



November 7, 2008

**In this Issue:**

Affirmative Vote on Debt Exclusion. 1	FY 2010 Budget Timeline..... 6
Football Arrives at G-D..... 1	Community Communications.... 7
Central Office Relocating..... 2	SPED PAC Parent Resources.... 7
Group Insurance Commission..... 3	Strategic Plan Development..... 8
Peter Twomey Youth Center..... 3	EQA Findings..... 9
District Re-Issues BAN on HS Debt. 4	Think Tank Committee..... 10
FY 2010 Budget..... 5	What's Happening?..... 11
	2008 MCAS Performance..... 12

# District News

Groton-Dunstable Regional School District

## **Affirmative Vote on Debt Exclusion**

*Dr. Alan D. Genovese, Superintendent*

A very important ballot question was passed this fall by voters in both Dunstable and Groton. The school committee and district officials are most grateful and appreciative to everyone who supported this critical ballot question. The successful passage excluded from Proposition 2 ½ the bond debt for the high school property, know as the Casella land.

This provides some flexibility for town officials as they begin the budget planning process for the next couple of years. It also allows school officials and the school committee to develop a more definitive long-range capital debt schedule that will project each town's assessment in the coming years. This financial planning is essential during these difficult budget times.

The School Committee, Boards of Selectmen, finance committees and district officials all worked together in a collaborative manner to explain the importance of this question as it related to future town and school budgets. It is anticipated that these collective efforts of mutual interest will continue in the months and years ahead.

## **Football Arrives at Groton-Dunstable**

*Dan Twomey, Athletic Director*

This year marks a very special time in the Groton-Dunstable athletic history with the inaugural varsity football team. This historic season got off to a great start with a win at Maynard High School on September 12<sup>th</sup>. The following week an enthusiastic crowd cheered on the Crusaders during their first home game in Groton-Dunstable history as they defeated the defending Eastern Mass Super Bowl Champion, Greater Lawrence Tech, 16-0. Since then, the Crusaders have rolled to an impressive 7 and 2 record with two games remaining in the inaugural season. The program has 53 participants in the varsity/junior varsity program and the new cheerleading program has 14 students this season. Head Coach Derek Asadoorian's Crusaders have one home game remaining

*(Continued on page 2, column 1)*

## Football Arrives at Groton-Dunstable

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on Thanksgiving Day with cross town rival, Tyngsborough High School, at 10:00 a.m. at the Groton-Dunstable Regional High School.

Thank you to all the individuals and groups for their hard work and dedication and to every individual and business that have donated time, effort, and money to make this program a success.

## Central Office Relocating to Prescott

*by Dr. Alan Genovese,  
Superintendent*

During the week of November 24<sup>th</sup> 2008 the Administrative Offices will be relocating to Prescott Elementary School to share space with Merrimack Special Education Collaborative (MSEC) and the District's Maintenance Point of Distribution Center. One reason for this move is we have simply outgrown the space. In addition to the work space it is important to be able to store financial, student and Special Education records and retrieve this information in a timely manner. We are required to keep some of these records for 60 years.

Over the years, because of space limitations at Tarbell, many of these records have been archived at Prescott and the staff takes "fieldtrips" to research requests. Not exactly an efficient use of time. Ironically, the Administrative Offices were once located at Prescott and shared space with district classrooms. In 1994 Central Office staff moved to Tarbell. Beyond space limitations there are other reasons to move before snow flies!

As we look to achieve as many cost savings as possible in these difficult financial times, the consolidation of facilities will save money on heat and utilities. Although Prescott is a larger building, Tarbell's utility costs rivals that

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## Central Office Relocating to Prescott

*(continued)*

of Prescott which has newly installed e-rated windows, a new insulated roof, and an energy efficient furnace. Tarbell, built in 1914, is not an efficient building to operate.

Although Prescott has had some significant upgrades in the last 3 years, the ventilation system is extremely antiquated and cannot handle a large population. This resulted in higher carbon dioxide readings than desirable. Estimates to correct this problem and other related building deficiencies approach a million dollars. These issues will not require any attention with the relocation of Central Office staff and a few special education collaborative programs. With declining enrollment, we were able to move the 10 classrooms from Prescott to Swallow Union and Florence Roche. We saved on staffing salaries and were able to more efficiently utilize the time of support staff.

We have enjoyed being in West Groton and want to thank residents for being such great neighbors. It is a lovely part of Groton and we will continue to visit the Clover Farm Market and enjoy their delicious food. We especially enjoyed the seasonal decorations in homes. It is a great place to work and live. Although we lease Tarbell from the town, we will work with town officials to determine the best use of this facility and land.

A "walk through" of Tarbell is planned for Saturday, November 15<sup>th</sup> from 9 to 10:30 am. This will be followed by a Public Hearing at the Groton Senior Center beginning at 11 AM to discuss possible future uses of the Tarbell School. We hope many residents will be able to join us and share their ideas.

