



PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MILTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02186

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To: Milton Public Schools Parents & Guardians
From: Mary C. Gormley, Superintendent of Schools
Re: E-Update, December 2, 2008

From the Office of the Superintendent

Public school systems are evaluated by several different criteria; MCAS, SATs, Advanced Placement (offerings, enrollment and scores), high school drop-out rates, and teacher-made assessments. The MCAS, SATs and Advanced Placement assessments have been highlighted in the September and October E-Mail Blasts. A school system's MCAS results are the most public of all the assessments. Currently, students in Grades 3 through 10 are tested in English/Language Arts and Math. Each schools' and districts' Adequate Yearly Progress is measured by these results. Milton's achievement on these tests is at a very high level, although there is focused work to be done to improve results in certain learning standards and subgroups of students. Milton's administrators and teachers are working collaboratively during their common planning time sessions, department and principals' meetings to evaluate the results to identify strengths and weaknesses. With this data, we are developing action plans to improve instruction and student achievement. These initiatives will be highlighted in my monthly newsletters.

– **Mary Gormley**

Conferences

Last week's parent/guardian-teacher conferences went extremely well. The new format, which included both traditional evening hours and the addition of an early release day for students on Wednesday, was implemented at all six schools to allow parents/guardians more flexibility in scheduling their conference times. Also, thank you to the various PTO members for graciously providing meals for teachers during conferences.

Celebration for Education Wind-down

Everyone was a winner at this year's Milton Foundation for Education's Celebration for Education event! Hundreds of hard-working volunteers helped to make *Shake, Rattle and Roll* a huge success for the Milton Foundation for Education. We are very grateful to all who worked so tirelessly and to the nearly 700 people who attended this important fundraiser. Special thanks to this year's chairs Barbara Avitabile-Mullen, Ned Corcoran and Alison Corcoran.

Milton Public Library Tile Project

We are grateful to the Milton Rotary Club for their wonderful project involving our third- and fourth-graders. Rotarians recently organized a tile-painting session at the Pierce Middle School. Students were given a six-inch tile and allowed to paint a scene from their favorite book on the tile. More than 200 students participated in this project, and the finished tiles will be used to create a mosaic in the new Milton Public Library. Thanks to all the students who painted and volunteers who assisted. We can't wait to see your work displayed in our town's new library!

25 Gile Road, Milton, Massachusetts 02186

MCAS/AYP

Open-Response Questions

Submitted by Martha Sherman & Maryellen McDermott

Some parents have asked about the use of Open Response questions in homework assignments and during standardized tests. Open-Response questions are a form of assessment that measure students' ability to use higher order thinking skills to express content knowledge. These questions usually consist of two or more parts: a prompt and the directions for writing/answering. This measure assesses the student's ability to express their own ideas and synthesize information. Open-response questions assess writing, conceptual understanding and thinking skills-especially students' ability to analyze, to evaluate and/or solve problems.

The MCAS tests include open-response questions on all forms and require students to generate, rather than recognize a response. Students create a one-two paragraph response in writing or in the form of a narrative or a chart, table, diagram, illustration, or graph, as appropriate. Students can respond correctly using a variety of strategies and approaches.

Responses to open-response questions are scored using a scoring guide, or a rubric, for each question. The scoring guides indicate what knowledge and skills students must demonstrate to earn 1, 2, 3 or 4 score points. Answers to MCAS open-response questions are not scored for spelling, punctuation or grammar.

There are between two and five open-response questions on each content area test. These questions account for approximately 37% of the total number of points. The chart below represents the Math Open Response questions on the 2008 MCAS.

| Elementary Math MCAS Open Response Questions | | | |
|---|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Grade | Number of O.R. Questions and Points | Percent of Total Test Items | Percent of Total Test Points |
| 3 | 5 questions @ 2 points each | 14% | 25% |
| 4 | 5 questions @ 4 points each | 13% | 37% |
| 5 | 5 questions @ 4 points each | 13% | 37% |

Teachers use a variety of strategies to promote proficiency on open-response questions. They model problems, explore past test items, and show samples of student work at all score points to demonstrate what elements constitute an exemplary answer. Teachers also show students common errors and provide test taking support. Instruction familiarizes students with rubrics (scoring guides) and provides opportunities for students to use the MCAS rubrics. Students explore open response questions through homework, quizzes and projects across all content areas: Reading/ Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies.

