

**Questions and Answers from Budget Hearing
March 16, 2010**

Question: If we eliminate grandfathering of busing to elementary schools , would there be meaningful savings by reducing transportation expenses?

Answer: The school system previously contracted eleven buses with each bus doing approximately three runs per day. Our current contract is for nine buses. With the student assignment plan we were able to reduce transportation costs by \$100,000 (\$50,000 per bus). We will explore the issue of grandfathering further to see where we stand and to determine if there could be additional savings.

Question: How many students does each Milton High School guidance counselor now have and how many will each have after the Guidance Director is cut? How will that impact college counseling?

Answer: The current case load for each guidance counselor is approximately 270 students. The shift in this position will increase the case load slightly since the Guidance Director does carry a small case load. The impact of losing this position will be more to the extra services provided to parents by the Guidance Director such as attending evening meetings to explain the college process, curriculum, etc.

Question: Could you tell us about the five options under consideration for the French Immersion Program?

Answer: The five options are: 1) Partner school option; 2) Continuum Plan; 3) Lottery or Cap System; 4) Integrating French Immersion and English students in Grade 5; and 5) Capping by school. The first four options have been explored thoroughly by the World Language Review Team and the team will explore the fifth option further at upcoming meetings. A meeting is scheduled for April 6, 2010 to present the results of the World Language Review Team to the public.

Question: I have heard that the French Immersion program is *not an added cost to the budget*. Is this correct?

Answer: Yes. There has been some misconception in the past that French Immersion teachers were paid differently; however, all teachers are in a union and when they are hired their pay is based upon their years of experience and degree level. There are no extra costs for texts, materials and supplies for the French Immersion program.

Question: If French Immersion costs per pupil are the same as English, how does capping French Immersion save any costs?

Answer: There is no savings in capping French Immersion. We tried this option several years ago and it did not work for the community; however, the World Language Team is putting all options on the table.

Question: Was the teachers' union approached to re-open the contract? If yes, what was the response? If not, what is the excuse? Either way, the union contract seems to be crippling the school system. When does the contract expire?

Answer: The current contract expires next year. Although there has been some informal discussion this year about the needs of the system, no formal request has been made to the union.

Question: Will the School Committee consider approaching the union regarding re-opening the contract to discuss the possibility of a wage freeze or lower increase and the GIC program for health insurance?

Answer: The School Committee does not negotiate GIC or health insurance provider (administrative company) with the teachers. This is done through the Board of Selectmen with a collaborative group of all the employee unions. They have been meeting but have not come to an agreement on health care.

Question: Is there any possibility of moving contract negotiations with teachers to an annual or bi-annual basis rather than every three years?

Answer: This is a possibility since the law only restricts us to signing a contract that is no more than three years. Historically, three-year contracts have been the norm for the duration of a settlement.

Question: Why can't we re-certify each student's residency annually to address out-of-town students?

Answer: We have done a great deal of work regarding the issue of residency and have re-organized our internal staff to dedicate more time to the issue of enrolling students. Also, the School Department pays a stipend to two Milton Police officers to work on residency issues. Last year approximately 120 cases were investigated and over 40 students were removed from the schools. Over the summer months an additional 10-20 students were removed. To date for this school year, approximately 35 students have been removed from the Milton Public Schools. Citizens are encouraged to call Central Office or the anonymous hotline to report any residency concerns. The anonymous hotline 617-698-1213.

Question: Why are all the cuts coming from staff positions and not from other spending such as supplies, etc.?

Answer: The majority of the budget (approximately 75%) is people and spending for other items such as lighting, heat, supplies, insurance, and other contracted services is not as flexible. Over the last few years we have cut the non-salary supplies as tight as we believe we can and still operate our programs.

Question: Why do the elementary schools take the biggest hit as opposed to the High School which is only being cut by \$166,000?

Answer: Milton has approximately 4,000 students and approximately 2,000 of those students are in the four Elementary schools and the remaining students are at the Middle and High schools. The leadership team sits down and attempts to divide the cuts fairly, with the least adverse impact to the quality of education, at each level. One of the main principles we operate under is to maintain programs and services offered to children. In the simplest terms, we want to offer a well-rounded education. We want children to achieve at a high level, be exposed to a

variety disciplines and acquire strong and creative problem solving skills. Given all the circumstances before the administrative team this year, when faced with cutting a program entirely or increasing class size, we decided to keep programs.

Question: The situation being described sounds as though an override may be necessary. How is an override initiated?

Answer: When concerned parents and community members feel an override is necessary, a committee is formed to educate the public why an override is needed and to inform the public of the ramifications to the schools/town of not passing an override. It is ultimately the vote of the Board of Selectmen as to whether or not an override question is put on the ballot.

Question: What can we do as citizens and parents to help influence both the Warrant Committee and Town Meeting of the need to fully fund our schools?