## **Group Insurance Commission**

*by Jeanne Mitchell, Human  
Resource Manager*

The Groton-Dunstable Regional School District and the Groton-Dunstable Public Employee Committee have concluded negotiations on health insurance benefits provided by the District to employees, retirees and their dependents and survivors.

The District will provide transfer of subscribers to the Group Insurance Commission (GIC) effective July 1, 2009.

The Group Insurance Commission (GIC) was established by the Legislature in 1955 to provide and administer health insurance and other benefits to the Commonwealth's employees and retirees, and their dependents and survivors. The GIC also covers housing and redevelopment authorities' personnel, participating municipalities, and retired municipal employees and teachers in certain governmental units. The GIC became available to municipalities and school districts last year.

Health coverage options include an Indemnity plan, Preferred Provider-type Organizations (PPO), and multiple HMO plans. The GIC also manages basic and optional life insurance coverage. As part of its Indemnity and Navigator Plans, it manages mental health/substance abuse benefits and also manages pharmacy benefits for the Indemnity Plans. For active employees only, the GIC offers a long term disability (LTD) program, two pre-tax employee programs - Health Care Spending Account (HCSA) and Dependent Care Assistance Program (DCAP). The GIC also offers a discount vision and a dental plan for retirees.

The Group Insurance Commission is a quasi-independent state agency governed by a fifteen member Commission appointed by the Governor. Commission members encompass a range of interests and expertise including labor and retirees, the public interest, the administration, and health economics.

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## **Group Insurance Commission (continued)**

Over 294,000 people are enrolled in GIC plans. The mission of the GIC is to deliver high quality care at a reasonable cost.

Joining the GIC will save taxpayers money in FY2010 and subsequent years.

## **Peter Twomey Youth Center**

*and How We Spent Our  
Summer Vacation!*

*by Karen Tuomi, Director of  
The Peter Twomey Youth Center*

In the summer of 1997, a small group of people, representing many community groups, committed to a project entitled "New Gym Renovation" and began eleven years worth of summer vacation projects. Phase I was completed on time for the opening of that school year and its success spurred on each phase after, including the summer of 2000 when with 100% volunteer effort, a beautiful hard wood floor was put down in the gym. This summer, again with many hours of volunteer effort and funds collected through donations and the Peter Twomey Golf Classic, the final Phase for inside the building was completed with the renovation of a new room dedicated to Middle School students.

This room existed originally as the High School Shop classroom and then, with the high school moving to a new site, the room was used by the District's maintenance department as garage and shop. With the support of the Superintendent and approval by the School Committee, volunteers helped prepare the space for a new face.

*Continued on page 4, column 1*

This prep included hours of sweeping and cleaning and sweeping again in order to clean one more time. Members of the Groton Fire Department came in and used part of our demolition as a training program. They removed the overhead door to make way for a double glass entry way. After the prep was satisfactory, a Saturday was set aside and a request went out to high school students, Extended Day students and parents for a painting party.

Members of the girls and boys varsity basketball and baseball teams came down for the day, along with Middle School students who currently attend Extended Day. They were able to complete the painting of all three rooms and two bathrooms. Now we were ready for the contractors to come in with a new heating and AC unit; new lights and electrical; new ceiling and finally, a new tile floor. Add to these changes the donations of a 60 inch television, ping pong table and pool table along with new furniture and computers - the room is complete and definitely does not look like the old high school shop classroom!! We opened our doors on September 4<sup>th</sup> to a new room set aside for Middle School students not only in the Extended Day program but with plans to expand the use of the facility on weekends.

Over the past 11 years the core group of committee members has remained the same but there have literally been countless people who have volunteered work hours or made financial donations to the project. For those people they will always have our thanks, but more importantly, they will have the inner knowledge that they did something really worthwhile for their community. Members of the School Committee have also come and gone over the years and we appreciate all of their endorsements for our many phases. However, there are two people who, from start to finish, have shown unwavering support for this project and we will be forever grateful to them for their faith in us and the work they did to help us along the way. Those two people are Dr. Mary Athey Jennings and Dr. Alan Genovese.

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## Peter Twomey Youth Center *(continued)*

We began this project with a structurally sound building, but desperately in need of repair, that our committee saw as having a lot of potential. It was a vision that was hard to sell when we would talk about “the New Gym” and we knew that we needed a name that would encompass all that our vision included; academics, athletics, fun and team, because we saw this as creating a unique partnership between community and school. In July 1997 our community tragically lost in a car accident one of the outstanding students from the graduating class of 1997, Peter Twomey. In his too short 18 years, Peter embodied all of the facets of our vision and it became clear that associating his name with our project would give it the instant recognition that we desired.