School Committee Update

There have been two school committee meetings since my last E-blast, which were held on November 5th and November 18th. Below is a brief summary of those meetings. Please remember the next school committee meetings will be held tonight, December 2nd, and also on December 16th.

November 5, 2008 Meeting

- **Food Services:** Ms. Jacqueline Morgan, Food Service Director, updated the committee on the Food Service Program of the Milton Public Schools. Ms. Morgan reported that nearly 2,500 lunches are served each day in our schools. Also, breakfast is served at all six schools; our snack program complies with Mass Action for Healthy Kids; and all beverages are on the American Healthy Generations list. The emphasis on healthy meals has also resulted in all breads being changed to whole grain or whole wheat; and Milton's participation in the Farm to School Program, which provides fresh fruits and vegetables to our students.

A new computerized system has made the Food Service department more efficient both for students and for administrators. Elementary cafeterias use a pre-paid system; while middle- and high-school school students swipe their IDs as payment, which limits the amount of cash in use.

Ms. Morgan also discussed the free and reduced lunch program. Applications for this program are sent at the beginning of the school year and are available in all school offices and on the school website. All information is kept strictly confidential. Ms. Morgan noted that any family who qualifies for food stamps is automatically eligible for the free/reduced lunch program. See chart below for qualification information. Finally, Ms. Morgan commended the work of the Health and Wellness Committee. This group is made up of faculty, administration and school committee members; town employees, students and parents. It is hoped that a representative from Milton Hospital will join the Committee, as well as additional parents and/or students.

| FEDERAL INCOME CHART | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|---------|--------|
| For School Year 2008-2009 | | | |
| Household size | Yearly | Monthly | Weekly |
| 1 | 19240 | 1604 | 370 |
| 2 | 25900 | 2159 | 499 |
| 3 | 32560 | 2714 | 627 |
| 4 | 39220 | 3269 | 755 |
| 5 | 45880 | 3824 | 883 |
| 6 | 52540 | 4379 | 1011 |
| 7 | 59200 | 4934 | 1139 |
| 8 | 65860 | 5489 | 1267 |
| Each additional person: | +6660 | +555 | +129 |

- **Science:** Our Science Department Head, Barbara Plonski, presented a report on science MCAS scores for the district. Students are tested in grades 5, 8 and at the high school level. The class of 2010 will be required to pass a science portion of MCAS in either biology or chemistry, which 95% of students have already done, with scores above state levels. Grade 8 scores also met or exceeded the state average. Grade 5 scores showed a need for improvement in some elementary schools. Among the initiatives discussed to boost scores was the WISP program, which brings scientists from University of Massachusetts at Boston into our classrooms to give students more hands-on science experience and to create science "libraries" in each school.

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- Diversity Report:** On November 5th, I presented the annual Diversity Report to the School Committee. The report discussed the hiring practices and recruitment policies of the Milton Public School system which are put in place to ensure diversity in the staff. Monthly meetings are attended by the Superintendent and two Assistant Superintendents along with the Citizens for a Diverse Milton's Leadership team to discuss a variety of issues involving diversity in the Milton Public Schools. In addition to hiring and recruitment practices, this group discusses raising the achievement of all students attending the Milton Public Schools, improving communication, and increasing parental involvement.

I also discussed the role of the Diversity Committee that exists in each school and consists of teachers, parents, and administrators who work to implement diversity initiatives. Enrollment statistics for the district by race/ethnicity for the years 2007 and 2008 were presented and can be found on our website. Click on "School Committee Presentations," then "Superintendent's Diversity Report."
- Field Trips:** The School Committee had expressed concern about the pricing of certain field trips and the number of school days missed. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Personnel John Phelan has begun a process to "annualize" these trips so families will know in advance what trips will take place. Mr. Phelan also discussed the possibility of alternating the years for these field trips for planning purposes.
- Facilities:** In the interest of cost efficiency, we are working on a new lighting project for the Copeland Field House which would require new fixtures to accommodate energy-efficient lighting. In addition, the facilities subcommittee is working on a plan to limit the number of lights left on in the evenings at the various schools and to possibly consolidate building use during the winter months to save on heating costs. With regard to the solar panel project, Mr. Hilton reported that Town Counsel has reviewed the contracts and with some minor remedies, the project work will begin.

