

## **BARTLETT VOTERS APPROVE PUBLIC PRESCHOOL**

(March 7, 2018—The Conway Daily Sun) “Josiah Bartlett Elementary School was the first school in the state to offer full-day kindergarten more than 25 years ago. Now it will be the first school in Mount Washington Valley to offer an integrated preschool after townspeople voted 191-68 by secret ballot to support a \$149,346 warrant article to get the program off the ground....when the preschool opens this fall [it] is projected to have 18-29 students. The preschool will be for children ages 3-5 developing within age expectations as well as those in need of specialized services such as speech/language therapy, occupational therapy or physical therapy.”

The principal of 23 years initiated the plan for the town of Bartlett to establish a public preschool within the Josiah Bartlett Elementary School (JBES). His support enabled a private non profit preschool started by town residents in 1992 to rent an elementary school classroom and to access limited school resources. Transitioning to a publicly funded preschool was part of his vision for revitalizing JBES and the town, which has been experiencing a decline in school population.

The initiative took 2 and a half years to reach public approval, starting with a proposal prepared in 2015 by a community committee. The proposal was rejected by the Bartlett School Board stating “a need for more information and research.”

This was followed by an extensive planning and public engagement process led by SAU9 (School Administrative Unit) to determine the feasibility and gain community support for public preschool programming. Bartlett was one of 3 school districts included in this process. Jackson and Conway were the others. This was made possible by a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) grant through the NH Department of Education as well as a grant for community engagement services delivered by the UNH Carsey School of Public Policy and funded by the Endowment for Health and the NH Charitable Foundation. A leadership team and sub committees were formed with cross district representation.

This resulted in several related recommendations, but the primary community consensus reinforced the need to invest in and ensure

access to quality early childhood education for all Mt. Washington Valley children.

Armed with this community endorsement, a new proposal for public preschool funding was presented to the Bartlett School Board by the SAU9 Special Education Director and the Assistant Chair person of the School Board. After careful review and discussion, a warrant article request was approved 3 to 2 and was presented at the Annual School District Meeting in March 2018. An overwhelming 75% majority of a record number of voters attending the meeting voted in favor of funding the preschool.

Providing access to preschool education for all Bartlett children was a primary rational for going public.

Supported by tuition and fundraising, the existing private preschool struggled financially to meet this goal. An average of 25% of each new kindergarten class had historically been unable to attend preschool and many families could only afford a limited number of days.

It was also determined that the public school could provide better coordination of special education services, teaching resources and family services.

Newspaper coverage and a mass media campaign facilitated by young parents and the non-profit preschool Board kept the community well informed. The private nonprofit is dissolving and donating its playground and classroom equipment to JBES. The public preschool will ensure the long term stability of quality early childhood education for all Bartlett children.

For more information contact Nancy Keleman, Bartlett School Board Assistant Chairperson ([ncolony@roadrunner.com](mailto:ncolony@roadrunner.com)) or Pam Stimpson, SAU9 Special Education Director ([p\\_stimpson@sau9.org](mailto:p_stimpson@sau9.org)).

*Submitted by Birdy Ellsmore (League member, Mt. Washington Valley unit)*