

**Milton School Committee
Regular Meeting
Milton High School Library
February 24, 2009**

Committee Present: Beirne Lovely, Chair, Lynda Lee Sheridan, Vice Chair, Chris Huban, Mary Kelly, Glenn Pavlicek and Kristan Bagley-Jones

Staff Present: Mary Gormley, Superintendent; John Phelan, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Personnel; Paul Hilton, Assistant Superintendent for Business

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Approval of February 24, 2009 Agenda

Ms. Gormley stated that Residency will be moved under the Finance Subcommittee and a report will be given at the next School Committee meeting. With the Committee's consent, Mr. Lovely approved the agenda of February 24, 2009 with this change.

3. Citizen Speak (Policy BEDH-Residents may speak for up to 3 minutes)

Chris Link voiced his concern regarding potential cuts to the art programs at the Elementary and Middle school level. In his speech (copy attached), Mr. Link referred to a 2007 Boston Globe study on the benefits of providing art education and also mentioned the impact art has had on his own family. Mr. Link feels that Milton families are hungry for art education and this is evident by the waiting lists for FAVA (Friends and Advocates for the Visual Arts).

Bridget Mastandrea, parent representative of FAVA, stated that FAVA is very concerned about the proposed cuts to the visual arts department. Ms. Mastandrea read a statement prepared by FAVA (copy attached) which details the benefits of an art program.

Jeanne Crowley also had a prepared speech (copy attached) detailing the importance of visual and performing arts programs. She implored the School Committee to keep the funding as it is for these programs and to keep in mind the 25% of students who learn visually.

4. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of February 3, 2009 were approved.

Move: L. Sheridan

Second: C. Huban

Vote: 6-0-0

The minutes of February 10, 2009 were approved.

Move: L. Sheridan

Second: C. Huban

Vote: 5-0-1 (C. Huban)

5. Superintendent's Report

Ms. Gormley stated that tonight's Citizen Speak was very moving. She had planned to have students who earned awards at the Globe Scholastic Art Competition attend tonight's meeting to display their work; however, their artwork is still on display in Boston. This will be presented at a future School Committee meeting. Ms. Gormley moved to the third item under the Superintendent's Report, which was an update from the Music Department.

Music Department - Dr. Noreen Diamond Burdett, Gary Goode, and Rebecca Damiani

Dr. Burdett was accompanied by students from the Middle School and High School who participate in various programs offered within the Milton Public School system. The students present were Adam Hanna, Conor Walsh, Marline Alexis, Tim Marotta, Braedy Taugher, Arielle Bounas and Cristina Ruscito. Dr. Burdett updated the Committee on several accomplishments within the Music Department. These include:

- 3 students were selected for the Mass All State Festival to perform at Symphony Hall
- 19 High School students were selected to participate in the Eastern District Senior Music Festival
- 9 High School students and 5 Middle School students were selected to participate in the Eastern District Junior Music Festival (grades 7-9)
- 40 High School students were selected to participate in Senior SEMSBA (Southeastern Mass School Band Masters Association)
- 5 High School students and 17 Middle School students were selected to participate in Junior SEMSBA
- This year Milton hosted the Senior SEMSBA District auditions; over 1100 students came to Milton High to compete.

Ms. Gormley commented on the many talented students within the Milton Public School system and stated that every night Milton High School is full of students coming in for Music lessons. She thanked the students and their parents for their dedication. Ms. Gormley also stated that there is no finer advocate for Music education than Dr. Burdett. When asked to describe the current Music program, Dr. Burdett stated that there is not a strong program at the elementary level. Music is once a week for one half of the year and Chorus for grades 4 and 5 has been eliminated. Band and Strings are offered at recess and lunch. At the Middle School, we have general Music and offer Chorus, Band and Strings. There are many before and after school groups at the Middle School also. The High School has all of the performing groups and several different music classes including Music in America, Music Theatre, History of Rock and Jazz and also has an Electronic Music Lab. Mr. Lovely thanked Dr. Burdette, Mr. Goode, and Ms. Damiani for their hard work and dedication to the Milton Public School system. He stated that Dr. Burdett is a “legend” whose work has distinguished our community from so many others. Ms. Sheridan mentioned that Dr. Burdett is also organizing a Faculty and Staff Talent Show fundraising event which will include over 54 faculty and staff members. Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased at the High School office. This event will be held Thursday, March 12, 2009.

Ms. Gormley stated that the School Committee had requested to be kept informed with regard to AYP and MCAS issues. As a result of this request, Martha Sherman, Dr. Karen Spaulding, and Scott Devlin were invited to give the Committee an update on the Saturday programs currently being offered within the Milton Public School system. Ms. Gormley noted that all of these programs are funded outside of the Milton Public School budget.

