

## Big changes in Wachusett RSD

JEFFERSON – Parents from the Wachusett Regional School District (WRSD), along with SPEDWatch Executive Director Ellen Chambers, publicly expressed outrage that the district's recent Coordinated Program Review (CPR) report documented continued wide-



spread noncompliance with special education law. They all spoke at a May 27th school committee meeting. The committee reacted strongly, admonishing parents for not channeling their concerns through the district's SEPAC, and accusing Chambers of making her comments solely for their publicity value. The committee insisted that the CPR contained numerous inaccuracies which were being addressed, telling Chambers "your assumptions and conclusions in regard to the District's programs are completely without foundation or any factual basis." The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) which conducted the CPR, however, later told SPEDWatch that the report in question was "the final report and we do not intend to make further changes."

Quickly, the WRSD underwent a remarkable transformation. According to WRSD parent leader and SPEDWatch member Julianne Kelley, "The Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) will elect 4 parents to sit on a new Task Force the Superintendent is forming to address special education programs in the District. The SEPAC will also be reviewing the District's Corrective Action Plan and will formulate and present a response on

that Plan to the District. In addition, the Superintendent is forming an audit committee, and a committee to focus on high school vocational offerings, both of which will include parents appointed from the SEPAC constituency. We are in a completely different place than we were a month ago, and while we certainly have a way to go -- we are quickly moving in the right direction with a paradigm shift away from status quo with regard to subpar special education standards which long have plagued this District."

According to Chambers, "We'll have to wait and see if the changes that are happening in Wachusett will have staying power but, at this point, we are thrilled at the short term outcome. Parents took a stand, SPEDWatch supported them, and the district changed for the better. This is a perfect illustration of what the SPEDWatch model was designed to accomplish."