

**Milton School Committee
Open Public Budget Hearing
Milton High School Auditorium
April 30, 2009**

Meeting called to order at 7:30 p.m.

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

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

Ms. Sheridan thanked everyone for coming tonight to discuss the budget and to become informed of the drastic cuts proposed for the Milton Public Schools. She informed the public that prior to the Open Budget Hearing the School Committee held its reorganizational meeting. Ms. Sheridan will now act as the Chair of the School Committee, and Mr. Pavlicek will act as the Vice Chair. Ms. Sheridan publicly thanked Beirne Lovely for serving as the Chair of the School Committee for the past two years and for his years of dedication to the Milton Public School system.

Ms. Gormley stated that the leadership team has been working collaboratively with the Finance Subcommittee and the full School Committee after being given the charge of coming up with a non-contingent budget (no override). She explained that this has been a difficult task and the team has tried to keep the students and families in mind while also trying to keep the shell of programs alive. Another important consideration has been making sure that the reductions to the system were equally distributed between the Elementary, Middle, and High School. Ms. Gormley discussed the Massachusetts School Building Authority's reply that Milton could jeopardize state reimbursement by closing an elementary school. She informed the public that the reply from the MSBA necessitated the discussion of further reconfiguration options for the elementary schools. The Finance Subcommittee and the leadership team reviewed eight possible options and two options will be presented.

Ms. Gormley reviewed the Warrant Committee's non-contingent budget recommendation of \$31,313,982 and explained that this recommendation will result in the reduction of 45.4 positions in the Milton Public Schools (11.0 at the Elementary level; 11.5 at the Middle School; 12.4 at the High School; 9.0 District-wide positions; and 1.5 positions within Administration). After explaining the impact of these cuts at each level, Ms. Gormley reviewed the two reconfiguration options proposed for the elementary schools (the French Continuum Strands and the French Partner Strands). Ms. Sheridan emphasized that the Milton Public School system takes its core values (integrity, high academic achievement for all students, excellence in the classroom, respect for human differences, collaborative relationships with the community, and risk taking and innovation for education) very seriously; however, these are challenging times and cuts need to be made. Ms. Sheridan opened the discussion to the public and all questions were addressed by the Administration, School Committee members, or members of the leadership team.

A Summary of Questions and/or Comments:

Laurie Stillman spoke of the importance of co-curricular programs (music, art, sports, etc.) and emphasized the importance of the Guidance Department at the High School for students and parents going through the college application process.

Margaret Carels asked for an explanation on looping and when transportation costs would be determined for the reconfiguration options.

Julie Roche asked if parents could go back to the English program if the non-contingent budget is chosen. She also asked if any consideration has been given to having mandatory parent volunteers in large classrooms so there would always be two adults in a classroom.

Ana Ketler asked if any consideration had been given to eliminating the FLES program.

Amy Joiner believes this presentation should also include the numbers in the English program. She feels the proposed class sizes for French Immersion are absurd and stated that everyone (French Immersion and FLES) should be making a sacrifice.

Patty Elliot voiced her concern with regard to AYP for the special education sub-group. She asked why an administrative position could not be cut within special education rather than cutting a position that directly services students.

Julio Verella commended the School Committee, the Administration, and the leadership team for the transparency with the budget this year. He spoke of the difficulty parents will have staying active in the schools if they have children in different elementary schools. Mr. Verella spoke of the limitations of Proposition 2 ½ for the Town as a whole and urged community members to support the override and to visit the override committee's website, www.investinmilton.org.

Bridgette Kelliher expressed her worry as a parent and a teacher with having classrooms of 33 or above. She feels it will be difficult for teachers in large classrooms (and without the support of an aide) to be as aware of the different learning needs of students. Ms. Kelliher also asked if it would be possible to cap the number of students allowed in the French Immersion program.

Margaret Eberhardt stated that everyone present is a parent of a Milton Public School student and we all want the same for all of our students. We all want an excellent education for our children, opportunities, and good quality teaching.

Sara Mills stated that class size does seem disproportionate between French Immersion and English. She asked where the Committee stood with inviting the union back to the table and how much money will need to be spent on pay increases for next year.

Ms. Sheridan read a question asking if the option of having a French Immersion school had been considered.