Title I Program, Martha Sherman, Elementary Language Arts Coordinator – Through Title I funding, a Saturday program is being offered at Tucker School. This is a ten week program running from January 10, 2009-April 4, 2009 and it runs on Saturday from 9 a.m.-12:00 noon. 92 students (grades 1-5) are currently enrolled in this program. The program has eight certified Milton Public School teachers (stipend positions), two additional staff members to assist with supervisory roles (arrival/dismissal, arts. and recreation), and an Administrator present every Saturday. Ms. Sherman explained that the instruction is based on the curriculum standards in areas that have been identified as weaknesses via data analysis with the assessment team. In addition to one hour of Math and one hour of Reading/Language Arts, students have time for snack, arts and crafts, and gym. Per request, Ms. Sherman explained that the Title I program is a federally funded program and that money is allocated to the school district based on census data for free and reduced lunches. Currently Tucker is the only school to receive Title I funds.

Scott Devlin, High School Guidance Counselor – Mr. Devlin reported that he works to receive a grant through the Dept. of Education to support students with MCAS testing. He also plans to apply for the summer component of this grant. When considering what students qualify for help, Mr. Devlin reported that Guidance looks at students who failed MCAS in the 10th grade. As soon as they receive results from the 10th grade MCAS tests, Mr. Devlin organizes teachers to work closely with these students. Two teachers were hired through this grant, and these teachers work to prepare students for a MCAS re-test in November. The first group consisted of 10-12 students for Math and approximately 4 students for English/Language Arts (ELA), and the students worked in small groups with their teachers for two Saturday morning sessions. The grant allows for supply money so students are provided a light breakfast at these sessions. Once the results of the re-test are in, this information is reviewed again to get those students who still failed ready for another re-test in March. The group is currently down to four students in Math, and one in ELA. A Biology re-test was held at the beginning of this month and Barbara Plonski worked with students for one evening session. Mr. Devlin explained that they also look at the 8th grade scores of current 10th grade students. For those who failed or were in the Warning/Needs Improvement categories at Pierce, tutoring is offered leading up to the 10th grade exam. Ms. Kelly mentioned that MCAS funding has decreased significantly over the years. Ms. Gormley explained that when MCAS testing began funding came from the state to the Elementary, Middle, and High School for students failing MCAS. Currently, funds are down to only High School money. Ms. Gormley also mentioned that the High School Social Studies MCAS requirement has been delayed due to funding at the state level. The School Committee and Ms. Gormley thanked Mr. Devlin for the outstanding job he does at the High School.

Dr. Karen Spaulding, Assistant Principal, Pierce Middle School – Saturday Academic Support and Enrichment Program

Dr. Spaulding reported that this nine week program was made available through a grant received from the Copeland Family Foundation. 177 students were invited to attend this program and follow-up calls were made to the homes of those students who did not respond. Currently 69 students attend the program. The goals of this program are to increase students' confidence and persistence; increase students' skills in Mathematics and English Language Arts; and to create a community that inspires passion for learning. The program is held on Saturday from 8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m., and students are given a light breakfast. Students then have one hour sessions in both English/Language Arts and Math followed by an activity period of gym, computer lab, board games, etc. Within the Language Arts curriculum, students work to develop specific writing skills as well as an overall deepening sense of the writing process through Writers' Workshop. In Math, students develop specific Mathematics skills as well as a deeper understanding of Mathematics and its uses by obtaining a job; establishing a personal budget; and playing out other real life scenarios. Dr. Spaulding stated that eight teachers participate in this program along with Stephanie Nephew. Also, she, Mr. Jette, or Ms. McReynolds is present.

The total funds received for these various programs include a \$10,000 grant for Pierce Middle School; \$17,000 for Milton High School (\$6,000 of which is allocated to the summer program); and \$9,600 in Title I funding for Tucker School which includes a stipend for the custodian. The School Committee thanked Ms. Sherman, Mr. Devlin and Dr. Spaulding for their dedication to the students of Milton.

Athletic Update

Ms. Gormley gave the School Committee a brief update on the many success stories of the Milton High School athletic program:

- The boys' basketball team won their third consecutive Bay State Conference Herget Division title with a 16-4 record and qualified for the MIAA Division 2 State Tournament.
- The girls' basketball team finished with a season record of 6-12.
- The boys' ice hockey team won their second Bay State Conference Herget Division title in three years with a 11-5-4 record and qualified for the MIAA Division 1 State Tournament.

