

# **Transition Best Practices and Research Summary**

**Presented to the Windham School Board by the**

*Windham High School Integration Committee*

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## **Background**

Over the past year and a half, the Windham High School (WHS) Integration Committee has reviewed and researched several critical integration considerations (alternative education, college trends, etc.) and reviewed summaries of transition plans from four New Hampshire high schools. The summaries of the transition plans were prepared by Dr. Elaine Cutler and included review of plans from the following schools: Bow High School, Campbell High School, Bedford High School, and Souhegan High School. Traditionally a new high school's transition plan is prepared by a Transition Team composed of the school's principal and other key administrators/educators.

Our general findings indicate that those schools that began "with the end in mind" were most successful. When schools had a vision, a mission and a clear direction that was communicated effectively to the community, they opened with a sense of accomplishment, pride and purpose. Clearly developed, rigorous academic and athletic curriculum plans were essential. Communication via email, websites, large and small meetings, and in print were thoughtful, frequent and understandable. Entire documents were posted on websites for the community. A timeline for hiring, class meetings, team meetings, and athletic schedules were developed. Inclusion of students in many and varied capacities gave students a sense of importance and ownership in the process.

## **Best Practices and Research Findings:**

1. **The Right Team:** It is critical that the Transition Team that is selected understand and embrace the Windham School District's vision and philosophy for education as well as the vision and expectations for WHS. These philosophies are a reflection of the Windham community. The Transition Team should be in place at least one year in advance of the School opening and should include:
  - School Principal
  - Guidance Director
  - Athletic Director
  - Deans of Math and Science
  - Dean of Humanities
  - Library/Media Specialist.
2. A **Principal** should be hired this summer to work as a consultant for a year and then be in place full time for a year prior to the school's opening.
3. **Eighth Grade Graduation:** The team should consider the appropriateness of an elaborate eighth grade graduation in Windham. Historically this has been a "send off" for students as they all technically leave Windham. We advise the Transition Team to review this custom in light of Windham's new high school and consider having only an awards evening or a less formal daytime event.
4. **Space and Visibility of New Staff to Students:** The WHS Principal and Transition Team should have space at Salem High School (SHS) and be available for regular office hours for students. Regular visits to Windham Middle School (WMS) are also imperative during the transition period.
5. **Community:** Communication with the Community of Windham on WHS remains critical and should include components of both information on the new WHS and visibility for the project and Transition Team (when timing is appropriate). The principal should hold regular office hours for community members.
6. **Students** should be involved as much as possible in the transition. Examples include:
  - Planning joint field trips

- Allowing for joint school newspapers, or something similar, to keep students up to date on each school's activities.
  - Having students serve on a variety of committees for development of WHS:
    - Food service
    - Interior design
    - Furniture
  - Providing areas for student planned and drawn murals in the school.
  - Electing student leaders who will become the liaisons between the School Board and the student body.
  - Offering periodic tours of the facility while construction takes place.
  - Holding "step up" days.
7. **Open Houses and Tours:** As appropriate, open houses and tour of the new facility should be held for students and the community-at-large to build excitement and remove uncertainty about WHS. Student tour guides should be used.
  8. **Web Presence:** An up-to-date and responsive website should be maintained for students, parents, and the Windham Community.
  9. **International Baccalaureate:** We believe that WHS should seriously consider this academic offering for WHS students. The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) is synonymous with a world-class education. IBO was founded in Geneva, Switzerland in 1968 as an independent, not-for-profit education foundation. Its original purpose was to facilitate the mobility of students internationally by providing schools with an upper secondary school diploma recognized by universities around the world. Since then, its mission has expanded, and it now provides an internationally recognized education available to students of all ages.

The IBO has established a high reputation as a leading organization in the field of international education. IBO's core values underscore three important qualities of its program: international understanding, intellectual rigor and high academic achievement. The IBO offers three programs: the Diploma Programme (for students aged 16-19), the Middle Years Programme, created in 1994 (for students aged 11-16) and the Primary Years Programme, created in 1997 (for students aged 3-12).

There are over 1500 schools in 116 countries that have chosen to offer one or more of IB's academic programs. The greatest concentration of IB programs is in the United States, with 426 Diploma Programmes, 49 Middle Years Programmes, and 30 Primary Years Programmes.

Bedford, New Hampshire will be the first high school in New Hampshire to offer this program in 2009. Bow, NH is planning on initiating this program in 2010. Dr. Cutler and Jan Moynihan-Cooney attended a presentation in 2006 with these schools. Dr. Cutler has extensive knowledge of the program as it was immensely successful in her previous district and she was responsible for the beginning of a Primary Years Programme at the elementary level. Additionally, her daughter was an IB graduate, and she has first-hand knowledge of the program from a parent's point of view. Both Mrs. Cooney and Dr. Cutler were excited about the possibilities of this curriculum being available to Windham High School students.

#### *The IB Curriculum*

An IB education spans all the major disciplines: mathematics, language arts, history, sciences, the arts and foreign languages. The programs blend a variety of courses to ensure that students receive a comprehensive liberal arts education.

