

REPORT OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Jeff Evaul, Chair, Term Expires 2011
Jeanine Cunniff, Vice Chair, Term Expires 2010
Rebecca Brockelman, Term Expires 2010
Susan Archer, Term Expires 2011
Rosemarie Lucey, Term Expires 2012
Ronald Giovannacci, Term Expired 2009

School Superintendent: Bernard F. Creeden

Director of Finance and
Human Resources: Steven Greenberg

Director of Special Education: Sharon Lyons

Director of Facilities and
School Operations: Steven Clifford

Milestones

Ron Giovannacci completed six years of service on the committee. The committee and the town wish to thank him for his service.

In June, Third Grade teacher John Deveney retired after thirty-four years of service as a classroom teacher at the Proctor and Steward Schools. Music teacher Linda Cristofaro retired after thirty-five years of service as a classroom teacher and specialist at the Proctor and Steward Schools. Trudy Dooner retired as Principal of the Steward School after five years of service in Topsfield and thirty-five years of service as an educator in Massachusetts schools. Kerry Kaplon retired after twelve years of service as the Principal of the Proctor School and more than thirty five years as an educator in Massachusetts. In November 2009, Kathy Deveney announced her retirement as the Proctor School Secretary after twenty-three years as the Proctor School secretary, but continues to work on a part-time basis in post-retirement with Helen Dukehart as her counterpart. In January 2010, Debra Hale retired after ten years of service as the Director of Curriculum first in Topsfield and for the past five years in the Tri-Town School Union.

New staff joining the Topsfield Elementary Schools in September 2009 included Ryan Engebretson (Music), Maureen Jordan (Grade 2), Allison Pechalk (Behavior Specialist) and Elizabeth Martin (Kindergarten). Christine Elliott was appointed to be the Acting Director of Curriculum in January 2010.

Michelle Costa was appointed to serve as the Steward School Principal after nine years of service as a teacher at Steward. Sarah O'Leary was appointed to serve as the Principal of the Proctor School returning to Topsfield after having worked in a curriculum leadership role in Middleton for three years.

Highlights of the Past Year

Regionalization Readiness Grant & Corresponding Study

The Tri-Town School Union received a \$25,000 grant from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to study the possibility of a K-6 Regional School District. The TTU employed Future Management Systems, Inc. to research and investigate the possible governance structures that we may employ to meet our future educational needs as well as proper planning for succession of the Superintendent of Schools upon retirement.

The study was completed and submitted to the administration, the school committees, community leaders and the DESE. The options highlighted in the study were as follows:

- Form a K-6 Regional School District
- Strengthen the existing School Union
- Do nothing

A Regional Readiness Sub-Committee was formed to review the FMS Study and evaluate options for recommendation to the Tri-Town School Union Committee. After a great deal of due diligence from the Superintendent of Schools, Director of Special Education, Director of Finance & Human Resources, Town Administrators, Members of Boards of Selectmen (from all three towns), Members of the individual School Committees, and members of the community at large, the Sub-Committee is recommending that the existing School Union is strengthened to improve its ability to serve the three districts and assist with a reasonable succession plan. The four areas that the Sub-Committee is recommending are addressed as follows:

- Modify the existing governance structure and meeting schedule
- Adjust the existing leadership structure at the Central Office no later than July 1, 2012.
- Review existing educational programs and strive for consistency across the three school systems
- Implement a fiscal agent for Central Office expenses no later than July 1, 2010.

The Tri-Town School Union has excelled in delivering comprehensive support and leadership to the educational process of the three elementary school districts and the towns. The leadership has worked hard to engage in collaborative efforts that are productive and cost-effective while maintaining the identity of each of the member towns.

After ten years of stability and productivity, the current governance structure and leadership model has come to a crossroad. The Regional Readiness Report suggests that the governance structure and existing leadership model is not sustainable for the long term.

