

NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS



A community
and
school
partnership
that

- creates excited learners
- demands excellence
- fosters integrity

Performance Report 2004

Needham

The Schools

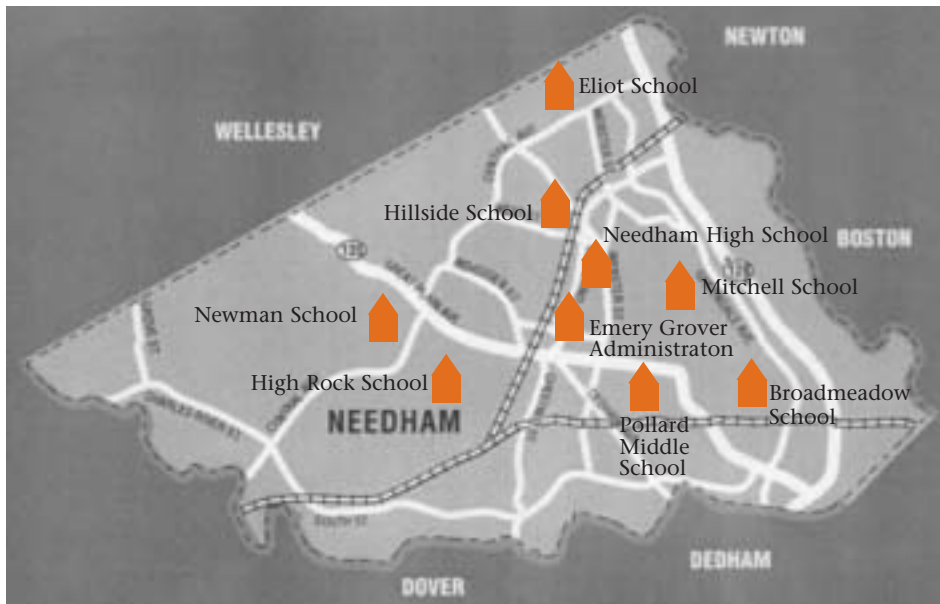
Needham has five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, with an enrollment totaling 4,775 students at the start of the 2003-2004 school year. The Needham Public Schools provide strong academic and co-curricular programs along with a preschool and after school enrichment opportunities, including summer school. An adult education program, enjoyed by over 1,000 participants each year, provides lifelong learning experiences for the community.

Needham is a long-standing member of METCO, a voluntary desegregation program that provides educational opportunities for Boston students in surrounding suburban communities. Needham also participates in The Education Cooperative (TEC), a collaboration

of 13 school systems. This partnership enables all of the communities to enjoy economies of scale and shared programming that would be impossible for any one school system to provide by itself. For more information about our schools, visit our website at www.needham.k12.ma.us

The Town

With its easy accessibility to Boston, good schools, and many amenities, Needham is a popular and desirable location for families. The Town boasts an increasingly rich cultural diversity, outdoor open space, and recreational areas, as well as a strong and vibrant community. The current population is about 29,000, with a median family income of \$107,570. Two websites provide useful information about Needham: www.town.needham.ma.us and www.state.ma.us/cc/needham.html



By the Numbers—The 2003-2004 School Year

Students

Total Number of Students	4,775
Enrollment by Level	
Preschool	87
Elementary	2,206
Middle School	1,084
High School	1,355
Out of District	35
TEC Alternative School	8
Student Demographics:	
METCO Students	2.9%
Receiving Special Education Services	10.8%
Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch	3.1%
Limited English Proficient	0.7%
Black Students	3.7%
Asian Students	5.6%
Hispanic Students	2.1%
White Students	88.5%
Needham Residents Attending	
Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical HS	26
Needham Residents Attending Private Schools	947
Home Educated Students	12

Dollars

Needham Public Schools FY04 Operating Budget	\$34,060,905
Percentage of Budget Dedicated to Personnel	84%

Staff

Total Number of Teachers and Administrators	437
Black Staff	7
Asian Staff	10
Hispanic Staff	3
White Staff	417
Teachers Licensed	97.4%

Miscellaneous Statistics

Number of Meals Served Annually	384,130
Number of Students per Computer	4.8
Dropout Rate	0.2%
Attendance Rate	96.5%



Letter from School Committee Chairman

Dear Citizens of Needham,

Welcome to the 2004 Performance Report for the Needham Public Schools. In this

report, we take the opportunity to examine our current situation, to celebrate our successes, and to reflect upon the challenges that face us. Central to this report is the notion of community. The community that we aim to reach with this information is not the narrow school community; rather, it is the entire community of Needham that has so steadfastly supported its schools. Because of your support, we want you to be able to evaluate for yourself the quality of our schools.

This Performance Report tries to take a holistic look at our schools. Too often, a school system is judged by a test score or the actions of a few students. Instead, by looking at different types of data from multiple sources, we hope to tell the bigger story. Our students are more than good grades and test scores; they are performers, athletes, and citizens. We believe that by taking a comprehensive look at our schools, we are in a much stronger position to chart a wise course of action for the future.



We are proud of our schools. The achievement of our students has never been stronger; however, our schools also face significant challenges and opportunities. One major objective that we have yet to achieve is the implementation

of full-day kindergarten. We also continue to have facility needs resulting from the confluence of a growing school population and our deteriorating buildings.

Please read the full report, but don't stop there. Come out to visit our schools. Attend our performances and sports events. Participate in our adult education program. We think you will be amazed at the quality and breadth of the Needham Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Gary Crossen

Chair, Needham School Committee



Needham School Committee

Gary Crossen, *Chair*
Paul Denver, *Vice-Chair*
Marianne Cooley
Donald Gratz
Karen Price
Jeff Simmons
Susan Welby

Principals

Anne Whittredge
Broadmeadow School
781/455-0448

Suzanne Wilcox
John Eliot School
781/455-0452

Andrea Wong
Hillside School
781/455-0461

Michael Schwinden
William Mitchell School
781/455-0466

Robert Abbey
Newman School
781/455-0416

Joseph Barnes
Pollard Middle School
781/455-0480

Paul Richards
Needham High School
781/455-0800

Report Organization

To monitor change and growth we have kept the organization of the report the same as in preceding years. Five critical performance areas are tracked. Each section begins with a chart outlining our key objectives and performance measures, and the data to suggest how we are doing. The ensuing narratives provide more information and outline specific challenges for the future. We thank the Team to Improve Performance (TIP), a group of community members and staff dedicated to using and analyzing data to inform decisions and monitor progress, for its continued guidance in this project.



Office of the Superintendent

Dear Fellow Needhamites,

It is with great pleasure that we present our 2004 Performance Report. This is our fourth report. What began as a communication instrument has become an important evaluation and planning tool. Preparing the data each year provides us with an opportunity to reflect on a set of measures, look at patterns, and determine what this information tells us about what we truly value in education. This analysis is extremely important in identifying challenges and helping us to chart a direction for the future.



The first conclusion we can draw from the data is that Needham has an excellent school system. Because we now have several years of information, we can see from all of the indicators that our students continue to demonstrate academic and social accomplishment and progress. I am particularly pleased to see increased satisfaction rates for all academic areas on our latest parent survey.

Education is a primary gateway to a happy and productive life; and we are fortunate to have a community that supports its schools through commitment, resources, and collaboration. A very strong example of this support was the override vote by the citizens of

Needham, which will enable us to build a new, state-of-the-art high school. We are very appreciative of the entire Needham community for their support in meeting this pressing need.

Despite all of the good news, our schools still face a number of difficulties as we move forward. We have other school buildings that are too small and badly in need of repair, our student population is increasing at a rate that is beyond all projections, and the needs of our students multiply and grow more complicated. In addition, we are faced with replacing a significant portion of our administrative staff over the next few years. These are challenges that require the continuing support and commitment of our entire community if we are to maintain a quality school system.

Please read this report. We welcome your opinions and feedback in our effort to keep you informed about the performance of your schools.

Sincerely,

Stephen J. Theall
Superintendent of Schools

Central Administration

781/455-0400

Stephen J. Theall x203
Superintendent of Schools

Mildred B. Beane x209
Director of Personnel Resources

George Johnson x213
Director of Student Development
and Program Evaluation

Theresa W. Duggan x226
Director of Program Development
and Implementation

Anne Gulati x207
Director of Financial Operations

Susan Bonaiuto x211
Director of Community Education
Programs and External Funding

NCLB Reporting Requirements

The federal *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) now requires schools to issue a District Report Card, which includes minimal data that must be provided to all parents. This Performance Report not only satisfies that requirement, but also, we hope, offers a comprehensive presentation of the issues of concern to the community.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE LEARNING AND GROWTH

We believe that the Needham schools are a place for all students to achieve personal, as well as academic, growth and success. In order to monitor student academic progress we analyze total class, subgroup, and individual student performances. However, it is important to see students as more than test scores; we assess our success through the actions and deeds of students as well. By all measures, the great majority of Needham students are achieving both academic and personal success.

Students Excel Academically

Ninety-five percent of Needham graduates go on to college, and Needham students at all levels score significantly better than their state and national peers on a variety of standardized tests.

College-bound students continue to score impressively on SAT and Achievement Tests. The average combined SAT score for the Class of 2004 is steady at 1183. The average SAT verbal score of 586 was up from 577 in 2003, while the average math score of 597 exceeded the 2003 record score of 596 (figure 1.1). Further, 193 students took 322 Advanced Placement exams in 20 different subjects, with a passing rate of 95%.

Needham's scores continue to be among the best in the state on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), which assesses students in Reading, English/Language Arts (ELA), Mathe-

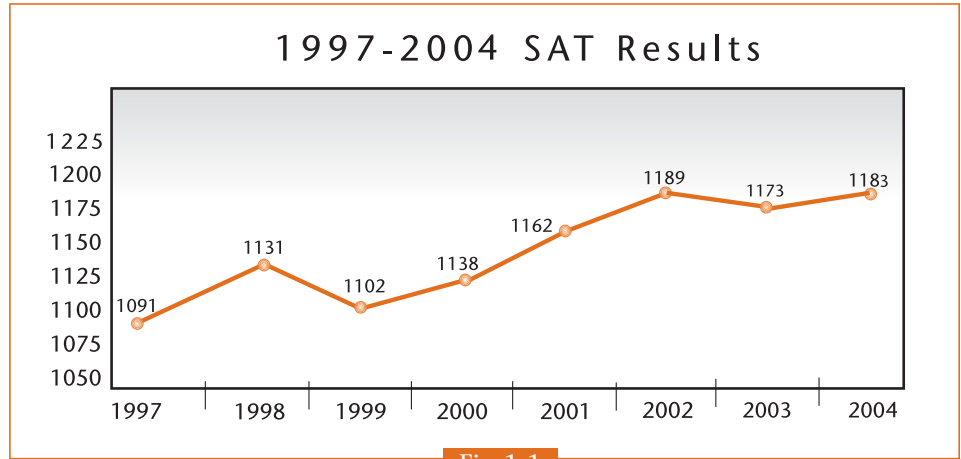


Fig 1.1

tics, and Science. Passing the tenth grade ELA and Math tests is a graduation requirement in Massachusetts; 100% of Needham seniors passed those tests. The most recent results (2003) indicate that there has been overall improvement in all areas except third grade Reading and fourth grade Mathematics (figure 1.2).

