

WHS Project: Enabling Core Values

By **School Building Committee and School Committee**/Guest Commentary

Tuesday, July 10, 2007

The Wellesley Public Schools (WPS) has long-standing *core values* which provide the basis for all curriculum and organizational decisions:

1. Academic Excellence
2. Caring and Cooperative Relationships
3. Respect for Human Differences
4. Commitment to Community

This list was the most appropriate place to start as School Committee sought to identify priorities and key drivers in Phase I of the High School Building Project. The *Massachusetts School Building Authority* (MSBA) has outlined a series of process “phases” in a school building project as requirements for communities to obtain state funding. **Phase I** is designed to *Identify the Problem*. This phase includes assessments of not only the physical aspects of the building, but also the ability of the building to provide an adequate environment to enable the delivery of education and system values.

The WPS *core values* provided the starting point for School Committee as they developed and approved the following list of key principles (in order of priority) to serve as the foundation for decision-making in the High School Building Project:

Health and Safety of Students and Faculty Of first priority is the physical and mental health and safety of students and faculty. In addition to providing appropriate heat, ventilation and natural light, the school must also stimulate an atmosphere conducive to academic focus and healthy social interactions.

Compliance with Laws and Mandates The building should comply with federal and state laws and mandates including the provision of the space necessary for special education and time in class. School Committee will strive to provide cost effective special education programs to students with similarly defined needs in-house rather than off-site when it is practical and cost effective to do so.

Effective Instructional Methods Strong student/teacher relationships are a key component of effective instruction. Teachers use a variety of instructional methods to reach out to students’ diverse learning styles and interests. Core curriculum class sizes will average 22 students, with a 25-student maximum. Scheduling will allow sufficient

time in each class for in-depth discussion and exploration of topics. Under the current and anticipated learning models, one hour class periods will be the norm.

Emphasis on College Preparation Wellesley High School is primarily a college preparatory institution. Over 90 percent of Wellesley High School students are accepted at one or more institutions of higher learning. The competitive college admissions process will be considered when evaluating the depth and breadth of our academic and non-academic program.

Rigor in the Core Curriculum The first academic priority is the core curriculum in English, math, science, social studies, and Classical and Modern Language. These areas of study form the bedrock of skills most essential to success at institutions of higher learning and in future employment. The course of studies offers a range of academic levels suitable for students of all abilities.

Life Skills and Exposure to Specialized Interest Areas Non-core/elective subjects develop life skills and provide opportunities for students to explore specialized areas for learning and pursuit during and beyond high school. Current elective courses include performing arts, visual arts and applied sciences such as family and consumer science, TV/video, and technology/engineering.

Education and Encouragement in Good Health and Fitness Along with formal coursework in fitness and health, the entire school community -- students, faculty and staff -- will be encouraged to embrace a lifelong commitment to healthy habits and activities.

Opportunities for Competitive Athletic, Performing Arts and Visual Arts Programs Extra- and co-curricular programs provide personal health and development opportunities and provide significant advantages to many students in the college application process. Facilities will be provided and scheduling established to accommodate these programs.

Public Use of School Assets Large, unique high school assets such as the gym, auditorium, fitness center, and cafeteria will be located in places that are accessible for the public's use when these areas are not in use by the school.

The core values provided the basis for the ***Architectural Educational Program***, developed after many months of review with faculty, students, administrators, parents and the Town Moderator-appointed Program Review Committee. As a critical process tool, the *Architectural Educational Program* will ultimately drive building design

decisions. The next article will provide a detailed look at the components of the *Architectural Educational Program* and how it was determined.

This is the second in a series of articles developed by the School Committee and the School Building Committee. For more information, including presentations, reports, and scheduled meetings, please visit the website www.wellesley.ma.gov and go to *School Building Committee* under "Useful Information". Community members are also encouraged to subscribe to the SBC email newsletter (go to <http://wellesley.ma.virtualltownhall.net/subscriber>).