COMMUNICATION
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Area schools ranked in Boston mag survey

By Rick Foster

Sun Chronicle

Three area school districts ranked in or near the top third of school systems in Boston Magazine's ratings of the best public schools in the Boston area.

The survey, which measured 125 school districts within the Interstate-495 area, gave Mansfield the area's highest rating at number 42 with King Philip Regional 49th and Foxboro 51st. Norton schools came in at number 76.

School districts outside the 495 area, including Attleboro, North Attleboro, Seekonk and Dighton-Rehoboth, were not rated.

Schools were ranked by a formula that took into account a number of factors including per pupil spending, classroom size, test results and graduation rates. Schools that spent more per student were favored over those that spent less.

Dover-Sherborn, with per-pupil spending of $20,143 and a student-teacher ratio of 11.6, was rated tops in the area by the magazine. Area superintendents said they had not yet reviewed the magazine's findings.

"I haven't had much time to look at it," said Mansfield Superintendent Teresa Murphy. "Of course it's always nice to be held in high regard."

KP Superintendent Elizabeth Zielinski said she hadn't reviewed the rankings although she noted some inconsistencies.

The survey credited KP, which has 2,300 students, with an enrollment of 4,778 combining the school's enrollment with students from three different elementary districts. Those districts are operated separately from KP. Of the four local districts, all spent less money per pupil than the top 10 districts in the survey. Norton spent the least at $13,219 followed by Mansfield, $13,790; KP, $14,074, and Foxboro, $15,207.

Mansfield's graduation rate at 97.5 percent, however, was higher than Dover-Sherborn's 97.2.
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New parent groups forming for KP schools

By JIM HAND

Sun Chronicle

Alarmed by the difficulties in building a budget for King Philip Regional Schools last spring, parent groups are forming to explore and recommend solutions to a number of school issues.

The parents, administrators and school committee members will formally announce the groups at a Sept. 14 meeting and invite other parents to join.

The meeting will be held at the middle school at 7 p.m.

One of the founders, parent Julie Redlitz of Norfolk, said the budget crisis pointed out a number of problems to parents who got involved and was the motivation for forming the groups.

Taxpayers, she said, had gotten use to hearing each year that the schools needed a lot more money, only to see the budget get worked out in the end.

So, when a budget problem arose last spring, many did not take it seriously at first, she said.

But, increased costs for special education, health care for employees, and salaries really were a problem, she said.

At the same time, selectmen and finance committee members in the three member towns of the regional school district became concerned about the constant need for more school money, she said.

"Last year it came to a head," she said.

Another parent, Tracey Molloy of Norfolk, said parents decided they wanted to be part of the solution to the school system's problems.

She said they attended roundtable discussions with the school committee and administration and decided to take action.

Three committees will be announced at the Sept. 14 meeting.

One will be on the budget, another on community relations and a third on a strategic plan.
Molloy said the hope is that ways of lowering operating costs in the school can be found while attempts are made to better inform the public about issues such as the cost of special education and the formula used to distribute state aid for schools.

The school department's strategic plan also needs to be updated.

Redlitz said the school administration has been very cooperative and the hope is more parents will volunteer to serve on the three committees.