



# Lexington Public Schools

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## “Our Schools”

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When I last wrote in this column two months ago, I asked whether we ought to talk about Lexington High School in the past, the present, or the future. At this moment, as I write, I am looking at an “uncapped schedule run”—that is, a computer tally of student course sign-ups that prefigures what class sizes will look like in September.

In it, I see 20 sections of English with more than 25 students in each. I see a social studies teacher’s schedule that includes a popular upperclass elective with 170 student requests. I see all 10 sections of ceramics with 29 or more students. And that’s just a sample.

This uncapped schedule run represents the status quo at Lexington High School, a complicated pattern of enrollment that we refine by moving students to different sections to balance class sizes or by moving students into other courses and then “capping” the classes and telling the remaining students they have to find another course or go to a study period or (if they are juniors or seniors) include a “free block” in their schedules.

This predicament is the result of two factors: enrollment that has dramatically increased over the past seven years and resources that have dramatically diminished. The High School lost more than 15 full-time positions after last year’s failed override. Consequently, many classes have become overcrowded; teacher loads have increased in mathematics, social studies, foreign languages, and most science courses by 20 percent or more. Instructional time in biology, chemistry, and physics, except for AP courses, has been cut 17 percent; laboratory activities have been reduced; a co-curricular science program was eliminated; the ninth grade “freshmen team” program has been eviscerated; extra help time for students has been curtailed; and student access to courses has become more limited.

This is Lexington High School, post-2006 override failure.

That is why the June 5 override will have a major impact on the future of the High School. If it passes, we will pick up 2.4 teaching positions to help deal with enrollment increases, 2.0 positions to reduce excessive class sizes, a half-time physics position to restore instructional time to honors physics, a social studies position that will restore the freshman team—in all, 5.9 positions. The High School will not be able to return teacher loads to the 2006 level, when most teachers taught four instead of five classes, but we will be able to stop the bleeding.

On the other hand, if the override vote is lost, we lose three more faculty positions in a school that is already turning students away from classes. The net difference between a passed and a failed override vote is nearly nine teaching positions.

The pre-override Lexington High School produced more National Merit semifinalists than any other public high school in Massachusetts, 176 Advanced Placement Scholars, more than 20 award winners at the state science fair, the first team in the Massachusetts Mathematics League to record a perfect score, a nationally ranked debate program, music and drama organizations that have been invited to festivals all over the world, award-winning student writers and publications, and an athletic program that recorded a 70 percent record of wins.

More than the high-profile awards and achievements is the fact that this has been a school for all students. All its courses are college preparatory courses, so that each graduate has the opportunity to continue on to higher education. Nearly 92 percent do. Our school as a whole ranks among a handful of outstanding high schools in the state in S.A.T. and MCAS scores. The faculty of the High School advises, largely on a voluntary basis, over 90 clubs and activities, including academic teams, student government, service organizations, and special interest clubs. Every graduate completes a minimum of 40 hours of community service, many in service to the town of Lexington.

That is the High School that the June 5 budget override is intended to maintain—for the children of Lexington and for the future of the community.