Answer: Citizens can advocate the need for an override and can lobby Town Meeting members. The Warrant Committee works very hard and very closely with the School Department and other town departments throughout the budget process to make sure the budget cuts are as equitable as possible. It is, however, the Warrant Committee's responsibility to recommend a balanced budget for the entire town.

Question: Town Meeting recently passed an article regarding construction of a wind turbine. Over the life span of the wind turbine, an approximate savings of \$7 million to the town is anticipated. Will any of these savings be factored into future budgets?

Answer: This will be factored into future budgets. The money saved from the wind turbine will come into the town as special revenue and it will be determined at Town Meeting(s) how the money is allocated and spent.

Question: Is there any possibility of special education stimulus funds going directly toward something related to special education that would be an investment in the future success of students with disabilities? An example of this would be to teach social skills. If the body of special education students had more confidence in themselves and felt more included with their peer groups, there is no question that performance district-wide would raise across all disabilities.

Answer: With the federal special education stimulus funds we received this year, we started an elementary school program in cooperation with the New England Center for Children (NECC) to serve children in community with autism. This investment in our staff and children helps us serve our students directly, reducing the need for out-of-district tuition and transportation. It also keeps the children closer to their peers and their parents. With the 2nd round of federal stimulus funds for special education, we will continue our partnership with NECC next year to solidify the program.

Working to improve and perfect all of educational programs is an ongoing effort. Recently, as a result of meetings with the Milton Parent Advisory Council, a meeting has been scheduled for this week with Marcia Uretsky, Tucker Principal, and a small parent group to discuss the possibility of developing a team of teachers who would investigate new programs across the state and nation and discuss how those programs could be integrated into the Milton Public Schools.

Written and Verbal Questions From Milton Citizens – February and March 2010

Question: Can you please inform me of the level of increases in salaries that all school employees (both school administration and teachers, both union and non-union) have been given in the last three years and how much is contracted to be given before the next union contract is up for negotiation?

Answer: All Union contracts are up for negotiation for FY12 (meaning next year is the final year of a three-year contract.)

Employee Group	Union	Salary Schedule	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	Expiration Date
Administrators	No	No	2-4%	0-4%	0%	3.50%	Varies
Unit B Supervisors	Yes	Yes	3%	2%	3.02%	3.50%	30-Jun-11
Teachers	Yes	Yes	3%	2%	3.02%	3.50%	30-Jun-11
Educational Aides	Yes	Yes	3%	2%	3%	3.50%	30-Jun-11
Custodians	Yes	Yes	2%	2%	3.02%	3.50%	30-Jun-11
Secretaries & Support	No	Yes	3%	2%	0%-1%	3.50%	

Question: Who negotiates the contract with the union representing school employees?

Answer: The elected School Committee members on the negotiating sub-committee.

Question: What advance authorization is there for negotiating a contract whose terms exceed the property tax limits imposed by Proposition 2 1/2?

Answer: There is not any required advance authorization for settling a collective bargain agreement under a future (projected) Proposition 2 ½ limit. The voters get a chance each year to decide on what they want for a budget and what two school committee members to elect to the six-person School Committee. The School committee votes the budget number that goes before the Annual Town Meeting. If the total of all departments budget request will exceed the projected Proposition 2 & ½ levy limit, then the Selectmen have the option to put that before the voters for approval to increase the property taxes above the Proposition 2& ½ limit.

Question: Please explain what are the various types of salary increases that school employees are entitled to (e.g., cost of living, "step" raises, "line change" raises, etc.)?

Answer: Depending on the contract, salary increases may be set or not. If a salary schedule is in place for an upcoming year, the employee is entitled to the terms and conditions as agreed to in the contract.

A step increase is what an employee is entitled to for gaining another year of experience in a particular job classification. That continues until the individual reaches the top step or pauses for years between steps.

A lane change is a form of merit pay for educational achievement. Teachers and Unit B Supervisors are entitled to better compensation for completing advanced coursework. The theory behind this form of merit pay is teachers are paid for the intellect they share with and impart on students. The better educated the teacher, the better educated the student will be. The same principle applies to administrators and the staff.

MPS does not have "COLA" raises, the steps and/or lanes cover most job classifications. Positions with individual contracts and are not part of a union do not have steps and lanes.

Question: What percentage of our town budget does the school budget represent?

Answer: According to Audited FY09 figures, the school expended \$32,339,497 from the total General Fund Expenditures of \$76,704,513, so the school budget actuals were 42% of the town's total general budget actuals.

Question: Does this amount include teacher's health insurance coverage and pension benefits?

Answer: No, the town does not have the school department include employee health insurance or pension related expenses in its budget; it is budgeted for by the Town. The teacher pension benefit is funded by the state and the teachers direct contributions to the MA Teachers' Retirement System; the town does not get a pension assessment bill to cover the future projected liability like it does for Town employees and school employees that are not DESE certified and part of the MTRS.

Question: If not, then how much more do these two items add to the percentage of our total town budget allocable to our school system?