An important goal of *No Child Left Behind*, the federal public education act, is that all students be proficient in Mathematics and English/Language Arts by 2014. Each year, every school must provide information to its community, called a School Report Card, describing its "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) towards meeting



MCAS Test Results by Grade

% of Students at Advanced and Proficient Levels

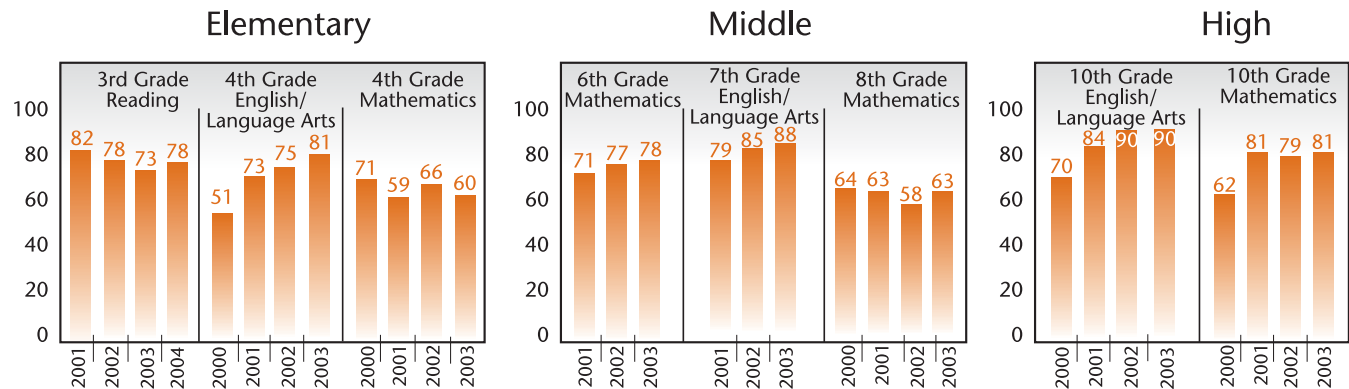


Fig 1.2

Key Objectives	Measures	How Are We Doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To set high academic standards for all students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2003 MCAS Graduation requirement 2004 MCAS results 2004 SAT results 2004 Advanced Placement data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Class of 2004 and Class of 2005 students passed MCAS. 98% of 3rd graders passed the MCAS Reading Test. Average combined SAT score was 1183 (compared to 1173 in 2003). 193 students took 322 AP tests in 20 subjects. Of those, 95% passed, scoring three or better, with 74% scoring fours or fives. (In 2003, 187 students took 298 AP exams with 93% passing.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To enable a high rate of post-graduation success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher education statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% of 2004 Needham graduates enrolled in college (compared to 95% in 2003, 94% in 2002 and 90% in 2001).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide a high level of co-curricular engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sports participation statistics Club participation statistics Performing Arts participation statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 71% of high school students played on one or more of 55 athletic teams. 42 clubs are available at the High School. Approximately 25% of high school students participated in musical performing groups.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To engage students in being active community contributors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Classroom statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 486 students logged 25,200 hours of community service at the High School; all 8th graders logged at least 6 hours of community service.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To maintain a safe school environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10.6% of our alumni reported being harassed while at NHS (compared to 11.7% in 2001, and 10.5% in 2000).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To instill strong character and social skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risky behavior statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 52% of high schoolers reported alcohol consumption in the last month. 66% of high schoolers reported vigorous physical exercise.

that goal. In Massachusetts, the determination of a school system's progress is based on the MCAS. All schools in Needham met their overall AYP targets; however in mathematics, some schools and the district did not meet targets for Black students. Complete information about the District Report Cards can be found on the Department of Education website (<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>).

No Child Left Behind also requires that school districts examine specific groups within their student populations and work towards closing any achievement gaps (figure 1.3). In both fourth and

Destination Imagination

Teams from Broadmeadow, Mitchell, Newman, and Pollard were challenged in problem-solving skills, creativity, and drama at the Destination Imagination regional and state tournaments. The Mitchell/Broadmeadow fourth grade team won first prize in its division and traveled to the national competition.

seventh/eighth grade scores, the largest gaps are found in mathematics for our Black, low-income, and special education students. In English/Language Arts, 83% of

Racial/Economic and Special Education Student Comparisons

% of Students at Advanced & Proficient Levels

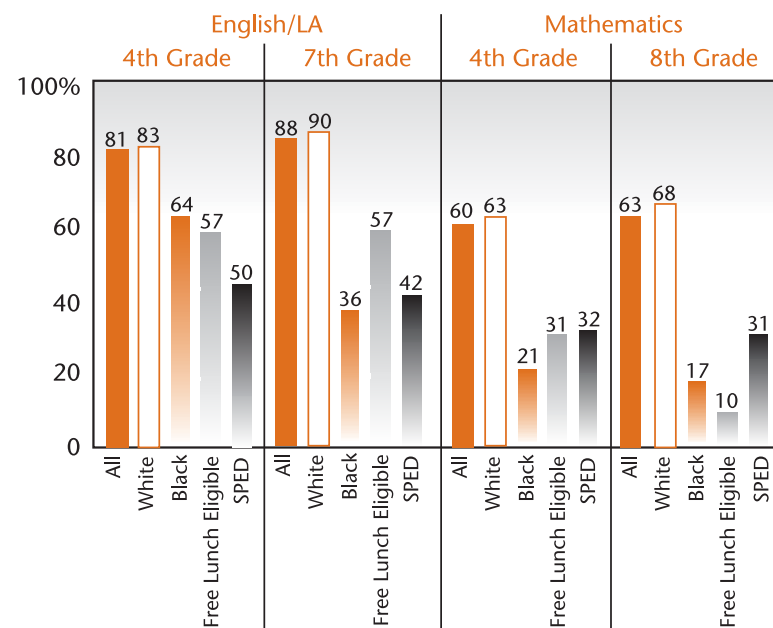


Fig 1.3

Sexual Assault Awareness Day

The NHS Women's Coalition organized a Sexual Assault Awareness Day at NHS. With funding from the Needham Education Foundation, the Coalition hosted nationally known speaker Katie Koestner in an address entitled "No - Yes." The keynote was followed by discussion groups and homeroom activities. The NHS Women's Coalition, motivated by its members' personal experiences, was formed to educate students about sexual assault. The Coalition won Harvard University's Warrior Award for presenting Sexual Assault Awareness Day.

Needham's White fourth graders scored as Advanced or Proficient, compared to 64% of Black students. In mathematics, the gap was wider, with 63% of White fourth graders scoring as Advanced or Proficient, compared to 21% of Black students. In addition, only 2% of White students failed, while 21% of Black students failed. The gap widened with eighth graders, where 50% of Black students failed the mathematics MCAS, compared to 5% of White students. For this reason, the district did not meet AYP targets for Black students in mathematics.

Results followed a similar pattern for students eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch: 31% of fourth graders eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch scored as Advanced or Proficient in fourth grade mathematics,

compared to 60% of all students. Only 3% of non-free lunch eligible students failed, while 19% of free lunch eligible students failed. In eighth grade the gap widened to 50% of free lunch eligible students failing, compared to 6% of non-eligible students. These gaps are a major focus for our schools and are discussed further in our Challenges section, which follows on page 7.

Beyond Academics

While academic achievement is central to the mission of the Needham schools, we believe it is also important to encourage students to become well-rounded, responsible adults with practical social and emotional skills. Social and emotional competencies for grades K-12 have been articulated and are being taught. The next step will be to develop assessments to measure mastery of those skills.

In addition, students are encouraged to be active community members by participating in clubs, sports, and extra curricular activities, as well as giving back to the community through service. This emphasis on citizenship and service is introduced in elementary school and expanded and reinforced in middle and high school. For instance:

- The Broadmeadow School community collected 10 boxes of books and 80 children's winter coats for a sister school in Dorchester.
- Pollard Grade 8 students hosted Students Take Action Day (STA Day), an all-grade conference with



Courtesy Needham Times Photo by Mark Fiset

social justice workshops on world hunger, racism, AIDS education, and stereotypes in the media.

Following the conference, each student executed a community service plan.

- At the high school, 21 students traveled to Costa Rica as part of an interdisciplinary course combining Spanish language, history, and biology. While in Costa Rica

the students painted and upgraded an elementary school building as a community service project. In addition, 486 high school students logged over 25,000 hours of community service as fulfillment of their graduation requirements.

Risky Behaviors

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has developed a survey



that enables schools to gather data about certain behaviors of their students. The Needham School System administers this questionnaire to high school and middle school students on alternating years. This past year, all high school students took the survey. While some areas showed improvement, others declined, but most remained the same (figure 1.4). The number of students who have tried cigarettes or who are regular smokers has decreased; unfortunately, this is not the case for marijuana, alcohol, and other substances. Alcohol use has remained steady since 1995, hovering at around 50% of students who have consumed at least one drink of alcohol in the last month. Marijuana use continues to be high with

31% of high schoolers having used marijuana at least once in the last 30 days. Use of cocaine and other drugs remained steady with about 5% of high schoolers reporting having ever used cocaine. Also consistent over time, but of great concern, is the 35% of students who reported having been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property.

The sexual behaviors of high schoolers remained essentially unchanged, yet more students reported condom use and delaying sexual intercourse until later in life. Twenty-six percent of high schoolers reported that they have had sexual intercourse, and 19% have had four or more partners.

Stress and depression continue to be problems for many high school-

How Do Needham High School Students Spend Their Time?

In a survey conducted at Needham High School, we asked our students how they spend their time when they are not in class.

Below is the percentage of students who said that they spend ten or more hours a week on the following activities:

- Socializing with Friends 40.8%
- Athletic Team Participation 3.9%
- Chatting or Instant Messaging 29.3%
- Homework 18.6%
- Television, Videos, or Videogames 15.2%
- Working 11.7%
- Performing Arts 6.7%
- Clubs 1.6%

High School Behaviors % of Students Engaging in Behavior

	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003
Smoke Cigarettes Every Day	19	8	5	5	4
Used Marijuana in Last Month	9	25	20	31	31
Alcohol Consumption in Last Month	49	54	38	55	52
Binge Drinking in Last Month	-	32	27	36	34
Have Ever Tried Cocaine	5	5	4	4	5
Have Had Sexual Intercourse	29	34	23	26	26
Used Condom When Sexually Active	59	61	61	63	67
Trying to Lose Weight	42	41	28	44	43
Regular Vigorous Physical Activity	61	58	40	65	66
Did Not Go To School Due to Feeling Unsafe	4	4	1	5	2

Fig 1.4

ers. A full 11% of students reported significant stress or depression in their lives. Another concern is that only 51% of students described themselves as being the right weight, and 43% were trying to lose weight at the time of the questionnaire. These numbers have been very consistent over time, as have the numbers of students who practice unhealthy weight control strategies such as going without eating (8%), taking pills or powders (5%), and inducing vomiting or using laxatives (5%). On the positive side, students reporting vigor-

Batteries Not Included

Fourth grade students at the Hillside School had a unique experience when they collaborated with Olin College students in helping to design original toys. College students in an experimental course called “Batteries Not Included” at Olin, Needham’s new college of engineering, created a series of hands-on exercises for the Hillside students to help the Olin group get in touch with how kids think. After spending a day on the Olin campus, the fourth graders were given a homework assignment to design an advertisement for a new kind of toy that included the name of the toy as well as a picture and design of the toy’s features. The Olin students then collected the assignments and returned to Hillside to discuss the results with the fourth graders. Their ideas were developed by the Olin students into detailed toy design plans and eventually into simple electro-mechanical toys that were displayed last May at an Olin College Expo.

ous physical activities (66%), including participation on sports teams (71%), is at an all-time high.

