

# Stockbridge School Board Act 46 Update and School Happenings

## Act 46 - What's Going On?

### **Act 46 Committee**

The Stockbridge Central School (SCS) School Board has formed a committee to conduct a self-study as a proposed means in which SCS can meet the Act 46 goals regarding equity, opportunities for students, and financial efficiency. Team members include school board members Janie Feinberg and Carl Groppe, PTO president Jenny Austin, teachers Ollie Brown and Donna Gallant (also PTO), parents Charity Colton, Joe Pimental, and Joe Nolet and community members Marilyn Edgerton and Kim Robertson. If you would like to join the committee or want to share your thoughts, please feel free to reach out to any committee member. We expect to continue to meet weekly on Tuesdays at 6pm in the SCS library through the end of the school year and as needed over the summer to keep momentum and formulate the stand-alone alternative structure plan, which is (at this time) due in mid-November.

### **Current Legislation**

- It is important to note that legislation regarding Act 46 has been constantly changing.
- SCS currently receives a \$75,000 small schools grant (SSG). There are a number of schools across the State that are considered “isolated”. The legislature is currently working on rules regarding revising the criteria for schools to receive the SSG. Stockbridge is currently on this list and has a history of being recognized as “geographically isolated” and has received this in the past. The final ruling on this is anticipated to be announced at the end of September. This grant and its criteria is independent and not contingent on compliance with Act 46.
- The current rules in legislation H.513 state that we may meet the requirements for a “side-by-side regional educational district structure” IF Rochester, Bethel, and South Royalton become a “newly merged district, together with an existing unmerged district”. Stockbridge then could be a stand-alone “existing unmerged district” under this legislature criteria. However, if only two of those three schools merge it is unclear whether it will be acceptable to the State that Stockbridge is a stand-alone school.
- Based on current legislature a merger with any surrounding school could potentially lead to a school closure. As the rules currently read, five years after a school merger there may not need to be a Town vote to close a school. Instead, the decision to close a school is decided by the combined School Board. For example, under a merger the newly formed school board could lead to more representatives from another (larger) school, resulting in fewer Stockbridge representatives, which could potentially vote to close our school without approval from town residents. This does NOT mean that a merger with a neighboring school will result in a school closure; there are possible avenues to negotiate alternatives to closure.

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### **The Current Plan of Attack**

- We are in the process of setting up an Act 46 website where you can find the most up-to-date information.
- The committee is working to develop an alternative structure plan to be submitted to the State by mid-November.
- We are tuned into what is happening with neighboring schools in case one should become available for merging with SCS to meet the goals of Act 46 regionally, should that option be considered beneficial to our students.
- At this time we do not know what the financial implications are of either merging or remaining as a stand-alone school, nor do we know what property tax implications will occur. If we keep our elementary school for grades pre-K through 6 and tuition our students grades 7-12 as we've been doing, we will be uniquely positioned as the only town and school around offering this type of educational program (young ones learning close to home, middle & high school choice for families). This may provide an opportunity to potentially attract families to our town.
- Analysis shows that closing SCS may result in higher taxes as we will need to tuition all of our Town's pre-K through grade 12 students elsewhere.

### **Stockbridge Central School – Did you Know?**

There is a renewed energy within the School, School Board and Act 46 Committee to improve school and community interaction. Here are some of the exciting developments going on at SCS.

#### **Full-Time Pre-K**

Currently pre-K is offered at SCS three days a week, half-days. Beginning in the 2017-2018 SCS will be offering full-time pre-K. This is beyond the State's requirement of schools needing to offer pre-K a minimum of 10 hours a week.

#### **Grades 5/6 Stockbridge Research Project**

In the 2017-2018 school year, the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade class will be conducting a historical research project on the history and future of Stockbridge. Under the guidance of classroom teacher, Ollie Brown, librarian Donna Gallant, and the support of local townspeople and our historical society, students will research, map, report, and present their findings about the history of the schools, businesses and farms in Stockbridge. As part of this students will visit Stockbridge sites to learn more about the history of the Town. Younger grades will also be a part of this study with 5/6 grade leaders guiding them through portions of the bigger project. We view this as a community building opportunity for the school as well as the town.

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### **Farm-to-School Program**

Rebecca Pimental of Luce Farm is the new SCS Farm-to-School (F2S) Coordinator. The newly formed, dynamic F2S team at SCS includes Rebecca and Joe Pimental (owners of Luce Farm), teachers Ollie Brown and Donna Gallant, food service manager Mary Kathryn Naples, and Jordan Swank, site coordinator for SCS afterschool and summer programs. Jordan and his wife Julie (garden manager at Farm & Wilderness in Plymouth) of Stony Brook Road have vast experience growing and teaching about food as well as food initiative fundraising. With SCS's long history of school gardens and healthy eating, we are in an exciting place to take student learning opportunities and community building to the next level. Stay tuned for abundant gardens at SCS (around since 1999!), more school taste-tests that lead to increased healthy offerings at lunch, afterschool cooking classes and, new this year, weekend family cooking classes! The F2S team is beginning to plan exciting fundraisers for the F2S program including a Farm Dinner at Luce Farm with music, motivational speakers, and great local food.

### **Stockbridge PTO**

The Stockbridge PTO is very active in our school. During the 2016-2017 the PTO sponsored the following:

- Gymnastics field trip for grades K-2
- Books and Bagels program for grades K-2
- Teacher Appreciation Week bulbs and food goodies
- Class pet for grades 5-6
- Felting Workshop for grades 3-4
- Teacher survival kits at the beginning of the school year
- Book Party providing books for the school and a book for each student
- Community mailing to enhance visibility of the school and PTO
- Wonderfeet Kids' Museum field trip for Pre-K
- Mascot election supplies (congratulations to the fox!)
- VSO performance funding
- Sound Studio construction to enhance reading opportunities
- Jeh Kulu dancing and drumming workshop and performance (with funding from the Trustees of the Public Funds)
- Boys with Wings registration sponsorship
- Safe Arts Residency for grades 5-6
- Brain Pop Junior online subscription for grades 1-2

For the 2017-2018 school year, we will continue to be active in our school and community. The PTO is also working with the grades 5/6 teacher Ollie Brown to coordinate an overnight trip to the Boston Museum of Science funded by the PTO.

### **Cross-School Alliances**

The SCS currently has alliances with neighboring school resources that we intend to grow to maximize the student experiences here at SCS. This is a great opportunity for our students to be connected to other communities, which will also foster increased community networking opportunities.

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### New Staff Joining SCS

After 18 years at SCS, Maggie Smith has announced that she will be retiring. These are big shoes to fill, and the school has hired Melanie King to take her place. Melanie is a native Vermonter with family in Addison County. She loves the White River Valley, having attended Rochester High School for a couple of years and completed her student teaching there. Melanie has been teaching multi-age combinations of 3rd, 4th and 5th grade in Waits River Valley School for 15 years. She is a highly qualified teacher with two Master's degrees including the Science of Teaching Math. With Melanie's wealth of experience differentiating instruction, expertise in math as well as reading and writing, she is a wonderful addition to our faculty.

In addition, the current school principal, Barbara Woods, has resigned, and the School Board is currently interviewing candidates for a new full-time principal.

### Stay Tuned

The Act 46 committee is currently developing a public survey that will be mailed to Town residents as well as being posted online to gather opinions on school-related topics and preferences regarding school structure.