Amy Flanagan feels that if the teachers' union made some type of concession, it would go a long way in helping to gain support for an override. With regard to the reconfiguration of elementary schools, Ms. Flanagan feels that the PTO system will be decimated if parents have children in different elementary schools. Ms. Flanagan also referred to the class size in the French Immersion as compared to the English program.

Rob Cormack asked why not present a Milton Continuum option and move everyone around to help reach the bottom number and balance class size. He also spoke of the discrepancy between the average class size in elective courses and core courses at Milton High School.

Brian Kelley stated that it is not the School Committee and the Administration making these cuts; they work for the voters. The voters and community members have to do a better job at selling the idea of an override and being informed on the impact these cuts will have in the school system and for the Town of Milton.

Earl Fay stated that an override is critical and stimulus funds will not bridge the budget gap. He believes that School Choice should be discussed again when the schools get back to reasonable class sizes. Mr. Fay stated that French Immersion is not a choice for every student in the Milton Public schools; it is not a realistic opportunity for special education students. Mr. Fay feels it is time to move away from the French Immersion/English strands and have English for everyone.

Karen Friedman-Hanna stated that she was compelled to speak of the need to maintain both the French Immersion and the English/FLES programs. She urged community members to call their neighbors and Town Meeting members and encourage them to support an override vote.

Key Leissner stated that the French Immersion program was the reason he moved to Milton. Mr. Leissner feels it is important to keep 1st grade French Immersion students with older students in the French Immersion program. He feels this would happen more with the French Partner Strand option.

Linda Farwell does not want this to be a French Immersion vs. English program issue. She feels that any decision made in this budget situation is not going to be palatable; the most important consideration has to be what will have the least impact on students educationally.

Elizabeth Debord a new resident of Milton stated that she moved here for the schools and she hopes the override passes. She feels there are dangers at each level (Elementary, Middle, and High School) with class sizes this high. As a teacher, she agreed with previous speakers that children in classrooms of 30 and above will not learn and it will be difficult for teachers to identify learning difficulties.

Kristine Hodlin feels the response from the Massachusetts School Building Authority has made a difficult situation more difficult by limiting the flexibility to close an elementary school. She asked if there was any way to go back to them to discuss this response. Ms. Hodlin also asked if there was any way for people to communicate with representatives of the teachers' union to plead our case.

Jennifer Healy read a letter from Denise Queally who could not attend this meeting. Some matters addressed in Ms. Queally's letter were the differences in class size between the French Immersion and English programs; the rise in enrollment in the French Immersion program and the fact that both of these reconfiguration options only disrupt French Immersion students; the possibility of using stimulus funds to reinstate FLES to its fullest form; and the possibility of using stimulus funds to provide aides in classrooms over a designated number of students. Ms. Queally stated in her letter that she understands the FY10 budget looks grim without an override; however, she hopes that the core values of the Milton Public Schools are kept in mind when coming up with alternatives.

Bernadette Bentley stated that she is optimistic an override will pass. She spoke highly of the special education program in Milton and the success of the co-taught classrooms. Ms. Bentley mentioned the cuts to be made within special education and voiced her concern with regard to AYP in the special education sub-group. Ms. Bentley also mentioned that staying with the "status quo" is not alright even if the override passes. It is her understanding that there are only 18 families signing up for English at the Glover School and that talk on the playground is that this may have something to do with special education students being included in the English program. Ms. Bentley feels it is upsetting to have the Town divided not only by French Immersion and English but between regular education and special education.

Anita Russell feels that the Milton Public School system has made great strides with its investment in special education. She spoke of the co-taught classrooms and feels that eliminating special education staff and services is a compromise that Milton cannot afford.

Catherine King was surprised that the budget hearing was not better attended. She suggested that everyone in the community talk to their neighbors and spread the word about the need for an override.

Matthew Walko feels that the high class sizes mentioned tonight at every level are shameful. He is dumbfounded that the Warrant Committee would recommend this budget.

Ms. Sheridan thanked everyone for coming tonight and gave a special thanks to the new Board of Selectmen Chair, John Shields. Ms. Sheridan also thanked the leadership team and the Administration for the work they have done and for their dedication to the students of Milton. She suggested that everyone view the new school website, miltonps.org and the override committee's website, www.investinmilton.org.

Motion was made to adjourn.

By a roll call vote, the School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 p.m.