With the completion of this year’s summer vacation project we proudly present the Peter Twomey Youth Center and hope that it will continue to be used by the school and community with the number one priority being “for the children”.

P.S. We already are making plans for improving the outside of the facility – only 8 more months till our next summer vacation!

## School District Re-Issues One Year BAN on High School Debt

*By Chuck McKinney, School  
Committee Representative*

The Groton-Dunstable School Committee recently voted to issue a one-year Bond Anticipation Note (BAN) to cover the recent \$2.5 million payment on the high school property. This BAN replaced a previous BAN that expired in October.

The school district’s original plan was to issue a long-term bond this fall, but the tight credit market dictated a change in direction. The School District’s financial advisor, Cinder McNerney, Managing Director at First Southwest Corporation, had this to say about the current credit situation: “The uncertainty in the financial industry has caused severe disruption to the municipal market.

*Continued on page 5, column 1*

School District Re-  
Issues One Year BAN on  
High School Debt  
(Continued)

Volatility, illiquidity, and instability have resulted in widespread cancellation and postponement of bond sales throughout the country, including Massachusetts. Most issuers are selling or renewing notes to mature at least 9 months to a year from now, in order to allow time for stability to return before locking in long-term rates.”

Fortunately for the district, the availability of a one-year BAN gives the committee time to allow the credit market to stabilize. The interest rate on the BAN is 3.25%, which is lower than last year’s note which carried an interest rate of 3.76%

The tight credit market situation did not come as a surprise to Groton Town Treasurer Christine Collins. “When I contacted the Department of Revenue’s Debt Section, I was told that many Financial Advisors were recommending that short term loans be renewed,” she explained. “The instability in the lending market would likely produce unfavorable interest rates for long term bonds, since many of our customary bidders would not be willing to bid right now.”

Given the abrupt change in circumstances, the budget and finance subcommittee held an emergency meeting in October to discuss the situation with town officials and review options. Members of the Groton Board of Selectmen, along with the treasurers of both towns were able to attend and participate in a conference call with the district’s financial advisor.

“I am really glad that town officials took the time to come over and work on this with us”, explained B&F chairman Chuck McKinney. “The one-year BAN option is clearly the right decision at the moment, and we will continue to work together to decide how to structure the long-term note in a way that meets the needs of the towns.”

School District Re-  
Issues One Year BAN on  
High School Debt  
(Continued)

Discussions on how to structure the long-term note will begin shortly. Town and school officials will choose a structure that produces an annual tax burden as close to the original plan as possible.

Groton Selectman, Fran Dillon commented, “Based on the best input from the towns, the school district’s financial advisor, and discussions with the State Department of Revenue, the Groton Board of Selectmen support the current course of action and will work with the District to structure the debt.”

The BAN will not require principal payments during the one-year term, so the debt assessment to each town will be reduced to reflect this change. The school committee recently voted to authorize a reduction in each town’s debt assessment. This will help Groton and Dunstable town officials to finalize their documentation required by Massachusetts Department of Revenue in order to establish a tax rate.

Superintendent Alan Genovese thanked district personnel and the financial advisor for their prompt effort to research and explain this change. “The volatility in the credit market really changed our course, but thanks to a responsive team effort we can move forward with this temporary solution. I really appreciate how quickly the staff was able to recalculate the impact of these changes so that we could explain to town officials how this will work to everyone’s advantage. The collaboration among town officials, school committee members and the district’s accounting staff was essential in order to create a plan that will protect the best interest of our tax payers”.

**FY 2010 Budget**

*By Tim Sheehan, Director of  
Business and Finance*

The FY 2010 school operating budget will be presented to the School Committee and to the residents of Groton and Dunstable in a new simplified format that will provide a more concise and understandable picture of spending priorities.

FY 2010 Budget  
(Continued)

Historically, the GDRSD budget has been organized by department or school site, with expenses broken down into six basic categories: salaries, professional development, expenses, library, computer and building (utilities). Last year a seventh category was added – payroll – to identify personnel related expenses such as substitutes, maintenance and custodial overtime, teacher lane changes, etc. The formal document listed every budget account – a level of detail that often made it difficult to see the “big picture.”

This year the budget will be organized according to function codes defined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE- formerly DOE). The business office uses these codes for its annual end-of-year report to the state. In addition, our outside auditing firm also uses the DESE function codes to prepare the district’s formal financial reports for presentation to the School Committee and the public. The codes are broken into the following major groups:

1000	Administration
2000	Instructional Services
3000	Other Student Services (athletics, transportation, health, food service)
4000	Operation and Maintenance of Plant and Facilities
5000	Fixed Charges (retirement, Insurance, equipment lease)
6000	Community Services (civic activities, recreation)
7000	Acquisition, Improvement, and Replacement of Fixed Assets
8000	Debt Retirement and Debt Service
9000	Programs With Other School Districts (charter schools, school choice)

Within each broad category, the district plans to break down expenses into two categories: salary and non-salary (expense).