In addition, there is a growing shortage of qualified candidates for Superintendents and other Central Office positions in the Commonwealth. Districts that are considered "more attractive" because of their governance structure and compensation are experiencing difficulty locating Superintendents and other key leadership to fill the roles. If we do not change the way we conduct business with our governance and leadership models, then we will risk losing the stability and standards of excellence that we have worked so hard to achieve.

The priority is the education of our children and the most effective and efficient delivery of services to meet that priority. We strongly recommend that we place as much effort into meeting this challenge as we do with our educational programs, budgets, staff development, and community outreach.

Proctor School Playground: In January 2009, The Topsfield Playground Committee (TPC) was formed with the goal of replacing the 25 year old, broken playground structure at Proctor School. In ten months time, the TPC reached their goal and a new structure was raised in October 25, 2009. The TPC coordinated the construction of the new play structure with the help of countless community members. The Topsfield Playground Committee has made a long term commitment to the development of play spaces in the community. The TPC is now undertaking the refurbishment of the "Tot Lot" adjacent to the Tennis Courts. To learn more about the TPC visit www.topsfieldplaygroundcommittee.org. Assisting the TPC in their efforts at Proctor were: the Topsfield Education Fund (TEF), who donated the final funds needed to begin construction; the Boxford and Topsfield Athletic Associations (BAA/TAA), who donated new basketball nets for the basketball courts adjacent to the new playground; and two Eagle Scouts, Nick Bettencourt and Sam Warner who painted games onto the paved surface, In addition the Peaceful Playgrounds Program templates were donated by the Teffera- Mersha family and have been painted on the blacktop.

Response to Intervention (RTI): In 2008, staff at both Steward and Proctor schools completed a year-long series of meetings in preparation for the implementation of RTI. In September of 2009, the RTI program was launched at both schools. The RTI program uses district and state assessments, as well as teacher recommendations and observations to identify struggling learners. Each school has been assigned RTI liaisons that work with educators to create a RTI plan that specifically address each student's needs.

Energy Conservation: Our elementary schools participated in an energy audit through a program at National Grid. Based on the age of our lighting system and the potential for significant savings, we qualified for National Grid's program and in 2009, the lighting systems in both school's gymnasiums were retrofitted to a much more energy, efficient system.

Support for the Topsfield Elementary Schools

We are fortunate to live in a town that supports an excellent school system. Two organizations assist in supporting increased educational experiences to our student. The Topsfield Elementary School Parent-Teacher Organization provides funds to support excellent enrichment programs and field trip transportation. The Topsfield Education Foundation supports various enrichment programs including the Proctor School Band, Scientist in Residence Program, the Proctor Science Laboratory and the Lego League. The School Committee has spent a considerable amount of time identifying system needs and working with these great organizations to ensure continued excellence.

Parent Teacher Organization (TESPTO): TESPTO raises money through a variety of fundraisers in order to fund an extensive, series of enrichment programs for both Steward and Proctor schools. The largest portion of the budget, \$24,000, is used to fund the enrichment programs. TESPTO funds all field trips - two trips per grade. For the first time this year, TESPTO held The Fall Family Fun Fest at Steward- a day filled with horse carriage rides, live owl demonstrations, cider making and other activities as a way to thank the community for their support. TESPTO also partially funds the 3rd & 6th grade committees. TEPTO also looks for ways to support the school through new initiatives whether in the classroom, the library or one sponsored by the principals.

Topsfield Educational Foundation (TEF): TEF continue to play a significant role in the enrichment of our elementary students particularly in the area of science, math and music. Led by president, Jen LaRussa, TEF has provided a “Scientist in Residence” at Proctor including all necessary materials and textbooks for this program; a science coordinator; Lego league teams and hosted a regional tournament in Topsfield for the 1st time, science lab materials, music curriculum books, grant for online math league at Steward, purchased clarinets and trumpets for new 3rd grade instrumental program and provided funds to keep the instrumental program at Proctor viable for another year.