Answer: Based on what the town allocated to the school at the end of FY09 it adds the following: \$3,650,892 for employee health insurance, \$1,503,217 for retiree health insurance, and \$841,384 for the pension assessment (teachers and most administrators are part of the state teachers' retirement system, that \$841,384 is for the non DOE certified staff.) So, the total % of school related costs to the rest of the town General Fund Budget is approximately 50% of the total town general fund expenditures.

Question: What savings could have the town achieved if the state GIC were used to provide health coverage to our school employees?

Answer: The school department does not have recent information to answer this question as the health benefits are on the town side of the budget. Ask Kevin Mearn, Town Administrator, for his, or the consultant's, calculations to the projected savings.

Question: How do our salary levels for administrators and teachers compare to towns of comparable student body size?

Answer: Based on Per pupil expenditures for FY09, Milton is efficient compared to that of the state average and most neighbors that abut our borders or have many similar characteristics. Milton ranks in the middle or bottom of categories requested. See the chart below for more details.

Question: How do they compare to our neighboring towns of Dedham, Westwood, and Canton?

Answer: In FY09, for the combined administration, leadership and teaching expenditures, Canton spent \$ 5,734 per pupil, Milton spent \$5,766 per pupil, Westwood spent \$6,487 per pupil and Dedham spent \$6,846 per pupil. (continued on next page.

Answer: Back-up data for the prior two questions

The following data is from the DESE's "FY09 Expenditure Per Pupil, All Funds, Summary by Function" report.

				instruc-	classroom &		total
		total	admini-	tional	specialist	total	expenditures
lea	district	pupils	stration	leadership	teachers	expenditures	per pupil
999	State AVG	925,126	\$ 441	\$ 825	\$ 4,932	\$ 12,084,593,984	\$ 13,063
189	MILTON	3,971	\$ 417	\$ 647	\$ 4,702	\$ 45,571,009	\$ 11,477
243	QUINCY	9,065	\$ 448	\$ 901	\$ 5,200	\$ 122,580,190	\$ 13,522
40	BRAINTREE	5,528	\$ 296	\$ 788	\$ 4,262	\$ 58,818,053	\$ 10,640
199	NEEDHAM	5,223	\$ 580	\$ 927	\$ 4,785	\$ 67,681,744	\$ 12,958
131	HINGHAM	4,033	\$ 334	\$ 656	\$ 4,506	\$ 43,542,501	\$ 10,797
26	BELMONT	3,954	\$ 331	\$ 858	\$ 4,450	\$ 45,919,393	\$ 11,613
266	SHARON	3,465	\$ 385	\$ 1,042	\$ 4,870	\$ 49,806,278	\$ 14,374
50	CANTON	3,156	\$ 262	\$ 658	\$ 4,814	\$ 39,279,004	\$ 12,445
335	WESTWOOD	3,107	\$ 399	\$ 1,050	\$ 5,038	\$ 42,440,342	\$ 13,658
73	DEDHAM	2,939	\$ 841	\$ 808	\$ 5,198	\$ 43,569,645	\$ 14,824

Milton	% of state AVG	NA	94.7%	78.4%	95.3%	NA	87.9%
	MPS Rank of Quick Group	NA	5	11	8	NA	9
	1 being highest, 11 being lowest						

Question: How many new employees were added to the school payroll in the last three years?

Answer: Like any business with 500+ employees, there is employee turnover every year. People voluntarily or involuntarily end their employment with the Milton Public Schools. We have people new to the system every year, but not necessarily new positions that did not exist before. In short, even with the override last year, our total general fund budget has grown very modestly and has not kept pace with negotiated salary increases or many non-salary increases and we have had to reduce the total Full Time Equivalent(FTE) staff we have on the payroll to live within our budget. (See pages 9 and 10 of FY11 Budget Presentation on line for budget history.) <http://www.miltonps.org/committee-budget.php>

Question How many were teachers? Administrators? Other Categories?

Answer: In FY10, with the voted budget the school department reduced the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions on staff by 12.5 FTE. Grants and Stimulus funds enabled the school department to restore 7.0 FTE, with 6.0 positions being from one-time funds. Eight of the 12.5 reductions were teachers, Aides and support staff made up the balance of the reductions. (See the following link for more details <http://www.miltonps.org/documents/FY10staffingreductionsctoactual.pdf>

In FY09, the school department reduced staff from FY08 by 21.5 FTE. Teachers and Specialists made up 15 of the 21.5 FTE, Adminsitrators made up 1.8 FTE, and support staff made up the balance of the reductions.

In FY08 the net of staff reductions and additions was 30.35 FTE. Teachers and Specialists made up 19.45 FTE of the total reductions, the balance of the reductions was support staff (custodians, aides, tech support.) For details on the FY08 and FY09 budget reductions please see the following link <http://www.miltonps.org/documents/fy09reductadditimpactrev5-1-08.pdf>