Challenges

Achievement Gap, Racism, and Acceptance of Diversity

Three years ago, a district team conducted an action research project in

an attempt to understand the causes of the under-performance of our Black students in mathematics. The action research team concluded that a variety of factors contribute to that achievement gap, including lower expectations, learning style preferences, parent involvement, and incidents of racism experienced by our Black students. Using this research, each school last year developed an action plan to address this achievement gap.

Despite our efforts to create an anti-racist culture, our schools, like society in general, are not free of prejudice. Last year Needham High School experienced several racial incidents involving harassment, graffiti, and name-calling. The Needham High School staff and students responded proactively with “Students Speak Up,” a panel discussion for the entire student body addressing a wide range of “isms.” The student panelists were compelling and articulate as they described the slights and affronts of prejudice and the bias and stereotyping that they may encounter on a daily basis within our schools. Homeroom discussion groups followed the assemblies. A motivated group of students also formed a Civil Rights Action Committee to address the “isms” that cause pain to individual students and compromise the NHS community. We know that only with continuous awareness, education, and action can we hope to reduce ignorance, hatred and victimization in our schools.

Globe Scholastic Art Awards and District Music Awards

Sixteen Pollard Middle School students and fourteen High School students were selected to participate in the Southeast District Music Festival. Six high school students went on to All-State, and three were selected for All-Eastern. In addition, nineteen Middle and High School art students won awards in the Boston Globe Scholastic Art competition.

Making Healthy Choices

While Needham’s statistics about risky behaviors are similar to or better than those of most school systems, we continue to be diligent in our pursuit of our systemwide goal to equip students with the social and emotional skills they need to resist peer pressure, make wise decisions, and weigh the risks of their behaviors. A discussion of our progress appears in the Planning section of this report on page 15.



Courtesy Science Center

STAFF PERFORMANCE LEARNING AND GROWTH

Nothing is more important to the success of a school system than the quality of its teachers. Ensuring a capable faculty requires three major endeavors: selecting highly qualified professionals, providing opportunities for them to learn and grow, and utilizing effective supervision and evaluation.

Hiring
The Needham Public School System employs 401 teachers, 36 adminis-

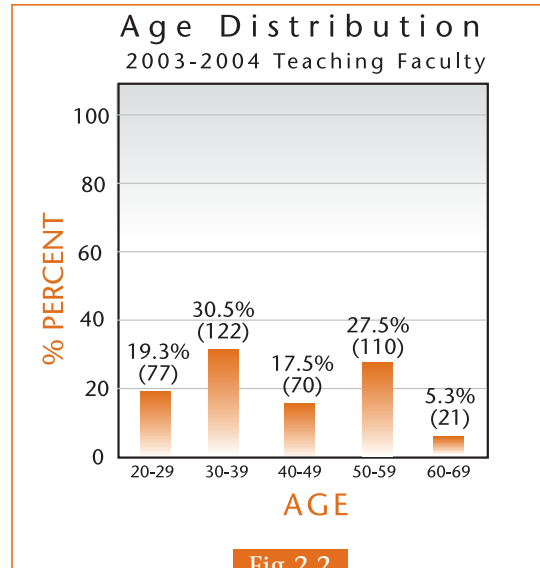


Fig 2.2

trators, and 112 assistants and support staff for a total of 549 people. Because some positions are part-time, the actual full-time equivalency count is 466. In recent years, we have hired about 100 new people each year. Staff members leave for a variety of reasons (figure 2.1), but the primary causes are retirement and changes in family circumstances. With the recent large turnover in staff, we

are seeing a younger faculty (figure 2.2); however, a very high percentage (85.9%) still have advanced degrees (figure 2.3). Figure 2.4 indicates that 30% of our faculty today does not have Professional Status, meaning that they have worked in Needham for three years or less.

During the next few years we expect another third of our faculty will

retire, while still more teachers will leave for other reasons. In addition, there will be significant turnover in the administrative staff. Eight administrators were replaced this year, but more than half of the remaining administrators will retire over the next five years. Replacing these professionals is a difficult and time-consuming task. Hundreds of applicants are screened and interviewed. The complete selection process involves multiple interviews, classroom observations, and other exhibitions of competence, as well as reference checks. In addition, the system requires a criminal offender record (CORI) check on each person prior to employment.

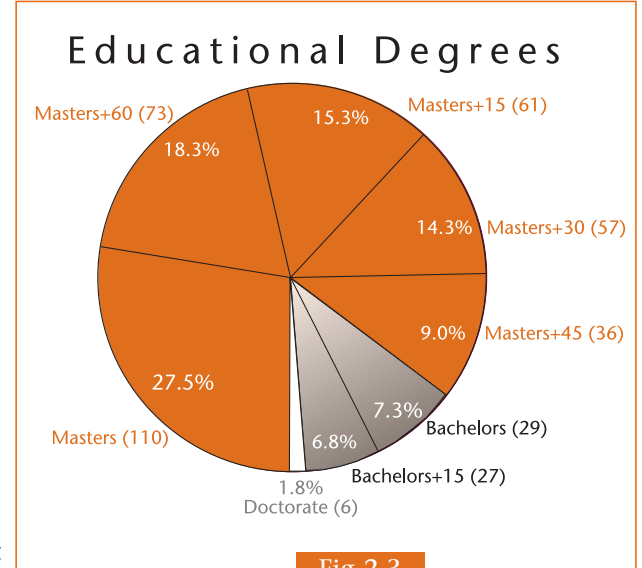


Fig 2.3

Professional Development

Twenty years ago, teaching was thought to be more art than science; however, research demonstrates that there is clear evidence that teachers can learn instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and curriculum designs that will enhance their effectiveness. One indication of the new

Reasons for Leaving

The School System keeps records to determine why our faculty members leave us. By the end of the 2003-04 school year, over 50 teachers and administrators had notified us that they were not returning for the 2004-05 school year. The reasons were:

Retirement	38.2%
Changes in family situation	23.6%
Relocating	12.7%
Job in another school system	10.9%
Change of career	7.3%
Non-reappointment	5.5%
Medical	1.8%

Fig 2.1

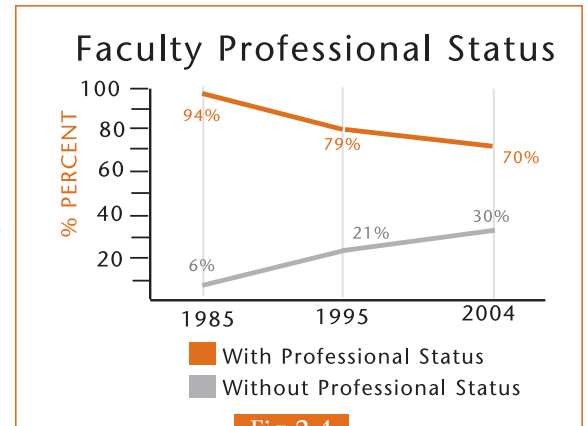


Fig 2.4

emphasis on research to improve teaching can be seen in the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The phrase “scientifically-based research” is used 112 times in the wording of the law.

Needham offers a variety of content and skill-based professional development opportunities. There has been a decision to offer more in-district graduate level courses (figure 2.5) and opportunities for “job-embedded” learning linked to our district priorities. These types of experiences afford staff the opportunity to learn and practice new skills while receiving modeling, feedback, and encouragement.

However, the needs of the novice teacher are somewhat different from those of the more seasoned veteran. To respond to these particular needs, Needham provides each new teacher with a trained mentor whose purpose is to share his or her experience, perspective, and knowledge. Studies have shown that mentoring is very important in the retention, integration, and growth of the new teacher.

Supervision and Evaluation

The supervisor helps the teacher by making suggestions, providing resources, and giving support; however, the primary value of the supervisor



is to help the teacher become a reflective professional who can analyze situations, make informed decisions, and assess his or her own performance.

For an evaluator, one of the most important responsibilities is deciding whom to retain. During their first three years, teachers undergo an extensive evaluation. Two different administrators formally observe and hold conferences with these teachers at least thirteen times. In addition, they conduct regular informal observations and discussions with the teachers. In order to obtain Professional Status, each teacher must also create a portfolio and write a reflection about his or her growth as a professional while teaching in Needham.

Challenges

Diversity Hiring and Retention

Although the Needham Public Schools hired seventeen staff mem-

Key Objectives	Measures	How Are We Doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To recruit diverse, well-qualified staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribution of teaching staff by age, gender, race, education, years of experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 64 teachers and administrators were hired for the 2003-2004 school year. 17 staff members of color were hired for the 2003-2004 school year. 13 staff of color did not return for the 2003-2004 school year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To retain top-quality teaching and administrative staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher and administrator retention rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The top two reasons for teacher vacancies are retirements and changes in family circumstances. Over 50% of the administrative staff will retire over the next five years.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage staff to pursue higher education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribution of staff by educational attainment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Twenty-one graduate level courses were offered to Needham teachers. 86% of teachers have a master's degree or higher.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide broad skill-building training for all staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of professional development resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needham Public Schools spent approximately \$548,000 (1.6% of the total budget) on staff development in 2003-2004.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage mentoring relationships among faculty members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of teachers trained as mentors to first-year teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All teachers new to Needham in September 2003 were assigned a mentor.

bers of color (non-White) for the 2003-2004 school year, this achievement was clouded by the number of people of color we lost, which was thirteen. Our total number of

staff members of color is forty-one, with twenty teachers and administrators and twenty-one support staff. Part of our plan to close the achievement gap is to hire more

2003-04 Graduate Courses

As part of its staff development program, the Needham Public Schools offers a large number of graduate level courses to its teachers:

Instructional Strategies

The Effects of Childhood Disorders on Personality Development
Differentiated Instruction

Social and Emotional Learning

Guided Discipline and Effective Teacher Talk

Principles and Strategies for Holistic Stress Management
Social and Emotional Learning - Middle School Infusion

Teaching for Wellness Outcomes
Responsive Classroom

Technology to Improve Teaching and Learning

Digital Audio
Intermediate Web Design
Technology in Music Instruction
Webquests
Technology and Your Curriculum

East Asian Initiative

Asians in America, 19th-20th Centuries
The Genesis and Genius of Islam
China: From the Earliest Times to the Ming Dynasty

Anti-Racism

Multicultural Curriculum Development
Anti-Racist Teaching Practices (Talking About Race)
Anti-Racist Teaching Practices and Racial/Cultural Identity Development

Discipline Content

Meaningful Mathematics: Elementary
Standards Based Instruction in Foreign Language
Integrating Natural History and Technology

Black faculty. Despite focusing resources on the recruitment of Black teachers, in 2003-2004 only five Black teachers and two Black administrators were employed. Hiring a diverse faculty has been listed as a challenge in this report for the past three years, but it must remain a priority as long as we have so few role models for our children of color. We must also continue to seek new and better ways to retain those teachers we do hire.