Furry Vengeance: During the summer of 2009, the Steward School had its first opportunity to work with a film crew as it was the chosen locale for a feature film starring Brendan Frasier and Brooke Shields. The film's producer and art department spent much of July working with the newly appointed principal, Michelle Costa, and the custodial crew to plan for the one day of filming in August. The movie was filmed mostly in the Topsfield area. The plot centers around a real estate developer who decides to build in small town, yet the animals of this rural community rebel. Local resident were invited to be extras and a few did participate. The custodial crew at Steward was pivotal in assisting the production crew and even though school was to begin only a short time after filming, the building showed little evidence of a movie set once filming was completed. The movie will be released in April of 2010. .

H1N1 Influenza Response: In the spring, the new H1N1 strain of influenza quickly became a public health concern at all levels of government. In response to this public health threat, several measures were taken by our school district to minimize spread of the H1N1 virus. Hand sanitizers were installed in all school buildings, proper hand washing and cough/sneeze covering techniques were taught to all students and staff, information on symptoms related to student and staff absences was collected, and students with influenza-like illness (ILI) were asked to stay home until they had been fever- free for 24 hours. The Superintendent's office published weekly statistics on absences of students and staff, which never rose to alarming levels. In the fall, the Directors of Health in Boxford, Topsfield and Middleton organized several free vaccination clinics for students and all town residents.

Strategic Planning/District Goals

The School Committee reviewed and updated its Mission Statement, Core Values and setting Goals for 2009-2012. The new plan was approved at a public meeting in February, 2009, and is posted at www.tritownschoolunion.com.

Educational Mission Statement and Core Values

The School Committee is committed to implementing its Mission Statement and Core Values which are: The Topsfield Elementary Schools pursue educational excellence by providing the opportunity for every individual in its community of learners to reach his or her full intellectual, social, moral, creative and physical potential.

In cooperation with family and community, our mission is to guide students in becoming personally responsible, self-motivated, disciplined, respectful, competent, and contributing members of society. It is the belief of the Topsfield School District that all children can learn and be successful. Effective education requires a committed partnership among the schools, home, and community.

Student achievement results from high expectations within an environment that is stimulating and challenging, yet safe and nurturing. A sense of respect for oneself and others promotes belonging and is essential to learning.

School Committee Overview

The committee is comprised of five elected town members who all have children enrolled in our schools. The goal of the School Committee is to continue to provide a high quality education within a managed budget.

Fiscal

The budget process begins with the presentation of guidelines presented to the committee by the Finance Committee, in late fall, and ends with the School Committee approving a budget and submitting it to the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen in the spring. The budget development process is a constant balancing act, weighing the needs of students and teachers against the town's financial constraints. The Committee's goal is to provide the highest quality educational programs with available funding from community tax revenues and limited fiscal support from the state. Increasing costs associated with insurance, school transportation, utilities, special education, building maintenance, and contractual salary increases, must be addressed annually. Our town scores as well or better on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and other measures of achievement as many other communities that spend far more per pupil.

The following general guidelines are used in preparing the budget. These guidelines reflect the Town's desire to provide a first rate education to all students.

Preserve Excellence in Curriculum and Instruction

At the core of our efforts will be preserving the quality of our programs and services that enable all students to reach high standards and expectations. Hiring and retaining the highest quality staff available is the most important factor in accomplishing this goal.

Maintain a Safe and Secure Environment and Infrastructure

The School Department should continue to maintain appropriate levels of safety, security and quality of school environments, while seeking energy conservation and appropriate cost-reduction measures. Many of our long-term capital programs for the maintenance and management of our facilities have been deferred in the last several budget cycles. Careful consideration of the long-term impact of further deferrals on the successful operation of our schools should be given in the FY 2010 Budget cycle.

Maintain the Rate of Budget Growth at a Responsible Level

Due to economic pressures, the School Committee has exercised significant fiscal restraint the past three years. We are now at a crossroads where we feel further restraint could jeopardize our ability to remain a top school system. However, we are also mindful that taxpayers are concerned about maintaining fiscal responsibility by the Town as their tax bills continue to rise. Therefore, the School Administration must continue to carefully examine spending to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness while taking special consideration of the impact that prior and continued restraint may have on the long-term stability and strength of our school system.

