

Massachusetts School Building Authority

Timothy R. Cahill
Chairman, State Treasurer

Katherine P. Craven
Executive Director

April 14, 2009

Mary C. Gormley
Superintendent of Schools
Town of Milton
25 Gile Road
Milton, MA 02186

Dear Superintendent ~~Gormley~~ ^{Mary}:

I am writing in response to your letter requesting that the Massachusetts School Building Authority make a decision about the potential closure of any of Milton's elementary schools and also requesting an "advisory opinion as to whether the Milton Public Schools can temporarily change the use of either the Tucker or Cunningham Elementary School from a K-5 elementary school to a school that houses our Integrated Pre-School program with a plan to fully re-open the school when funds allow."

As you know, although the Town of Milton owns these recently built schools, the Massachusetts School Building Authority, and the taxpayers that fund the Authority statewide, have paid a grant of \$114 million dollars to the Town of Milton for substantial capital construction at the Tucker, Pierce, Collicot/Cunningham, Glover and Milton High schools. The MSBA has regulations which allow for the recoupment of some or all of a grant made to a school if the school closes or the original, as-built, educational use changes. In addition, the Town of Milton has received an \$8 million dollar low-interest loan from the MSBA in order to assist in closing a funding gap for the most recent school to be built, the Collicot/Cunningham school. The MSBA stands ready to work with the Town of Milton in developing a mutually agreed upon plan that allows Milton to develop a locally approved educational plan that maximizes that use of these new educational facilities and minimizes the disruption to the originally approved and funded facilities plan.

Although the MSBA wants to be sensitive to Milton's local financial difficulties, we also are looking to protect this significant state investment in a manner that best preserves the original educational purposes under which these school funds were applied for by Milton and approved by the Commonwealth. All state funding for these schools was granted based upon Milton's application that all of these capital improvements were *necessary* for the provision of the desired local educational program. With respect to advice on what alternative educational purposes could be accommodated in either the Cunningham or Tucker schools, the MSBA will be relying upon the Milton school committee voting to approve a new, revised educational plan for any proposed changed facility that utilizes the facility for pre-K through grade 12 educational purposes at its *highest and best educational use, ideally with as little deviance from the original educational plan, and as supported by your long range plan to accommodate the educational needs of the*

District. Under MSBA regulations, the district must also provide the MSBA with certain information, approved by the Milton School Committee, including a plan for accommodating displaced programs and services; a plan for accommodating district students within the remaining school buildings, and a long-range plan for accommodating district students.

Outright closure of a facility is the least attractive option for either the Tucker or the Cunningham schools, as I am concerned overall that any proposal to entirely take a building out of service reduces the likelihood the building will be returned to service as a school. Moreover, changing the educational program of the 323-seat Tucker School to accommodate just the 169 preschoolers would seem to be most disruptive to Milton's original educational specifications, as submitted in Milton's 2001 school construction funding application, because of Tucker's geographic location and the loss of facilities that were built for the educational needs of older elementary school children. I would like to assure you and the Milton School Committee that the MSBA is willing to exercise flexibility in reviewing the MSBA funding implications of any locally approved educational plan that would potentially allow portions of the Cunningham or Tucker Schools to be temporarily reduced in use, should that outcome be desired as part of your local school funding solutions. Is there a potential alternative educational use that would be better accommodated at the Tucker School, for instance, moving an entire elementary grade level into the Tucker facility rather than the pre-school?

The decision about whether or not any school facility should be removed from service, or partially removed from service, is a policy decision that ultimately rests with the District. I appreciate that the Town of Milton does not wish to jeopardize any of the \$122 million dollars in state funds that were granted or loaned for the original pre-K through grade 12 educational facilities improvement plan resulting in state-of-the-art new or renovated school buildings in Milton. I appreciate the difficult decisions that Milton will have to make in funding the operating budget, and eagerly await a plan that best preserves the original intent of the funding investment in order to avoid the step of recouping state funds not used for school purposes. Unless the MSBA agrees with Milton on the parameters of a facility reuse plan, the MSBA will take steps to recoup the grant funds. Just a few short years ago, these facilities were funded in good faith by the state taxpayers at a 90% reimbursement rate, and there needs to be a compelling reason why their originally intended use and operation is no longer locally supported.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Very truly yours,



Katherine Craven
Executive Director

Cc: Beirne Lovely
Chairman Kathryn Fagan, Board of Selectmen
Representative Walter Timilty
Representative Linda Dorcena-Forry
Senator Brian Joyce