



Lexington Public Schools

1557 Massachusetts Avenue ♦ Lexington, Massachusetts
02420

Paul B. Ash, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

(781) 861-2550
email: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us
fax: (781) 863-5829

“Our Schools”

Voices from David Crump, Retiring Harrington School Principal **and Barbara Manfredi, Retiring Bridge School Principal**

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This June will mark the end of an era at the Bridge and Harrington Schools. After thirteen years, principals Barbara Manfredi and David Crump will be retiring. For this week's column, I asked them to share some thoughts with us about our schools.

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Experience Shows Winning Schools Depend on Community

David Crump

“Milton Man New Lexington Principal” was the headline 13 years ago when I became principal at Harrington School. I'm sure I've spent more time in Lexington than in Milton since then! Every morning when I've gotten up, I've looked forward to coming to work at Harrington. The kindergarten class of 1994, the year I started, is graduating from high school as I retire as principal. As I think about what I might say to some of these students, I remember the advice my mother gave me: go to college after graduation. My friends and I had a singing group in Gary, Indiana, just one street away from another group. We competed against each other at school talent shows – we usually won. The other group decided to pursue a music career and did not attend college. You may have heard of them: The Jackson Five. I headed off to Northeastern University and then taught in Boston and Concord, and I've never regretted it.

I had over 18 years of teaching experience with high-caliber colleagues, which prepared me to become a principal. Having been a veteran teacher, as principal my mission has been to provide the best education for all children. We need to stretch kids, to challenge students at all ability levels so that everyone comes out a winner. I am the biggest winner of all, because I thoroughly love my job. I love working with children, helping them learn, watching them grow, and seeing them become competent, productive citizens.

1994 was a year of great change in Massachusetts, with the Education Reform Act of 1993 dramatically affecting school funding and setting statewide standards for education. MCAS has brought important accountability, but also means that teachers spend less time teaching and more time testing. This new

environment has brought changing expectations and placed new demands on schools, teachers, and students.

There have been times in the past when there was a scarcity of resources, but I have never seen it as bad as it is now. Schools are expected to do a better job with fewer resources. We are losing, year after year, piece by piece, what has made our school system great. Needing overrides every year for our schools means something is fundamentally wrong with how schools are funded. Why would anyone want a school system where children would learn less? There has to be a better way, a different way. Dismantling an excellent school system is demoralizing for the community, students, teachers, and staff.

Lexington residents are fortunate to have some of the best schools in the state. Children receive a top-notch education, the caliber of the teaching staff is high, and the overall atmosphere is positive for children to learn and thrive in.

Parental involvement is a hallmark of the Lexington Public Schools. Research shows that students do better with more parent involvement. Whether parents volunteer in a classroom, help with fundraising, or get involved with the PTA, parents and teachers collaborating enhances children's education.

Our schools face many challenges.

- Safety of all children is paramount. Whether they are arriving at school, working in the classroom, playing on the playground, or taking the bus home, it is essential that children perceive school as a safe and fun place to be so they can relax and learn.
- Class size continues to be a challenge. Teaching becomes more dynamic and effective with smaller class size. I know what it is like to teach large classes. I once had thirty students in a fourth grade class, and the type of instruction I was able to deliver was markedly different.
- Professional development for classroom teachers and specialists is the lifeblood of an excellent school system.

My message to the community is this: We have a worldwide reputation for educating students and a wonderful public school system within a supportive community environment. Let's work together to figure out how we can keep it this way. The children are fabulous and make it all worthwhile. To quote a pop song from a few years ago, "I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way." I hope that Lexington continues to support the schools as it has done in the past.

Reflections on a 13-Year Career in Education in Lexington

Barbara Manfredi

An Unexpected Plan

Thirteen years ago, when I became the principal of Bridge School, the Minuteman's profile headline read, "First Create an Atmosphere of Trust." A teacher since 1967, I had not planned on becoming a principal. I came to Bridge as a special education teacher in 1986 and in 1990 was asked to become Assistant to the Principal in addition to my regular job. For a modest stipend, I focused on staff development through writing grant proposals and organizing professional development. When the principal retired, I was pleasantly surprised when I was invited to interview for and ultimately selected for the job.

An Atmosphere of Trust

To create an atmosphere of trust, I focused on communicating clearly and sensitively with all members of our school community. I relied on my instincts, always conveying that whatever I asked of my staff was needed. My objective was never to have a student, staff member, or parent walk away feeling more

confused than when we began our conversation. As a special education teacher, I was accustomed to delivering sensitive information to parents. As a mother of three children, I would try to put myself in parents' shoes to understand the challenge of hearing difficult news about one's child for the first time. These initial steps helped foster a sense of trust that I believe still prevails at Bridge.

Despite considerable teaching experience, the initial learning curve as principal was steep as a result of the overwhelming amount of work, the number of meetings at and away from Bridge, and my desire to be as responsive as possible to the entire community. To this day, I continue to learn about being a better teacher and principal by adapting and responding to the significant changes that have occurred in public education throughout my career. We have improved our understanding of how children learn and have used this knowledge to develop more effective ways of teaching our children. When I walk into a classroom and hear children laughing as questions are being asked and answered, I know that we are closer to achieving our goal.

A Standard of Excellence

MCAS has had a profound impact on our schools. Bridge was the highest scoring elementary school the year MCAS was introduced, but I am a firm believer that we should be using the data collected differently—primarily to improve the quality of our teaching.

At Bridge, we have developed a vision of delivering an excellent education. However, although we are educating children better today, state and federal financial support for public education is waning, putting enormous strains on our communities. When people challenge the need for that level of excellence, I respond by asking them "Would you go to a mediocre doctor?" Despite the increase in unfunded mandates, Lexington has been able to deliver a quality education by creating and sustaining a collegial environment in which leadership is shared, ideas are encouraged and shared widely, and professional development is supported at all levels. Having well trained professionals teaching and administering our schools enables us to deliver a quality education. As I prepare to retire, I am deeply concerned about the cuts we have had to make to our school budget. Without the financial support of the Lexington Education Foundation and our individual PTAs, there would have been little to no professional development this year.

Safety First

Members of the Bridge community know that maintaining a safe learning environment has always been my top priority. We constantly evaluate how to protect the emotional and physical well-being of all our students. We have employed the Open Circle curriculum routinely to empower our students to deal with issues such as bullying and racism. Our children must learn how to speak up and speak out for one another effectively. Establishing a tradition of community service helps our students understand the world in which they live, while instilling in them a sense of social justice. In our ever-changing world, creating learning environments like these that are safe on all levels protects all of our safety.

Leaving the Bridge community will be hard. There has been a lot of laughter and some tears throughout the years, but my most cherished memories will be of time spent with the children. They have been and always will be the best part of the job.