Administrative Hiring

As indicated above, eight key administrative positions were filled this year. While we are very happy with the quality of the professionals chosen, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find highly qualified candidates for these positions. Across the state, there are many leadership jobs being filled by “temporary” or “acting” administrators because school systems are unable to find the right candidates for their jobs. With over 50% of our administrators retiring in the next few years, we face a major challenge in finding high caliber people to fill these positions.

Professional Development

Research indicates that nothing is more important to improving a school system than staff development. Yet, with budgetary con-

Courtesy George Johnson



straints, cuts are often made first in professional development funds in order to maintain class sizes. This was the case in Needham's 2004-2005 budget. Such cuts often go unnoticed in the short term, but over time they begin to undermine the quality of teaching.



Fig 2.5

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Needham's School Department FY05 budget constitutes about 46% of the Town's annual operating budget. Other town departments also provide funding for building maintenance, health benefits, field maintenance, and services that complement and enhance school operations. Additionally, the Town provides a substantial amount of money for school construction and renovation projects. The reality and consistency of this funding has enabled us to build a quality school system, a primary reason people move to Needham.

FY05 Operating Revenue \$34,623,270

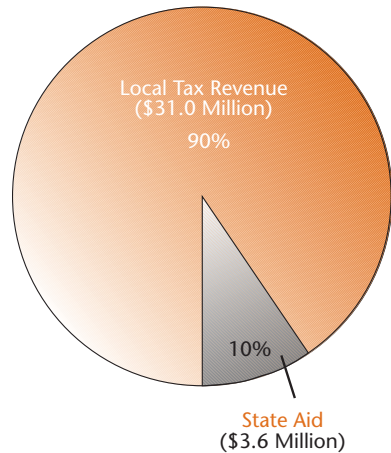


Fig 3.1

FY05 Operating Budget

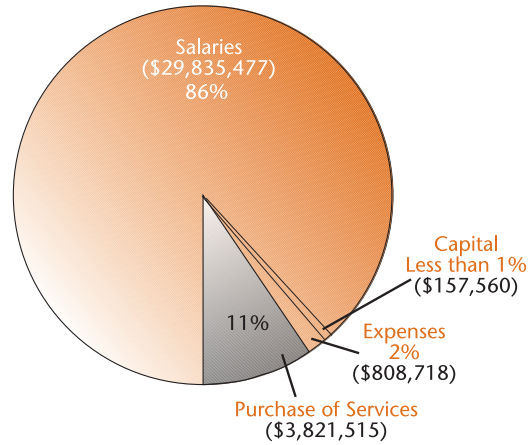


Fig 3.2

Needham Public School System's Budget

The development of the FY05 budget presented a significant challenge. From the outset it was clear that the resources necessary to meet school and town department needs substantially exceeded anticipated revenues. Ultimately, the School Committee agreed to accept a budget increase for FY05 that totaled \$562,365, or a 1.7% increase over FY04. This budget increase is significantly less than the 5% average annual increase the School Department has received in the preceding seven years. Given that the Superintendent's initial budget requested an additional \$1.58 million (4.6% increase), a variety of expenses totaling \$1.02 million were eliminated to arrive at the final budget. These reductions affect program

offerings, faculty professional development, and class sizes. Professional development, for instance, declined by \$63,877 (or 12%) and now constitutes 1.4% (down from 1.6% in FY04) of the total budget (significantly short of the 1.6% recommended in State budget guidelines). With enrollments projected to increase by more than 100 students in FY05, there is also an impact on class sizes throughout the system but most particularly at Needham High School.

The resulting total FY05 budget is \$34,623,270. About 90% of this budget is funded by local taxpayers; state funds supply the

Per Pupil Expenditures

The State Department of Education requires financial reporting that offers like comparisons town to town. Needham ranks in the lower half of like communities for per pupil expenditures, as well as tax burden, and Needham ranks in the top half in terms of SAT scores. (See the At A Glance chart on the inside back cover.)

remainder (figure 3.1). Salaries constitute the largest portion of school expenditures (86%). A breakout illustrating the distribution of all funds by educational function is shown in Figures 3.2. and 3.3.

The cost of providing a quality educational program continues to

FY05 Operating Budget \$34,623,270 (as approved by Town Meeting)

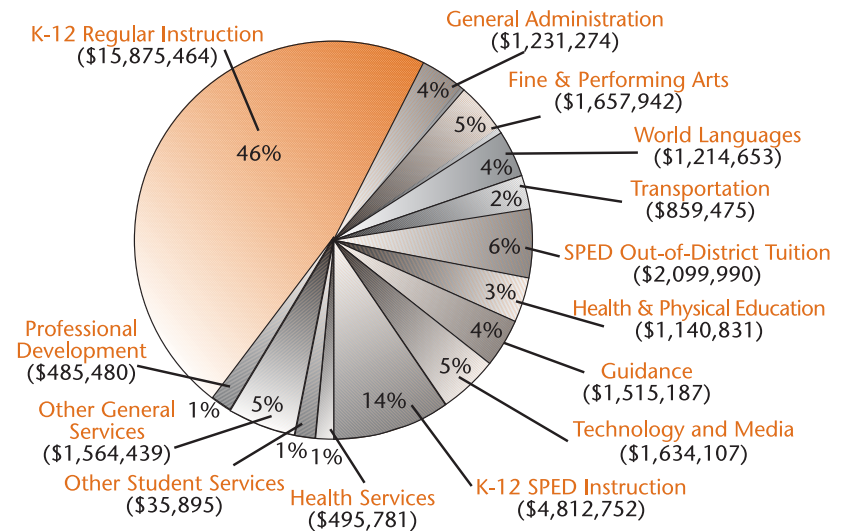


Fig 3.3

Key Objectives	Measures	How Are We Doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure efficient use of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of budget expenditures (FY05) Per pupil cost comparisons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FY05 School Budget increased 1.7% over FY04, whereas enrollment is increasing by 2.4%. Reduced per pupil funding affected program offerings, administrative support and faculty professional development. Per pupil spending in Needham ranks 14th out of 21 comparison communities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To allocate resources to key district strategic priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funds allocated to support improvement initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available funds were prioritized in an attempt to maintain reasonable class sizes and essential program services.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To maximize district capacity through external resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External revenues received annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entitlements and competitive grants totaling \$2,105,142 were received in FY04.

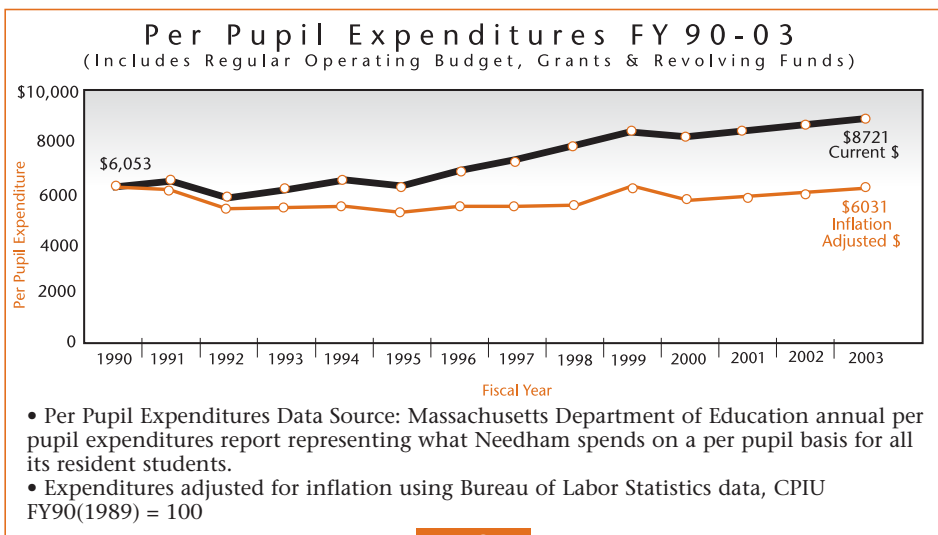


Fig 3.4

rise. Figure 3.4 illustrates the impact of inflation and enrollment growth on annual operating budgets since FY90. Although per pupil spending increased from \$6,053 in FY90 to \$8,721 in FY03; when the FY03 amount is adjusted for inflation, we find per pupil spending has actually dropped. An increasingly competitive hiring environment; rising materials costs for textbooks, technology, and supplies; and the need to provide more comprehensive programming for students with disabilities are challenges as we move forward with the same per pupil allocations.

Override Consideration

The School Committee worked closely with the Board of Selectmen and other Town Boards to understand what funds would be available to the schools and whether or not an operational override should be requested. The voters had overwhelmingly approved an operational override of nearly \$2 million for the FY04 budget, and there was great reluctance to request another ballot question for the FY05 budget. The School Committee was also mindful of the successful capital project override in November 2003, which provided over \$51 million in funding to renovate and construct a new Needham High

School. Following several months of meetings, public hearings, and careful examination of the school budget, the School Committee decided not to seek an operational override in FY05. However, the School Committee was insistent that the programs that had been funded and supported as a result of the FY04 override would not be dismantled.

Operating Efficiencies and Alternative Funding Sources

A number of cost-saving initiatives have supplemented the Town and school budgets. For example, Needham’s participation in The Education Cooperative (TEC), a long-standing partnership among nearby school districts, allowed the Municipal Building Maintenance Board (MBMB) to save all Town departments \$46,000 in the purchase of oil, natural gas, and custodial supplies.