**FY 2010 Budget Timeline**

- 11-18-08** Budget & Finance Meeting
  - Review budget assumptions and targets
  
- 12-16-08** Budget & Finance Meeting
  - Review budget drivers
  
- 12-18-08** Budget & Finance –with Town Officials
  - Review budget drivers, town budget data
  
- 01-08-09** Budget & Finance-with Town Officials
  - Review proposed draft budget request
  
- 01-14-09** Budget & Finance-Town Officials
  - Administrators’ reviews of budget priorities
  
- 01-21-09** School Committee Meeting
  - Present budget request - publication date
  
- 01-30-09** Release of governor’s proposed budget
  
- 02-04-09** School Committee Meeting
  - Present preliminary town assessments
  
- 02-12-09** Budget & Finance-Town Officials
  - Review assessments, town impacts

## Next Steps for Community Communications

*By Jim Frey, School Committee Representative*

Did you know that GDRSD is translating newsletters into Chinese and Spanish? As it turns out, we have a small population of non-English-speaking families in the district, and as a public system we are required to do what it takes to ensure we provide adequate learning opportunities for all of our children. In this case, that includes making sure we can communicate clearly with parents so they can properly understand our programs, including translating key documents, and even occasionally engaging interpretation services for active dialogue. It's just one small example of the many communication challenges our district faces in supporting our community.

As a learning organization and public entity, communications is an essential element of just about everything the district does. The School Committee has recently made a refreshed push for improving information exchange by constituting a committee dedicated to communications. The Communications Advisory Committee is tasked with examining communications techniques and practices in order to improve accessibility, accuracy, and effectiveness of dialogue between the district, the School Committee and the many constituent groups within the Groton-Dunstable community.

One of the committee's first tasks is to take action on the recommendations that were made by last year's Communications Research Team. Top initiatives of this type will include improving use and utility of the district's web site and simplifying/clarifying the ways you can communicate with the district administration and the School Committee. We'll also be trying out some new approaches to both getting the word out and taking your words in, especially during this year's budgeting process and also during the strategic planning project that's now underway.

Oh, and by the way, if you happen to be skilled at Chinese or Spanish and would be willing to do some occasional proofreading, please contact Dr. Susan Rübél at the central office. We could use your help!

## Groton-Dunstable SPED PAC to Open Parent Resource Center

*By Melissa Sweeny, GD Sped PAC President*

As part of the GD SpedPAC's goal to further develop outreach programs to the parents in our community, we will be moving into space at the Prescott School building to set up a **Parent Resource Center** consisting of an education resource library and meeting area. If all goes according to plan, we will be moving in the first week in December.

Beginning last August, the GD SpedPAC approached Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent of Schools, with a proposal to gain community space, centrally located in the District, to hold our resource materials and to meet with parents. With the support of both, Dr. Genovese and Cam Huston, PPS Director, it was brought before the School Committee this fall and was received with a favorable vote.

Having this space will allow us to create an education resource library geared toward, but not exclusive to, parents that would include books, information, and materials from the school district, state, and federal agencies. This new resource library will complement the staff resource libraries we have created at the individual schools. The new Parent Resource Center will most importantly allow us to meet with parents on a scheduled and/or drop-in basis to help them navigate the special education process, learn about their child's disability or allow *any* parent in the District to simply inquire about a child's academic or social struggles.

The centrally located Parent Resource Center will not only increase awareness and broaden communication with the *entire* community of parents in the District, it will allow the GD SpedPAC to pro-actively support the parents of our community – preparing and educating them to be a contributing member of their child's education team and to be part of a collaborative process with the District.

The Center will be open to *all* parents and caregivers in the community who need access to

*Continued on page 8, column 1*

## Groton-Dunstable SPED PAC to Open Parent Resource Center *(Continued)*

educational resources, support, and guidance in the area of educating the “whole child.” The GD SpedPAC is committed to helping *all* students achieve academic and social success in an emotionally supportive environment.

We thank Superintendent, Dr. Genovese, and Cam Huston, PPS Director, for their advocacy and support of our pursuing our own space and thank the Groton-Dunstable School Committee for their supporting vote to provide school building space for the GD SpedPAC’s supportive outreach plan to District parents.

For more information visit our website at [www.gdspedpac.org](http://www.gdspedpac.org).

## **Strategic Plan Development**

*by Dr. Alan D. Genovese,  
Superintendent of Schools*

There are many activities that contribute to the growth of an organization, but one that deserves full attention is the development of a district strategic plan. Such a plan enables us to assess and establish our priorities which will be embedded into a three to five year focus plan.