November 18, 2008 Meeting

- Full Day Kindergarten:** Dr. Dore Korschun, principal of the Glover School, along with teacher Kimberly Comer, presented information about Full Day Kindergarten (FDK.) With the academic year nearly one-third complete, Dr. Korschun called the program "a true success story," and discussed how extensive planning helped to make the transition to FDK go smoothly this fall.

Our kindergarteners are actively engaged in learning in all areas of the curriculum and have adjusted to their full-day schedules. Although 96% of parents have chosen the FDK option, Dr. Korschun noted that those students who are in half-day classrooms are also flourishing. First grade teachers will be able to instruct both groups of students through differentiated instruction, if necessary.
- Communication Subcommittee:** School Committee member Kristan Bagley Jones reported that her goal of having a school committee or central administration staff member present at each PTO meeting has been accomplished. She discussed future plans to meet with Milton's PAC groups and organize visits to school site councils. Ms. Bagley Jones also praised the middle and high school for sending regular E-blasts to parents and said she is hopeful that the elementary schools will do so in the near future. She discussed plans to increase communication to all town residents; plan a celebration of the end of school construction; and convene a forum on issues surrounding the French Immersion/English programs.
- Finance Subcommittee:** Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Personnel John Phelan, Assistant Superintendent for Business Paul Hilton, and School Committee member Mary Kelly presented a PowerPoint on the state of the school budget for FY 2009 and discussed the impacts on each school. They explained the difference between a level-funded and a level-service budget for next year and

pointed out that a level-funded budget could result in the loss of as many as 34 teaching positions. In addition, unless fundraising and collection efforts reach sufficient levels, the elimination of high school sports and/or activities could occur before the end of this school year.

Recent Activities

Sister School Bake Sale
By Ludmila Nivoroshkin
Pierce Middle School

Sixth-grade French students at Pierce Middle School recently held a bake sale to raise funds for their sister school in Burkina Faso, Western Africa. The students, under the direction of their parents, baked cupcakes, cookies, and brownies for sale during the recent parent/guardian-teacher conferences. The students, with the help of two 8th graders, wore African outfits and enthusiastically sold the treats to parents as they came in the door. The sale was an enormous success, with a total of over \$500 raised for the African school.

This “sister school” project began four years ago, when Pierce adopted the elementary school, Samandin A, in the country of Burkina Faso. Every year, Pierce students send the money they raise during the November bake sale.

All funds raised by our Milton students go for backpacks, school supplies, flip flops and rice for needy students at Samandin A. For some students, the rice they get at school is the only meal they can count on in a day. The Samandin A students and their teachers sent thank-you letters to Pierce. Reading the letters was educational for the students, who were surprised to learn that their African counterparts have about 75 students in every class.

Our students at Pierce not only learned more about the school and students in Burkina Faso, but they learned compassion, sharing, and appreciation for their own lives in the U.S.

Williamstown Field Trip

A group of sixth-grade Latin students recently attended a catapult contest at Mt. Greylock High School in Williamstown, Mass. The students and parent chaperones were treated to a great performance by a local acting group, but the main focus was the catapulting equipment.

In addition to the marshmallow division for middle school student, the competition also featured high school catapults, which were capable of hurling pumpkins and other items “likely to explode in an entertaining way.”

Will Breslin, Corey Handy, Andrew Issner, James Coyne, Liv Jensen, Renee Chiu, and Rebekah Schaffner attended this event, along with several parents, Mr. Jensen, Mrs. Schaffner, Mrs. Handy, and Mr. Issner. Everyone looks forward to attending again next year.