Another economic enhancement arises from our pursuit of outside funding. Since September of 1997,

User Fees FY 05

Preschool	
Tuition for regular education students	\$3,000.00
Kindergarten After School Enrichment (KASE)	
Daily fee rate	\$16.50
High School Athletics	
Participation fee per sport	\$124.00
Transportation	
Annual fee Grades 7-12, and Grades K-6 less than 1.5 miles	\$313.00

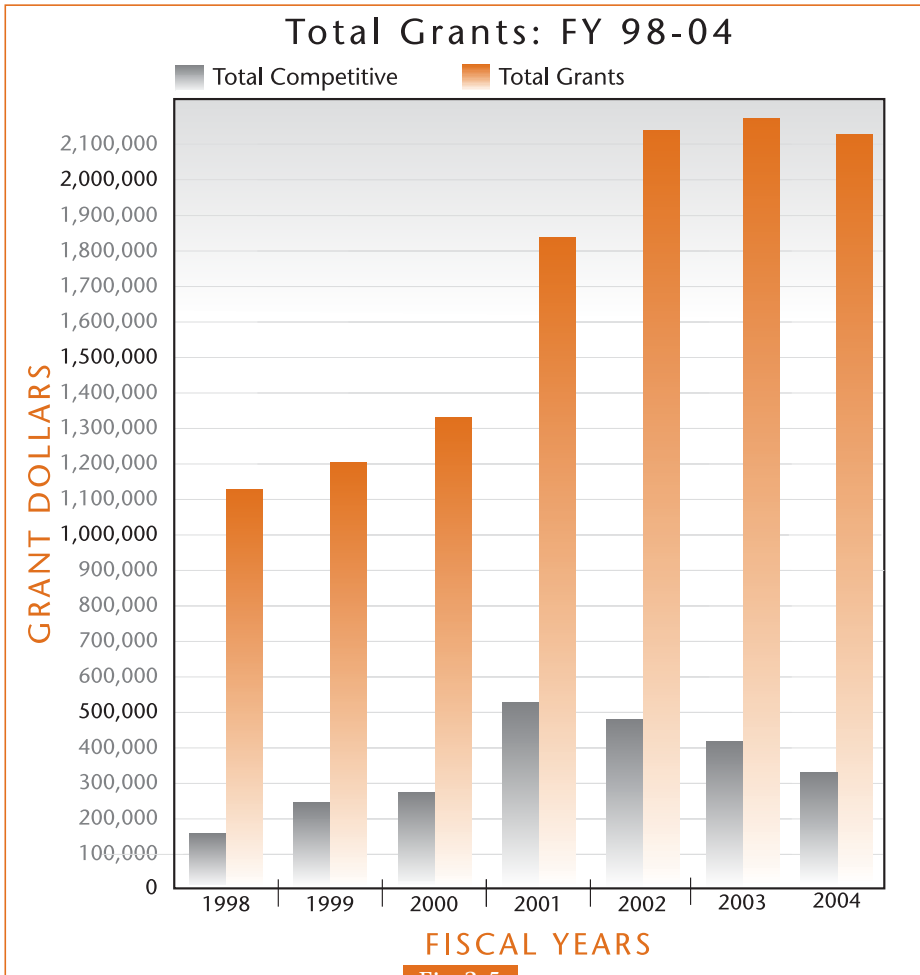


Fig 3.5

we have attracted a total of \$11,888,203 in grant and foundation funds through the Office of External Funding. Of that amount, \$2,388,469, or 20.1%, has been in the area of competitive grants. This is a remarkable accomplishment since funding agencies tend to look less favorably toward grant applications from communities that are perceived as relatively affluent. Figure 3.5 illustrates the growth in

total and competitive grant dollars awarded to the Needham Public Schools since FY98.

Further, the school system itself looks for ways to provide educational services effectively and efficiently. In special education, we have worked to build capacity within the system to educate students with significant handicaps or disabilities. In so doing, we are able to provide high quality programs for

Assistance for School Building Projects

Needham was the recipient of some very good news this summer. The method and timelines by which communities receive reimbursement from the State for school building projects have been substantially improved. Currently, Needham is awaiting payment from the State for over \$30 million in cost and interest reimbursement for the Newman, Broadmeadow, and Eliot construction and renovation projects. We also expect 50% of the cost for construction and interest in the \$51.3 million high school renovation. Under the former State reimbursement system, these funds would have come to the Town in yearly installments over the next 38 years. With the new legislation, it is anticipated that Needham will receive all promised reimbursements from the State within the next four years, thus substantially reducing the Town's debt burden.

students with their peers in their own community. A secondary benefit is a savings in transportation and programming costs. It is estimated that in FY04 a new program at the

Broadmeadow School alone realized approximately \$225,000 in savings. (See sidebar on "Special Education Inclusion.")

Special Education Inclusion - Better Results, Less Cost and Higher Achieving Students

There was a time when special needs students were generally served through "pull-out" programs either within the home school or at a different school all together. We now know from research and experience that special education students learn best in regular classroom settings. As a result, Needham has taken a number of steps to educate special needs students alongside regular education classmates in their neighborhood schools. Over the past four years, Needham's out-of-district placements have declined 43.5%. During the same time, Needham's MCAS scores for special education students have been among the highest. Our success with inclusion has resulted from:

- restructuring of special education programs and constant monitoring and assessment of practices and results,
- extensive staff development for classroom teachers and paraprofessionals,
- development of new K-12 programs that allow special education students to progress through the Needham schools along with their classmates.

Changes in State and Local Contributions to School Budget Revenues: FY 95-05

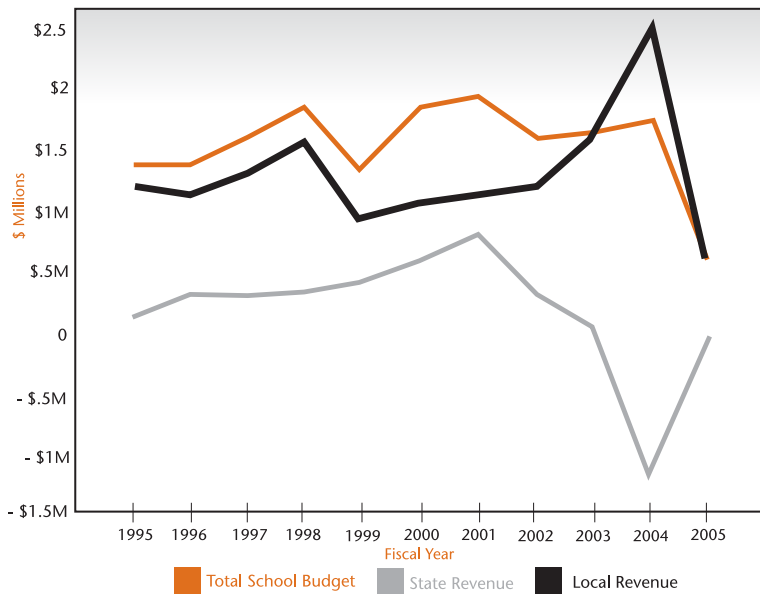


Fig 3.6

Special Education - Circuit Breaker

In FY04, the Commonwealth changed the way it assists local school districts with costs for students who have extraordinary special education needs. In the past, the state had shared the costs for

students who required residential placements on a 50-50 basis. Last year, this program was eliminated and assistance was provided for any student who cost the system more than \$29,320. Thirty-five percent of all dollars beyond that amount were reimbursed by the state in what is known as the “circuit breaker formula.” It turns out that the amount of FY04 reimbursement for the district was almost exactly the same using the circuit breaker formula as it would have been if the state had maintained the old 50-50 residential cost-sharing method. However, the State Legislature did increase the FY05 funding for this purpose by a substantial amount. As

High School Scholarships

Members of the class of 2004 received \$134,450 in scholarships and awards to support their post-secondary plans, thanks to the generosity of community organizations and individuals.

we go to press, we are still waiting for the Department of Education to tell us exactly what the benefit will be for Needham; however, it is safe to say that there will be an increase in the amount of reimbursement.

Challenges

Funding

As we prepare to develop our FY06 budget, we are cognizant of the difficulty the Town faces each year in maintaining quality services. Funding mechanisms require ever greater reliance on the local property tax to fund essential services. Reductions in state funding, in general, and increasing labor costs and services, in particular, place significant stress on our annual operating budget. As you will note, in FY04 when state revenues declined significantly, it was necessary for Needham voters to approve an operational override to maintain essential programs and services (figure 3.6). We are hopeful that initial indicators at the state level which suggest that the economic downturn has ended, will prove valid, and that more helpful and predictable state aid may be forthcoming in FY06.



Needham Education Foundation

During 2003-2004, the Needham Education Foundation awarded \$110,501 to support creative and educational opportunities that enrich student learning throughout our schools.

Contract Negotiations for Teaching and Non-Instructional Staff

The Needham Education Association represents our teachers, most of our administrators, and our instructional and non-instructional support staff in collective bargaining. This past year, with the leadership and support of the Association, we were able to extend our existing contracts with each of the employee groups for one year. A modest cost-of-living increase was given only to staff who did not receive a step increase. School staff members normally advance on the salary schedule with each year of satisfactory service.

As we go to press, the School Committee and the teachers’ association are still negotiating a new contract for FY05. A listing of teacher salaries in those communities with whom we historically compare ourselves is shown in the At a Glance inside back cover chart.

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

research-based practices, is the hallmark of good planning. The Needham Schools uses those practices in setting priorities, analyzing results, and allocating human, financial, and capital resources.

Systemwide Goals

The district continues to focus its energy and resources in the pursuit of two key goals. Significant progress has been made this year on both goals, and new objectives have been set to guide our work in the coming year.

Planning for the future is a hallmark of a good school system. Continuous improvement based on the collection and analysis of relevant data, coupled with a focus on

Goal #1 - To construct and implement an approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices that ensures that all students meet clearly defined high standards.

Needham has adopted a standards-based approach to teaching that establishes high expectations about what is important for students to know and be able to do. Our staff has spent hours in collegial discussion defining the standards for each subject and grade level. Our

Key Objectives

- To establish clear objectives and communicate them to all stakeholders

Measures

- Analysis of specific objectives

How Are We Doing?

- An audit by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability assessed Needham performance against 89 school standards and rated Needham "very high performing."

- To design a school improvement planning process that involves the community, relies on data, and produces measurable results

- Clearly articulated school improvement plans which reflect quality planning

- Individual School Improvement Plans (SIP) include specific actions to improve achievement for all students, to promote better communication, and to enhance social and emotional learning.

- To maintain adequate facilities which will support the educational program

- Analysis of space needs and facility adequacy

- 65% of Needham voters approved High School addition/renovation override.
- The new Eliot Elementary School opened in February 2004.
- Phase II of the redistricting plan went into effect in September, 2004.
- A reorganized Community Education program will extend use of facilities to more community members.

teaching and learning have improved as a result of our insistence on clarity about what is essential for each child to know. These expectations are now clearly defined in a curriculum database (see Sidebar, next page).

Goal #2 - To establish, implement, and assess community and school practices that respond to the wellness needs of Needham students and staff.

The Needham schools continue to be on the cutting edge with respect

Courtesy Kathleen Martell



to social and emotional teaching and learning. In its third year, our work has three parts: social/emotional learning (SEL) skill development; classroom practices and climate; and school-wide practices, structures, and programs.

