



Fall River Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Inc.  
200 Pocasset Street, Fall River, MA 02721  
Tel: 508 676 8226 Fax: 508 675 5932

## Article Series

April 2015

Melissa Pacheco

*Vice Chair of the Westport School Committee*

*Business Innovation Research Center, Charlton College of Business at UMASS Dartmouth*

Westport Community School's mission is to "ensure that our children achieve academic and personal excellence, become lifelong learners and responsible, productive and engaged citizens of the world." In order to achieve this mission, the district works hard to create a safe environment, where quality instruction, innovative learning and best practices are implemented. The Westport students are prepared for college and career readiness by the time they earn their high school diploma. I am honored to be one of those students who graduated in 1992 and a member of the Westport School Committee.

The district educates approximately 1592 students. As with many school districts, Westport struggles with maintaining a balance between providing top notch 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education and a minimum budget. While the student population has decreased, there are other cost factors such as additional students on IEP's and Free/Reduced lunch, and the increase in unfunded and underfunded mandates. (Unfunded and underfunded mandates are requirements imposed on school districts, without additional funds.) However, the community of Westport is resilient; there are hard working teachers, staff, and administrators, which equates to the quality of graduates, many who have gone on to find successful careers, such as nurses, entrepreneurs, school psychologists, journalists, producers, teachers, engineers, and more.

There have been recent changes within the district. During the 2014 summer, 1<sup>st</sup> grade classrooms moved from the Elementary School to the Macomber School and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms moved from the Middle School to the Elementary School. Before the end of 2014 the School Committee voted to close the Middle School and further restructure the classrooms and buildings in order to create a safer, more effective, and healthier learning environment for the students in grades 6-8. In addition to the PCB's the Middle School, has a number of issues such as ripped carpet, jagged lockers, and rooms without ceiling tiles; where voices echo and toilets flushing interrupt teaching.

In 2014, Superintendent Dr. Ann Dargon also completed a Statement of Interest with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for assistance with construction of a new facility, the application did not propose a solution, but identified current needs of the school district, including 3 aging buildings, two over 50 years old, and a 45 year old middle school with PCB contamination and maintenance needs.

Early in 2015 the Westport Community Schools was formally invited into the MSBA's eligibility period. While early in the stages, this opportunity will identify the best direction for the schools and if successful

a percentage of funding for construction. When asked about the opportunity, Dr. Dargon summarized it best, "We are excited that we can possibly provide a cost effective, educationally sound school building for our students to access a quality learning environment. This will change the lives of generations of students."

The next stage will include the feasibility study that will identify the best solution for the district. This town project will impact the lives of many. Great things are happening in Westport, and this is just the beginning. If anyone has any questions or comments, contact me, at [mpacheco@westportschools.org](mailto:mpacheco@westportschools.org).

## **About EdUp**

The EdUp Campaign is a production of the Education Committee of the Fall River Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Inc. EdUp strives to grow individual and community aspirations through a sustained and multidimensional outreach to students, parents, and other stakeholders throughout the Greater Fall River Area, and by demonstrating the power of education to change the future of the region and each of our roles in it. For more information about the Chamber and the Education Committee, please visit [www.FallRiverChamber.com](http://www.FallRiverChamber.com) or call 508-676-8226.