

A School Budget for a Changing Landscape

Safe and supportive is the foundation of a school where every student develops the academic and social/emotional skills necessary to be successful in our global world. Beyond opportunities to learn, schools, must now be prepared to provide specialized medical, social and mental health services. This new order requires appropriate space, equipment and training. It requires a budget that adequately endorses our most notable needs. More importantly, it requires the school and community to be collaborative partners; that is to collectively see and create a bright future. This article is the first in a series to provide the Milton Community with an inside look at the MTSD proposed budget and to understand the rationale for changes so that we may collectively serve our most precious asset, our children.

Part 1: An Elementary Organizational Structure to Support a New Era in Education

Our student data - academic and discipline along with other measurements related to mental health, youth risk behavior, homelessness and food security show an increasing number of students who are struggling to access their learning in meaningful and productive ways. Despite the changing needs of our students, our organizational structures are exactly the same as they were in 1918 when compulsory education in the United States began to take hold.

If we want to ensure coherence in programming (including an array of wrap around academic, health and social services), transitions, family involvement, and community partnerships then we need a system that can effectively integrate all available resources and opportunities to target the development of the whole child. As a starting point, we are proposing a new organizational structure in the elementary school.

The new structure calls for one principal, PreK-5, and three developmental teams: PreK-K; 1-2 and 3-5. The PreK-K team would be facilitated by an Early Childhood Coordinator while the 1-2 and 3-5 teams would be facilitated by Assistant Principals. In addition, a Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning would be shared between the 1-2 and 3-5 teams. This new structure would eliminate the existing silos between early education and the elementary grades and provide continuity and flexibility for student transitions especially between Triple E/PreK, Kindergarten and First Grade. The model would also provide the infrastructure for teams to creatively and flexibly address increasing complex and diverse needs of students. These teams would improve the effectiveness of opportunities and services for all children by ensuring timely coordination and continuity across all stakeholders - teachers, families and service providers. Other advantages of this new model include: clear lines of decision making and communication; a principal focused on instructional leadership; and two assistant principals to address behavior in both a more preventative and effective manner. An organizational structure more suited to addressing the needs of all learners would not only improve academic outcomes and social/emotional support for all students, it may in turn also minimize the number of students who must attend out of district placements.

Part 2: Positions to Promote a New Era in Education

The MTSD building and district administrators engaged in a very robust budget development process from September - December. One goal was to identify needs for programming that would help us move the needle on our continuous improvement plan. The three areas of that plan are related to improving: student achievement, the social/emotional health of students, and school climate. Each of the positions below address one or more of these areas for improvement. They will help us achieve the vision of learning we have for all our students to be successful now and in the future.

English Language Learner Teacher (.50 FTE) - The recommended ratio of ELL Teacher to English Language Learner is 1:25. In the 2019-2020 school year we are projected to have approximately 60 ELL students in Pre-K-12.

MES/MMS Restorative Practices/Harassment and Bullying Coordinator (1.00) - Vermont Agency of Education is recommending Restorative Practices approach; a systems approach to harassment and bullying prevention and as a way to improve school climate. To ensure success, a targeted position that could provide prevention and intervention support, training and outreach is necessary. It would also minimize school counselors' participation in investigations; a conflict of interest for them professionally.

MHS English Teacher (1.00) - A full time English teacher would fill the gap that exists in section numbers and also right size classes. At this time, there are sections with 28-30 students. We would also be able to offer more variety of classes especially for seniors as they prepare for College and Career Readiness.

MHS Pathway Coordinator (1.00)- This position would ensure that personalized learning opportunities are available and accessible to all students on and off site. This person would be responsible for coordinating the state mandated Personalized Learning Plan process through the Teacher Advisory (TA) curriculum planning. They would also be the School to Career liaison - forging partnerships with local organizations for students to access job shadows, internships and school to work programs while earning credit for graduation. Milton is one of the few high schools that does not have a position dedication to Flexible Pathways and this is putting our students at a disadvantage.