Children learn social and emotional skills best when there are opportunities to learn, to practice, to apply skills, to see those skills modeled, and to receive coaching. Our elementary teachers are doing just that as they teach specific skills and infuse them into the very fabric of classroom life. Eighty-four percent of elementary teachers have now received training in SEL principles, Responsive Classroom, or both. These teachers are using proven methods such as Morning Meeting and Second Step to teach

Curriculum Data Base

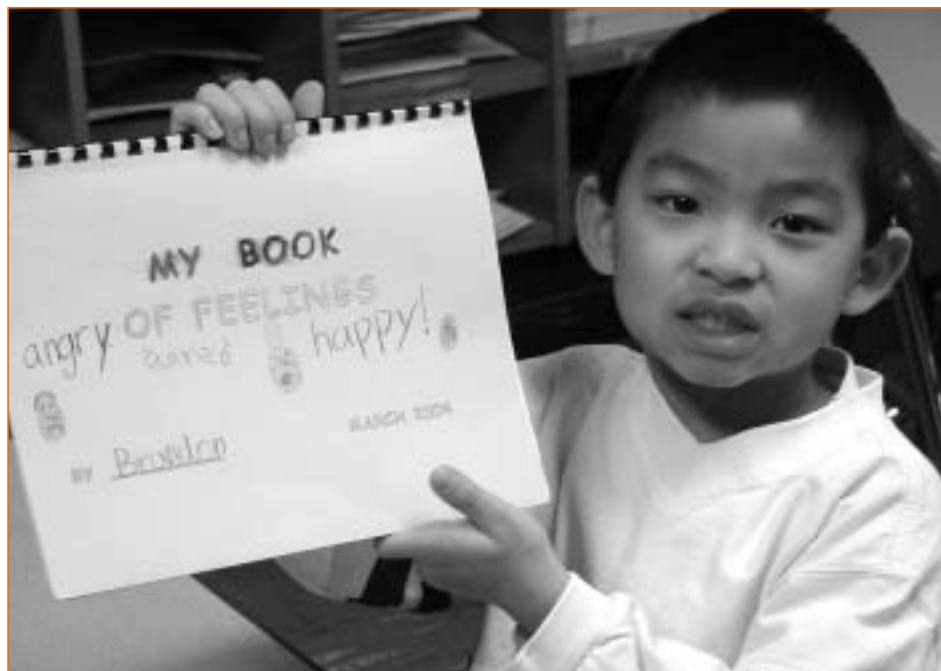
Just five years ago, Needham's curriculum was kept in 3-ring binders with tabs for each subject and grade level. Today it is completely accessible via the web. Teachers, students, and parents all have easy access to learning standards at every grade level and in every subject by course and by unit. Recently we have added a "keyword" function, making it possible to look for particular themes or concepts. For instance, a search for electricity will tell us that the concept is first introduced in third grade science. We can then see how the concept is extended and made more sophisticated all the way up through Advanced Placement Physics in grade 12. The next phase is to develop a section in which teachers may share lesson plans, resources, and assessments. You can check out the curriculum database at cdb.needham.k12.ma.us

skills and create a positive classroom climate where respect, cooperation, and self-management are the norm. (See Sidebar on Responsive Classroom.) More importantly,

as teachers and staff have become more experienced and comfortable teaching social/emotional skills, they are finding opportunities for students to practice and reinforce their skills all day long — resolving disagreements on the playground,

working together in a mathematics group, or understanding conflicts in literature.

At the Middle School, by connecting social/emotional learning to Students Take Action Day, Pollard teachers are creating real service learning opportunities. Students are learning problem-solving, goal-setting, and interpersonal skills for effective participation in school, as well as in the community and the larger world. Teachers who have participated in summer courses or the service learning curriculum workshops are infusing SEL skills into their lessons, thereby deepening students' understanding of academic material and of themselves. Additionally, some grade level teams are piloting an approach to classroom management called "guided discipline,"



Responsive Classroom

As part of our effort to promote social and emotional learning in our schools, many of our elementary teachers have participated in Responsive Classroom (RC) training. Last summer, we were lucky to have a weeklong RC Institute at the Broadmeadow School in which over 55 of our teachers participated. There are a number of elements to RC, including the Morning Meeting daily routine which creates a positive climate and reinforces academic and social skills; a clear and consistent approach to discipline that fosters responsibility and self-control; guided discovery to encourage inquiry and enthusiasm for learning; strategies for classroom organization that promote independence and learning; and family communication that involves parents as true partners. One example of a school practice is students' learning *apology of action* if they hurt someone. The practice calls upon students to do more than say "I'm sorry." Instead they are asked to think about how to make things right again — by helping with a task, by offering friendship, by saying something more meaningful.

Renderings of New Needham High School



New Needham High School -- Highland Avenue



New Needham High School -- Webster Street

designed both to shape a well-managed environment for learning and to teach students skills for self-discipline.

At the high school, a Mentor Homeroom team is leading efforts to add advisory activities in order to help homeroom teachers become familiar with every student academically and personally. Research shows that students who feel a sense of belonging and have an advisory relationship with at least one adult in school are more likely to stay connected to school, achieve more, and engage less in risky behavior. Large high schools can far too easily feel intimidating, isolating, or stressful to students — qualities that diminish openness to learning. The effort to increase advisory activities aims at forestalling those negative reactions.

Healthy Safe Environment

School Starting Time

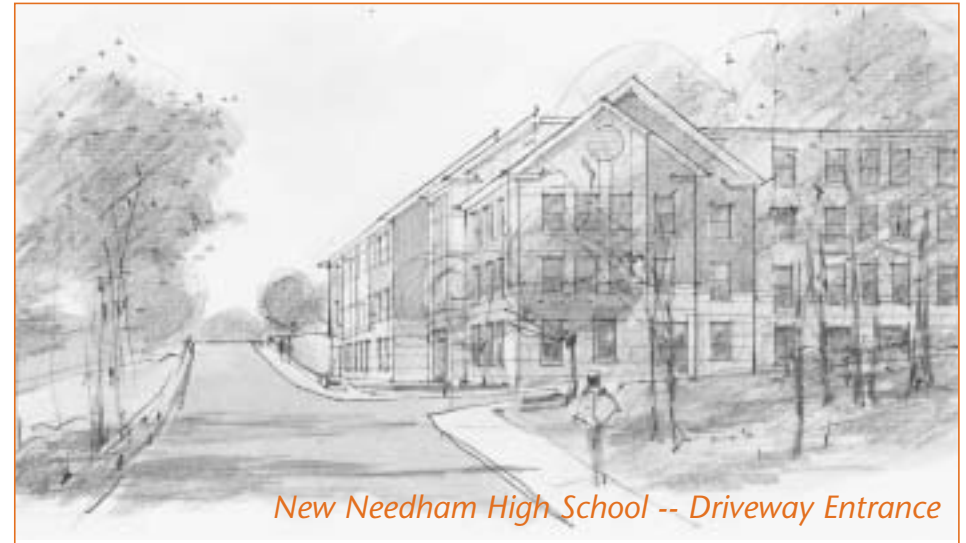
School start times have been adjusted this year in response to research

about adolescent sleep patterns. Pollard and Needham High School students now begin school 15 minutes later. A Task Force of school personnel, parents, and students has conducted an extensive analysis of medical and educational literature and concluded that there is a significant qualitative benefit to even minor adjustments in making the school starting time later. The entire School Starting Time report can be found under the Reports section of the system's website.

http://district.needham.k12.ma.us/ssc_reports.htm

Crisis Planning

In cooperation with the Local Emergency Planning Committee, the Needham School System has developed and articulated protocols for a general crisis, on-site evacuation, off-site evacuation, and shelter-in-place/lock down. In addition, the schools have been equipped with emergency radios and walkie-talkie systems in the event that phone service is disrupted. Parent phone



New Needham High School -- Driveway Entrance

trees, building-based crisis response teams, and training of staff have also been organized. On several occasions, school personnel have participated in “table top” exercises with representatives from other Town agencies and departments. These exercises simulate real disasters and help us evaluate our procedures, establish better communication mechanisms with other agen-

cies, and develop a better understanding of the roles and protocols that are important to know in a real disaster situation.

Planning in Process

District Website

In an effort to provide more timely and relevant information to all our stakeholders, the Needham Public

Schools district website received an overhaul this past summer. The new look is designed to be easier to navigate and to offer quick access to information of interest to parents, staff, students, and the community. Check it out at www.needham.k12.ma.us

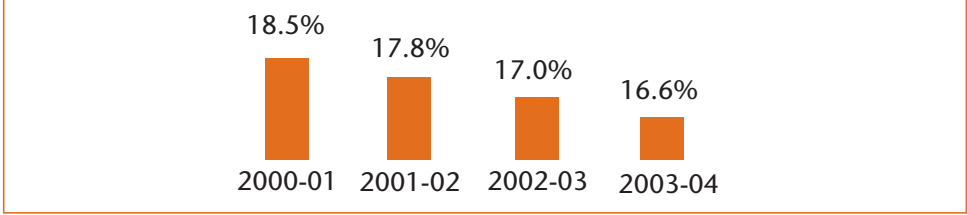
PowerSchool/Data Collection

Tracking student data, monitoring attendance, collecting fees, scheduling classes, recording student grades, and communication about

students is vital to a top-notch school system. This past year, the district invested in a new student information system called “PowerSchool.” Conversion to PowerSchool has required a significant investment of time and resources; however, the payoff is expected to be significant. In the future, PowerSchool will enable parents to have “real time” access to their children’s school records, in addition to having easier communication between home and school.

Private School Enrollments Declining

The percentage of students attending a private school continues to decline. A higher proportion of students electing public school is contributing to Needham’s higher than projected enrollments, which have reopened space and class size concerns.



Community Education

Seeing an opportunity for improved quality and cost effectiveness, we have consolidated a number of independent programs including Kindergarten After School Enrichment (KASE), adult education, summer school, after school enrichment, tutoring, SAT preparation, and driver’s education, to form Needham Community Education. The reorganized structure will improve the quality, accessibility, and breadth of programs along with a better link to in-school learning. Armed with data, models from other communities, and the help of a Harvard University School of Business Volunteer Consulting Team, the new Community Education office officially opened July 1. The first NCE initiative, a pilot Summer Explorations Program, offered high quality one-week enrichment options to over 175 elementary and middle school students, and classes in computer programming, SAT preparation, and driver’s education to over 100 high school students.

Challenges

Increasing Enrollment

While the opening of the new and larger Broadmeadow and Eliot Elementary Schools has helped to relieve the pressure of increasing enrollments at the elementary schools, the number of entering kindergartners has steadily increased over time. This fall, four of our elementary schools (Broadmeadow, Hillside, Mitchell, and Newman) had one more kindergarten class than anticipated. When the current kindergartners and first and second graders reach Pollard, they will number over 1200 students in a school that is already overcrowded with the current 1050 students. A study by DiNisco Design Partnership set the capacity of the Pollard School building at 780. Ten modular classrooms were added last year to help address the overcrowding; however, the building still lacks sufficient offices, auditorium seating, teacher workspaces, and parking; while the hallways, cafeteria,



Courtesy Connie Leonard

and gymnasium spaces are very overcrowded.

Two years ago, a Middle School Task Force recommended a second middle school, and a site feasibility study determined that the High Rock school site could accommodate a 600-student middle school. This is one option that will need to be considered as we develop a solution to the overcrowding at the Middle School. A related factor is that recently enacted changes in the state's School Building Assistance program (see sidebar in Financial Section on p. 13) will enable the Town to consider taking on another major school construction project much sooner than had

been anticipated. It is apparent, certainly, that space issues will continue to be a challenge for our schools.