- The girls' ice hockey team finished with a 13-4-4 record and qualified for the MIAA Division 2 State Tournament.
- The boys' indoor track team finished a successful 2008-2009 winter campaign. Two students from this team qualified for the all-state meet.
- The girls' indoor track team finished in a three way tie for the Bay State Conference Herget Division title.
- The wrestling team finished the season with junior, Geno Kelly, taking 6th place in the division 2 sectional.
- Six students from the boys and girls ski teams qualified for the Alpine State Championships.
- The cheerleading squad will compete this Thursday in the Bay State Conference Cheerleading Competition at Milton's Copeland Field House.

Ms. Gormley thanked Mr. Traister for providing this information and congratulated all the students involved in these activities.

6. Finance Subcommittee Report

Ms. Kelly gave a brief update on the results of the Special Town Meeting held February 23, 2009. At this meeting it was voted to decrease certain Town FY09 budgets as a result of Chapter 9C reductions in local aide to the Town. The School Department's budget was decreased by \$133,764. To make up this amount, Ms. Kelly explained that there was a one-time savings from replacing a mid-year retirement with a long term substitute teacher for the remainder of the school year; a one-time savings from reassigning existing staff to cover a mid-year leave of absence; a one-time savings from a reduction in aides; a one-time reduction in professional development; and a one-time reduction within the technology budget. With regard to the article relating to an energy contract, Ms. Kelly explained that Town Meeting was not being asked to approve the contract; it was being asked to give the School Department the ability to enter into an energy contract for 10-year period. Ms. Bagley-Jones pointed out that on the Warrant Committee's presentation at Town Meeting (available on the Town website) it was not made clear that there would be an elementary school closing. Ms. Kelly replied that she will discuss this at the Finance Subcommittee meeting on Thursday. She has invited the School Subcommittee of the Warrant Committee to attend this meeting and will suggest that the Warrant Committee amend its presentation.

Ms. Kelly briefly reviewed other recent matters discussed by the School Committee. With regard to the aide policy, Ms. Kelly reported that the School Committee recently voted to suspend the Class Size policy (IIB) and to send this policy to the Policy Subcommittee for review. She also reported that the Administration is working with MASBO (Mass Assoc. of School Business Officials) regarding a possible review of the business office. Ms. Kelly feels that there are two decisions to be discussed: (1) What does the School Committee desire in terms of leadership of finances as we move into the next phase?; (2) Can we review the business office (job descriptions, etc.) to see if there are efficiencies to be gained? With regard to the Assistant Superintendent for Business position, Ms. Kelly would like the School Committee to begin discussing the options for this position. The Superintendent's office has distributed information to School Committee members regarding job descriptions and salaries from other towns for their Assistant Superintendent for Business and/or Business Manager positions. Ms. Gormley added that Bev Quinn has further information to email to School Committee members so plenty of comparative data is available. Mr. Lovely suggested that Committee members review what has been distributed and discuss it at the Finance Subcommittee meeting and then the whole Committee will discuss this matter at the next School Committee meeting. Mr. Lovely took a moment to thank Bev Quinn and Sean Walsh for all their hard work.

When asked if a final cut list had been made yet in the event there is not a successful override, Ms. Kelly replied that the School Committee is still awaiting a reply from the School Building Authority. A final cut list can then be discussed by the Finance Subcommittee. Mr. Lovely asked if any update had been given by the Board of Selectmen regarding a number for an override or a date for an override question. Ms. Sheridan replied that the Selectmen have not determined a number and they are waiting to hear all information presented at the full day Warrant Committee meeting on the first Saturday in March. The Selectmen have said that an override question will be presented in June. With regard to the final cut list, Mr. Pavlicek added that no list is available yet since we don't have definite numbers yet. Absent an override, it may be less than a level dollar funded budget. As a community, Mr. Pavlicek believes we should be lobbying legislators and asking that they put back education funding that has been cut (we received 9C cuts and cuts in the Circuit Breaker). Mr. Lovely added that Senator Brian Joyce is on the oversight committee designated by the Governor to assist and make recommendations regarding stimulus funds. Mr. Lovely has put a call into Senator Joyce's office, and he urged other School Committee members and members of the community to contact Senator Joyce's office as well regarding the need for education funding. Ms. Kelly suggested putting something together at Thursday's Finance Subcommittee meeting as to how people can contact their representatives to lobby on Milton's behalf and then post this information on the website.