In the months ahead we will be inviting individuals who represent various constituents to participate in both focus groups and larger community meetings. Focus groups will include a variety of community stakeholders. Those stakeholders will include: clergy, senior citizens, community based child care centers, private and charter schools, business owners and district affiliations such as GDAY, GDEF, Youth athletics, and GSTEM. Teachers, support staff, and parents will also be involved in focus groups. The larger community meetings will be advertised and open to the public. This combination will provide multiple opportunities for people to share their ideas and offer input.

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## Strategic Plan Development *(Continued)*

### **Benefits of a Strategic Plan**

A strategic plan is important to have and implement for several reasons. First, it helps to align district, school, and individual goals with a common purpose. It also helps to integrate these goals and priorities into the everyday work of individuals in the school district.

Second, it provides and prioritizes a clear, organization-wide understanding and commitment to what is required for continued high performance. Finally, it provides for better accountability for results that are measurable.

Other benefits of a strategic plan include:

- Creation of opportunities for new/alternative revenue sources
- Organization-wide focus on key issues
- Enhanced team work and morale
- Increased business/community support and new strategic alliances
- Improved planning skills for administration
- Problems anticipated before they arrive

### **Potential Drawbacks of Strategic Planning**

As we know, the best laid plans do have some drawbacks. The solution to overcoming potential drawbacks is awareness. As long as we are mindful of these challenges we will be able to craft and implement a meaningful plan that facilitates student learning.

Some examples of these potential pitfalls include:

- Failure to adjust to environmental conditions that impact the plan
- Taking too long for the process or moving too fast
- Lack of staff or community involvement
- Not being “visionary enough”; fear of going “outside the box”

The Administrative Team is committed to developing a plan that is inclusive and democratic.

*Continued on page 9, column 1*

## Strategic Plan Development

*(Continued)*

While embracing the opportunity to “set the course” for the future we fully understand that your help is essential. We have identified areas that are consistent with Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) standards as central topics for our qualitative and quantitative data.

These areas include:

### Topics for Focus Groups

- Leadership, Governance, and Communication
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Assessment and Program Evaluation
- Human Resource Management
- Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support
- Financial and Asset management, Effectiveness, and Efficiency

Using EQA findings as a contextual basis we will ask each focus group the following questions:

1. What do you think is important for the district to consider in making decisions when it comes to each of the six standards?
2. What can we do to prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
3. What can we do to help us move from a good district to a GREAT district within the next 5 years?
4. If you could change one thing in our district, what would it be?
5. What do you see as our strengths? What can we do to maintain them?
6. What are our weaknesses? What can we do to address them?
7. What are the schools currently not doing but could or should be doing?
8. What emerging trends (locally, state-wide, nationally and internationally) should we be thinking about now that may impact our school system?

Once the focus group meetings have concluded there will be an open public forum on each topic area. This will allow everyone to hear and share their ideas on the collective results. The community at large will then

*Continued next column*

have another opportunity to provide a broader perspective in each area. We are interested in the factors that drive student performance, fidelity of implementation and the overall management of the district.

Last year, EQA examiners conducted a comprehensive evaluation of our district. A summary of their findings, an article entitled *EQA Findings*, follows this article, and will help you better understand the District’s status as a beginning point to the strategic planning process.

We look forward to your participation. A calendar of scheduled strategic planning meetings will be published once it is finalized.

### EQA Findings

Last year the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) conducted a comprehensive review of our district. The following is a synopsis of the EQA executive summary.

**Leadership, Governance, and Communication:** School committee, district leadership, and school leadership established, implemented, and continuously evaluated the cost effectiveness and efficiency of policies and procedures that were standards-based, focused on student achievement data and designed to promote continuous improvement of instructional practice and high achievement for all students. Leadership actions and decisions related to the attainment of district and school goals were routinely communicated to the community and promoted public confidence, financial commitment and community support needed to achieve high student and staff performance.

**Curriculum and Instruction:** The curricula and instructional practices in the district were

*Continued on page 10, column 1*

## Strategic Plan Development

*(continued from page 9)*

developed and implemented to attain high levels of achievement for all students. They were aligned with components of the state curriculum frameworks and revised to promote higher levels of student achievement.

**Assessment and Program Evaluation:** The district and school leadership used student assessment results, local benchmarks, and other pertinent data to improve student achievement and inform all aspects of its decision-making including: policy development and implementation, instructional programs, assessment practices, procedures, and supervision.

**Human Resource Management and Professional Development:** The district identified, attracted and recruited effective personnel, and structured its environment to support, develop, improve, promote and retain qualified and effective professional staff who were successful in advancing achievement for all students.

**Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support:** The district provided quality programs for all students that were comprehensive, accessible and rigorous. Student academic support services and district discipline and behavior practices addressed the needs of all students. The district was effective in maintaining high rates of attendance for students and staff and retained the participation of students through graduation.

**Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency:** The district engaged in a participative, well-documented, and transparent budget process that used student achievement as a factor in the overall budget. The district acquired and used financial, physical, and competitive capital resources to provide for and sustain the advancement of achievement for all students enrolled in the district. The district regularly assessed the effectiveness and efficiency of its financial and capital assets and had the ability to meet reasonable changes and unanticipated events.

We are proud of this report and look forward to your feedback in the coming months.

## Think Tank Committee

*by Berta Ericksen, School Committee Representative*

So you say we have a need and desire to save money and approach financing our school district in more creative ways? Well, that seems to have been the hue and cry from local Groton and Dunstable citizens for quite awhile now. So we're trying to do something about it!

The idea of creating a microcosm, of what Anthony Catanese (a Groton citizen, associated with the medical aspects of Veterans' Administration) did for the V.A., was germinated last year. He had created a "think tank" consisting of several individuals who worked together to save the V.A. \$10,000,000!!

The school committee voted to go forward with the idea and appointed an advisory committee which is committed for a ten-month period, September 2008 – June 2009 with the purpose of exploring many ideas that may lead to improve cost efficiencies in the operation of the school district and explore the possibility of new revenue sources.

The committee assignment is as follows:

1. Review current cost savings and cost avoidance measures from FY09 budget presentations and documents.
2. Explore potential cost savings and cost avoidance measures and make a list of these initiatives.
3. Recommend additional cost savings and cost avoidance measures to the Budget and Finance subcommittee in writing, with details, to the Budget and Finance Chair approximately in November and in March.
4. The Budget and Finance subcommittee will determine which recommendations will be acted upon.
5. The Budget and Finance subcommittee will report to the School Committee on all recommendations and on any actions taken approximately in January and in May.

*Continued on page 11, column 1*

## Think Tank Committee

(continued from page 10)

6. The Budget and Finance subcommittee will be responsible for the release of information to the press

So on September 9, 2008 Sara Abrahamsen, a Florence Roche parent; Debbie Bermudez, a middle school parent and secretary for the group; Kevin Welch, a Dunstable selectman; Barbara St. Jean, mother of 4 children in the district and local Dunstable business woman; Jay Praeger, Chair of the Groton Finance Committee; Dennis Blair, retired businessman with no children; Gary Hogle, community activist (Facilities Task Force Co-Chair and founder of G-D STEM); Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent of Schools; and Berta Erickson, School Committee member met for the first meeting of the Think Tank at the Groton-Dunstable Middle School North Library where it is planned that all of our meetings will take place. Absent were Joel Magid, high school parent; and Christine Bennani, local business woman and high school parent. David Johnson of Dunstable is going to share a position with Kevin Welch.

## What's Happening in the District?

### District Dates

Nov 15	Walk Through of Tarbell
Nov 15	Public Hearing - Tarbell
Nov 26	½ day Thanksgiving Break
Nov 27-30	Thanksgiving Break
Dec 24 / Jan 4	Winter Break – No School
Jan 16	½ day Curriculum Day
Jan 19	Martin Luther King Day – No School

### High School Dates

Nov 20	½ day Parent/Teacher Conf.
Nov 21	Star Search
Nov 27	Thanksgiving Football Game
Dec 11	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Parent Orientation
Dec 18	Concert

### Middle School Dates

Nov 17	Cyberbullying
Dec 2	½ day Parent/Teacher Conf.
Dec 4	½ day Parent/Teacher Conf.
Jan 13	Chorus Concert
Jan 15	Band Concert

### Swallow Union School Dates

Dec 3	½ day Elem Parent/Teacher Conf.
Dec 4	½ day Elem Parent/Teacher Conf.
Dec 17	½ day Elem. Only

### Florence Roche School Dates

Dec 3	½ day Elem Parent/Teacher Conf.
Dec 4	½ day Elem Parent/Teacher Conf.
Dec 13	Holiday Faire
Dec 17	½ day Elem. Only
Jan 22	Grade 4 Concert

## Groton-Dunstable 2008 MCAS Performance

*by Dr. Susan Rübél, Director of Curriculum and Staff Development*

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is the state-mandated battery of tests given annually in various grades. These tests assess students' mastery of content standards as outlined in the State Frameworks for each core content area. The class of 2012 will also need to pass the US History MCAS in order to graduate.

MCAS tests are administered in the core content areas of English Language Arts, Math, Science and Technology/Engineering, and History/Social Science. Reading/ELA and Math MCAS tests are administered to students in grades 3-8 and 10. Science and Technology/Engineering tests are administered in grades 5, 8 and 9 or 10, and History tests are given in grades 5, 7 and 10 or 11. All students have to pass the English Language Arts and Mathematics tests and one of the Science tests (Biology, Chemistry, Introductory Physics, or Technology/Engineering) in order to graduate. In addition, the class of 2012 must pass the US History test.

