

Area Leaders Respond to Centralization Vote

Is it a victory or is it a defeat? Perhaps you are elated or maybe discouraged over the results of the recent vote to centralize the school districts in Westfield and Brocton. One will never know for sure what might have been with a “yes” vote. And, paradoxically, we do not know for sure all that will come about as a result of the statutory vote. How will education look in our communities? Certainly, most people hold a strong opinion. And, even those “on the fence” leaned in a direction to cast a vote one way or the other. That said, whether we are happy, saddened or still perplexed, the will of the people was expressed through this vote. Brocton residents voted overwhelmingly to centralize, while Westfield residents voted decisively against centralization – 59% to 41%.

Interestingly, it was the WACS District that reached out to the Brocton Central School District in mid 2012 to initiate discussions of a possible centralization, following extensive WACS strategic planning efforts and Board of Education approval. After much hard work by many in both Westfield and Brocton, the two districts moved in the direction of studying and then recommending centralization. Then, in the June 2013 straw vote, Westfield voters overwhelmingly supported to further pursue the concept of centralization. What happened in the time between the straw vote and binding vote is puzzling, and perhaps telling. The boards of education of both districts were unified in delivering its message and recommendation to centralize. The community participated in the discussions. Surely, we can all identify advantages and disadvantages of a centralized school district. Yet in the end, the Westfield community and its Board of Education were not aligned. We can lament what did or did not happen. Did fear get in the way? Were there many unknowns or lingering questions? Did residents question and ultimately doubt its leadership? Perhaps, but, we do know that good people took the time and resources to go down a road with a common objective. That was to do the best for our children and community.

Although we the undersigned were divided in our vote and/or opinions, some for and some against, we now come together in unity with a common purpose. We recognize the importance of education in the lives of our children, and how important it is to the vitality of a community. An amazing 1,225 Westfield residents voted on October 9. We remain hopeful that the people of Westfield will continue their resolve to foster excellence in education and learning. There is much work to be done.

Despite our differences and views, we remain friends and neighbors. We will still greet each other warmly. We know in our hearts that every citizen who voted did what he or she thought was the right thing. And, if there were any strong reactions and harsh words throughout this process, we are going to give each other the benefit of realizing that sometimes we all react strongly to things we value and hold dear.

Now, some talk of a community that is hurt and perhaps divided. And, some fear resentment from our neighbors in Brocton. Hopefully, we will find the conviction to forge ahead, downplay our differences, and focus on adding value to the total education experience in both communities.

At this time, we need to build upon our past successes, not gloating in them, but using those strengths, skills and human energies as a strong foundation to move forward.

We are a community enriched with caring people who have made Westfield what it is today. We want to continue the legacy of all those who left their mark, whether through volunteerism, contributions, work and personal experiences or otherwise. Many have passed on, some have moved away, and those here or yet to come here will find an indomitable spirit.

Long live Westfield and Brocton!

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