

# EDUCATION EXPRESS

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**The Educational Fund Committee has generously provided a grant for the production and mailing of this newsletter.**

The Educational Fund Committee is appointed by the Medway Board of Selectmen and is charged with distributing donations made to the fund to benefit students and schools. The committee reviews and grants requests made for schools by principals .

Current committee members are: Heidi Anderson, Joann Bruce, Marion Cole, Lou-Ellen Maiorana, and Mindy Peden.

Donations to the fund may be made directly or through the form provided by the town with tax bills.

For further information about the Educational Fund, please contact:

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## Elementary Schools Celebrate Literacy Month

The families at the Burke, McGovern and Memorial Elementary Schools were provided with several opportunities to celebrate Literacy Month in November. Among the activities were a Family Literacy Calendar and a Parent Literacy Night.

On November 1<sup>st</sup>, each student received a calendar with a specific activity to complete each day of the month. Ideas included: read the Sunday comics with your mom or dad, scatter bird seed on the ground and make a list of the birds you see, or make a cozy reading area to enjoy your favorite books. In all, almost 250 students participated in the challenge and received a bookmark for their efforts. Six lucky participants were drawn at random to win a B&N card.

The children were excited about completing the month of literary activities. Here's a sampling of quotations from the children:

- "I loved snuggling with my mom as she read to me"
- "My favorite activity was getting to play a game with my family"
- "I still have my reading nook; I made it in the basement"
- "I loved being able to go to the Library every week"
- "I loved being with my family to complete the calendar activities"

- "My favorite thing was writing out the grocery list"
- "When I had nothing to do, I wanted to work on the calendar activities"
- "I was able to get my own library card, instead of using my babysitter's card."
- "I loved doing things outside that had to do w/ reading and writing"
- "I got to act out a play with my family. It was fun."

In addition to the student calendar, a Parents Literacy Night was held at McGovern School. The evening focused on providing parents with information and tools to bring more literacy events into their daily lives. After watching a presentation about the importance of literacy in the lives of early readers, parents moved through four literacy centers.

Parents explored websites, made lists of favorite read-alouds, explored ways to increase writing skills (writing thank you notes, letters to grandparents, to do lists...) and learned new ways to discover literacy while on a car ride, in the grocery store or a museum. The feedback from those in attendance was all positive with many parents asking for additional sessions to be held for other subject areas. Teachers commented on the enthusiasm of students towards literacy, thanks in part to the calendar.

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# Funding Medway Public Schools

By Dave Verdolino, Assistant Superintendent

Recently, I had the opportunity to participate with the Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials (MASBO) and the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (MassBudget) in preparing a research report entitled *Cutting Class: Underfunding the Foundation Budget's Core Education Program*.

The full report can be found at MassBudget's website, [www.massbudget.org](http://www.massbudget.org). The following is an excerpt from the report's Executive Summary, authored by Luc Schuster, MassBudget Policy Analyst, followed by some additional observations of mine.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Education Reform Act of 1993 ("Ed Reform") dramatically overhauled the formula for providing state education aid to the Commonwealth's K-12 school districts, in large part by creating the state's foundation budget, a calculation of adequate baseline spending amounts for every district individually. The foundation budget has been in place for almost two decades now, and it has not yet been comprehensively reexamined.

This paper contributes to the growing statewide conversation about the foundation budget's present adequacy

by identifying major gaps between what the foundation budget says districts need for certain cost categories in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 and what districts are actually spending. We gather this data for each of the state's 328 operating districts, allowing us to analyze trends for different types of districts, especially for districts of varying wealth. Key findings of this paper include:

### **Foundation understates core SPED costs by about \$1.0 billion**

Due to a range of factors, notably an increasing proportion of high-needs special education students, the foundation budget significantly understates the true cost of staffing in-district SPED programs and paying tuitions for specialized out-of-district placements.

### **Foundation understates health insurance costs by \$1.1 billion**

Similarly, original design of the foundation budget did not foresee the dramatic increase in health insurance costs nationwide, and the general inflation factor identified for adjustments to the foundation budget has lagged well behind true cost growth in this area.

### **Districts have not implemented the low-income student program envisioned in the original**

### **foundation budget**

The original foundation budget targeted additional resources to address the greater needs of low-income students in two very direct ways: 1) providing funding for 3 extra teachers for every 100 low-income students; and 2) allocating \$380 (in FY 1993 dollars) per low-income student in expanded program allotment money to help schools expand instructional time for these targeted students.

