

**Milton School Committee  
Regular Meeting  
Milton High School Library  
March 18, 2008**

**Meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m.**

**Committee Present:** Beirne Lovely, Chair, Lynda Lee Sheridan, Vice Chair, Chris Huban, Mary Kelly, Laurie Stillman and Glenn Pavlicek

**Staff Present:** Dr. Magdalene Giffune, Superintendent; Mary Gormley, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Personnel; Paul Hilton, Assistant Superintendent for Business

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

Karen Friedman-Hanna voiced her concern regarding additional cuts to art and music which are being discussed as part of the upcoming budget process. In addition to academics, Ms. Friedman-Hanna feels art, music, and sports are equally important to many students and feels we should not consider cutting them further. She had actually hoped there would be a way to reinstate the devastating cuts made to these programs last year. After reading an article from Neurology Now which focused on music and how music affects the brain, she asked the Committee to keep in mind the importance of these programs when going through the budget process.

Joan Clifford thanked the Committee for responding to her recent emails. Ms. Clifford is a member of FAVA (Friends and Advocates for the Arts) which is a fee-based after school enrichment program that was created in response to cuts made in the arts within the school system. Ms. Clifford is concerned for the children who cannot pay for these programs. She discussed a bill being proposed by the Chairman of the Joint Committee of Economic Development which involves a new measure of accountability for schools in Massachusetts. This measure, the Creative Challenge Index, will measure how many opportunities schools provide for students to engage in the practice of creative work. She is concerned over the cuts already made to art and music and feels cutting these programs completely in grades K-8 could make Milton a second class school system.

Drew Flanagan stated that many of his concerns this year regarding funding and the budget process are similar to the concerns he voiced last year. He urges the School Committee, Administration, and Selectmen to get together to discuss this long term financial problem. He is concerned over further cuts to art and music and urged the Committee to have full disclosure with the community during the budget process and to gather feedback from the community.

Amy Flanagan spoke of the potential cuts to the art and music programs. She feels that the arts are what many children need to get through the school day. She discussed various studies which state that children involved in these programs have better math skills, reading comprehension, and higher SAT scores in math and verbal skills. Ms. Flanagan believes the arts are the future of our country and feels we need to solve this problem creatively.

Sara Mills feels the School Committee is in an impossible situation right now regarding the budget. As was previously stated, she feels we should be regaining what was lost last year and not losing these programs entirely. Ms. Mills feels that the root of the problem every year is that there is not enough money in the pot. In order to stop this cycle she feels we must convince the Town to increase their tax base by allowing carefully zoned restaurants and business to set up shop in Milton.

Steven Reilly had previously spoken out regarding the inequity of recess between the French Immersion and English programs and stated that last week's presentation showed several other inequities between these programs. He asked if there was a follow up plan to address these inequities. Mr. Reilly feels the data showed we are going beyond the tipping point with so many people choosing French Immersion and feels we must get back to having equity. He mentioned the crisis with the Middle School MCAS scores and asked if there is was a plan to address how these two different learning styles impact this.

## **2. Approval of Minutes**

Minutes of the March 4, 2008, were tabled until the next meeting. Ms. Kelly requested that more data points be added to the paragraph regarding the French Immersion presentation.

## **3. Special Education and Alternative Programs at Milton High School**

Dr. John Drottar discussed the Alternative Program at Milton High School. This program was started at the High School three years ago in an effort to target students who would not graduate in four years. The goal is to provide support, motivation, and monitoring to students in a smaller setting and to provide a home base for students to go to resolve any issues they may be having. Dr. Drottar referred to this classroom as a "safety net" and clarified the many misconceptions regarding this program.

- The program is not held in a separate location and students do not stay in the classroom all day.
- Students are not mandated to attend; they are there because they want or need the additional support.
- The classroom is not only for children with behavioral issues; it addresses students with many different educational needs on a more individualized basis.
- The program is fully integrated with Milton High School's regular schedule. It is a regular education program; however, it does include special education students.

Throughout the course of a day 90 or more students may come in to this classroom; some may be taking a make up class on line while others drop by for extra support. The program has been successful in helping to reduce the drop out rate and enhance academic achievement for many students. An evening program which runs from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. is also available. In addition to the Alternative Program, Milton High School offers a peer tutoring program, adult mentoring, and a senior mentoring freshman program. Jeff Rubin, Director of Pupil/Personnel Services, described the Alternative Program as "awesome" after recently observing a class. Mr. Rubin feels this program saves the school district money by allowing students to remain at the High School who may have otherwise had to go to private placements. He also commented that the computer programs which allow students to take classes on line are a great opportunity for students who may need to make up credits. Both Dr. Drottar and Mr. Rubin attribute the success of this classroom to the teachers involved, Megan Grantham and Brian Mackinaw. The Committee thanked Dr. Drottar and Mr. Rubin for this information and discussed some of the topics mentioned. With regard to the adult mentoring program and the senior mentoring freshman program, Dr. Drottar explained the adult mentoring program includes mostly teachers from the High School and one community member. Adults from the building are peered with a student and

activity periods provide the opportunity for the student and teacher to get together. There are currently about 30 adults in the building participating in the mentoring program; however, Dr. Drottter stated they are open to expanding this program to include more community members. As part of the senior mentoring freshman program, a group of seniors came in to school at the beginning of August for training and then helped with freshman orientation. The seniors meet with freshman during activity periods and also go in to freshman homerooms on a regular basis to discuss a variety of topics. When asked how students find out about the Alternative Program, Dr. Drottter replied this is a review process which starts with the Guidance Department. Guidance Councilors review how a student is doing in a regular class, talk with classroom teachers, adjustment councilors and teachers involved in the Alternative Program. If the need is there, students are recommended to participate in this program. If parents have any concerns or see that their child is struggling, they should talk to classroom teachers and Guidance to find out more about this program.

