

BROOKLINE SCHOOL COMMITTEE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR 2018

Our principal challenge remains the district's unchecked enrollment growth over the past decade despite aggressive actions to meet that growth. A successful Prop 2 ½ override in spring 2015 allowed for responsive staffing of schools and important changes to administrative structure, and a simultaneous debt exclusion financed the Devotion School expansion and renovation now underway. We are in the Schematic Design stage for expansion of Brookline High School to accommodate as many as 2700 students. This project is moving ahead well and so far we have received good cooperation from the MBTA. In addition we are still attempting to find a suitable site to build a ninth elementary school. Many of the sites we have considered have been challenged with legal and/or Article 97 issues – particularly in light of the recent SJC Decision in the Westfield case – or are otherwise not appropriate for an elementary school. Both of these projects have proceeded without MSBA partnership in order to speed the process.

The district and the Town of Brookline continue to experience growth and financial pressures as a result. The 2015 operating override was meant to and has carried us through three fiscal years (ending this July). While it has provided support, it has not sustained the town's revenue gap for the future. We continue to experience physical and budgetary pressures from our growth. The PSB budget will face or has already faced the following challenges for which we seek your help:

- Inaction on the Foundation Budget reform. We hope that this will be heard by Ways and Means this year.
- Sales Tax Reduction – what effect will this have on money available for MSBA?
- Reduction in Circuit Breaker Reimbursement (see #1)

The new administration in Washington has presented significant challenges to public education and to funding that supports vulnerable students in particular. We are concerned that the Medicaid funding for low income students will not be funded and that schools will have to pick up the balance. The PSB has seen significant growth in this revenue stream as our population and demographics have changed over the last ten years. With appreciation for the delegation's help and support for the PSB and our students, we invite your thoughts on those challenges, on your own priorities for the coming legislative term, and reaffirm our interest in and commitment to the following legislative priorities which have yet to be resolved:

1. Circuit Breaker Reimbursement, Transportation Reform & Trigger

This year (FY18) our budget has been severely affected by the 65% reimbursement of Special Education costs. We budgeted as we have done in previous years at 70%. We presently have a \$461,304 deficit for this year due to the legislature not funding this line item as they have in the past. In addition, transportation costs Brookline approximately \$1 million annually. Along with the burden of medically mandated services (see #4), spending for high-cost special education and its related transportation costs represent the largest unfunded mandates in our budget. We hope we can count on this delegation to prioritize and champion those bills that address this longstanding inequity, in particular funding the Circuit breaker at 75% or at least lowering the "trigger" for reimbursement to 3x the regular student cost and adding transportation to the Circuit Breaker formula.

2. Relief from Mandates, Related Costs, and Reporting

Each year we discuss the pressure on our budget, our administrators, and our educators from federal and state mandates to implement new curriculum, programs, or services. Yet each year, new mandates are added by the legislature, most without commensurate funding. The growing list includes MCAS 2.0 Testing, Educator Evaluation, English Language Immersion and related teacher training (RETELL), Bullying Prevention, school safety and gun control legislation, restraint training, and most recently opioid-specific policies and medical response training. While the BSC supports many of these initiatives in principle, these mandates affect both administrative and teaching staff by requiring new policies and budgeting, and they complicate collective bargaining as teachers seek relief from additional pressures on their time. In the absence of a moratorium on new mandated practices or curriculum, we request you ensure that any legislation implicating new requirements for public schools include the caveat that “the legislation is subject to appropriation.”

3. Sustaining METCO

One of the core strengths of our schools has been our investment in greater racial diversity through the METCO program. However, METCO funding lags far behind school choice, making it harder and harder to justify to Brookline taxpayers who foot the bill for almost 90% of PSB costs. As enrollments have risen and Brookline contemplates multiple large overrides, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain public support for this and other “non-resident” student programs. To help us protect METCO in Brookline, we ask that it be recognized as equivalent to a school choice option with the same reimbursement level.

4. Health Insurance Coverage for Medically Necessary Treatment in School

We appreciate the delegation’s willingness to work with us on this issue in past sessions, and realize the obstacles to progress. But, as we have reviewed for several years, approximately 1.4% of Brookline students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) have high-cost, medically mandated services included. The PSB spends \$1.1 million per year for in- and out-of-district costs associated with those medically fragile students. We urge you to continue pressing for legislation to shift those costs to private health insurance.