High School Renovation

Needham's high school renovation/construction project represents the largest capital expenditure in Town history and will require extensive oversight and planning during the next four years. Although a preliminary estimate of the project cost was \$51.3 million, the project ultimately may cost more. A better understanding of the cost will be known when the construction bids are opened this fall. Students will remain in the existing building for two years while the

EQA

In September and October of 2003, the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) examined the Needham School System. EQA is a division of the State government whose purpose it is to review and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of public school districts in promoting student achievement in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The five-member panel from EQA reviewed documents, examined data, interviewed school committee and staff, and conducted a three-day site visit to the system. The EQA report found Needham to be a "Very high performing school district." EQA examined 89 different standards in five areas: Assessment and Evaluation; Curriculum and Instruction; Student Academic and Support Services; Leadership and Governance; Business and Finance. The examiners rated the District as "Excellent" on 32 of the categories and "Satisfactory" on 57. In no area was the District rated "Poor" or "Unsatisfactory." The EQA office has examined 34 school districts, and Needham is the only district to receive ratings in the top two categories for all five areas. A full copy of the report can be found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/eqa/default.html>



new wing is built. They will then move into the classroom portion of the new wing while the rest of the building is finished. Since the phases will be timed so as to be completed during the summer, no class locations should change mid-year. The estimated date for full occupation is September of 2008.

Although the most obstructive activities are scheduled, whenever possible, during the summers; the project will require the patience and cooperation of everyone as staff, students, parents and neighbors are inconvenienced with construction nuisances.

STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION

April, 59% of the voters supported an operational override of almost \$2 million for the schools. Then again in November, a capital override vote passed by a margin of 65-35% and provided over \$51 million to renovate and enlarge Needham High School. These votes are a strong indication that the community values and supports its schools.

An essential element in determining the success of a school system is the satisfaction of its stakeholders - students, parents, alumni, staff, and community. Each year we gather feedback from our various constituents through surveys, focus groups, open forums, public hearings, and through other indicators such as override or Town Meeting votes.

Community Support

In 2003, on two occasions, the citizens of Needham voted to support its schools with override votes. First, in



Survey Feedback

The Needham Public Schools conducted a second systemwide survey

Key Objectives	Measures	How Are We Doing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To offer a comprehensive program that appeals to a broad range of students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and variety of courses Opportunities for enrichment outside the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needham High School offers 14 AP courses. Pollard Middle School has added an Interactive Mathematics Program (IMP) at grade 8. The elementary schools have implemented a Writers' Workshop as part of their literacy program. Parent satisfaction levels for after-school programs have significantly improved.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage meaningful communication and participation of all stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent Survey and Focus Groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication is the area with the greatest improvement in satisfaction rates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To build and maintain a climate of satisfaction and motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent and alumni surveys continue to indicate very high satisfaction levels for academics. Parent surveys show a majority of parents to be dissatisfied with the facilities at both the middle and high school levels.

of its parent community in the fall of 2003. The first survey was administered in 2001; the 2003 version was very similar so that we might identify trends over time. It is our intention to readminister the survey every other year in order to help us understand what is important to parents as well as how they rate various aspects of our schools.

Academic Subjects

Generally parents are very satisfied with all academic areas. The average satisfaction rate for all subjects is 85.8%. Results are slightly better than in 2001; the satisfaction rate has improved for each subject area except mathematics, which remains exactly the same. Three disciplines — mathematics, foreign language, and technology — rate below the

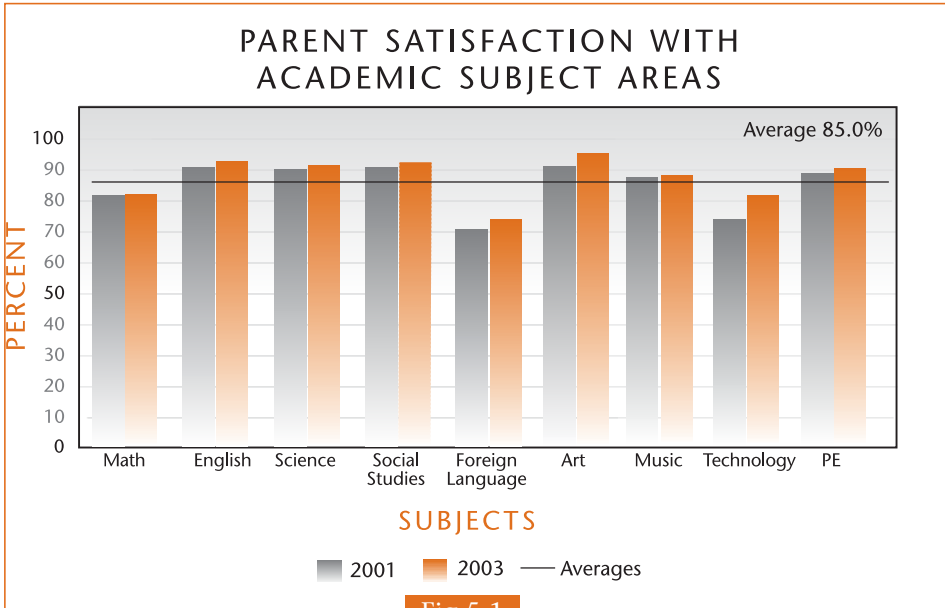


Fig 5.1

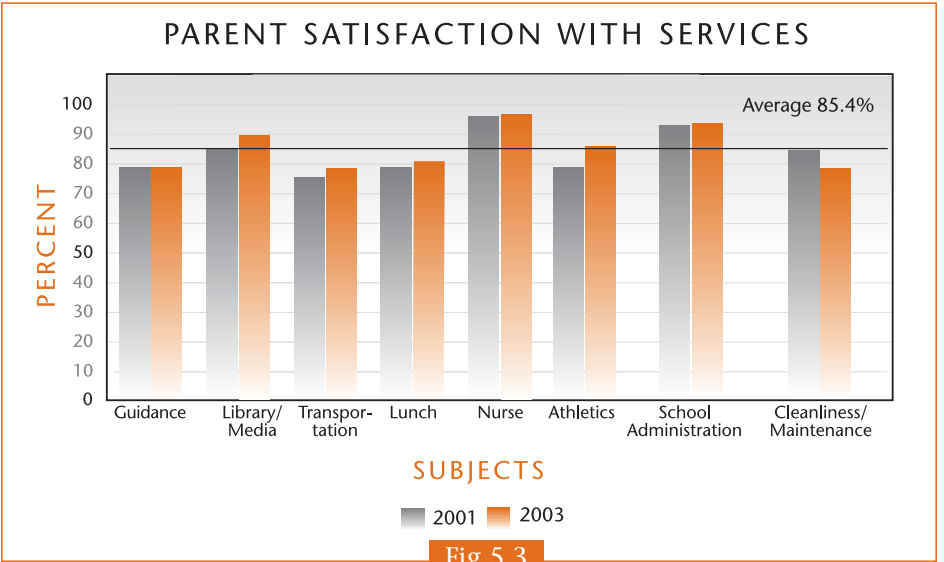


Fig 5.3

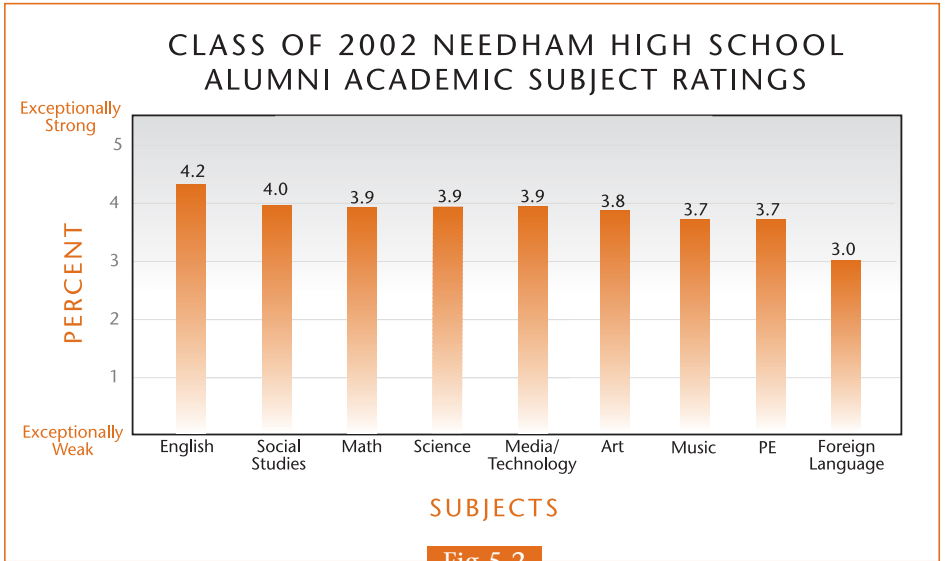


Fig 5.2

system average, the same three areas that fell below the system average in 2001 (figure 5.1).

It is interesting to compare these

parent perceptions with the results from the alumni survey for the Class of 2002 (figure 5.2). Our graduates rate all major subjects in the

“Exceptionally” to “Very Strong” range. Art, music, and physical education fall in the “Strong” range; and foreign language is considered “Weak.”

Service Areas

Parents also provided us with feedback about the various services offered by our schools. Again, we are able to compare these results with the 2001 survey (figure 5.3). These services are currently highly rated by parents, although the averages are slightly lower than those for academics. All service areas except for building maintenance have improved over the time since the 2001 survey.

Factors Affecting Education

Almost 95% of our parents are satisfied with the academic standards set by the schools for their children (figure 5.4), and about 9 in 10 indicate that they are pleased with the



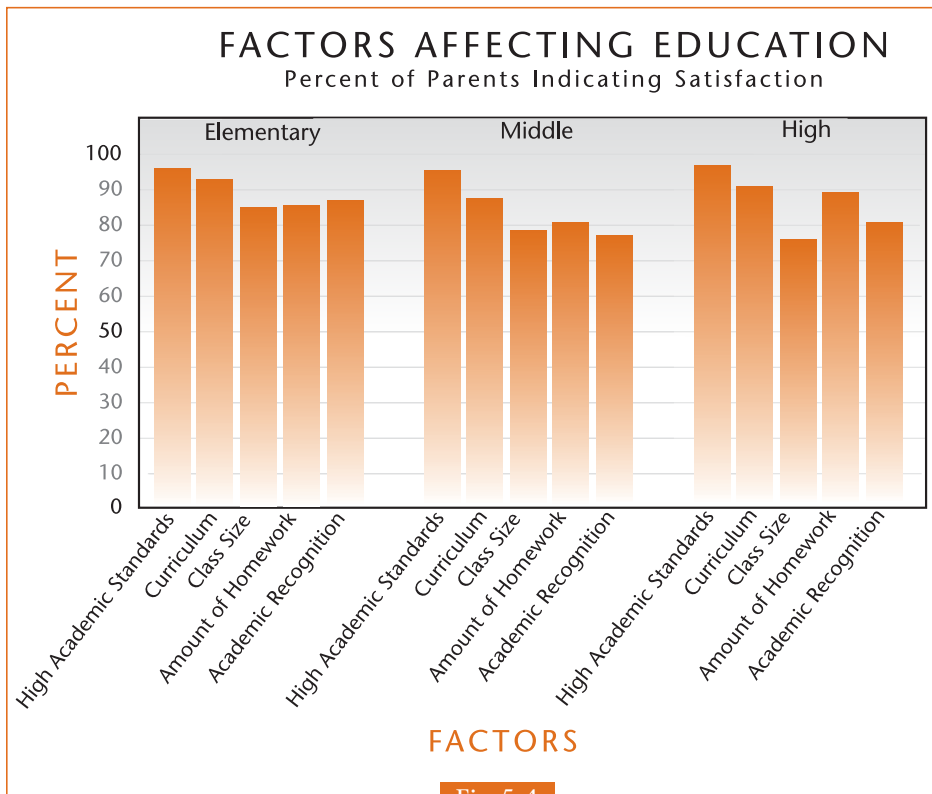


Fig 5.4

curriculum. Class sizes received the lowest approval ratings relative to other areas of the survey; however, it should be pointed out that the middle school satisfaction level for class size improved to 77% after being at only 29% in 2001. Since the last survey, modular classrooms have been added to Pollard Middle School; and the additional space has made it possible to increase the number of teachers and lower class sizes.

