



# Milton Community Schools Update October 2023

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## I. OVERVIEW

Milton Community Schools (MCS) is dedicated to providing high-quality after-school programs for students in grades K-5. This report covers updates on all aspects of our department, including program offerings, ongoing improvements, safety and security measures, financial assistance, and attendance statistics. We also outline our commitment to providing affordable tuition and valuable enrichment opportunities for all families in the Milton Public Schools community. Our programs are designed to provide a safe and nurturing environment for students to learn, grow, and thrive.

## Who We Are

Milton Community Schools (MCS) is a self-supporting department of Milton Public Schools. It was founded in 1980 to provide MPS students in grades K-5 with extended school-day enrichment activities in a safe learning environment.

We are committed to providing quality enrichment experiences safeguarded by compassionate and skilled professionals that promote growth and success in a safe, diverse, and nurturing environment.

## Programs

- ASE- After School Enrichment
- ESAP- Early School Arrival Program
- Early Dismissal Days
- School Vacation Camps
- Camp Cunningham



## II. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENTS

### Enrichment Opportunities Expansion

We continue to expand partnerships with third-party high-quality enrichment providers and specialist instructors.

- [Kids' Test Kitchen](#)
- [Puddlestompers](#)
- [Mass Audubon](#)
- [Right Brain Curriculum](#)
- [Super Soccer Stars](#)
- [Ja Shin Do](#)
- [Mandarin](#)
- [Chess Wizards](#)
- [It's A Small World: Storytime with Ms. Melody:](#)
- [Arts and Crafts with Ms. Nadine](#)

### A Pilot Program in Motion

Most enrichment activities that previously had an additional cost are now included in the ASE tuition. All After School Enrichment (ASE) participants rotate through the classes included in tuition to ensure all have the same opportunity to enjoy these quality, fun, and engaging activities.



### Family Engagement

MCS always seeks ways to strengthen partnerships with our families and the community. At the end of the 21-22 school year, the Site Supervisors started organizing events that gave families insight into our programs. A few examples are below, with more to come this year.

- Meet & Greet Camp Cunningham
- Coffee & Conversation Before School at Tucker
- Trivia Time at Collicot
- Bingo Evening at Glover
- Book Exchange at Cunningham



### Tuition Assistance

The MCS Sliding Scale chart is now in alignment with the EECs voucher program so that more families can benefit from our financial assistance program. In 22- 23, financial assistance was also granted to families for their child/ren to participate in our fee-based enrichment classes.

## Reduced Online Payment Processing Fees

Families who choose to pay their tuition online pay 2.6% in convenience fees when they pay their tuition online versus 4.95% from the previous year. The reduction is due to a negotiated lower rate and some of the cost being covered by MCS. Other payment options free of extra fees continue to be available.

## Professional Development (PD) for All Staff:

MCS provides PD sessions on Early Dismissal Days, which are now mandatory for all, including our MHS Counselor In Training.

Based on the feedback from our talent teams, we increased the quality of our PD offerings. These sessions are concise and purposeful. Thank you to the wonderful MPS staff working with MCS to make this happen. Here are a few examples of last year's PD sessions:

- Safety and security: Detective Cimildoro, Milton Police Department
- Restorative Practices: Adina Shecter, DEIB Department
- Mental Health 101, Calm Classroom; Allison McGrath Collicot Adjustment Counselor
- Behavior Basics: Lindsey Meyers Bertone, Behavioral Analyst
- Team Building and Kids-Play Techniques: Knucklebones LLC



## Competitive Pay

As a measure to improve recruitment and retention, in 2019, we were approved to tie our salary table to the MPS Unit D and HRS (non-union) tables to guarantee yearly increases in salary and step advancements to MCS employees.

More recently, we were granted approval so that MPS Unit D employees working in our programs are paid at the same rate as their MPS position as Educational Assistants. MPS employees working 40 hours a week between MPS and MCS are also paid overtime.

Our salary table is revised annually, ensuring it aligns with the district's salaries. Returning employees are advanced a step in the table, in addition to the cost of living increase, including MHS counselors.

## Paid Leave Benefits

Until 2022, MCS employees had no paid leave benefits. Like our salary table, the MCS paid leave policy mirrors existing MPS paid leave formulas. All adults in our programs now receive paid leave benefits, except for seasonal staff and volunteers.