While this incremental money still exists in the low-income student enrollment category of the foundation budget, there is little evidence that low-income students are receiving this additional instructional support. Spending on Regular Education Teachers is well below foundation for the lowest-wealth districts, and total spending on Regular Education Teachers is significantly greater for the highest-wealth districts.

### **Most districts hire fewer regular education teachers than the foundation budget sets as an adequate baseline**

Due in large part to increased health insurance and special education spending needs, most districts, not just the lowest-wealth districts, spend below foundation on Regular Education Teachers. Only the highest-

between under-spending on Regular Education Teachers and over-spending the foundation budget consideration on SPED Teachers is masked in analyses that combine these two types of teacher spending together.

Furthermore, teacher salaries, adjusted for inflation, have remained remarkably level with the foundation budget's original salary assumption. This means that teacher spending below foundation levels has likely been manifest in the form of fewer total teachers than foundation calls for, resulting in larger class sizes, less planning and meeting time for teachers during the school day, and the hiring of fewer specialist teachers, such as literacy specialists, language teachers, art teachers, etc.

**Inflation adjustments have not been fully implemented, causing foundation to lag behind true cost growth**

Due to issues with implementation of inflation adjustments over time, the full foundation budget has lagged behind true cost growth since FY 1993. This lagging in value helps explain a portion of the foundation budget's understatement of actual district spending.



**OBSERVATIONS**

- Ed Reform” is nearly 20 years old. Since its inception, there have been significant changes impacting the cost of providing public education in Massachusetts, among them: passage of No Child Left Behind proliferation of MCAS testing and technology. For example, the Internet had not yet been invented in 1993.
- As noted in the report, the costs of special education and health insurance have soared beyond the rate of inflation. Consider the following comparative data for Medway from FY1995 to FY2012:

	<u>FY1995</u>	<u>FY2012</u>
Special education costs	\$ 817,426	\$3,116,855
Employee health insurance	\$ 875,000	\$4,411,575

The increase in these two cost centers accounts for the vast majority of additional state aid (“Chapter 70”) Medway received between those periods, leaving little to offset wage inflation, increased enrollment, the operating cost of two additional buildings, etc. And in 1995, employees generally paid only 10% of their health insurance premiums; that was increased to 25-30% today. Special education costs (legally mandated), health insurance (collectively bargained), and utilities

must be paid; too often, as the report indicates, regular education services are shortchanged.

- Massachusetts leads the nation in many indicators of education outcomes, including some global measures. Likewise, Medway Public School ranks in the upper echelons of achievement within Massachusetts. Medway endured a financial crisis several years ago and fiscally bottomed out in FY2006-07, resulting in the elimination of 40 school positions. While many of those positions are likely lost forever, Medway fared better than most during recent recession, due to federal stimulus funding, modest budget requests and town-wide fiscal prudence.

So what’s next? Will Medway – and Massachusetts – be able to maintain such lofty positions of achievement? Have we reached a tipping point where additional funds are needed? If so, where would those funds come from? And is it okay to consider ourselves “good enough” and not strive toward excellence? In other words, is the gradual decline of providing high quality education services for our children good enough?

Feel free to visit me and ask questions. I don’t profess to have all the answers, but am very interested to listen to suggestions you might have for providing the resources needed to maintain excellent schools in Medway.

## Memorial Plaque Ceremony Honors Medway Volunteers

On December 14, 2011, at Memorial School, town and school representatives had the privilege of learning more about the fourteen Medway individuals who were honored by inclusion on the Memorial Plaque as they celebrated this event. Included on the plaque for 2011 were: George Archer, Charles Crowley, Dennis Flaherty, Walter Greene, Leonard Hill, Francis Kenney, Peter Kenney, Alphonso Marsh, Catherine Murphy, Robert Saleski, Jacob Sheinkopf, Peggy Wickstrom, Catherine Wilson, and Paul Wilson. A number of family members and friends of the honorees took the time to talk about the accomplishments and service of each of these remarkable men and women. It was truly heart-warming to learn more about the selfless commitment to town and schools shown by the honorees. The plaque is permanently displayed in the lobby of the Memorial School.