Parent satisfaction levels with the recognition given to students for their academic accomplishments, and the amount of homework their children have to do,

remain very similar to that of the last survey. The survey quizzes parents who are dissatisfied with the amount of homework given to see if they think that their children have too much or too little homework. Of this group, about 60% think that there is too much, and 40% that there is too little.

Communication

Ratings concerning communication have improved more than any other area of the survey (figure 5.5). The Middle School had significant approval increases in four of the seven questions relating to communication, while the High School has

Statement	Elementary 2001	Elementary 2003	Middle School 2001	Middle School 2003	High School 2001	High School 2003
School personnel are respectful, receptive, and responsive to input from parents.	93.9	95.2	88.4	92.3	88.5	94.1
School personnel are respectful, receptive, and responsive to input from students.	95.2	94.1	86.3	87.9	87.2	87.3
Teachers help me understand the strengths and needs of my child.	94.7	94.9	63.5	68.8	55.9	52.2
I am involved in decision-making about the education of my child.	72.9	78.2	60.3	67.9	76.7	80.0
I am provided opportunities to volunteer at my child's school.	96.0	96.6	84.2	80.1	75.8	78.8
I feel welcome at my child's school.	96.9	96.6	87.5	83.3	90.7	87.0
My child's school effectively communicates information to me.	91.3	93.3	75.6	80.8	71.8	78.6

Fig 5.5

improved in three of seven areas. The elementary level, which already had at least 90% approval for all questions in communications except one, shows significant improvement in that category (Involvement in Decision Making).

Safety

In general, parents believe that the schools provide an atmosphere in which there is a sense of order, safety, and fairness. They are very pleased with the high behavioral standards set for their children, as indicated by a 93.8% approval rating. There is also a decline in the percentage of parents telling us



schools has improved somewhat since 2001; however, there is still greater dissatisfaction with this area than with any other. Only about three in five parents believe that the schools are adequately funded, and that percentage varies greatly between levels (figure 5.6): 71.1% of elementary parents report being satisfied; however, this number drops to only 52.8% at the Middle School and 43.6% at the High School.

that there are places in our schools where their children feel unsafe. While this percentage may be small (8.3%) and declining (from 10.9% in 2001), it is still a concern when the parents of one in twelve students feel their child may be unsafe in school.

Resources

Parental satisfaction with the resources made available to their

In general, elementary school parents are more satisfied with resources than are secondary school parents. The most significant discrepancies between levels are seen in questions about the adequacy of space. Even though this survey was administered before the opening of the new Eliot School, over 81% of elementary parents report satisfaction with the educational space pro-

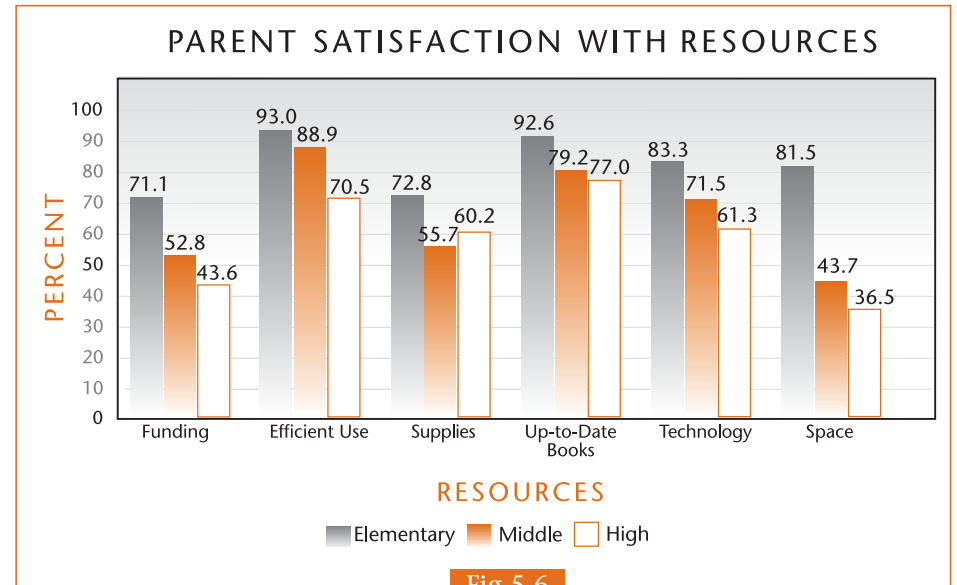


Fig 5.6





vided for their children. This number declines to 43.7% at Pollard and 36.5% at the High School.

Challenges

Resources

When finances are tight, school budgets tend to place a priority

on classroom teachers and the core educational program. Unfortunately, this means that other very important needs such as facilities, supplies, and maintenance go unfunded. It is a challenge for the schools and the Town to find ways of providing the necessary space,

maintenance, and supplies to support a quality academic program.

Program Evaluation

Following the 2001 survey, focus groups and follow-up evaluations were conducted in an attempt to understand the reasons why parents had greater dissatisfaction with certain subject areas (mathematics, foreign language, and technology) than for the others. Using the information that was gleaned, we have instituted a number of changes in our schools. A new elementary mathematics curriculum has been implemented, and the Middle School has added an eighth grade Interactive Mathematics Program (IMP) as well as a full year of algebra for all eighth grade students not enrolled in IMP. In Foreign Lan-

guage, we have instituted a new administrative structure, and two new department leaders have placed a priority on supporting new teachers and on implementing a standards-based approach to language instruction. In technology, we have worked to ensure greater consistency in the teaching of the technology curriculum and to more clearly identify for students the technology skills they are learning. In addition, we now have at least a part-time instructional technology specialist at each school, which was not the case in 2001. It is important that we evaluate these innovations to ensure that they are really improvements and not merely changes. We look forward to reporting on these areas in future Performance Reports.



At a Glance

Often people ask how Needham compares with other similar communities. This chart contains a variety of data on taxes, family incomes, school expenditures, and student performance that enable that comparison.

These figures are the most recent available for all of these towns: tax and income data come from the MA Department of Revenue website. Per pupil spending and MCAS data are derived from the MA Department of Education. SAT scores have been compiled through an informal telephone

survey of high school guidance offices. Teacher salaries are drawn from The Education Cooperative and a survey of individual school districts.

The MCAS scores represent the average percentage of students receiving Proficient or Advanced scores on all of the 2003 MCAS tests given in that district. The SAT scores are average scores for the community. The shaded numbers represent the rank order of the corresponding community in each category.

Community	FY04 Average Single Family Tax Bill (1)		1999 Median Family Income (1)		FY03 Per Pupil Expenditure (2)		2003 MCAS (5)		2003 SAT Verbal (3)		2003 SAT Math (3)		FY04 Teacher Starting Salary with Masters (4)		FY04 Teacher Top Step with Masters + 30 (4)	
	Amount	Rank	Amount	Rank	Amount	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Amount	Rank	Amount	Rank
Belmont	\$7,388		\$95,057		\$7,652		74.9		566		581		\$38,331		\$72,013	
Brookline	\$8,897 [^]		\$92,993		\$10,578		67		564		592		\$40,971		\$70,201	
Concord	\$7,987		\$115,839		\$10,157		* 74.8		* 585		* 630		\$39,826		\$78,418	
Dedham	\$3,697		\$72,330		\$8,761		55.8		494		508		\$40,426		\$64,371	
Dover	\$8,412		\$157,168		\$10,051		** 78		** 604		** 626		\$40,458		\$67,285	
Framingham	\$3,978		\$67,420		\$9,699		53.1		531		554		\$38,758		\$64,420	
Holliston	\$5,112		\$84,878		\$8,055		69.7		542		561		\$36,703		\$61,185	
Hopkinton	\$5,740		\$102,550		\$8,254		71.8		562		572		\$38,618		\$67,534	
Lexington	\$6,428		\$111,899		\$9,686		79.3		603		616		\$38,960		\$72,510	
Medfield	\$6,578		\$108,926		\$6,517		77.4		570		568		\$37,514		\$65,363	
Natick	\$4,108		\$85,715		\$9,330		62.6		544		547		\$38,831		\$62,466	
Newton	\$6,831		\$105,289		\$11,140		76.3		589		618		\$40,964		\$73,986	
Norwood	\$2,799		\$70,164		\$7,894		56.8		512		530		\$34,710		\$59,403	
Sherborn	\$9,591		\$136,211		\$9,211		** 86.5		** 604		** 626		\$40,458		\$67,285	
Walpole	\$4,275		\$84,458		\$7,230		66.8		525		535		\$33,806		\$58,562	
Wayland	\$7,595		\$113,671		\$10,035		81		607		629		\$39,014		\$70,425	
Wellesley	\$7,320		\$134,769		\$9,589		79.5		602		605		\$39,779		\$69,506	
Weston	\$11,238		\$181,041		\$11,404		77.8		604		616		\$39,155		\$74,965	
Westwood	\$6,673		\$103,242		\$9,921		77.7		550		565		\$36,080		\$69,853	
Winchester	\$7,043		\$110,226		\$8,278		82.4		574		589		\$38,606		\$67,513	

[^] Based on Median Value of Single Family

* - Concord-Carlisle
** - Dover-Sherborn

(1) Source: Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Revenue Website

(2) Source: Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education Website

(3) Source: Informal telephone survey to school districts

(4) Source: TEC Cooperative (Dedham, Dover, Hopkinton, Medfield, Natick, Needham, Norwood, Wayland, Wellesley, Westwood)

Other Districts - informal telephone survey

(5) Source: Student Development Office, Needham Public Schools

Contributors

Condon Realty

Raphael and Raphael, LLP

Dedham Savings Bank
The Needham Cooperative Bank

www.needham.k12.ma.us

781-455-0400



Needham Public Schools
1330 Highland Avenue
Needham, MA 02492-2692

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