



WESTWOOD

A COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Community Tours Give Westwood Residents Inside View of Deteriorating School Buildings

Westwood residents – some with children in the public schools and some without – took part in guided tours of the Deerfield, Hanlon and Sheehan elementary schools last weekend. The tours were coordinated by Superintendent of Schools Emily Parks as part of the District's efforts to give residents an opportunity to see for themselves the deteriorating state of the buildings.

"This is the beginning of a long process of engagement on the part of the School District," said Superintendent Parks. "It is important for people to understand that, while these schools are functioning well today, we need to consider how to deal with buildings that are decades old and in need of costly repair or replacement."

Helen Gee was among those who took the tours of the Deerfield School led by Principal Josh Baumer. Her children have graduated from the school system.

"I came just to get perspective, if these are the oldest schools and we need to do something about them, whether we consolidate or upgrade each of the schools," Gee said. "I think we need to invest, but how do we do it in the best way?"

Maya Plotkin is a parent and is running for school committee. She said it would be hard for people to understand the issues with the schools without seeing them up close.

"I knew the physical conditions of the buildings was a problem; I didn't realize the academic portion was such a problem. I think they've done a great job trying to address the issues that they have, but clearly it's not an ideal building for modern day teaching. That surprised me a little bit," she said.

Residents taking the tours learned that the District is focused on these three schools because they are the Town's oldest elementary schools. The Sheehan was built in 1948 and still has much of its original plumbing, windows and wiring. The Hanlon was built in 1951 and has a roof dating back to the early 1980s, in addition to aging pipes, wiring and windows. The Deerfield, which was originally built as a bomb shelter in 1953, has a temporary modular section that was added in 1995. It also has original systems that are deteriorating.



Tours and community outreach have been initiated to give all residents a chance to better understand the challenges facing the physical space of the schools.



Guided tours of the Deerfield, Hanlon and Sheehan elementary schools were held on March 3 weekend.

During a tour she led at the Hanlon, Superintendent Parks highlighted the many "cloffices," a term coined for former closets turned into offices, used by the school psychologist and other specialists.

"These buildings were built after WWII, when I don't know if they even had psychologists in the schools at all. Learning has changed a lot and, the way we teach our kids [has changed]," noted Ellen Larkin-Rollings, a parent, who attended the Westwood Public Schools as a child. "I would like to see those facilities and services have dedicated space."

Westwood has taken initial steps to secure state funding from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), which could help pay for construction, renovations, and repairs to the aging elementary schools. The MSBA voted to invite Westwood into its eligibility period, during which time specific plans will be formulated with input from the community.

Colin Cassidy, whose children attended the Deerfield School several years ago, said he came with his wife because they want to better understand the District's goals. He conceded the condition of the library and art room are "pathetic."

"The conditions are not ideal, I grant you that. But, on the other hand, the school population is declining. There is smaller enrollment now than when our kids were in the school," Cassidy said.

Superintendent Parks initiated the tours and community forums so all residents can better understand the choices and the challenges Westwood faces. *The next community forum will be held March 20 at 7:00 p.m. in the Hanlon School Gym.*

"I appreciate residents' interest in touring our schools and learning more about our needs. It was great to have the opportunity to talk with folks about the condition of our buildings and our programs," said Parks.

Westwood Media Center, (formerly WestCAT), attended tours at all three schools and will broadcast their videos later in March.

People can follow the School District's social media channels, or visit its website, www.westwoodschoolbuilding.com, for more information on the Westwood Schools Building Project.