

Summary
12/10/07 School Committee Meeting

- **Continued Discussion/Vote re: Facilities Planning for 2008-2009**

The Committee discussed the issues raised at the last meeting about funding of modulars and a date to back out of a contract if the override failed. Mike Cronin, Chief of Operations, reported that the Law Dept. suggests that the bid include a statement that funding is tied to an override, which the lawyers advise allows the system to cancel the contract if an override fails. The Committee clarified that the modulars are needed for projected enrollment increases at the four schools, but if an override fails, there would not be funds to pay for teachers to teach in the new modular classrooms; therefore, a purchase of these extra classrooms at a time when a number of teachers would have to be cut would not make sense. The Mayor noted that free cash is one funding source he has identified to pay for the modulars, and he is still exploring a source under capital expenditures since Committee members indicated that the operating budget could not handle this expense. Sandra Guryan, Assistant Superintendent for Business, Finance & Planning, also was asked to investigate the probable need for modulars in 2010 and believes that no modulars will be needed. Mike Cronin is continuing to investigate whether money could be saved by purchasing used modulars. The Committee voted to approve the purchase of modulars for Angier, Bowen (double decker), and Burr and to move the current modular at Bowen to Mason-Rice.

- **MCAS Report**

Carolyn Wyatt, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction, presented an overview of Newton's performance in general on the MCAS exams, with a particular focus on the longitudinal study of cohorts of students who have taken the test at multiple grade levels over the years. Students who move in and out and have not completed testing with their cohort are not included for a true "apples to apples" comparison. These data indicate that the percentage of students in these cohorts scoring in the advanced and proficient range has increased over time in almost all subjects where there are sufficient years of test data for analysis. She noted that by 10th grade scores are high at both high schools, which indicates that overall students are doing very well. However, challenges remain with certain subgroups of students. Mary Eich, Mathematics Coordinator, Greg Hurray, English Coordinator, and Amy Winston, Science Dept. Head at Newton North High School, addressed their curriculum areas. The mathematics performance shows an upward trend in the elementary schools and a flattening at the middle schools. The MCAS scores are

part of the reason they have implemented the two new initiatives -- math coaches at the elementary schools and the Breaking Ranks in the Middle (BRIM) program at the middle schools. In English/ Language Arts, Newton continues to perform favorably with similar districts at the elementary level and 90% of students entering the high schools are scoring at advanced and proficient levels. In science, Amy Winston described how media coverage of Newton's science scores was misleading. Newton designated the ninth grade physics test as the high stakes test and students performed well. The state insisted that 10th grade students take the chemistry test to help set scoring thresholds but many students did not take this exam seriously since it did not count. Each school district was allowed to pick which science exam would be high stakes for its system, which meant that comparisons among districts were not reliable. They concluded with a discussion regarding the tutorials and support systems in place for students at risk.

- **FY08 Budget Report**

As of 11/29/0, the district has spent 38% of the annual budget. The year end projection based on current information is now a deficit balance of -\$234,215, which continues the shortfall reported last month due to increased special education placements. A solution for closing the shortfall being recommended is to use some of the carried forward 2006 energy savings projects funds.

- **Special Education Report**

There were no questions on the report. It was noted that the recently published Guide to Special Education Programs was an excellent presentation and that this will be posted on the Pupil Services' website.

- **Update on Elementary School Counseling Grant**

Craig Murphy, Project Director, talked about the \$1,162,451 three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education, to improve the mental health services for Newton's children. Funds are being used to establish school-based behavioral and emotional support teams in each of the elementary schools to help identify and intervene with at-risk students and implement a consistent approach for their support. Funds have also been used to hire three elementary school counselors who were present and spoke about their work -- Sheryl Cohn, Stephanie Baumann, and Mary Gartland, along with doctoral student Jannon Farkis. They help facilitate the teams and act in a consultative role. They will work collaboratively with personnel to provide support to classroom teachers, conduct Functional Behavioral Assessments,

facilitate the implementation of the Behavior Intervention Plans, and maintain regular communication with parents. They will also provide direct service to some students. The grant also provides for training for elementary school teachers and other staff, as well as parent education workshops. At the end of the life of the grant, it is anticipated that they will have built in capacity for continuing the program without additional funding.

- **Presentation of Long-Range Facilities Options**

Lori Cowles and Steve Friedlaender, HMFH Architects, Inc., presented the revised options, which reflect the five-year enrollment projections update of November. The major shift from the original options is in looking at classroom capacity. While the facilities and educational space needs and overcrowding issues are still prevalent, the new projections do not appear to require a 16th elementary school. As in previous iterations, all options presume that redistricting is required and that modular classrooms currently in use systemwide are not counted in the space inventory. The options assume that each classroom will hold 21 students, although it is recognized that class sizes in individual schools will not distribute evenly into this model. The main differences among the three options are the number of new schools vs. renovations /additions, the number of larger schools to accommodate more pupils, and the distribution of larger schools whether or not they are concentrated in the center of the city. Proposed phasing assumes two swing spaces and for the purposes of planning are presumed to be Carr and Aquinas, both of which require renovations and additions. Carr would also hold the integrated preschool. Two swings spaces would allow for the completion of the projects in approximately 16 years; it would take about 32 years to complete the projects if there is only one swing space. Student enrollment will be reviewed and updated annually, which will provide the basis for confirming or revising the number of classrooms needed for the next proposed school project in line. As the projects are nearing their end and depending on enrollment projections, the school department will decide how to best incorporate the swing spaces into the system. The Committee will hold an interactive public forum on 12/13 to vet these options and get feedback.

- **Discussion/Vote re: Budget Guidelines - Without an Override**

Marc Laredo, Chairperson of the Budget Guidelines Subcommittee, presented the draft of the FY09 Budget Guidelines Without an Override. The Committee previously approved the FY09 Budget Guidelines based on the passage of an override. Without an override there will be a severe budget shortfall resulting in an inability to close the gaps in

maintenance, technology, and academic infrastructure to expand/undertake new initiatives. It will also require significant cutbacks to existing programs. These guidelines ask the Superintendent to do the following: 1.) Keep in mind long-range goals so that the system can rebuild essential programs and embark on new initiatives should additional funding become available in subsequent years; 2.) Focus on maintaining the essential interaction between teachers and students through consideration of breath of program and extracurricular activities, maintaining as favorable class sizes as possible, ongoing training of professional development, and taking cuts in a variety of areas vs. totally dismantling or eliminating programs; 3.) Continue to meet the legal requirements around special education; .) Maintain the facilities to the best of their ability; 5.) Examine the current level and scope of user fees.