### **MCAS 2008**

Groton-Dunstable students perform significantly higher than the state average on all tests administered. The graphs below compare GDRSD student performance to the state average on the spring 2008 MCAS ELA, math and science tests at all grade levels. (See chart 1 for English/Language Arts, chart 2 for math, and chart 3 for science.) For additional information on the district's MCAS 2008 performance, see the following link on the GDRSD website: <http://www.grotdunst.mec.edu/District/documents/SCMCAS08Pres1Final10.9.08.pdf>

Teachers and administrators have spent countless hours over the past few weeks analyzing the MCAS tests at the district, school and student levels to understand trends over time, grade level and individual student strengths and weaknesses and their root causes, and to develop intervention strategies and improvement action plans. There will be a more detailed presentation to the School Committee on November 12 to share summaries of the schools' analyses and intervention efforts.

### **NCLB and Making AYP**

MCAS is also used to hold schools and districts accountable for the progress they have made toward the objective of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Law that all students be proficient in Reading and Mathematics by 2014. The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) sets annual performance targets and measures whether districts and schools have met these "Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)" goals annually. DESE reports overall results for all grade levels tested as well as for subgroups' (such as special education students', low income students') performance.

AYP is determined separately for the English language arts and mathematics MCAS tests by a combination of three out of four factors:

1. 95% or greater participation in MCAS or the MCAS-Alternate Assessment (for certain students with special needs); and
2. meeting or exceeding a performance target specified by the state; or

*Continued on page 13*

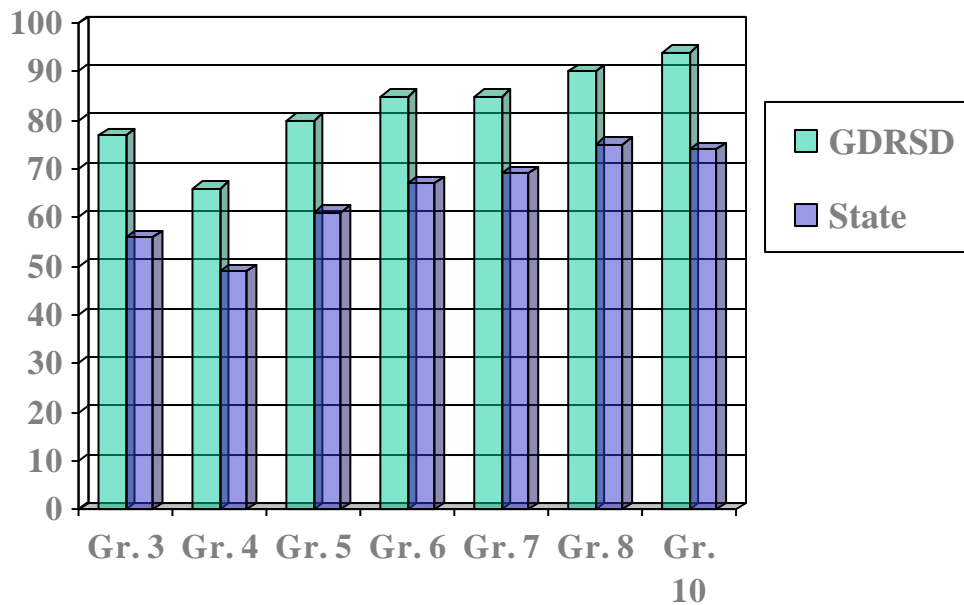
## Groton-Dunstable 2008 MCAS Performance

- meeting or exceeding an improvement target specific to districts, schools and subgroups within schools (such as the special education subgroup); and
- a 92% or higher attendance rate in grades 1-8; a 60% or higher graduation rate or 2% improvement in high school graduation rate.

All schools in GDRSD had a performance rating of high or very high in both E/LA and math, and most schools had an improvement rating of “on target” toward the 100% proficiency goal. In fact, the district is proud to share with the public that in 2008 the high school met the NCLB goal with 98.6% of students meeting or exceeding the state targets! Please take time to congratulate the high school students and teachers for their focused hard work and recognize all family members who supported their children toward the goal of attaining academic excellence.

