

Some Things Are Worth Paying For...

Editor:

As was noted on November 17th by participants at the Community Forum on Funding Education in Tough Times, Education is not just an expense, but an important investment. Successful communities value public safety and education. Those two areas determine who chooses to call Meriden home, and unfortunately, who chooses to leave our fine city. The Meriden Board of Education is not 11 million dollars in debt. We are concerned that we may receive 11 million dollars less in funding next year.

While the Board of Education added three positions, the rationale was explained at the Curriculum Committee Meeting, at the Finance Committee Meeting, and at the Community Forum. All these positions were funded by reducing positions elsewhere and using targeted grant dollars. The music coordinator position is a stipend position that pays \$3,934 per year. The Board of Education and the administrative team are confident that this position will save the district money by closely scrutinizing all music purchases and by effectively inventorying current equipment.

The science teacher will be a classroom teacher on a one year special assignment. It was approved in response to our science scores and our State Oversight Committee. While adding a science supervisor is a noted priority, it was not one that we could afford at this time. This current arrangement, utilizing ED Jobs Grant dollars, allows us to increase our focus on science and not create a new position that will impact future budgets.

The family school liaison (FSL) position has been designed in response to our District Improvement Plan and the Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Accountability and Improvement. We are still in the process of completing two indicators in regards to parent/community and climate survey for the State Oversight Committee. The FSL coordinator will spearhead our efforts here. The position will be funded out of target grant dollars. Our Title I allocation requires us to spend a portion of the money on proactively engaging parents in the academic success of their children.

Teachers are the most important resource in any school system. No one has a greater ability to positively impact student learning than the trained

professional in the classroom. As was noted by city officials at the Community Forum, the Meriden Board of Education is not heavy on administrators, but actually light.

As for all day kindergarten, Meriden lags far behind other communities in the number of current available slots. Sixty-two school districts provide full day kindergarten for all their students. Eight charter schools and nine magnet schools also provide full day kindergarten for all their students. Another thirteen districts provide a significantly higher percentage of all day kindergarten slots for their students. Only 12% of Meriden students are afforded the opportunity to attend all day kindergarten, even when our own local research and that of national experts reveals its true value.

Our elected officials have a difficult balancing act. Weighing the budget needs of our schools, police, and fire with our communities' ability to pay is not an enviable task.

Some things are worth paying for. . .

Signed: Thomas Bruenn, Chair, Finance Committee, BOE

John Lineen, Chair, Curriculum Committee, BOE