

The Dover School has for the past twenty years worked hard to improve outcomes for our students. As a note Dover is a Pre-K through six elementary school with school choice for grades seven through twelve. This is written from my memory and will hopefully be reviewed by both the current and immediate past administrator of the Dover School for accuracy. I feel that this could help other schools increase their outcome for their students. Although there is a philosophical difference between different groups as to the importance of test scores of standardized testing, I believe that our program that stresses the importance of early and strong development of basic reading and language arts skills allows students to be able to read to learn instead of learning to read by the third grade allows for students to have greater achievement and take more away from their education than students who struggle with the basic skills-

The Dover School had been a low performing school when reviewing standardized test scores. At the time the Dover School was one of the highest spending school districts in Southern Vermont.

We started to make changes when we hired Susan Mach as our administrator. One of the first school board meetings with our new administrator she proposed that we do away with the Winter Sports program at the Dover School. Her rationale was appropriate- we had our staff and students out of the school building for eight to twelve afternoons a year, and with our test scores as low as they were she did not see this as being justified. As a compromise it was agreed that the parents would be responsible and run the winter sports program, including an alternative for students who chose not to ski. With the parents running the program our Principal was able to use those afternoons for additional in-service training which gave us an additional four to six days of teacher training a year at no additional cost to the school district.

With the Brigham Decision and Act 60 looming around the corner, the Dover School Board adopted a unwritten mantra of “educationally sound taxpayer friendly budgets”. The school board also started looking at all expenses to see the justification.

A Supervisory Union issue was our early education program. The cost of the program to each school district was based on the number of students enrolled in the elementary schools, this being used to assign the percentage of the program that each school paid for. At the time Dover was paying three to six thousand dollars per year for the program which entitled 4 year olds in Dover to a ½ hour lesson with a travelling pre-school teacher once per month. When looking at the budget we asked the Superintendent how many students in Dover were utilizing the program, as we had been told there were only two, and since they were siblings they were taught together, which meant that we were paying the same rate as a high school tuition at that time. We pulled out of the program and started our own four year old program that was based on an educational foundation and not as a day care (one parent informed the school that they child would only attend three days a week to which the parent was told that if they enrolled the child it was a five day a week program). We also denied a

request by parents to extend the length of the day which we based on the recommendation of the Administrator that if we lengthened the program we would just be adding a nap time and a lunch time and that there was no educational value. We also increased the kindergarten program to a full day kindergarten program.

At a school board meeting a board member had just had a conference with the resource room teacher. This member brought to the Board that he had been led to believe that there was not enough hours in the day for this teacher to give the services that each student in our school needed. The Board felt that if the school was not able to provide the required services we would have to hire more staff and actually had gone as far as interviewing candidates for the position of a second resource room teacher. Again, this would have increased our special ed expenditures, and continue to increase our spending at the local level. Our Administrator took a different track- (we never did hire a part time teacher) which helped Dover to reduce our Special Ed expenditures to where we actually had no elementary special ed expenses a couple of years in the recent past.

Our administrator told us that the special ed laws was not about pulling the students out of the classroom for individualized instruction but meant to provide the assistance for students to be able to complete their education in the classroom with the rest of their classmates (inclusionary vs. exclusionary), however many of the staff members did not have the training to allow for the differential instruction that was needed. We used the additional in service training to have directed in service to give our staff the training to work with these students in the class room. We also became dedicated as a Board to have the preschool program with three days a week 3 year old preschool, 5 day a week 4 year old preschool, both programs school based to allow for the professionals in the building to be able to work with the preschool teacher to identify issues and correct them prior to the problem becoming more extreme. We have also been dedicated to full day kindergarten, and single standalone grades 1-3 with teachers who have been trained to provide differential learning for students that need the extra help, along with many student support systems including a Title teacher, after school and summer programs, and a breakfast and lunch program.

This has resulted in improved standardized test scores, as well as our poverty students outperforming our non- poverty students in this standardized testing.

Several years after starting these programs and becoming very budget conscious we were given a copy of Nathan Leveson's book Smarter Budgets Smarter Schools. I read the book in six hours as I could not believe that someone had actually written a book about how we operated our school (I know that he wrote the book about his own experiences but many of the issues he talks about in the book we had adopted and been doing since before he published his book in 2012). There are even ideas in the book that Levenson was unable to do at the schools he operated that we have done with great success.

I believe that this is a very simple model that can be used throughout the state to help reduce the overall expenses as well as provide for much better outcomes for all students.