### III: WHERE WE ARE TODAY

## SAFETY

### Capacity

We take great pride in providing safe and successful programs for all participants. There is no question that out-of-school time programs are essential for families, and MCS would like to accommodate everyone who would like to attend.

Pre-Covid, our ASE and ESAP programs across the district grew to numbers that were no longer manageable and safe. Our programs were shut down for 13 months during the pandemic, and over 120 employees were laid off. Post-COVID, our programs were started from scratch, and capacity was built as the staffing level increased (see staffing below).

When making capacity decisions, we consider our enrollment, staffing, student-staff ratios, and the ability to build solid connections. The number of slots we can offer at each school is thoughtfully considered around safety, space, and quality. The table below shows the capacity in the last three years since the reopening of our programs.

TOTAL CAPACITY	2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	ASE	ESAP	ASE	ESAP	ASE	ESAP
Collicot	110	25	120	50	130	50
Cunningham	110	25	120	50	130	50
Glover	110	40	120	50	130	60
Tucker	90	40	100	50	120	65

We are currently surveying school-based programs similar to MCS or in the area. Below is a chart for comparison purposes in terms of capacity.

	FY24 -Comparison After-School Similar Programs						
	Milton Community Schools	Braintree	Quincy- QCARE	Hingham	Rockland	Duxbury	Canton
Licensed Program	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
# Sites	4	2	9	4	3	2	2
Capacity per site	120-130	150*	26-65	35	40-65	40	65
Student/Adult	13:1**	13:1	13:1	13:1	13:1	10:1	13:1
Waitlist	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

\*Braintree BASE has separate space outside of schools

\*\*MCS Ratios when fully staffed



The comparison above shows that our capacity is in line with other districts when fully staffed yet, it is more than double that of other districts per site.

Our goal child/adult ratio is 13:1. Based on the current maximum capacity, today, our child/adult is at 23:1 due to staff hiring and retention challenges.

## Waitlist Status

Community Schools registration for the 23-24 school year opened online on the week of June 12, 2023, applying on a first come, first served basis as in previous years. A lottery system will be established for the next school year. The official communication will be released in January 2024.

Last year, except for the Cunningham ASE program, the ASE and ESAP waitlists at Collicot, Glover, and Tucker were cleared by December 2022. Cunningham ASE had a waitlist all year that averaged between 26-38 children. Below is the most recent update on our waitlists for both programs:

<b>After School Enrichment</b>	<b>Original Waitlist June 2023</b>	<b>Moved off the waitlist to ASE as of today</b>	<b>Waitlist October 2023</b>	<b>Declined/ Withdrawals</b>
Collicot	32	16	13	4
Cunningham	52	20	34	1
Glover	37	18	21	3
Tucker	20	18	1	8

<b>Early School Arrival Program</b>	<b>Original Waitlist June 2023</b>	<b>Moved off the waitlist to ESAP as of today</b>	<b>Waitlist October 2023</b>	<b>Declined/ Withdrawals</b>
Collicot	0	0	0	0
Cunningham	0	0	0	0
Glover	24	19	5	5
Tucker	28	27	0	8

We were able to accommodate all students on the waitlist with registered siblings. We revise our waitlist daily and closely monitor attendance to ensure programs are utilized.

## Attendance

Safety, consistency, and economic feasibility are of utmost importance when running ASE and ESAP. After implementing a five-day-a-week structure in the spring of 2021, our programs remain fully enrolled while keeping tuition affordable. We understand that this structure may not work for every family.

ASE Utilization	21-22	22-23
Five days	86%	92%
Four days	8%	5%
Three days	6%	3%

## Behavioral Conduct

In the last two years, we have seen a significant increase in adverse behavioral conduct. This is now a large part of our work, impacting our ability to manage the other aspects of the program, and the high staff stress levels are affecting retention.

Behavior management is challenging and requires high levels of judgment from supervisors, group leaders, and young counselors to handle difficult situations while being conscious of the children's and their parent's needs and well-being.

We are still gathering data; for example, even though we are only in week six of the school year, we have at least 36 reported incidents and 15 written reports, with two resulting in permanent removals from the programs.

## FINANCES & VALUE FOR MONEY

### Tuition

Community Schools continues to offer affordable tuition. The chart below shows similar school-based programs for comparison purposes.