The Elementary School Department Budgets for the years FY 2008, FY 2009, FY 2009 and proposed for FY 2011 are presented in the following table:

Topsfield Elementary Schools Expenditure Summary	FY08 Approved Budget	FY09 Approved Budget	FY10 Approved Budget	FY11 Proposed Budget
Total Salaries	4,845,188	5,132,500	5,088,448	5,053,332
Total Supplies/Materials/Textbooks	169,706	163,794	127,956	168,959
Total Equipment	35,257	40,826	36,358	43,306
Total Prof. Dev. (Mem./Work./Conf.)	62,009	62,697	45,732	45,062
Total Special Education (Tuitions & Services)	566,556	563,997	400,153	395,338
Total Transportation	329,409	284,575	248,801	246,203
Utilities	213,229	211,394	237,590	225,306
Facilities	171,194	170,453	159,105	164,287
Total Operating Budget	6,392,548	6,630,236	6,344,141	6,341,793
Less: Applied Income Sources	462,608	522,398	559,200	516,200
Total Town Appropriation	5,929,940	6,107,838	5,784,941	5,825,593

School Enrollment

The building grade level organizational structure continues to locate the pre-school through grade three programs at the Steward School and grade four through grade six at the Proctor School.

	Pre School	Kindergarten	Grade One	Grade Two	Grade Three	Grade Four	Grade Five	Grade Six	Students K-6	Classrooms K - 6
October 1, 2004	50	80	99	96	104	97	103	112	691	36
October 1, 2005	47	89	80	99	97	104	95	104	668	35
October 1, 2006	50	73	96	81	99	96	105	97	647	34
October 1, 2007	54	80	80	95	85	103	94	104	641	33
October 1, 2008	50	78	82	79	94	91	103	100	627	33
October 1, 2009	46	78	77	83	80	101	92	107	618	32

The School Committee has worked for many years to maintain class sizes within the following ranges across each grade span: Kindergarten, 18-20; Grades 1-2, 20-22; Grades 3-4, 20-22; Grades 5-6, 22-24. A study of future enrollment trends completed by the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) in March 2006 and updated in December 2009 continues to show a trend of anticipated enrollment decreases for the next several years.

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)

As Educational Reform in Massachusetts heads into its thirteenth year, school district accountability continues to be at the forefront of the reform effort. The Topsfield School Committee goal is to increase the number and percentage of our students achieving at the Advanced and Proficient Levels in each grade and in each subject tested. The Department of Education has rated each school district and school in terms of its performance and improvement over the past two years. Detailed information about the School District Accountability System Cycle III ratings, including determinations regarding the requirement to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, can be found on the Massachusetts Department of Education web site, which can be reached through a link on our school district web site (<http://www.tritownschoolunion.com>).

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) now includes the following areas and grades:

Grade Three: Reading and Mathematics

Grade Four: English Language Arts, Writing and Mathematics

Grade Five: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology, History and Social Studies

Grade Six: English Language Arts and Mathematics

The School Performance Index was introduced for the 2003 MCAS Administration. Performance points are awarded to a school or district for each student in the MCAS test group during the rating period. The goal is for each school and district to achieve a Composite Performance Index of 100 by the year 2014, (corresponding to all students performing at the Advanced or Proficient levels). Our Composite Performance Index is in the High or Very High Range for all areas tested. Our Overall District Ranking for 2009 continues to be in the top 5-10% out of 373 school districts participating in the MCAS.

