

West Islip Study Group

Summary of March 15, 2011 Meeting

1. All 34 members of the Study Group attended the meeting in the Beach Street library.
2. Mr. Simon gave a brief introduction and reviewed the charge to the Study Group. Mr. Simon also introduced guest Joan Townley from the Western Suffolk BOCES Office of School Planning and Research. Ms. Townley is coordinating the Western Suffolk BOCES report on projected enrollment and facility use for West Islip. Ms. Townley noted that the report is almost finished and that the Study Group should receive some of it by the next meeting on March 29.
3. Michael Keany, the Study Group facilitator, then led the remainder of the session. Mr. Keany had three goals for the evening: 1. Get to know the Team. 2. Understand the Task. And 3. Learn some Tools. The Study Group then engaged in an activity designed to help the members learn about each other as well as emphasizing the importance of listening.
4. Mr. Keany then identified Team Rules for the Study Group. They are as follows: 1. Ask questions to try to understand. 2. Keep an open mind. 3. Recognize when one's own experience is clouding thinking. 4. Do the heavy lifting, i.e. the work that the Study Group has to do. 5. Be prepared for each meeting by doing the necessary reading "homework."
5. Mr. Keany then reviewed the task for the Study Group by articulating what the task is and is not. In short, the task is to develop a variety of options for the Board of Education to consider that enable WI to provide quality education in a fiscally responsible manner. The task is also an opportunity to make something better, to use the group's creativity, and to see things differently. He then reminded the group that their task is not to make specific recommendations; it is the job of the Board of Education to decide what happens. He also reminded the group that they should not advocate for special interests. In short, they need to put WI above special interests, and create a future that is best for the children of WI.
6. Mr. Keany then introduced the tools the Study Group is to use. First he explained the difference between dialogue and discussion, noting that the goal is to dialogue rather than discuss. Dialogue is trying to learn, listening to understand, asking more questions than making statements, and more listening and reflecting. Discussion, on the other hand, is about convincing, more statements than questions, more speaking than listening. The second tool Mr. Keany introduced is known by an acronym, "SWOT," which stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The Study Group then engaged in a series of practice exercises using the SWOT method of assessing situations and problems. Mr. Keany then explained that the group will be using the SWOT method to look at each option developed for consideration.
7. The Study Group then reviewed the mission statement of West Islip with attention to the rapidly changing nature of the world that the children of WI will inhabit as

- adults. These changes have profound implications for the education they receive. Specifically, WI's children will need to be global citizens, able to work in a world of ambiguity, hold multiple jobs during their lifetimes, be able to creatively solve problems, and recognize that the future opportunities will go to those who are the thinkers and problem solvers. He also identified the ability to "tell stories" and the ability to be empathetic as important future skills that students will need.
8. A short video was then shown on a concept personal transportation vehicle that Honda is developing.
 9. The final tool that Mr. Keany explained that the group will be using is Edward De Bono's Six Thinking Hats. The six color coded hats represent different ways of looking at a situation or problem. The white hat is about data and information, the red hat is associated with feelings and emotion, the yellow hat is for a positive view of things and looks for benefits in a situation, the black hat is used for critical judgment, the green hat is for creative thinking and generating new ideas, and the blue hat is about process and thinking about thinking. The Study Group will use these lenses as a tool to examine each of the options developed.
 10. The next meeting of the Study Group is scheduled for Tuesday, March 29 from 7:00-9:00 p.m. in the Beach Street Library.