Mr. Lovely also reported that he was asked if the School Department would provide the Selectmen and the Warrant Committee with its foundation number. They are interested in this information since there has been some suggestion that a portion of the stimulus funds might be allocated predicated on whether a community has achieved its foundation level. Therefore, he asked the Administration to provide this number to the Warrant Committee and Selectmen and to also let them know by what percentage we have exceeded the foundation number. With regard to any increase in education funding, Ms. Kelly asked if the School Committee had any stance on how this should be handled by the Town. She suggested having more detailed conversations with the Warrant Committee. Ms. Kelly also voiced her concern over the timing suggested for an override and the fact that one draft worksheet shows money going into the Stabilization Fund. She is not sure of the best way to communicate these concerns to the Warrant Committee and the Selectmen and suggested the possibility of the School Committee drafting a letter. Ms. Kelly also stated that she had looked at the Police and Fire Department budgets from FY08 to present FY09 as shown on the draft worksheet. Although looking at the percentage of cuts going into the next year seem equitable, prior years show that while the school budget has gone down, the Police and Fire have had a net increase of 6%.

Ms. Gormley informed the Committee that the March 7, 2009 Warrant Committee meeting has been posted so any School Committee member can attend. Ms. Gormley plans to attend to represent the schools.

7. School Building Committee

Ms. Sheridan reported that the fences have gone in at Collicot/Cunningham. The temporary railing is still up at Pierce Middle School and, hopefully, this will be finished in the near future. With the demolition of the High School it had been the concerted effort of the Massachusetts Historical Society to maintain some portion of the building. This proved to be impossible; however, the Society took pictures and we now have beautiful, well documented photos of the 1909 wing. These photos will be on display at Pierce Middle School and at the High School and the hope is to have them up in time for the April Town Meeting. Mr. Pavlicek added that this was part of the accommodations made with the Mass Historical Society and was paid for by the school building project.

8. Old/New Business

Mr. Huban requested a follow-up on school choice within the next month or so.

Motion was made to enter Executive Session for the purpose of discussing contract negotiations and not to return to Open Session and to adjourn directly from Executive Session.

Move: C. Huban

Second: K. Bagley-Jones

By a roll call voice vote, the Committee unanimously voted to enter Executive Session and not to return to Open Session and to adjourn directly from Executive Session.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Chris Link

Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight.

I'm here to ask that in this time of deep and understandable budget cuts ... we find a way to spare the arts programs in the middle and lower schools. To be specific, I'm worried about reducing the middle school staffing to just one art teacher and eliminating the ACE program from the day school.

A 2007 *Boston Globe* study confirmed what many educators already know about art education. It develops creative, problem-solving skills that don't always occur in the core curriculum. Skills like:

- Non-verbal thinking
- Imagination and reflection
- Learning from one's mistakes
- And Experimentation

These are skills required not just by the next generation of visual artists ... but by entrepreneurs and inventors, engineers and architects. I would argue that in every career, imagination can play just as big a role as executing along predetermined principles.

But there is another reason for preserving art education ...

Often, perfectly smart kids think in unconventional ways, and as a result they do not always excel in traditional academics.

My own brother Randy is an example. By the eighth grade, he was failing virtually all his classes. He even failed gym. His ceramics teacher knew he was struggling and asked one day what he liked to do most. His answer was "making monsters." So while other kids made bowls and cups, Randy made monsters out of clay. Today, Randy is one of the top animators of feature films in Hollywood ... and his specialty is monsters.

The point is not that Randy learned his craft in the middle school. It is that an art teacher gave him an avenue for achievement when all the other doors were closing around him.

Finally, I would like to point out that Milton families are hungry for art education.

My children were lucky this past fall to have taken the after-school programs offered by FAVA (Friends and Advocates for the Visual Arts). I say lucky because within one hour after notifying Glover parents about these classes, they were oversubscribed with a waiting list — despite the fact that each class cost \$150.

Art education should be preserved in Milton because not every family can afford the price of these precious electives ... because not every child will respond to traditional course work ... and because every child deserves an opportunity to explore the world that only art education can offer.

Thank you for listening.

Good evening my name is Bridget Mastandrea and I live at 44 Antwerp St.

I am here as a parent representative of FAVA (Friends and Advocates for the Visual Arts) a parent run organization and I am reading a statement prepared by FAVA.

Our organization was formed in 2003 in response to earlier cuts to the visual arts. It is the mission of FAVA to promote the visual arts in the Milton Public Schools; to advocate for greater visual arts opportunities for the students; and to lobby for appropriate funding for the visual arts within the school budget.

We are highly concerned about the proposed cuts to the visual arts department namely the loss of the department head and the loss of the Pierce Middle School's Honors Art (A.C.E.) Program. We find these cuts to be absolutely unacceptable for a number of reasons.

