

## **Sudbury Public School Committee May 2008 Newsletter**

Since deciding to throw my hat into an empty ring of candidates for a seat on the SPS school committee, I have learned more than one might care to about schools, school budgets, town budgets, school policy, state laws and state and federal mandates.

Below are some of my early thoughts about serving in this role:

- Don't take anything too personally.
- Take a nap before the meetings because they always run very late.
- All members of town committees are required to take an oath of office to perform faithfully the duties of their office.
- All School Committee members are required within the first year by State Law to attend courses (8hrs) on school finance • open meeting law • public records law • conflict of interest law • special education law • collective bargaining • school leadership standards & evaluations • school committee roles & responsibilities.
- SPS is not obligated to provide transportation to (K-6) students living within 2 miles of school or any 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade student.
- Grocery shopping, unless you go in disguise, will always take longer than you expect.
- The School Committee is responsible for creating the policy (the what), the administration is responsible for implementing the policy (the how).
- Open Meeting Laws govern Sudbury Public School Committee meetings.
  - A.** The Open Meeting Law provides no general right for a member of the public to address a governmental body. The Sudbury School Committee, however, always provides for time for public comment during each of its regular meetings. This time period is called Open Forum on the SPS School Committee agendas.
  - B.** Open Meeting law requires that SPS School Committee post public notice of a meeting on the official bulletin board at town hall at least 48hrs before the meeting. SPS School Committee also posts meeting notices to the SPS website.
  - C.** The requirements of the Open Meeting Law grow out of the idea that the democratic process depends on the public having knowledge about the considerations underlying

governmental action, for without that knowledge people are not able to judge the merits of action taken by their representatives.

- School Committee members are not permitted to receive Staff Personnel records
- School Committee members are not permitted to receive school information about any specific students or information regarding specific special education needs.
- Data for the following year's budget is worked on as soon as one fiscal year ends. As early as October 17, 2007, Dr. Brackett updated the Committee on the recent Finance Committee Liaison Meeting when the Town requested a 'Level Staff' and a 'No Override' budget.
- Code of Conduct requires School Committee members to alert the school in advance that they will be visiting.
- After the age of 3 yrs old, costs of physical therapy, occ. therapy etc for special needs students that had previously been the responsibility of health insurance or Early Intervention is now borne by the local school districts until age 22 or High School graduation.
- In the 1980's, the Sudbury Public Schools had to cut their Gifted and Talented Curriculum and program due to budget constraints. It has not been reinstated.
- Because of budget cuts, lunchroom and recess monitors were cut in 2002 and have never been reinstated.
- Many times parents do not realize that when the majority of voters votes to place "limits on what we can do as an educational institution, there cannot be unlimited expectations of what we can deliver."
- A report, by the Massachusetts Department of Education, found that while healthcare, salaries, and special education program costs have escalated sharply, state funding has remained stagnant since 2003. As a result, cities and towns have had to shoulder a greater portion of the burden, raising property taxes and instituting fees for once-standard services, such as bus transportation and athletics, in order to make ends meet.
- From fiscal year 2003 to fiscal year 2006, most school districts saw little or no increase in their aid, and many districts experienced cuts in fiscal year 2004. With the adoption of changes to the Chapter 70 formula in fiscal year 2007, aid has increased in each of the last two years. But after adjusting for inflation, state aid has only recovered to fiscal year 1999 levels, well below the high-water mark of fiscal year 2002.

- There were 11 SPS school committee meetings between Sept 5 2007 – Feb 6, 2008 each lasting at least 3hrs each. Of the 22 open forums, only 50% were used by residents for comments to the School Committee Members.
- Character Education: The Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework recommends students be taught how to identify character traits such as honesty, trustworthiness, self-discipline, respectfulness, and kindness by grade 5.
- One particular example of increasing mandates is the federal “Adequate Yearly Progress” measure, which requires all school systems to show improvements in test scores for all students, including those in a number of sub-groups involving race or income levels, every year. These mandates, unfortunately, are not accompanied by enough additional funding to make them achievable without sacrifices in other services that the SPS schools have traditionally provided. In the event that a school system does not make “AYP”, it can be subject to a number of conditions culminating in a State takeover of the District.

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