While in Williamstown, the Latin students also attended The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute for a tour. The docent showed our students a variety of pieces from their collection that had mythological themes. Students enjoyed this opportunity to combine art and language experiences in one session.

Upcoming Events

Language Mentors

A group of Pierce eighth-graders in Senorita Shea’s class will be going to Glover today (Dec. 2) to read their Childhood Books to the elementary FLES students. These books were created by the Pierce students in their Spanish class as part of the curriculum. This mentoring program is a great opportunity for our 8th graders to showcase their work and it could be very inspirational for the elementary students to see and hear the older students’ presentations.

Kindergarten and Grade 1 Information Nights

Parents/Guardians of children who will begin Kindergarten or Grade 1 in the Fall of 2009 should mark their calendars for the upcoming information nights.

- Kindergarten Information Night will be held on Thursday, January 22, 2009 at 7pm in the High School Auditorium
- Grade 1 Information Night will be held on Thursday, January 29, 2009 at 7pm in the High School Auditorium

More information including how to pre-register will be sent out to all MPS families and will be advertised throughout town.

Milton Public Schools Ambassadors Page

Each week, as part of our E-Update, we recognize students, teachers, parents and members of the community whose hard work deserves recognition. Please read about some of their outstanding accomplishments below:

Student Highlight:

Eastern District Musical Festival

Nineteen students from Milton High School were accepted to the Eastern District Music Festival and eight of them had such high scores that they have recommendations to audition for Massachusetts All State Festival. Congratulations to these outstanding young musicians!

Eastern Music Festival - 19 students

Band--Matt Kelly; Orchestra--Charlie Rosmarin, Blake Daniel, Elizabeth Mahon, Tim Marchetta-Wood; Jazz--Willie Archibald, Garrett Pavlicek, Gabe Stillman; Chorus--Jon Adler, Marline Alexis, Malcolm Carvalho, Elaine Daiber, Melissa Donovan, Liana Gineitis, Hannah Mulkern, Lauren Stafford, Braedy Taugher, Conor Walsh, Emily Whipple.

Recommendations to audition for Massachusetts All State - 9 students

Jazz--Willie Archibald, Garrett Pavlicek, Gabe Stillman; Chorus--Marline Alexis, Elaine Daiber, Braedy Taugher, Conor Walsh, Emily Whipple; Orchestra - Charlie Rosmarin

Teacher Highlight:

Another Nationally Certified Teacher

Pierce Middle School teacher Ellen Gehret just received word that she passed her National Board Certification. It should be noted that only 40 percent of those who take the test are able to pass on the first try. Congratulations to Ms. Gehret, who teaches 7th grade English, and a special thanks to Patricia Turner for all of her guidance and support throughout this rigorous process. Excellent job!

Athletics Highlight:

Girls Cross Country Finishes Strong

The Milton High School Girls Cross Country team, after finishing an undefeated season, earned 7th place at the All-State Cross Country Championships at Franklin Park on Saturday, November 15th. Congratulations to Chelsea Mitchell, Evelyn Orlando, Maria Lannon, Jessica Brennan, Olivia Collins, Emily Hughes, Clara Heiden and Mairead Kiernan. What a season for these outstanding student athletes!

Volunteer Highlight:

MHS Best Buddies Program

By Karen Coughlin (Faculty Advisor/Best Buddies)
& Kim Sullivan (Special Education Advisor/Best Buddies)

Best Buddies is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities by providing opportunities for one-to-one friendships and integrated employment. Thanks to a donation from the Copeland Foundation, the MHS chapter of Best Buddies is again thriving this year.

Under the leadership of President Sophia Thompson, this club includes nearly 50 high school students. In addition to last month's Halloween party, they have also participated in other outside-of-school activities, including movie nights, or catching a Bruins and Celtics game. Students have also discussed taking on a community service project.

The MHS Best Buddies chapter is looking forward to organizing many more events and adventures to further strengthen and solidify the friendships among each of its members in the future.

Calendar of Events

To see a listing of upcoming events, please go to District-Wide calendar located on the MPS website at www.miltonps.org.

The MHS Athletics Winter Schedule can be found at https://www.edline.net/pages/Milton_High_School/Athletics.