	FY24 -Hourly Rates- Similar School-Based Programs							
	Milton Community Schools	EEC Rates FY23	Quincy-QCARE	Hingham	Rockland	Hanover	Duxbury	Dedham
After School	\$5.83	\$8.12	\$11.00	\$8.75	\$8.50	\$10.00	\$9.01	\$9.72
Before School	\$3.89	\$6.30	N/A	\$7.98	\$8.50	\$10.00	\$9.19	\$8.10
Sibling Discount	30%	N/A	5%	10%	0%	25%	10%	10%
Registration Fees	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$75.00	\$25.00	\$50.00	\$35-\$50	\$35-\$45	\$75.00

## Pilot Enrichment Program Cost

This initiative is estimated to cost an additional \$430.00 per child/year, an overall \$220K for the 23-24 school year.

The program currently bears this cost and is not passed on to families. The total cost of the enrichment activities for the 23-24 school year will depend on the number of students participating. We will have a clearer idea at the end of this school year.



## Tuition Assistance

The chart below shows the amount rewarded and the number of families who benefit from our financial assistance programs.

	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Financial Assistance Awarded	\$36,693.00	\$50,631.00	\$44,250.00
# Of Families	17	27	20

**SPACE**

## Rentals

MCS submits an annual rental request to reserve spaces at each of the four elementary schools for use during the early and after-school programs, the vacation week programs, and the summer camp. The following spaces are utilized daily at each school:

	Collicot	Cunnigham	Glover	Tucker
Cafeteria	Shared	Shared	☑	☑
Library	Shared	Shared	☑	☑
Gymnasium	☑	☑	☑	☑
Art Room	☑	☑	☐	☑
Music Room	☐	☐	☐	☑

The spaces listed and some classrooms located near cafeterias where programs mainly operate are, in theory, for MCS use when programs are in session. In practice, there are frequently occurrences in which we are required to share the space or relocate to other areas of the school buildings.

While we are always willing to collaborate and accommodate, space management is another factor that directly impacts the program's logistics, requiring changes in schedules and routines. Some examples are;

- Inclement Weather
- School Events After Hours
- Staff Meetings
- PD sessions
- Elections
- Parent/Teacher conferences
- Extracurricular Activities before and after school, i.e., CASS, Tucker Enrichment, BOKS, etc.



In early 2021, the former School Committee Chair asked us to provide an update concerning the problems created by overcrowded schools and how they affect out-of-school time programming. Such challenges have remained the same. You can find the [report here](#).

## STAFFING

The ASE Program capacity is currently built for 120-130 students/program. Even though we are not required to be state-licensed, we strive to maintain the state-recommended child/adult ratio of 13:1. We currently employ 27 ASE adult group leaders spread over the four school sites. We must fill at least 18 more open ASE adult group leader positions five days a week to improve the current student/adult ratio.

ASE/ESAP	19-20	20-21*	21-22	22-23	23-24
Total Staff	134	25	49	61	75
Site Supervisors	7	4	4	4	4
Assistant Supervisors	5	0	4	4	2
Group Leaders	53	19	27	29	37
MHS Counselors	53	0	9	14	24
Specialists	8	0	5	5	4
ASE Nurses	3	0	0	2	1
Clerical/Director	5	2	0	3	3

\* ASE reopened at reduced capacity in Spring 2021.



## Staff Availability

We are proud of our team, qualifications, and commitment to the children. Staff schedules are challenging because only about 22% of the MCS staff works Monday through Friday.

In the out-of-school-time sector, it is well-known that these positions are transitional for many people. Finding staff willing to commit to a complete school year and five days a week is highly challenging. Like many other organizations, we have been forced to hire people who can work fewer days to meet our staffing needs.

ASE Adult Group Leaders on Duty by Weekly Schedule					
	5 Days	4 Days	3 Days	2 Days	1 Day
Collicot	2	1	2		1
Cunningham		1	5		
Glover	2	1	3	2	1
Tucker	2	1	2	1	
<b>TOTAL ASE Adults</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>

We currently have 15 MPS Educational Assistants on payroll. With the increased hours in their current contract, most only have five hours available before incurring overtime. MCS is currently paying overtime to the Educational Assistants for at least until November as we continue to recruit and hire new adult staff.

## Staff Turnover, Absences, & Burn Out

As many organizations and MPS included, we see a high rate of staff absences and turnover that inevitably put a strain on our programs, making it difficult to maintain the desired child/adult ratio. The ongoing challenges in securing people to be fully staffed have yet to allow us to hire extra staff to serve as substitutes and additional support.