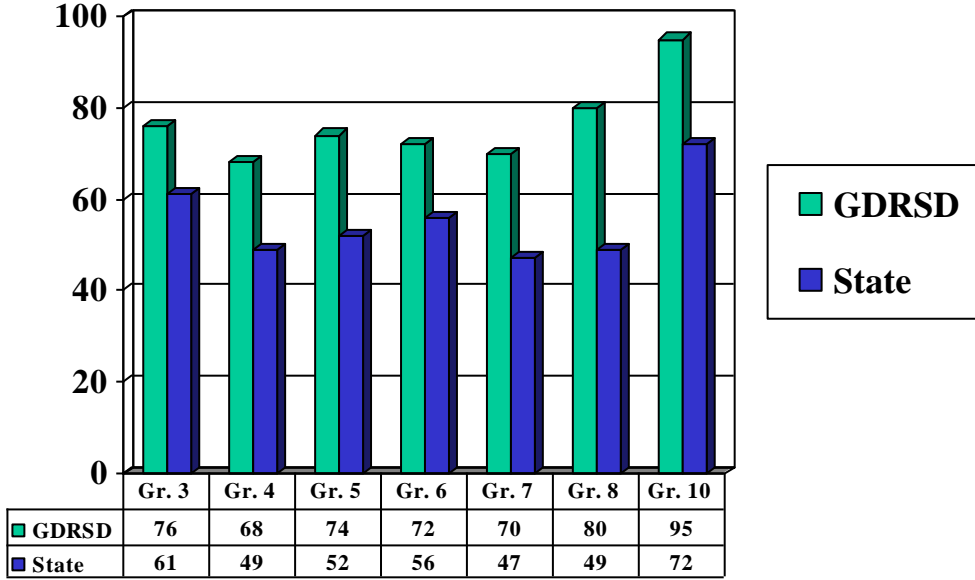
This year the special education subgroup, while it still has not met the same performance targets as the rest of the GDRSD students, has met the expected improvement targets and therefore made adequate yearly progress in both E/LA and math in grades 6-12. This subgroup, however, continues to lag behind in math in grades 3-5. The district is taking specific steps to monitor these students’ progress. These include providing professional development to teachers in implementing standards-based math programs and diagnostic math assessments; using a manipulative-based supplemental “Digi-blocks” program to help struggling math learners develop conceptual understanding; and; developing Individual Student Success Plans to track their performance and enumerate instructional strategies to address their weak areas.

**MCAS 2008 - Percent of Advanced/Proficient Students in ELA**

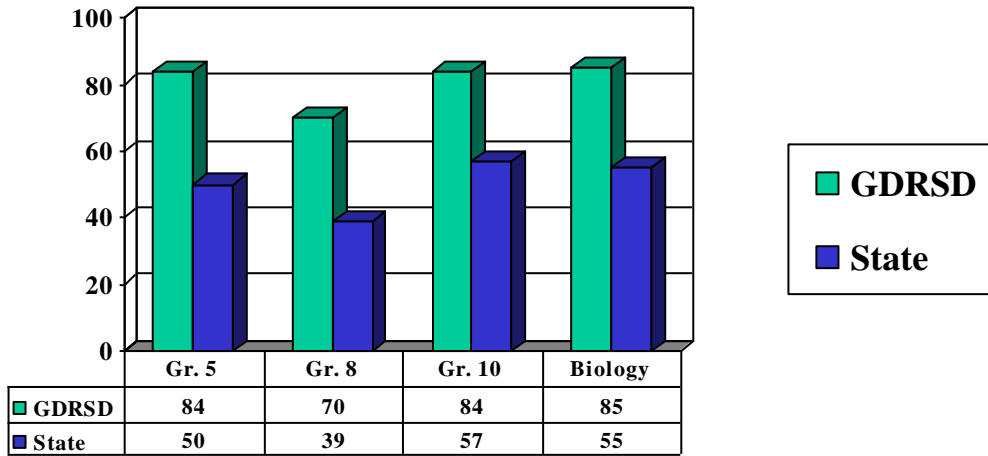


(Charts continue on page 14)

**MCAS 2008 - Percent of Advanced/Proficient Students in Math**



**MCAS 2008 - Percent of Advanced/Proficient Students in Science**



**School Committee**  
**Presentations/Discussions**

Please visit [www.gdrsd.org/School Committee/Meeting Information](http://www.gdrsd.org/School%20Committee/Meeting%20Information) for agendas, meeting minutes, and presentations/handouts.

Visit [www.gdrsd.org/District/Financial Information](http://www.gdrsd.org/District/Financial%20Information) for budget and related presentations.



**Betty Lavin**

The end of the last school year we saw the retirement of the Principal of Prescott School, Betty Lavin. Ms. Lavin had been with the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District for 27 years in a number of different positions. She is shown here accepting a special certificate presented to her by the School Committee Chairman, Paul Funch.

**Congratulations Betty, we hope you enjoy retirement!**

***Our Mission***

The Groton-Dunstable Regional School District, in cooperation with the parents and the community, is committed to providing the best possible education for each student. It is our responsibility to promote in each child a spirit of inquiry and to instill a self-sustaining desire for continuous growth and service to self, family and community.

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*Together,  
A Promise to Excel*