IB's academic programs are constructed as frameworks that require teachers to choose from a range of topics and materials that they believe are important for their students. For example, the prescribed book list for the literature program indicates which book selections should be included, but does not specify any works that should be excluded.

These frameworks included descriptions of the required and optional topics, how students will be assessed and the criteria against which they will be measured. Teachers receive rigorous training from IBO on a systematic basis in order to maintain the integrity of the program. It is this determination of excellence in teaching which is the hallmark of the rigor and success of IBO.

While IBO's programs are broadly written, they do have standards and program regulations by which schools must abide. In the case of the Diploma Programme, the regulations allow IBO to assure universities and ministries of education that the marks students receive are of equivalent value, regardless from which school a student may come. A student in Belgium will take the same examination as a student in Maine. Assessments are standardized to ensure equivalent value.

IB programs are rigorous. Students completing the Diploma Programme are highly prepared for post-secondary work in universities throughout the world. The strength of an IB education is widely recognized. Deans and directors of admissions from universities throughout the US value the weight of an IB education.

It is recommended to the Windham School Board that an IB Diploma option be studied in depth to determine its feasibility for Windham High School. Please visit the IBO website ([www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org)) for more detailed information.

10. **Special Education Philosophy:** The Windham School District has historically embraced a philosophy of inclusive education where all students are involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum to the greatest extent possible. We will continue to focus on meeting the needs of identified students based on their individual education plans.
11. **Alternative Education:** The Integration Committee met in the Spring of 2006 with Denise Oldham, who has provided alternative educational programming in the Andover (MA), Winchester (MA), and Lexington (MA) public school districts over the past decade. Currently, Ms. Oldham is the secondary special education director for the Lexington Public School system.

Key in the alternative education process is a philosophical decision about inclusion of students. Alternative education hinges on the desire of the school district to educate all its children, and to match instructional programming to the unique needs of students. While most students attending Windham High School will be college-bound, some will not (and thus will require either alternative educational programming or opportunities to attend other schools [e.g., Alvirne for specific vocational interests]). In addition, some students (usually ~10% in a town similar to Windham) will have difficulties or special needs for accessing the core curriculum such that alternative educational programming will be required. Special Education will address many of these children's needs. Among the most important admonitions by Ms. Oldham was to identify and address students early, proactively, before significant difficulties amass which then are costly to the student and parents (in credits/school progress, or school/life experience in the school), as well as the District (special education evaluations, administrative costs to "react" to the adversities of the student, and potential placement or alternative education programming costs).

Specific alternative education practices to consider:

**Vulnerable General Education Students:** the objective is to address student difficulties early before they warrant substantially different programs or placements so that all students feel “included” and valued by WHS

- **Student support center** within the school to assist, early, any students having any difficulties. This would require space and staff to assist students with academic needs. Student “mentors” may also be helpful to other students having difficulty, and both offer alternative “tutors” for these students and diminish direct costs for additional staff. It can also enhance a talented student’s experience.
- **Homeroom** and **student mentors** can often provide forums to “check in” each day with vulnerable students. **Homeroom** can be devised as a forum for discussion and for generating school involvement at the beginning of each day. **Student mentors** can be connected to all students to help each student navigate the high school experience (and to validate the importance of upperclassmen’s WHS experience).
- Consideration early to **attractive electives** to “hook in” students seemingly less invested in traditional curriculum can be helpful:
  - Student-generated or preferred electives may identify sufficient interest to justify a course (e.g., contemporary music appreciation) offering.
  - Activities that allow course/elective credit may invest students in WHS. Everything from “chess” (game) to social service in the community to specific recreation pursuits (e.g., teaching tennis to elementary students) which can be substituted or augment traditional requirements may increase student interest.
- **Vocational and technical offerings** will be needed for some students. Several options exist, including coordination with other local towns already offering particular tracks (e.g., Alvirne H.S. has specific vocational courses), coordination with local businesses to provide students credit for work-related experiences, or creation of programs for those with specific interests.
  - For Windham High School, a first step would seem designation of a “**Vocational Coordinator**” to address emerging needs/patterns identified within WHS, and to devise programs initially for individual students. This part-time responsibility could address individual student needs proactively as patterns are identified for possible later program track development.
  - A Vocational Coordinator could (early in this role) provide students with interest inventories, transition to college planning, serve as a work-study coach, and coordinate internship programs. Similarly, for students with special needs, this staff person might assist with identification of work-sites for vocational training, and cultivate a network of community resources useful for that student and possibly for future students as well.

**Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities:** Approximately 1-2% of students in a high school similar to Windham may have emotional or behavioral difficulties substantially affecting their academic success. *The District and its selected Administrators should concur on the “approach” to working with these students.* The fundamental choice is to what extent to outplace these students in settings where they can receive an education in a therapeutic site (minimizing disruption of the educational focus of WHS for most of its students), or to develop on-site programming to “include” these students.

