

Dear Citizens of Milford,

On June 20, 2017, the Milford citizens will have an opportunity to come to the Milford Town Meeting to vote on the Milford School Budget for the 2017-18 school year.

I'm writing to you today with the intent of providing you with what I think is important information for you to have in regard to the Milford School Budget before you come to the June 20<sup>th</sup> Town Meeting.

I think we share some very important common concerns as we consider the budget. Most, or all of us, I think want to provide appropriate and good quality education for our children in a safe school environment. We also need to be resourceful while we also do our best to prepare our children to be ready for the challenges they will face along their individual journeys through school, work, service and future career choices which they will need to make in life. We also share in the responsibility to address the growing financial challenges that increasing costs and decreasing state funding dollars create, and we share the responsibility to put together the least cost ways we can to bring learning to our children.

With these common concerns and responsibilities as our guide, the school committee, school staff, and administrators have cut, rebuilt, and revised the Milford School District 2017-18 School Budget repeatedly over the last several months to provide what we believe is the lowest cost budget we can while still providing basic education for Milford's children in a safe school community.

The school committee would like you to know what the school district has done over the months of reworking and rewriting this budget to meet these responsibilities with the primary goal of reducing the cost to our citizens to the best of their ability.

### **Regular Education Budget**

We run a good, solid Regular Education Program with the smallest number of teachers we can to deliver a basic, but sound Pre K-8 education. Our teachers are skilled and resourceful. We have a total of 315 students at Dr. Lewis S. Libby School. With one pre-K teacher; two teachers per grade, Kindergarten through grade 8, the average number of students per Regular Education class is 19 students. These teachers teach English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Geography, History, and Health Education.

In addition to these teachers, we have:

- 1 Art teacher who teaches Art across all grades, pre-K to 8. The Art teacher is also responsible for meeting the state minimum requirements for identifying and arranging study for Gifted and Talented students. This meets our minimum state requirement for Gifted and Talented Programming.
- 1 Physical Education teacher who teaches Physical Education across all grades, pre-K to 8.
- 1 part time Music teacher 3 days per week who teaches general music K-5, band and chorus 5-8, and very limited group instruction by common instruments.
- 1 librarian (at Ed Tech salary) responsible for maintaining a solid and appropriate reading library for the range of readers from Kindergarten through research students preparing for high school. The librarian also provides instruction in using the library resources effectively, group reading circles, additional tutoring and individual help for students in need often after school.

The School Committee has maintained a minimally staffed, but skillful faculty, now with more than half of our newer staff at lower end salaries, and we have held the Pk-8 total program to the smallest increase possible. One cost we have no control over is the total high school tuition increase. Due to more students going to high school our high school tuition total cost has increased by \$47,000.00. Outside of that increase, we have been able to hold the overall increase in Regular Education spending pre-K to grade 8 to \$23,000.00

### **School Administration and Guidance**

It is not possible to make further cuts to Education and Classroom Instructional and Learning Needs. Understanding the local tax hardships our economy has created, Administration and School Committee made hard decisions to make severe cuts to Administration, and then to provide less costly but necessary support to our 315 students facing the loss of direct intervention with the cut in administration.

- The Superintendent's salary was reduced by \$15,000.00, also reducing the position significantly to 1 ½ days per week.
- Assistant Principal Position, salary and benefits eliminated, salary cut by \$43,300.00, and Health Insurance and Benefits cut by \$9,577.00
- Principal position reshaped: All student discipline and management incidents, and assistant principal share of teacher evaluations added to All current Principal Responsibilities and tasks, with, still, a reduction in salary by \$1,472.00

These cuts, however, will damage the school climate for our children. Reducing the Superintendent's time and ability to respond to high level student and parent concerns is inevitable with this change. The elimination of the Assistant Principal position will reduce the level of personal involvement and contact the Assistant Principal was able to provide with a range of student behavior and disciplinary issues. For these reasons, the School Committee found it necessary to shift some of the total cuts in administration (\$69,349.00) to bring the ½ guidance counselor position back to a full time position with a total salary cost impact of an additional \$22,500.00. Group guidance instruction and programming improves student to student respect and behavior which we believe will bring back a more comfortable and safe climate for our students and reduce the number of aggressive and bullying behaviors. This will reduce at least some of the overall negative impact of these reductions the School Committee saw no choice but to make.