## Medway Students Win Awards for PSAs



Five Medway 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from Mrs. Maureen Porter's computer class won an Honorable Mention in the *Cyber Bullying – What a Parent Should Know* Public Service Announcement video challenge last spring: Daniel Yates, Adem Karacaoglu, Craig Soule, Ben Lagan, and Matthew Marcinkiewicz. All of Mrs. Porter's classes created public service announcements on cyber-bullying.

There were over 80 videos submitted this year in the contest and these young men won one of 5 awards with their first video!

The students received their awards from the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center last spring. The winning PSAs from Medway Middle School have been selected to be screened the STAND UP 2011 event on December 13 at Northeastern University. This event will educate, motivate and empower young people to actively promote positive social change in their schools and communities.

# Medway Honored by College Board

Medway is one of fewer than 400 public school districts in the nation being honored by the College Board with a place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual AP® Honor Roll, for simultaneously increasing access to Advanced Placement coursework while maintaining or increasing the percentage of students earning scores of 3 or higher on AP exams. The district is successfully identifying motivated, academically-prepared students who are likely to benefit most from AP coursework.

Since 2009, Medway increased the number of students participating in AP from 138 to 193, while maintaining the percentage of students earning AP Exam scores of 3 or higher from 87% in 2009 to 76% in 2011. The majority of U.S. colleges and universities grant college credit or advanced placement for a score of 3 or above on AP exams.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual AP Honor Roll is made up of only those public school districts that are simultane-

ously expanding opportunity and improving performance. The list includes 367 school districts across 43 states and Canada. Pennsylvania led all states with 34 public school districts named to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual AP Honor Roll, followed



by Massachusetts and New York, both with 30.

“Participation in college-level AP courses can level the playing field for underserved students, give them the confidence needed to succeed in college, and raise standards and performance in key subjects like science and math,” said College Board President Gaston Caperton. “The AP Honor Roll districts are defying

expectations by expanding access while enabling their students to maintain or improve their AP Exam scores.”

Helping more students learn at a higher level *and* earn higher AP scores is an objective of all members of the AP community, from AP teachers to district and school administrators to college professors. Many are experimenting with a variety of initiatives and strategies to determine how to expand access and improve student performance simultaneously.

“This school district has achieved something very remarkable. It managed to open the doors of its AP classrooms to many more students, while also increasing the percentage of students earning high enough AP Exam grades to stand out in the competitive college admission process and qualify for college credit and placement,” said Trevor Packer, the College Board’s senior vice president of Advanced Placement and college readiness.

# District Pilots NWEA's MAP Assessments

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Students in grades 2, 4, and 6 are taking part in a Medway Public Schools' pilot of a new computer-based assessment tool. MAP assessments provide detailed data about where each child is on his/her unique learning path.

Because student engagement is essential to any testing experience, NWEA has worked with educators to create test items that interest children and help to capture detail about what they know and what they're ready to learn. It's information teachers can use in the classroom to help every child succeed.

MAP dynamically adapts to students' responses – as they take the test. If a child:

- Answers a question correctly, the test presents a more challenging item

- Missed a question, MAP offers a simpler item.

In this way, the test narrows in on a student's learning level, engaging each student with content that allows him/her to succeed.

This year's test measure students' skills in the areas of reading/ language arts and mathematics. Parents have received a copy of their children's test results, which



provide details about students' reading levels and strengths and challenges in relation to students tested across the nation. Teachers are able to use the test results to

provide instruction tailored to individual student needs.

Understanding a student's true achievement level and academic needs gives educators an advantage when MCAS exams approach. By using MAP assessments, teachers know precisely where each student needs additional instruction, and how students may be grouped for a more effective learning dynamic. MAP tests also help educators prepare by providing them with reliable information to guide instructional planning.

Students in grades 2, 4, and 6 will be tested again in January and May. These additional assessments will provide timely data about student growth. The district will assess the usefulness of the data collected and make a determination about whether the MAP pilot should be extended to all students in grades K-8 in the 2012-2013 school year.

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## Help Support Medway Community Farm

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The Medway Community Farm seeks to raise funds to support the renovation of the Farm Community Center, improve the farm infrastructure, support education programs, and enable food donations. Contributions in any amount are tax-deductible and can be sent to:

Medway Community Farm

PO Box 239

Medway, MA 02053



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