

# Supt. updates DEAC on schools' progress

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DEVENS -- Interim Superintendent of Schools Joseph Connelly said he was proud of the school district's accomplishments during a meeting this month with the Devens Educational Advisory Committee.

The fiscal 2013 school budget has been drafted, and is likely to be approved soon, he said.

"We were asked to identify funding we'd need to maintain the same level of service in the schools, which is a breath of fresh air, because most school districts in Massachusetts are doing level- or under level-funded budgets," said Connelly.

The school district's fiscal 2013 level-service budget of \$11,401,640 is an increase of \$47,000, or 0.4 percent, from this year.

"A couple of things happened this year that will help Harvard immensely," Connelly said. One was that special education is down \$350,000 due to a very expensive out-of-district placement turning age 23. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require schools to educate special-education students ages 3-22.

The second financial benefit to Harvard schools is that all Massachusetts communities are receiving a 20 percent increase in the so-called "Circuit Breaker," a law that provides additional assistance for special-education expenses over the state reimbursement rate.

"That additional reimbursement has helped the budget immensely," Connelly said.

He said Harvard schools still rely heavily on Devens funding. Next year's budget includes \$800,000 in projected offsets, with half slated for each of Harvard's two schools.

Enrollment projections

The school district has also been engaged in a detailed enrollment-capacity report, which was needed to project enrollment for next year's budget and to insure that there is enough classroom space in both schools.

The detailed report was used to determine how many classes would be needed at each grade level for the next decade. "The good news is that this report indicates that we have enough capacity to meet our projected needs over the next 10 years," Connelly said.

For the potential number of school-aged children who may live in the proposed Vicksburg Square housing development in Devens, the report took a slightly different approach than Trinity Financial, the proposed developer for the site.

The data used included two scenarios: the numbers of school-age children projected in the Vicksburg Square proposal, and also the current percentage of school-age children in Devens, just slightly less than 0.7 percent, applied to the proposed 168 family units at Vicksburg Square. That brought the number of Vicksburg Square children who may enter the school system in the coming years to between 75 and 117, according to Connelly.

"Harvard continues to have the capacity to meet the needs of future enrollment," Connelly said.

#### Capital, technology plans

The school district has also developed a detailed five-year capital plan that breaks down the needs for each school department: building repairs, grounds repairs, technology, and curriculum needs.

"Textbooks are not considered capital expenditures, but since that and capital costs are expensive, they were looked at to see if the costs can be spread out without peaks and valleys, such as with the purchase of textbooks," Connelly said.

Although there is not enough money to fund all projects in the plan, those with high priority will be addressed this year.

The district's technology report has also been completed.

"The report includes a detailed inventory and research on where we think we should go, and we have come up with a plan to be presented to the school committee next week," said Connelly.

Connelly said the major difference in this year's budget compared to those of prior years is that a detailed inventory analysis was done for every line item. "That type of detail is very important in these tough economic times to promote transparency and enhance credibility," he said.

#### Administrative plan

With an interim superintendent on just a one-year contract, Connelly said that Harvard is in the very unique position of being able to look at its administrative structure to see if what it has now is the right administrative plan.

"Are we top-heavy? Do we have enough administration at the school level? We are looking at different administrative structures," he said.

Those structures include having a part-time superintendent, a combination superintendent/principal, or a school union with another school district. In the latter scenario, each district retains control over its school system but cost-shares certain positions such as the facilities director, food services director, and special-education director.

"Or we can continue status quo," Connelly said. "The report will help the school committee to make that decision. After hearing it next week the school committee will identify which of these options they support or what other administrative structure they support."

He added that in his first six months in Harvard he has discovered that "Harvard has a very, very effective administrative team and a very healthy work atmosphere. Each report easily represents hundreds of hours of work, and because we have such a good team, it was easily accomplished."

Harvard AP, MCAS

Connelly prefaced his report on Harvard students' academic progress as measured by the 2011 MCAS and College Board by stating that "12 percent of Harvard students are Devens and nonresident school-choice students, and collectively they all did extremely well."

He reported that Harvard is one of 367 school districts across the U.S. and Canada being honored by the College Board by being placed on the Second Annual AP Honor Roll. The award was given for simultaneously increasing access to advanced placement course work while maintaining or increasing the percentage of students earning scores of 3 or higher on AP exams. The majority of U.S. colleges and universities grant college credit or advanced placement for a score of 3 or above on AP exams.

Bromfield is one of 30 Massachusetts schools to be placed on the 2011 honor roll, and one of only six to win a place on the honor roll for a second year in a row.

MCAS achievement

Connelly summarized the 2011 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) score achievements of students at Hildreth Elementary School, where 75 percent of third-graders, 72 percent of fourth-graders, and 76 percent of fifth-graders scored in the proficient or advanced categories in math. The corresponding state averages are 66 percent, 47 percent and 59 percent, respectively.

In reading, 82 percent of third-graders, and in ELA, 80 percent of fourth-graders and 85 percent of fifth-graders scored in the proficient or advanced categories. Those scores far exceed the state averages of 61 percent, 53 percent and 67 percent.

In grades 6-8 at Bromfield, more than 75 percent of students' math scores were in the proficient to advanced range, compared with the state averages of from 51 percent to 58

percent. In ELA, the scores were even higher.

In grade 10, the proficient to advanced scores were 99 percent in math, 100 percent in English, and 96 percent in Science, Technology and Engineering, well above the state averages.

Connelly said that the Bromfield School was the only public high school in Massachusetts to achieve a 100 percent passing rate on its MCAS scores two years in a row.

He added that, although the test scores are very impressive and the schools made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in all areas, "the principals want to better align the curriculum to the state-mandated frameworks."

He commended Harvard's administrators for having good coordination and oversight over what goes on in the classrooms, which, in turn, helps teachers to be consistent and work well together and in tune with the state requirements.

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