



Friday, April 12, 2013

## Harrington named new Director of Pupil Services

by Erin Fay

At its April 8 meeting, the School Committee voted unanimously to accept interim Superintendent Joe Connelly's recommendation of Marie T. Harrington as the new Director of Pupil Services for the Harvard schools. Dr. Harrington has a background in psychology, teaching, and business, with a doctoral degree from Boston College. Most recently, she has been first Coordinator and then Administrator of Special Education in the Wachusett Regional Schools for the past 16 years.

Dr. Harrington's appointment comes after ten weeks of a well organized and thorough search process. The search committee consisted of ten members: three administrators, three special education teachers, three parents, and one School Committee member.

### **Search began in January**

The search process began in late January with a public posting period. During this posting period, the search committee led focus groups, looking for the characteristics and skills that stakeholders felt were most important in a candidate. The committee then examined applications and interviewed five applicants. After the search was narrowed to two finalists, members of the site visitation committee visited the finalists at their place of employment. It was then that they selected Dr. Harrington as their preferred candidate. Unlike the search process for other school administrators, the process for a Special Education administrator is kept confidential, with only the preferred finalist being recommended to the School Committee by the superintendent. Chairwoman SusanMary Redinger said of the process, "There were no surprises. It really went very well. I think everybody felt heard and valued and that they had something to contribute. It was a great process."

Both the search committee and the site visitation committee strongly supported Dr. Harrington, and for good reason. With 16 years of experience as an administrator in Special Education and a variety of positions in research, clinical work, business, and teaching, Dr. Harrington impressed the search committee. She strongly met every one of the committee's requirements, and garnered the support of every member of the search committee as well as the site visitation committee.

### **Outstanding recommendations**

Dr. Harrington also came with what Connelly described as "outstanding recommendations." At Monday's School Committee meeting, Connelly summarized what her co-workers and superiors had to say about her. She was described by them as "very knowledgeable, very calm and always respectful of people's opinions and positions," "very child-oriented," and "extremely well-

organized." Also mentioned were her budgeting skills and her esteem for the job. One glowing recommendation said, "She holds the Special Education department to very high standards, which she models with her daily actions."

During Monday's interview with the School Committee, Dr. Harrington was asked to describe her core values in the context of making Special Education-based decisions. She replied, "I tend to be, I believe, a very ethical person. I've sometimes been told I'm too honest. I think that's very important. I have a very strong work ethic, and I find it very difficult to rest if I feel that something has been left undone or hasn't been done right....I don't tend to be political. I try to step back and be very rational. I think that's an important value as well. So much of what we do has such a high emotional content that you have to be able to step back without taking anything personally and try to look at varying perspectives and then work toward a consensus." She cited the importance of developing a collaborative relationship with staff so that those values are clear to everyone involved.

Connelly ended his recommendation by saying, "At the site visit I was able to confirm in my mind that Marie's administrative style would be an excellent match for Harvard. Everyone interviewed truly had very high regard for Marie as a person, as an educator, and as an administrator. Everyone expressed how much they would miss Marie and how helpful she had been to them. For these reasons and more, without hesitation, I recommend Dr. Marie T. Harrington."

The title "Director of Pupil Services" will replace the former post of Director of Special Education. The title change reflects an increase in responsibility for the position, which has expanded to include the roles of Health Service Coordinator, homeless liaison, and English Language Learners Coordinator. The next step in the process will be a meeting between Dr. Harrington and Superintendent Connelly to negotiate her contract. Once that is settled, she will begin her employment in Harvard on July 1 of this year.

*Erin Fay, a senior at Fitchburg State University, is a Harvard Press intern.*

Filed under: [News](#)