4. **FY09 Budget** – Mr. Lovely reviewed the budget situation. Last year’s budget appropriation was \$31,658,970, and this year the Committee has been informed by the Warrant Committee that the budget will essentially be level funded. There has been some discussion by the Warrant Committee of a possible contingent (override) budget. A contingent budget has to be approved at Town Meeting and requires the Selectmen’s approval to put the override question on the ballot. The School Committee has proposed a budget of \$33.1 million and has informed the Warrant Committee that figure did not include a raise number for teachers since their contract is still being negotiated. Administration had previously made several budget variations, some of which the School Committee did not agree with. Administration was asked to come up with other budget variations and these have been discussed at recent Finance Subcommittee meetings. The Finance Subcommittee began to prioritize what cuts would be made first and what would be cut last, keeping in mind the general premise has been to keep class size manageable and teachers in the classrooms. They felt teaching positions would be last on the list, along with the K-8 specialists. Mr. Lovely asked for the Committee’s opinion regarding the list made by the Finance Subcommittee. Mr. Pavlicek stated this list took into consideration that level dollar funding for this year would be approximately \$2 million from our request. In addition to money from retirements and further cuts to materials, supplies and equipment, the list included cutting 34.8 positions which are either existing positions and/or positions that were proposed and are now being cut or reduced. This list totaled \$2,048,288. Mr. Pavlicek stated the potential cuts to existing positions (6 at the High School, 5 at the Middle School, 5 at the Elementary School and 7 K-8 Specialists) will have a huge impact on our system. Due to the anticipated increase in class size as a result of losing 5 positions and the increase in families choosing French Immersion next year, several students may have to move from their school district. Mr. Lovely explained that this year’s enrollment statistics for 1<sup>st</sup> grade were 55% for the English program; 45% for French Immersion. Next year’s projected enrollment statistics according to program are 44% English; 56% French Immersion. Dr. Giffune went over the implications of these reductions and the projected enrollment statistics and stated this could result in having to move 100 students. Ms. Stillman added this does not include the fact that in order to save the 7 K-8 Specialists, 7 other staff positions would have to be cut throughout the system.

Mr. Lovely discussed the Hillside money which was donated by the Copeland Foundation and the use of revolving accounts. The Hillside money can only be used to supplement the budget; there are stringent guidelines for the use of this money. For example, if we cut \$150,000 from materials and supplies, we cannot take that money from the Hillside account. With regard to revolving accounts, these accounts are intended to take in revenues generated for a certain purpose. For example, money left from facilities rental cannot be put in the athletic fund; it can only be used to pay for expenses with respect to facilities.

With regard to the list being presented this evening, it was suggested by various School Committee members that the following be added for consideration: (1) revisiting the fee structure for athletics and activities to mitigate teacher reductions; (2) cutting back the 4 professional development days to perhaps 1 or 2 next year (response by Dr. Giffune was that this is part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement and would have to be discussed in Executive Session); (3) re-examining the Elementary Assistant Principal positions; and (4) re-examining School Choice. Further discussion topics included:

- moving students – this would not be limited students entering 1<sup>st</sup> grade students; it could mean that a 4<sup>th</sup> grader at one school would be moved to another
- If this plan is implemented, siblings could not be taken into consideration when moving students.
- Milton High School’s accreditation could be affected by these eliminations. Dr. Drottar will have to report to NEASC any substantive changes at Milton High School.
- Due to the elimination of K-8 Specialists, early dismissal 3 days/week may be necessary in order to maintain contractual obligations with teachers (prep time).
- Scheduling - it was suggested that we look at the way we do scheduling at the Middle School and High School before eliminating any program. For example, would it be possible to go from 7 to 6 periods/day. How would that impact graduation requirements at the High School? (Although this would be a Collective Bargaining Agreement matter, Mr. Lovely suggested that Administration inquire as to the implications at the High School and Middle School of reducing periods and report back to the Committee.)
- With the shift in more families choosing French Immersion, do we want to start thinking about restoring FLES at 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level? What would be cost of this restoring? (It was stated this would be approximately 1.4 positions/\$70,000). Where else in the system could that \$70,000 come from?
- Can Milton afford to have Elementary foreign language?
- Math/Reading Coaches – should the positions for coaches be left in this budget?

Mr. Lovely suggested that the Finance Subcommittee continue to meet to discuss all possibilities; it is too early in the process to determine what the cuts will be. Ms. Stillman feels the Finance Subcommittee should talk about what would be put on an override budget and make a clear presentation to the Warrant Committee of the severe cuts already made to the system. Before the meeting adjourned Mr. Lovely addressed the Anti-Nepotism Policy previously adopted by the School Committee. He had been unaware of this policy when his daughter worked temporarily in the school system. Other members have also been in violation of this policy; therefore, Mr. Lovely requested that the Anti-Nepotism policy be put on the agenda for the next School Committee meeting. A School Committee meeting will be posted for Tuesday morning at 7 a.m. at the time of the Finance Subcommittee meeting in the Superintendent’s Conference Room. Ms. Kelly requested another School Committee meeting prior to April 1, 2008; Administration will gather some possible dates. Ms. Kelly also suggested that as much information as possible regarding the budget be posted on the website before Town Meeting. The April 1, 2008 School Committee meeting will be posted as the Open Public Budget Hearing.

Motion was made to adjourn.

Move: C. Huban

Second: L. Sheridan

Vote: 6-0-0

The meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.