The tables below detail our performance in terms of percentages during the past four years:

Grade	State Rank and % Advanced and Proficient 2009 Out of 373 school districts	State Rank and % Advanced and Proficient 2008 Out of 373 school districts	State Rank and % Advanced and Proficient 2007 Out of 373 school districts	State Rank and % Advanced and Proficient 2006 Out of 373 school districts
3- Reading	#57- 82%	#10 - 83%	#19-81%	#31-79%
3- Math	#34-89%	#7 - 90%	#65-75%	#38-71%
4-ELA	#60-80%	#33 - 73%	#44-76%	#33-73%
4-Math	#35-89%	#102 - 57%	#23-70%	#11-68%
5- ELA	#8-98%	#24 - 85%	#15-87%	#2-93%
5- Math	#15-95%	#15 - 80%	#6-83%	#26-69%
5-Science	#41-87%	#48-- 72%	#19-79%	#6-85%
6-ELA	#16-95%	#16 - 90%	#3-99%	#17-89%
6- Math	#29-92%	#31 - 79%	#3-93%	#7-80%

Curriculum and Program Development

The Topsfield Elementary Schools maintain web sites which contain detailed information about our ongoing initiatives in curriculum, instruction and professional development. These web pages can be located at www.tritownschoolunion.com and www.topsfieldschools.org.

Special Education

The special education program in Topsfield has always been outstanding and we continue to assess and modify our program needs each year to ensure we remain flexible enough to meet the growing complexity and numbers of our students with disabilities. School districts are mandated by state and federal laws to provide special education services to those students with disabilities who require specialized instruction in order to make effective educational progress and to ensure that these services occur in the least restrictive environment. Special Education programs are required to be individually tailored to ensure the individual student makes steady progress towards meeting the same curriculum standards as all students in our district. Students with disabilities who meet the eligibility criteria for a special education program are entitled by federal statute to

receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), therefore, this is an area over which the local School Committee has little control in terms of costs, which can have a major impact upon our budget. Clearly, there are diverse student needs that must be addressed through our educational programs and the School Committee asks for your continued support with the local budget to ensure all children's needs are fulfilled to the best of our ability.

As of December 1, 2009, there were 118 special education students in the Topsfield Elementary Schools, grades Pre-Kindergarten through grade 6. The percentage of Topsfield students (Kindergarten through 6th grade) receiving special education services is approximately 15.9% which represents a slight decrease compared with December of 2008. In addition to our Inclusion and Resource Room programs, we also have several programs for students with more intensive needs; our Language-based Learning Centers are successful program options and are available at both the Steward and Proctor Schools. With the financial assistance of Federal ARRA stimulus funds to supplement the federal grant for special education students, we have been able to create and implement a new model at the Steward School for students in grades 1 and 2. This program is a multi-age classroom with two teachers, one of whom is a part-time special education teacher, who work collaboratively to provide a high quality program for both typical and special needs students and do so by providing all special education teaching within the general education classroom. In addition to school year programs, we are obligated to provide Extended School Year (summer) programs for about 1/3 of our special education students. In the summer of 2009, we forged a partnership with the Topsfield Recreation Department in order to provide not only the educational program required to prevent substantial regression, but also the social pragmatic language program option these students require. This program was a highly successful partnership and benefitted the students tremendously.

The District is deeply committed to an inclusion philosophy pursuing effective ways to integrate all our children into regular education settings. We continue to implement an inclusive teaching model in both schools which combines the strengths of a classroom teacher with those of a special educator to provide intensive instruction right in the regular education classroom setting, one of the goals and requirements of the special education regulations. This structure enables us to provide the most appropriate instruction in the least restrictive setting possible. In addition to our in-district programs, Topsfield has affiliations with the Greater Lawrence Educational Collaborative and North Shore Education Consortium to provide more intensive and highly specialized educational programs to low incidence populations of special needs students and to serve as a resource to work collaboratively with member districts to address a variety of special education issues, as well as to provide professional development opportunities for staff.

Closing Statement

The School Committee has endeavored to maintain a focus on teaching and learning directed towards increased student achievement in a standard based environment. The economic climate has made this endeavor most challenging. We are fortunate to have the steady leadership provided by our Superintendent Bernie Creeden and his central office along with our dedicated principals and teachers who ensure that the quality of education for our children remains at the highest level possible despite the drastic cuts to our 2009/2010 budget. As members of the community serving on the school committee, we are most grateful for these efforts.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Evaul, Chair
Jeanine Cunniff, Vice Chair
Rebecca Brockelman
Susan Archer
Rosemarie Lucey