I'm sure you have all heard anecdotal evidence about the child who has been saved by the introduction to the visual arts. There is hard evidence to support why all kids need art in their curriculum. When children engage in creative activities, especially in an art room, they develop neurological connections within the brain that they keep all their lives. The more they practice creative thinking, the better they get at it, no surprise. But what is a surprise is that between the ages of 9 and 12 the brain does some "neurological pruning"...actually eliminating connections that haven't been used! The older the child gets the more difficult it is for them to think creatively if they haven't formed a good foundation in early life. "You can't teach an old dog new

tricks" is actually based on physical fact! There is no stronger case for a good art foundation in grades K - 8! We simply cannot wait until High School to foster children's artistic development.

More than 20 years ago Dr. Robert Brooks, PhD introduced the metaphor of "islands of competence" - "If there is an ocean of inadequacy, then there must be islands of competence - areas that have been or have the potential to be sources of pride and accomplishment."

In other words once a child achieves success in one aspect of their studies it carries over to other parts of their life.

Studies recently conducted with "at risk students" in New York point out that schools with strong art programs actually motivated these students to come to school and to try harder in their other classes! For some kids, it's the only reason they come to school!

To many children acceptance to the Honors Art Program ACE acknowledges that these students have a talent and they deserve to pursue this course of study.

At this point we can't quantify the benefit of a good art program through standardized testing but the fact is 25% of children are "visual learners" that is a quarter of our students. When we eliminate how they learn best we send them the message that who they are is not important. Do we want a school system with the slogan, "Only Verbal and Analytical Kids need Apply!"? We sincerely hope not but that's the way we are heading.

From: Jeanne Crowley (jeanecrowley@yahoo.com)
To: janerjilmore@comcast.net
Date: Tuesday, February 24, 2009 6:42:33 PM
Subject: art is not a "nice to have" it is a must have

My name is Jeanne Crowley. I live at 15 Hinckley Road. I'm here tonight to urge you to consider maintaining level funding for visual and fine arts in our schools. In fact, it is my deepest desire that you increase arts funding, and I will tell you why.

I have two children, both are on IEPs for special needs. I have one who is all about science and math, and gets all the help he needs with his organizational challenges and has great accommodations for his learning needs. His world is very black and white, but he loves to create games. The schools have been fantastic for him. My other son is all about the right brain and creativity. He struggles with basic learning, but can recreate scenes from films, provide detailed descriptions of photographs, and sing on perfect pitch. Sadly, I can't put more art or music on his IEP to help in the areas where he has the most confidence. And that place is in the art room, using his creativity. I know I am not the only parent who has bemoaned the cuts in art and music this year.

As educators, and people passionately devoted to education in our town, I deeply respect your position, and don't envy what you have to do. But I implore you to find a way to keep this vital part of our children's education.

There is nothing in this room, nothing that we wear, drive, buy, see or touch, that has not been influenced by our visual perceptions. What art does is engage our imagination, our creativity and our ability to see possibilities. Art leads us from "what is" to "what can be". It leads us to our best problem solving, our next level of productivity and the potential to make our world a better place. It unifies us, and shows us what we have in common with other people, and reminds us of what we share.

Education is not just about the left side of the brain, it is our right side that reaches out to our neural pathways to make connections. Our connections to the rest of our body, our minds, our community. Students need art to connect to their imagination, to increase their empathy and strengthen their ability to develop creative solutions to live in the world that we are leaving to them.

We need to help them develop these skills not just to compete in our global world but thrive and help the world: empathy, creativity, understanding, seeking connections, engaging and reaching out.

If we limit their access to the tools and ideas that can bring them these skills, we are not just hacking off limbs in the school budget - we are killing it at the roots. By removing access to art education in the public schools, we are effectively abandoning the 25% or more students who learn visually. For some of these children, taking art at school has

<http://us.mg4.mail.yahoo.com/dc/launch?gs=1&rand=hva0b163%shkh>

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provided them with a direction in life that may never have been tapped. For some, art or drama is what makes school bearable. It is especially important at the early education and middle school years, when students are most willing to express themselves.

By slashing the budget for the arts, we are leaving the skills of potential contributors behind - something we won't be able to repair at a later date. You know that young children are inherently creative - our culture, our community, our world would be nothing without imagination. Creativity needs to be nourished, it needs to be protected, it needs to be promoted.

Art is not a nice to have. Art is a need to have. Please find a way to keep this critical part of our children's development in the forefront of your thinking.

Thank you.