



# Lexington Public Schools

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## **“Our Schools”**

### **What Makes a Good School?**

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During these difficult budget times, I ask Lexington residents to engage in a conversation about what kind of schools we want. As the proposed 2008 budget for our schools indicates, our ability to maintain previous levels of excellence in the schools is severely challenged. I encourage us all to take a step back from the details and talk with each other about what kind of schools we want for our children and our community.

We educate our children so they will grow up to be productive and thoughtful members of our world. Children need to learn much more now than in the past to join our society. They learn best when their intellectual and emotional needs are met. This is a complex process most effectively accomplished when class sizes are small, teachers are well trained and supported, and the educational programs our students need to thrive as productive citizens are provided.

There has been considerable research on what makes a good school. I feel that my colleague Matthew King, who has been a Superintendent for almost 28 years and is retiring as Superintendent of the Wellesley Public Schools at the end of this year, best summarized the top qualities of a good school. A good school would have:

- Teachers who deeply respect and like children and who are passionate about what they teach
- Educators who communicate with parents, students, and each other openly and non-defensively
- A principal who articulates a school vision about teaching and learning, embodies the school's values, and effectively supervises teachers
- A cohesive, well-articulated curriculum that is periodically assessed and refined
- Vibrant performing and visual arts programs
- Small class sizes
- Diverse instructional strategies that engage students and make success accessible for all students
- A demanding professional development program for teachers and a commitment to continuous improvement
- A strong partnership with parents
- Evidence that the school produces students who are confident in the face of challenge, caring in their relations, competent in what they have studied, and curious about the world

At this week's School Committee hearings on the Fiscal 2008 budget, current and former students pleaded with the community to maintain the quality of the educational programs that have well-served many generations. Dedicated teachers, librarians, and custodians spoke passionately about their commitment and service to children of Lexington. Others spoke about the breadth of programs offered for all different types of students. Whether they be literacy, special education, or foreign language programs, they are all part of the vibrant fabric of our school system.

Nevertheless, the financial constraints mandated by Proposition 2 1/2, combined with unfunded mandates from the state and federal governments, mean that we have inadequate funds to maintain the quality of our schools. Many of our students are in classes that are approaching the upper bounds of what researchers consider to be reasonable class sizes to effectively teach all children. Providing individual students with differentiated instruction becomes more challenging with each additional student.

Attracting, training, and retaining high-caliber professionals is made much more difficult when jobs are put at risk year after year. For example, having to put the librarians on the "at-risk" list is impeding our ability to hire replacements for our three librarians who are retiring. We have almost no money for professional development, except what is funded through the generosity of grants from the Lexington Education Foundation. For every item not included in the same-service budget, there is a similar story.

So how do we proceed from here? I believe we need to have a community discussion on what are good schools and what we want in Lexington. Please start talking to your neighbors about what kind of school system you want. Also, please visit <http://lps.lexingtonma.org> for the most up-to-date details on the Fiscal 2008 budget process and attend the upcoming School Committee meetings, or e-mail [school-com@silver.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:school-com@silver.ci.lexington.ma.us) to share your comments. Only when we come together and agree on what we want can we set a course to accomplish it.