

From the School Committee

Please attend Town Meeting, starting Wednesday, April 4, at 7:30 p.m., at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School to vote on our town budget and other important matters.

Town Meeting represents the culmination of our budget planning process. At the Town Election, Sudbury residents voted to allow the Town to assess additional taxes above the Proposition 2 ½ limit to fund the operating budgets, but the election does not determine the Town or School budgets. The next step is the vote on the budget at Town Meeting. The override budget will not be adopted unless it is approved by the Town Meeting vote. Updated information about the Sudbury Public Schools override and non-override budgets is available on the District website.

Throughout the budget process, the School Committee and the administration have had numerous opportunities to talk with parents and others about the priorities reflected in the proposed override and non-override budgets. We have heard many valuable comments and questions. We appreciate your input as it truly informs our decision-making.

The District *class size guidelines* have been a frequent topic of these discussions. The class size guidelines articulate targets for the high end of the average class size for a grade. These are not strict limits and there are no legal or policy requirements that classes meet these goal sizes. As the student population is not evenly distributed across the grades and schools, there are often individual classes that are over the guideline size. At present, 8.9% of our class sections are above the guideline size. The guidelines are: Kindergarten – 20 students, grades 1 and 2 – 22 students, and grades 3 through 8 – 24 students.

In the early 1990s, as the enrollment in Sudbury schools was growing rapidly, many classes were quite large. At that time, Haynes and Noyes were the only elementary schools. The School Committee considered class size goals in relation to the study of projected enrollment and space planning. The Committee reviewed the research available linking class size to student achievement. The Committee then formalized class size recommendations in the form of the guidelines as they planned for the reopening of the Nixon school in 1994. Over the years, the Committee and the administration have continued to assess appropriate class sizes in light of the District's educational goals and budget priorities.

The wide-spread view that lower class sizes enhance student achievement is supported by research and by our understanding of what happens in the classroom. Our guidelines are very similar to those adopted by comparable school districts, including Wellesley, Wayland, Lincoln, Weston, and Lexington, and to standards used in other states. Research on class size shows the strongest link to measurable student achievement in the younger grades (K-3) and with class sizes below 20 or much smaller; there are fewer definitive studies of class sizes in the higher grades or of the impact of size variations among much larger class sizes. Thus, like others, we have set the lowest size guidelines for the youngest grades.

Our direct observations underscore the benefits of smaller classes. Larger class sizes make it more difficult for a teacher to communicate and meet with parents, to provide individualized or differentiated instruction (helping those who need more challenge or extra assistance), to manage

classroom behavior, to review homework, and to use desirable instructional practices such as small-group work. Some of the specific benefits of smaller classes, such as increases in student attention span and in individualized instruction, have been documented by class size researchers.

Nonetheless, small class sizes are not the only indicator of quality education. Class-size researchers have concluded that the experience and the preparation of teachers are critical factors in the success of class size reduction programs. The researchers have found that schools cannot meet the academic achievement goals of smaller class sizes without supports such as professional development for teachers and a rigorous curriculum. Certainly, we all understand that teachers will be more effective in the classroom with adequate supervision, a strong curriculum and training in that curriculum, and development of their instructional practices. Moreover, the support that students receive from nurses, guidance counselors, tutors, special educators, aides, and others enables the classroom teacher to make the most out of the instruction for the class as a whole.

Budget constraints require us to make choices – to decide when to allocate resources to maintaining appropriate class sizes and when to fund those services that support the classroom. Thus, in our staffing and budget planning, we constantly strive for the appropriate balance of these factors, consistent with our goal to maximize student achievement in a fiscally responsible manner.

Again, the School Committee appreciates the involvement of parents in discussions about the District's priorities, and encourages continued input even after the budget is set for next year. We hope to see you at Town Meeting on Wednesday, April 4th.

Susan Iuliano
For the School Committee