



# ESTABROOK UPDATE

Joseph Estabrook Elementary School, 117 Grove Street, Lexington, MA, (781) 861-2520

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## A Principal Notes...

I am finally almost back to being myself after a battle with the flu. We are including in the update a message from the Superintendent that gives a helpful context to the rise in special education costs.

As the holiday season approaches I like to remind myself that this is a stressful and busy time for many families. At school and at home, children can benefit at this time from more structure and predictability, balanced with quiet, reflective family time. It helps to be sensitive to the fact that an increase of tears and squabbles at school is not unusual in December.

Some parents have asked me about holiday gifts for teachers. It is hard to know what to say because sometimes bringing up the subject makes people think they ought to get something. Please know that there is no obligation for a child to give a gift. It is not expected. If a teacher receives a gift, it is not opened publicly in a way that would make any child feel sad about not bringing something. Because parents ask, some teachers provide a wish list of little things useful in the classroom. Other ideas could be a donation to the Lexington Education Foundation in honor of the teacher, a letter to the teacher, and any homemade gift.

Finally, the recommendations for redistricting of the elementary schools are on the Lexington school website. The Estabrook school boundaries would remain substantially as they are now.

## Message from Superintendent of Schools Paul Ash —

On November 29, School Committee Chairman Tom Diaz told the Special Town Meeting that our nation, our state, and the Lexington Public Schools are

facing a greater demand for special education funding. Medical science is saving young lives, and:

- Many survivors are medically and educationally challenged.
- Local school districts are obligated to pay all special education costs with inadequate state and federal aid.
- Special education needs cannot be accurately predicted since students move in and out of district and their educational needs change.

The School Committee requested that the Special Town Meeting appropriate an additional \$834,000 to cover the projected deficit in special education. Since March 2006, the projected 2006-2007 cost for out-of-district special education has increased by one million dollars. There have been 32 changes in placements since March: 10 of these were new out-of-district students (4 students moved in from out of state and went directly to out-of-district schools, 1 moved in from another Massachusetts school system and 5 Lexington students needed to go out-of-district for educational reasons). Even though we added \$260,000 in contingency funds to the FY 07 school budget for new out of district placements, it was not sufficient to cover these new costs.

I am very pleased that the Special Town Meeting approved the School Committee's request for the additional \$834,000. Now that we have these funds, we will not have to adversely impact regular education and maintenance programs; however, our budget will still remain very tight for the remainder of the year.

Here are some important statistics:

- Lexington's special education costs, as a percentage of total costs, are typical for surrounding communities.
- During the past 15 years, the statewide percentage of school budgets allocated to special education has increased from 17% to just under 22%.
- During the past 15 years, the statewide cost of regular education has increased by 88.7%. The cost of special education has increased by 156.2%
- For 29% of communities in Massachusetts (including Lexington), the increased cost of special education has been greater than all new state aid since 1993.

Although Lexington cannot stop state and national trends, there is much we can do. First, we must remain committed to educating all students at the highest possible standards. Second, we must continue to develop more in-house programs that will permit us to reduce out-of-district placements. And third, we must continue to improve regular education supports that will permit more students to thrive in regular education.

As an example of what we can do, last Tuesday evening we presented to the School Committee three new special education programs that we expect will avoid \$865,000 in costs next year. Two programs will better serve middle and

high school students with autism. We also requested funds to expand the high school Multidisciplinary Support Team (formerly AIM program). I want to thank Liz Billings-Fouhy, Jim Russo, Maura Johnson, Denise Oldham, Kathy Meagher, Barbara Bennett-Fortier, and Mary Sullivan Kelley for developing these programs and writing a comprehensive report for the community. The full report is posted on our web site. I hope you have a chance to read this outstanding report.



**Next Wednesday, December 13, students at Estabrook will be joining schools, libraries, and other organizations across the country to help break the Guinness World Record for the Most People Reading Aloud Simultaneously in Multiple Locations. The current record is held by 155,528 students from 737 schools in the United Kingdom who read William Wordsworth's poem, "Daffodils," on March 19, 2004.**

**Students and staff in grades 2-5, as well as other school staff who may choose to join, will be reading a passage from Charlotte's Web by E. B. White. At this point, there are 399,044 participants signed up from all over the country who plan to be reading together.**

**If you are interested, more information about the event can be found at <http://www.charlotteswebbarr.com>**

**Jennifer Kuhn  
Library Teacher**



## From the Nurse

Two important things to mention today:

We are having indoor recess (Friday, 12/8) because of the cold. When the wind chill factor is below 20 degrees, we will be indoors. Some teachers may bring children outside in such weather for a few minutes for a quick run. When it is 20 degrees or more we will have outdoor recess. With the wildly varying weather we have been experiencing, it is important that children bring hats and mittens as well as warm winter coats so they may participate in outdoor activities comfortably and safely. All children will go out when it is outdoor recess unless they have brought a doctor's excuse. It is Lexington Public School practice that if children are well enough to be in school, they are expected to participate in all school activities including recess.

In addition, it is very helpful for me to know when children are absent with medically diagnosed illnesses such as pneumonia and Strep. This way I can be aware of clusters of cases or trends in distribution. I would also ask you to inform me when children have broken bones, crutches, surgery etc. I'm often asked about permissible activity for injured children that I didn't even know were injured. Thanks for your cooperation.

*Kathy Johnson*

## LISTSERV

If you have requested to receive the Estabrook Update and other materials electronically, please subscribe to the listserv. To subscribe, send an email to: [majordomo@silver.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:majordomo@silver.ci.lexington.ma.us). Send it from the email address that you want to subscribe. In the body of the message, put only the following two lines:

subscribe estabrook-announcements  
end

Please note that the Estabrook Update will be sent via listserv after the Winter break. If you have requested a paper copy, the update will be sent home in your child's backpack.



## The William Diamond Junior Fife & Drum Corps Holiday Concert

Come join in the holiday festivities with The William Diamond Junior Fife & Drum Corps on Sunday, December 17, 2006 at 1:00 PM at the National Heritage Museum in Lexington. The Corps will be performing a selection of colonial music along with familiar holiday tunes. In addition, there will be refreshments, and colonial toys and goods available for purchase. Tickets are \$10 for adults (students under 18 are free). Tickets can be purchased at the door or in advance by calling (781) 862-4120. For more information about the Corps and its activities, please visit their website at <http://williamdiamondjrs.org/>.



## PUPPY BLANKET COLLECTION

Please remember to bring your old blankets, towels, rugs, etc. to Estabrook. They will be donated to the Animal Rescue League to keep animals warm this winter. The last day for collections will be Friday, December 15, 2006.