5,900	5,412		11,312
Transportation,	43,209	28,807	133,742	205,758
Computer	14,185	7,093		21,278
Total Operating	\$1,488,561	\$747,255	\$391,892	\$2,627,708

\*Includes \$120,390 in placements outside the district.

Operating Costs based on 575 students. Cost per student: \$4,570

## DEBT SERVICE

The impact of debt service on costs is a major consideration in operating your own system for the following reasons:

1. You must negotiate your continuing share of existing debt in SAD #75
2. You need to incur additional debt for a new middle school.
3. If a system withdraws, the state will not participate in the costs for new construction for a period of 5 years unless the need existed prior to the withdrawal.

### Costs of Withdrawal

Currently, the existing debt on West Harpswell School is \$852,529.

1993-94 payments on West Harpswell are \$176,290.

Existing debt for SAD #75 is \$6,761,934.

1993-99 debt service payments excluding West Harpswell total \$924,685.

Based on the current cost sharing formula of 36.08%, Harpswell's share would be \$333,626.

The range of costs for existing debt service could be from \$176,290 (1993-94) for West Harpswell debt to \$509,916 (1993-94) for West Harpswell plus your share of the existing SAD 475 costs.

Assuming the state would participate in the existing debt service, the maximum cost would be \$247,181 based on existing

state valuation and the circuit breaker.

### New Costs (Debt Service)

The costs for a new middle school are projected as follows

#### TOTAL COSTS

	6-8 School	5-8 School •
New Construction	\$3,265,400	\$3,714,400
Land	375,000	375,000
Total	\$3,640,400	\$4,089,000

#### ANNUAL COSTS FOR 20-YEAR BOND

Principal	\$182,020	204,470
Interest @ 6%*	218,424	245,364
Total	400,444	449,834

\* Interest will decline each year as principal declines.

Total Costs	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Ranae</u>
Existing	247,181	176,290	70,891
New	449,834	400,444	49,390
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	697,015	576,734	120,281
Current Costs	175,226	175,226	--
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	+521,789	+401,508	120,281

The range of \$120,281 is dependent on the agreement reached with SAD #75 and a 5-8 vs. 6-8 middle school.

The current local assessed valuation of approximately \$375,000,000 would project a tax increase of 1.39 to 1.07 mils for debt service.

## TOTAL COSTS

The current costs are based on 674 students, while the projected budget is based on 766 students. In order to get a reasonable comparison, the same number of students should be used. In order to do that the per pupil costs are utilized and applied to the number of students.

### Comparison Based on 766 Students

	Projected Costs	Current Costs	Difference
Operating Costs K-8	2,694,038		
9-12	921,086		
	3,615,121		
Less 5% State	180,756		
Total Operating Costs	3,434,366	3,497,556*	-63,190
Debt Service	697,015	175,225	+521,789
Total	4,131,381	3,672,782	+458,599

\*  $3,077,812/674 = 4,566 \times 766 = 3,497,556$

### Comparison Based on 674 Students

Operating Costs	3,180,606*		
5% State	159,030		
Total Operating Costs	3,021,576	3,077,812	-56,236
Debt Service	697,015	175,226	+521,789
Total	3,718,591	3,253,038	+465,553

\*  $3,615,121/766 = 4,719 \times 674 = 3,180,606$

It appears that operating costs would not be significantly different under each option. However, while operating costs may remain relatively the same, there is a significant increase in debt service costs, since you must continue to support existing debt in SAD #75.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on our year-long involvement in Harpswell, we have found sufficient reasons to pursue the issue of withdrawal from SAD #75. These reasons include:

- The cost sharing formula.
- The overcrowding at Mt. Ararat.
- The 7-12 arrangement that places this range of students in the same school and on the same buses.
- The budget process that has forced reductions within the district, with specific impact on the staffing at the schools in Harpswell.
- The postponing of addressing facilities needs at Harpswell Islands School.
- Recent concerns about educational issues at Harpswell Islands School, and the ability to deal with these concerns.
- This issue has been studied for a number of years and needs to be addressed and brought to a conclusion.

For the above reasons, we recommend that the process of withdrawal be further pursued and brought to a vote so that both SAD #75 and the Town of Harpswell can complete the appropriate long range planning necessary for an effective educational program.

The current study indicates that the withdrawal of Harpswell from SAD #75 is feasible; i.e., possible, with some advantages and disadvantages. It has not answered the question of whether it is desirable. In order to answer that question, specific information needs to be obtained, including definitive answers to the following questions:

1. How will educational services be provided in the district?
2. What is the time schedule for the transition and how will students be accommodated during that time?
3. What new facilities are needed?
4. What portion of debt service will SAD #75 require Harpswell to continue paying?
5. How will secondary students be accommodated?
6. How will existing staff serving Harpswell but employed by SAD #75 be affected?
7. What will, transportation arrangements and costs be?
8. How will the district be administered?
9. How will current assets and materials be distributed?
10. What grade organization will be utilized?
11. How will special needs students be accommodated?

This information can be obtained in several ways. The first is to initiate the withdrawal process. If this is done, specific legal steps need to be taken. A copy of the requirements and time line is included in this report.

The second way is to continue to collect the same information, but in a less formal manner so that the community can have more information on which to base the formal vote to begin the withdrawal process.

In either case, the information needed would be available to the community before any final vote on withdrawal was taken.

Each of these methods has some advantages and disadvantages, and the Committee must decide which is best for Harpswell at this time. A summary of the advantages is as follows:

### Start the Withdrawal Process

1. Decisions reached would be binding and actual costs known.
2. The withdrawal petition and vote would indicate whether there is enough interest to proceed to the next step.
3. Less time would be required to reach a final determination.
4. The Town would need to act only once to continue funding and complete the process of gathering information.'

### Continue Information Gathering

1. There would be no legal restraints on the committee makeup and time lines.
2. Information could be gathered in a cooperative, rather than an emotional and competitive manner.
3. Persons seeking more information could obtain it before choosing to vote for the withdrawal process to start.
4. More time might provide more information on SAD #75's solution to the middle school concern.

### Summary

We believe that the Town of Harpswell should continue to pursue the possibility of withdrawal from SAD #75 so that this matter can be settled for the next several years, and all concerned can concentrate on the educational needs of students, regardless of the organization chosen. We feel that the residents of Harpswell need more specific information before a final vote is taken, and as noted above, there are several acceptable alternative ways to gather that information.

This recommendation is based on the information gathered over the past year and summarized in this report.

## COMPARATIVE COSTS

### Comparison with Similar K-8 Districts

District	Pupils	Per Pupil Cost
Richmond	452	\$4,202
Raymond	512	\$4,779
Arundel	316	\$4,635
Great Salt Bay	400	\$4,742
Average		\$4,590
Harpwell Estimate K-8		\$4,570

### Comparison with Current Costs

#### New K-8 District Plus Tuition

Total Costs	\$4,026,654
Less 5% State Aid	201,333
	\$3,825,321
Cost Per Pupil (766)	\$4,994

#### Current Costs (SAD #75)

Total Costs	\$3,253,038
Cost Per Pupil	\$4,994

#### Comparable Costs at Current Students (674)

New. K-8	\$3,365,956
SAD #75*	3,253,038
	+112,918

#### Comparable Costs in 5 Years (766)

New K-8	\$3,825,404
SAD #75*	3,696,716
	+128,688

Does-not include new construction in SAD #75.