

Communication from the Pentucket Regional School Committee as of 12/16/08

Greetings from the Pentucket School Committee,

As you are aware, the committee voted to release communications periodically throughout the year following significant votes on issues. It is our intention to help improve communications regarding actions which are taken during Committee meetings. The last communication was issued on September 30, 2008 and can be viewed on the school committee website (insert address to connect). This communication covers committee meetings from September 16 through December 2, 2008. Please feel free to contact through e-mail or by phone on any questions or concerns which you may have concerning this communication or other school related issues.

MCAS Results

The MCAS results are in and it is good news for the Pentucket District! Pentucket saw a positive trend of improvement in mathematics for grades 5, 6 and 10. In addition, analysis of the past three years shows positive improvement in mathematics for every grade as increasing numbers of students moved in the proficient and advanced categories. The Pentucket Middle School which was placed on the "warning" list for its special education subgroup showed a pattern of improvement over four years in all MCAS categories. Similarly, MCAS results for the district elementary schools showed improvements in all grades. The district is proactively addressing concerns for elementary students scoring in the MCAS "warning" category through individual analysis of student results to target areas of weakness and the after school MCAS tutorial program which was initiated in the Spring of 2008. The tutorial program showed impressive results for improvement of the students attending this specialized program. All parents are encouraged to take advantage of this excellent program for their elementary students.

Obviously, with so much good news the school committee was very impressed and heartened. We are extremely proud of our students for their hard work and diligent efforts to achieve these improvements and we are equally appreciative of the supportive families that have always been there to help their students. The committee also extends its congratulations and appreciation to our administrative team and our incredible teachers who always come through beyond expectations.

Task Force on School Fees

The Task Force on School Fees had its first full meeting on Thursday, December 4. The meeting was well attended and included four members from our three

towns, three school committee members, the superintendent and the business manager. During this meeting members expressed their concerns over school fees. Concerns ranged from safety concerns for students who are walking to school as a result of bus fees to financial hardship concerns for families that are paying significant amounts in school fees. Three priorities were established as a result of this meeting. The priorities are bus fees, family cap on fees and fairness of the fees. The committee plans to continue meeting to develop recommendations on these three issues for the 2009-2010 school year. As always, public input to this process is always welcome. You may forward your comments in writing or by e-mail to the superintendent's office and just note that your comments on are school fees. You may also feel free call the superintendent's office with your comments and they will be reviewed at the next Task Force meeting.

Budget 2009-2010

As the committee prepares to begin its budget review and recommendation process for the 2009-2010 year we again ask for support and participation from members of the Pentucket community. Your thoughts, questions and concerns are critical to the process and we encourage all to attend our **Public Hearing on January 20, 2008** so that we can include your input in the process. As we did last year, we are having the public hearing before we vote on our final budget recommendations. In this way, we can incorporate public input into the voting process. Please note the date on your calendar and plan to attend. We will not be scheduling any other business on that date so that the entire meeting may devoted to hearing from the public. Draft information on the budget will be available at the meeting for your review and Superintendent Livingston will open the meeting with a brief overview of the projected budget. You may have already read in the newspaper that we are anticipating a deficit between budget needs and available. This is nothing new for our schools. We routinely struggle with the fact that our school budget is 80% salaries and so with increasing health insurance costs and modest contractual increases it is a constant dilemma to try to balance within the confines of Proposition 2 ½ %. Over the past two years the school committee has successfully presented budget requests to the three towns which fit within town budget constraints and did not require overrides for funding. This was done through a series of consolidations and/or elimination of positions within the district as well as diligent efforts on the part of our administrative team to find cost savings within the budget. Dr. Livingston reported at the end of the last budget cycle that he did not anticipate any additional significant consolidations and/or reorganizations within our staffing for the upcoming budget year. This means that the school committee really needs public support and input if we are going to continue to support the quality of education that is so essential to our students. It is during difficult times such as these that we need to remember what is truly important to the future of our students.