

David Pollak, Precinct 11 Town Meeting Member and
Chairman of the Brookline School Committee

Our elementary schools are all overcrowded, and the School Committee shares the frustration and the sense of urgency that is being felt throughout our community, and particularly by our school families and educators. Much has been done to address the dramatic enrollment growth in our schools – passing two operating overrides and the Devotion debt exclusion, hiring new teachers and staff, and adapting and enlarging our existing school buildings so that they continue to serve as well as possible. But more needs to be done and we need another elementary school as soon as possible.

Ten years ago only two of our elementary schools served more than 550 students. Now they all do. We have absorbed more than 1,500 additional elementary students over a dozen years and we are expecting hundreds more. This 40% growth to date is the equivalent of more than three schools' worth based on the average enrollment at the beginning of the expansion, all squeezed into our existing eight schools.

Class sizes have grown significantly- by an average of 10% - and we now have 80 classrooms with 22 or more students. Children are learning in hallways and stairwells and every kind of available space throughout our buildings.

We have added 58 classrooms at our eight schools. We have built classrooms, divided classrooms, made classrooms out of hallways and locker rooms and libraries and offices. We are renting space for classrooms. We've leased modular classrooms. At this point, we have no more room for classrooms. More importantly, while we've been adding all these classrooms and teachers we haven't been adding all of the other spaces that are essential to schooling. Gyms, cafeterias, auditoriums and libraries are all now way too small for the number of

kids in our buildings. Children eat lunch starting before 10:30 a.m. and they take physical education at the Teen Center. The same is true for smaller spaces: In the 2015 override we added many much-needed math and literacy specialists, guidance counselors and nurses, but we didn't add any place for them to work with their students.

The School Committee unanimously recommends favorable action on Warrant Article 1 as voted by the Board of Selectmen.

The School Committee also voted unanimously in favor of the following sentence included in the Board of Selectmen's Supplemental Recommendation:

"The study process will be strategic in order to spend the funds wisely and timely in order to make a decision to meet the Annual Town Meeting timeframe and to inform the Fiscal Year 2019 budget process (including a potential tax override proposal)."

We embrace the opportunity to take a step back and look at our options but we don't have a whole lot of time. The bottom line is that we are educating children in hallways in every one of our buildings, and this has to stop.