### **Special Education Budget**

The Special Education Budget continues to be beyond our control. With efforts to control the Special Education increases to the best of their ability, the school committee has cut Special Education Legal Fees by \$35,000.00. With strict attention to meeting all requirements, we have avoided non-compliance and lawsuits entirely last year. For that reason, the school committee cut the Special Ed legal line from \$45,000 to \$10,000.00.

We also have reviewed our Special Education process this year and made some changes which include a reduction in the Special Education Director salary by \$15,000.00.

That having been said, we also have had an increase in Special Education out of district placement costs which we cannot do anything about. That includes a total of an increase in cost of \$86,800.00 in out of district placement and an additional bill of \$36,136.00 for an additional staff person at one of the high schools, that staff person hired at the high school to serve the needs of one of our high school students. That accounts for \$122,117.00 of the increase in our Special Education budget in spite of the cuts we have made. The remaining increase is due to IEP requirements of varying types which must, by law, be met.

### **Plant Maintenance Budget**

This was another hard decision area Administration and School Committee had to consider. We have a great deal of square footage across our school building, in addition to the gym floor and food service areas in need of attention, and other maintenance projects needing attention. The two full time and two part time positions are essential to maintaining the building needs of The Dr. Lewis S. Libby School.

However, the School Committee felt they had no choice but to eliminate one custodial position, given the need to reduce the budget and cost to the taxpayer as much as possible. Some parts of the school exterior are in need

of surface painting, and replacement of sections of broken cyclone fencing particularly at the street end of the playground is needed. However, the School Committee found it necessary to cut the exterior painting and fencing replacement as well, with a total cut to the Plant and Maintenance budget of \$29,375.00.

### **Additional Cuts to the Budget**

- Gifted and Talented Programming cut by \$4400.00, to be replaced by a more efficient/productive programming tool.
- Technology cut by \$4,000.00.
- Reg. Ed Computer Technology reduced by \$4,000.00.
- Co – Curricular Activities cut by \$6,500. (A.D. Salary reduction from previous year budgeted amount, uniforms and supplies).

### **Revenue Challenges**

- As you know, we have seen a pattern of State Department reductions in revenue sharing to subsidize base cost for Public Education. The state has again reduced its subsidy to Milford by \$35,000.00 for 2017-18.
- In addition, we have fewer elementary school tuitions from one of our neighboring towns. We will have \$79, 276.00 less in Tuition income next year.
- A number of years ago when times were better, the school department had old balances to carry forward and further reduce the local taxes needed to fund the school budget. Previous balances no longer exist for the school District to draw forward. However, for the 2017-18 school year, the school committee has brought forward all school reserves from prior Emergency Need CD's totaling \$219,298.00 in order to help with the local dollar need for the school budget.

### **Total Local Tax Impact**

The total impact, then, of the school committee's recommended school budget for 2017-18 for the local Milford taxpayer, together with the reduction in state subsidy and tuition short falls for next year, **will be a total need of just under one additional mil, or a total of \$172,517.67 more needed in total local taxes than in the previous school year.**

I hope this helps you better understand the school budget needs for the 2017-18 school year. I hope you also understand that the school committee has taken very seriously, both the responsibility to maintain a sound, basic education and school climate for your community's children, and the responsibility to deliver a pretty much bare cost school operation and budget in order to hold the local tax burden to the lowest figure within the school committee's ability and control.

Any increase is difficult. But we hope you will see that the one mil (or very slightly less than one mil) increase to support the school budget for 2017-18 is necessary.

Please come out to vote at the Town Meeting June 20, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. Our community's children need this budget and I hope your vote supports this need. Our children and the Milford Community need your support.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

James A. Underwood, Superintendent of Schools