

## Letter to the Editor

### School Committee debate comments

Dear Editor:

I like many residents watched the School Committee candidate forum last week and urge others to watch before the April 5, elections. Several years ago, I supported Mr. McFadden in his initial run for office. At that time, he told me he wanted a change in School Administrators, claimed he did not support wasteful building projects, and he would add business experience to the committee. I had hoped Mr. McFadden would bring spending accountability. Now in this election year, Mr. McFadden is finally against a prop 21/2 override but during his current term he has vocally and financially supported every override and debt exclusion.

Several inaccuracies presented by Mr. McFadden as facts need to be corrected. Mr. McFadden in his defense of the Wood End School continues to use incorrect enrollment numbers. If you watch the forum, Mr. McFadden states that 2,400 students are enrolled in our elementary schools needed to be redistricted. Incorrect, current enrollment for 2004-2005 is only 2,013 students. Why is this error significant? It is significant because the enrollment projections by Flansburgh Associates predicted 2,440 students by the year 2007. These erroneous projections were used to resell the new Wood End School after the project had been defeated at the polls. This year we have 300 less elementary students than the Flansburgh projections said were coming. Not one of the current School Committee questioned these numbers, even when better projections existed. Mr. McFadden at the Forum called those who held differing opinions "Naysayers". Meanwhile, 11.5 million dollars has been spent on the Wood End Elementary School which lacks sufficient staff and parent parking, has no Franklin Street sidewalks, and according to a State Report has unhealthy air quality issues. One wonders if the Eaton East parents qualify as "Naysayers" because they disagree with the "wisdom" of the School Committee's redistricting plan. The approved school committee plan busses their children more than two miles from the neighborhood school district for which they can currently walk. Their letters to the paper show frustration and dismay over the process and the selection of a plan without serious review of the Eaton-East alternative plan.

A second inaccuracy presented by Mr. McFadden was that the building projects are "On time and on budget". How does Mr. McFadden define "on time and on budget"? He must have added the 2.5 million debt exclusion (2/03) to bring the new elementary schools "on budget". Don't forget the 4.5 million dollar override (4/03) needed to fund the school department and town operating budgets. Additional funds are being funneled into all three school projects from monies moved from both the regular day and special education accounts. At the March 21, 2005 meeting, the School Committee voted to move \$750,000 from the Regular Day budget account to the school building projects. This will be voted at the April '05 town meeting. Previously, town meeting, article #5 (November 8, 2004) \$650,000 in special education money received from the State's Circuit Breaker Account was reallocated to the three building projects. Additional money from the building projects technology and furniture accounts have been redirected to the contingency funds of the projects. The 5th grade parents at Killiam School asked for one additional classroom teacher and were denied. Were the needs of their children met? Did you know there is one less classroom teacher now than in year 1999 but we have 31.61 additional school department employees and the budget has grown 5.8 million dollars more than in 1999 with a similar student enrollment? Where is all this money going? Are your children's classroom needs being met?

Vote for the School Committee incumbents if believe they have managed the schools wisely. Your taxes have increased on average 29% the past two years due in large part to their efforts. Vote against the incumbents if you feel new leadership is needed.

Dr. Robert L Mandell