- **Outplacement** is sometimes a more simple approach, but also costly (\$30,000 - \$100,000/yr per student).
- **Onsite programming** usually requires a dedicated space (1-2 adjoining rooms), 2-3 staff per 10 students, involvement of outside consulting staff (e.g., behavioral psychologists), and administrative time/support dedicated to such a program. These

programs usually have a time each day/week for students to convene with staff to both address emotional issues, and to address school assignments. These programs usually attempt to reenter students into mainstream courses or activities as they are ready to do so, and the student may go to the designated program if difficulties arise on a given day in a particular mainstream course. “Rewards” (and a budget for) participation and successes are often integrated into these programs (e.g., going to a ropes course, special food brought in, etc.) to sustain momentum. (From the Integration Committee, Jeff Bostic (Andover, Westwood, Boston schools) has familiarity with such programs.)

- Onsite programs may include **after-school** components to diminish staffing costs, and may minimize disruptions within the general curriculum; however, they may not afford as many options for transitioning students back into “mainstream” courses or activities. (From the Integration Committee, Alison Miller (Pinkerton Academy, Acton-Boxborough RHS) has familiarity with such programs.)

12. **Applied Technology and Vocational Programs:** In an effort to ensure WHS initially provides Applied Technology and Vocational Program options that are best suited to the desires of the initial student population we reviewed the trends Windham students had established at Salem High School. We studied the enrollment data in Applied Technology and Vocational Programs for all Windham students at Salem High School in 2006. In the Applied Technology curriculum Windham students showed the most interest in Culinary Arts subjects (Introduction to Food and Gourmet Desserts) followed closely by Business and Business Management courses. There has also been a large enrollment in the Personal Money Management and Accounting 1 courses. Rounding out the top ten, Windham students also showed an interest in Technology Education, Woodworking, Graphic Arts Technology and finally Interior Decorating. In the Vocational Programs Windham students had the highest enrollment in TV Production classes. Advanced Computer Applications 1&2 had the second highest enrollment followed by Health Science and Technology 1&2, Computer Assisted Design and Development 1&2, Early Childhood Education 1&2, and, finally (out of twelve), Office Technology 1&2.
13. **Modified Block Schedule:** Windham High School should have a modified block schedule. It was recommended by the Curriculum Committee and it was instituted at Bedford High School. It is a very good idea.
14. **Virtual High School Coursework:** SHS piloted virtual coursework this year, and it was very successful. Salem had 14 students take 21 courses. Next year they will have opportunities for 54 students. They have been very pleased with the results. This would be a wonderful addition to the curriculum of the high school for unique and specialized offerings.
15. **College Trends and Admissions:** The Integration Committee created a post-graduation profile of Windham youth that may prove useful as the School Board explores ways in which Windham High School can best prepare students for their futures. To compile the profile, the Committee examined data about Windham graduates of Salem High School and determined how many went to two- or four-year colleges, served with the military, or went directly into the working world.

Over the four-year period from 2002 through 2005, 519 Windham students graduated from Salem High School. Of those students, 73% (382) went directly on to four-year colleges or universities. 18% (94 of the 519 students) attended New Hampshire’s state university system. Engineering schools, from Wentworth Institute of Technology to Stanford University, were the choice of 4% (21 students). 3% (14 students) chose art or music schools. One student went to the US Air Force Academy.

Over the same four years, 13% of the students (67) elected to continue their education at 19 different two-year institutions. Nine of these schools are in New Hampshire, and only four of them are located outside of New England.

Military service was the choice for 1% (6) of the graduates. All of these military recruits joined the service after the start of the war in Iraq. In fact, four of the six were from the Class of 2003, the year the war began.

The remaining 12% of the students (64) in the four classes studied entered the work force directly upon graduation.

Additionally, the Committee worked extensively with the **New Hampshire Higher Education Assistance Foundation (NHHEAF)** to understand the impact that being a student at a new high school could have on college admissions. NHHEAF counselors attended an open house that our Committee hosted and assured students and parents that this should not be an issue. Additionally, discussions with college admissions staff from several prestigious institutions confirmed this. We suggest that the Transition Team utilize NHHEAF as a resource to educate and assist parents and students in the college admission process.

16. **Spirit Wear:** Spirit wear for WHS should be available in advance of the school opening to garner excitement and anticipation for WHS among students and the community.
17. **PTA and Booster Clubs:** These groups should get organized and moving early. Booster clubs should not be sport specific but perhaps WHS could have one booster organization for sports and one for the arts.
18. **Celebrate:** An opening day celebration is a must for WHS! The principal should be prominent and accessible during the festivities by, for example, hosting a barbeque for the students. Perhaps to engage the community, the Windham Historical Society could organize a time capsule to commemorate this historic event.

### **Summary:**

The Integration Committee's goal in reviewing these summaries and conducting research on various transition considerations was to synthesize, review and recommend best practices to share with the Windham School Board and eventually the Transition Team. We understand it is our role to advise these groups, while the eventual construction of a transition plan will rest with the Transition Team.

Our Committee intends to continue meeting on a regular basis. We are available to review our recommendations in more detail with the School Board and/or the Transition Team once it is established. We are also available as a resource to research other transition issues that arise.