

## **Tuition Students - Important to Both Programming and Taxpayers**

It is time once again to revisit the question of tuition students. A quick update shows that Barrington, Deerfield and Newmarket have all reached out to Oyster River in order to determine the feasibility of having their students attend Oyster River High School. I liken it to them asking us to dance. None of these school systems has asked us for a date and clearly no one has asked us to be engaged. But, it is very possible that one, two or all three will ask us out and as a District we need to be ready to give an answer.

Each system is asking us a variation of the same tuition question. Barrington wants to know if we will take some of their students, we currently educate 64 Barrington students at ORHS. Deerfield is asking if we would educate approximately 188 of their students which represent all of their high school level students. Newmarket is also inquiring if we would be willing to educate all of their approximately 300 students.

Clearly we cannot meet the request of all three school systems. Just as clearly, we need to have an open discussion about what the implications are of saying no to all and what it means to say yes to one or more. Oyster River is fortunate to have so many suitors, but it presents its own unique problems.

So how did we get to this point? Enrollment has declined from a high of 2,400 students ten years ago to 2,000 students today. Projections indicate that in the next ten years ORCSD will shrink another 400 students to an estimate of 1,600 students. The high school currently has 620 resident students and 64 tuition students from Barrington for a total of 684 students. Using the New Hampshire School Administrators Association Capacity Study as a guide, the high school has a functional educational capacity reflecting the ORCSD class size guidelines of holding 915 students. Using the State of New Hampshire maximum class size guidelines, the high school can hold 1202 students - the high school has openings for 295 tuition students.

### **The Choices:**

Option 1: Accept no high school tuition students and become even smaller.

- High school course options become limited
- Curriculum becomes far more limited
- Class size likely to increase
- Cost per student increases
- Staff lose jobs
- Inefficient use of a beautiful facility

Option 2: Accept only Barrington tuition students.

- Likely will fill only 1/3 of available seats
- Already attending
- The students who have attended have represented their town well
- They have choice to attend other school systems

Option 3: Accept only Deerfield tuition students.

- Fills 2/3 of available seats
- No high school therefore less transition issues
- Will need to hire staff
- Helps maintain current program and philosophy

Option 4: Accept both Barrington and Deerfield students.

- Fills most available seats
- Allows ORHS to maintain and expand academic programming
- Will need to hire staff
- Do not have own high school therefore less transition issues
- Barrington enrollment not guaranteed
- Helps maintain current program and philosophy

Option 5: Accept only Newmarket tuition students.

- Fills all available seats
- Allows ORHS to maintain and expand academic programming
- Stable, long term relationship
- Willing to pay more per student
- Newmarket High School exists so transition issues likely
- Will need to hire staff
- Helps maintain current program and philosophy

As I stated in December, tuition students can help ORCSD in two fundamental ways:

1. Assist in keeping the programs at our high school that have contributed to the District's excellent reputation; and
2. Assist in helping the District contain escalating costs.

In order to keep the quality program options we have for our students we need a "critical mass" of students. The cornerstone of our high school is to offer as many choices as possible in order to meet the needs of all our students. Should student enrollment decline precipitously, then individual courses could face elimination as enrollment decline to levels below District class size guidelines. ORHS relies on student choice to engage students in learning in areas they want to pursue. Tuition students help mitigate the loss of enrollment and assist in maintaining student choice.

Tuition students also assist the taxpayers of ORCSD. Currently the District projects that we will receive over \$800,000 in revenue due to tuition students. If we did not have this revenue, there are only two solutions, cut programming and staff or ask the taxpayers to make up for the loss of \$800,000. Neither option is appealing.

Currently ORCSD is in discussions with Newmarket, responding to a Request for Proposals (RFP) to Barrington and responding to inquiries from Deerfield. As ORCSD has more information, we will be sharing our findings with the ORCSD community.

By encouraging the growth of tuition students we are working to maintain programming as well as be fiscally responsible.