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Letter: Limit school spending, reduce tax bills

Thursday, January 29, 2004

Your recent article "Schools look at 6% increase" published Jan. 14, again highlights the MINE (More Is Never Enough) mentality of the school department and school committee. Despite a \$4.5 million override (overrides are forever!) last spring that gave an additional \$3.1 million to the schools, the school department is once again asking for more money. Here's a novel idea: Limit spending increases to the available 2 1/2 percent increase in revenue. The profligate spending of the school department will soon have the school-spending elites calling for another override and more taxes in the near future. Here is a table of school spending back to 1994.

READING PUBLIC SCHOOL DATA FOR BUDGET YEARS 1994-2005

Year, School Budget*, % Budget Increase, K-12 Student Enrollment, Staff

1993-94, \$15.3, 6.6%, 3757

1994-95, \$16.8, 9.6 %, 3843

1995-96, \$18.2, 8.0 %, 3957, 421

1996-97, \$19.6, 7.8 %, 4052, 451

1997-98, \$21.4, 8.7 %, 4119, 472

1998-99, \$23.2, 8.8 %, 4161, 490

1999-00, \$24.9, 7.4 %, 4194, 510

2000-01, \$26.4, 5.7 %, 4212, 516

2001-02, \$27.0, 2.5 %, 4237, 520

2002-03, \$27.3, 0.9%, 4234, 514

2003-04, \$29.2, 6.4%, 4201, 523

2004-05, \$31.0, 6.3%, ? , ?

* millions

? unknown or unpublished

School spending (2003-04) has almost doubled since 1993-1994 for an increase of only 444 students: a 91 percent budget increase for 11.8 percent rise in students. Since 1995-96, 102 more staff members have been added while enrollment increased by 244 students. That's right, one new staff member for every new 2.39 students since 1995.

Have you looked at your recent tax bill? The average Reading home (assessment \$391,400) had tax increases of approximately \$700. House assessments increased 17 percent town-wide and taxes increased on average 10 percent town-wide. These tax increases do not include the approved funding of the new \$54.3 million high school. Where is your compassion for taxpayers who live on fixed income; whose cost of living increase does not keep up with the ever-increasing tax burden. Have you looked at your recent gas, electric, and water bills? I urge all Reading taxpayers to call their elected officials and express their opposition to increases in spending beyond 2 1/2 percent. For the town spenders, "more is never enough." Please vote for responsible Town Meeting members, selectmen, and School Committee representatives who will support living within Proposition 21/2 percent and will take a pledge not to support new taxes.

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