We experience roughly a 30% staff turnover each new school year, and MHS counselors come and go throughout the school year due to sports and other extracurricular activities.

When employees call out, site supervisors make changes on the go that affect the child/adult ratio and create a domino effect at different levels: decreased supervision, cancelation of activities, increase in opportunities for inappropriate behaviors, and overall safety and quality.

Staff burnout is a pressing concern. While we are proud to be dedicated to supporting and enriching the students' lives beyond regular school hours, we also face increasing demands and challenges such as work overload, longer shifts, and managing behavior. Recognizing and addressing the factors contributing to burnout is crucial to sustaining a positive and nurturing environment for both staff and students in the programs.

## Recruitment Efforts



The childcare industry faces a shortage of qualified staff, and MCS is no exception. Despite our best recruiting efforts, we still cannot fill all open positions: adult group leaders, counselors, specialist instructors, support staff, and nurses.

Since the reopening of our programs, our recruitment efforts have been focused on both ends: getting the programs fully staffed and replacing staff. For the adult staff only, we have received and reviewed about 1,220 applications, contacted more than 800 potential candidates, set up over 300 interviews, and conducted at least 150 remote and in-person interviews. From there, we hired about 28 people.

We continue posting all positions on Indeed, Handshake, and School Spring online recruitment platforms. We have posted flyers at the library, nearby colleges, and the Council of Aging. We reinitiated an internship and volunteer program in partnership with Curry College that was disrupted due to the pandemic closure. In addition, we attend their Job Spot program and Curry College Job Fair (both Fall and Spring) to recruit possible candidates for the position.



Similarly, we put a call out for MHS Counselors on the Superintendent's Blog and the internal MHS communications to students. We interview and process counselor applicants throughout the year to help alleviate the workload on the adult group leaders. However, as great as our young high school counselors are, they cannot substitute for adult positions as they are not qualified to supervise children alone. Our goal is to hire at least 18 more adult group leaders.

## Nurses

With the high number of participants, having nurses in our programs is necessary. In 2018, MCS was approved to hire three nurses for the after-school programs at Glover, Tucker, and Collicot/Cunningham. It took over one year to fill the three positions just when the pandemic hit.

Nurses are in high demand; today, we only have one nurse placed at Collicot/Cunningham ASE, and it is expected to leave by the end of November, leaving no nurse coverage dedicated to the programs. Hiring nurses is especially difficult.

Fortunately, last week, we received news that our request for three part-time 0.5 Unit A nurses eligible for benefits and dedicated to ASE has been granted.

## IV: SUMMARY

The Milton Community Schools department provides after-school programs for students in grades K-5, committed to providing quality enrichment experiences in a safe, diverse, and nurturing environment. Our tuition remains at very affordable rates compared to similar school-based programs. We have expanded partnerships with third-party high-quality enrichment providers and specialist instructors, included most enrichment activities that previously had an additional cost in the After-School Enrichment (ASE) tuition, and strengthened partnerships with families and the community. The MCS Sliding Scale chart aligns with the EECs voucher program to benefit more families from the financial assistance program. We have increased the offerings and quality of the professional development sessions for all staff and ensure yearly increases in salary, step advancements, and paid leave to MCS employees to improve recruitment and retention.

This document also provides an update on capacity, waitlist status, attendance, behavioral conduct, and finances of the programs offered by Community Schools. We provide comparable data to show that the capacity is in line with other districts when fully staffed, yet it is more than double that of other school-based programs. We acknowledge the importance of out-of-school-time programs to working families and the fact that we cannot meet the current demand. We provide an update on the waitlist and the number of students we have been able to accommodate since registration opened in June. The increased behavioral conduct represents a new challenge requiring high judgment, time, and attention from each team member.

The childcare industry faces a shortage of qualified staff, and Milton Community Schools is no exception. Even with measures and improvements in place, we experience a high rate of staff turnover, which puts a strain on our programs, making it difficult to maintain our goal of a 13:1 recommended child/adult ratio. The challenge of securing fully staffed programs has yet to allow us to hire extra staff to serve as substitutes and additional support to alleviate absences and staff limited availability to commit to work five days a week. This has resulted in a domino effect at different levels, including decreased supervision, cancelation of activities, and increased opportunities for inappropriate behaviors. Staff burnout is also a pressing concern. Despite our best recruiting efforts, we still face significant challenges filling the current open positions.