



TOWN OF WESTON MASSACHUSETTS

FINANCE COMMITTEE

June 2017

Members of the Weston Community:

The Finance Committee published a column in *The Weston Town Crier* on February 9, 2017, concerning the high costs of the Weston Public Schools. This letter addresses the School Committee response that was sent electronically to Weston parents and many Weston residents through myGrapevine on April 13, 2017. While we certainly welcome the School Committee's efforts to provide further details and information related to our original letter, we need to correct some erroneous information and misstatements.

Our original letter was published in *The Weston Town Crier* and was put up on the town's website. It was never "circulated electronically to Weston residents." In fact the only Weston residents to whom we emailed our letter were members of the School Committee. While the FinCom originally voted to mail its letter to all Weston households, that did not happen due to a delay at Town Hall.

The School Committee has erroneously suggested that we decided not to mail our letter to all households because it was inaccurate. After a joint meeting with the School Committee members about their budget and our letter, we voted not to mail the letter, in the spirit of fostering future collaboration. Simply put, we believe our letter is accurate. Our full discussion can be viewed on the Weston Media Center link found on the town's website (FinCom meeting on March 9, 2017, at 2:53 into the meeting).

Despite continued declining enrollment, the School Committee explains that its budget increase of about 1.5% for next year is due primarily to increases in contractual obligations to our unionized employees, the cost of special education, and post-employment benefits. It is worth noting the number of students receiving special education has declined over the past three years, and the cost of any benefits received by current or retired employees is not included in the school budget. Further, unionized employees are not unique to Weston, yet we continue to have higher costs per student than peer towns.

Our original letter has two main sections. The first contained “Facts about Weston and our Schools,” which contains various statistics, while the second contains “Recommendations.” The main statistic in the “Facts” section that the School Committee objects to is the statement that “The School Committee reported at their January 9, 2017 meeting that we have approximately 450 FTE’s (full time equivalent employees) of which 250 are faculty and 200 are not faculty.” This is exactly what was reported by school administration at that meeting, and can be viewed online on the Weston Media Center link found on the town’s website at 3:11 into the meeting.

It is worth mentioning that two members of the School Committee were given a draft of our letter four days prior to our finalizing it, and were sent a copy of the final version before it appeared in the *Town Crier*. While they made some suggestions on the draft, including a couple of wording changes that we made to reduce confusion, neither took any issue with the statement about the number of non-faculty employees.

The School Committee notes that it would like to address the specific recommendations made in our “Recommendations” section. When discussing administration, it claims our letter “implies that only 55 percent of Weston Public School employees are teaching” and that “alleging that a non-faculty employee is part of administration is a misrepresentation.”

Our “Recommendations” contain no such assertions, nor did we mention the 200 non-faculty employees. Rather we simply note that administration costs, as defined in the school’s budget book (page 20), have outpaced overall school costs. Indeed, over the fiscal 2010 to fiscal 2015 period, administration costs have grown nearly 50 percent faster than overall school costs (6.1 percent versus 4.1 percent annually).

We also raised the issue of school space in our letter because we believe it should be explored in-depth before the town embarks on the costly renovation of the Case House, a historic building that was given to the town and does not belong to the schools. The School Committee has dismissed our suggestion by simply stating that “the appropriate place for administration is in the Case House.” We believe there should be a serious consideration of alternatives. How much space is available in the school buildings or other town buildings? Do all employees currently at Case House need to be in the same location?

Last, we want to highlight that our only comments about METCO are in the “Facts” section. We state that METCO students represent 8 percent of enrollment, which is much higher than most participating peer towns, and that the reimbursement that Weston receives from the state does not cover even the direct costs of busing, METCO administration, and summer METCO student support programs. The FinCom did not, and has not, made any “Recommendations” about the METCO program.

In conclusion, the Finance Committee would urge members of the School Committee to be clear about what is stated in the FinCom report before commenting publicly. There is a

difference between “Facts” and “Recommendations.” The School Committee did not object to the “Facts” provided to them in the FinCom draft, yet it is now using these “Facts” to misrepresent the FinCom’s position on our “Recommendations.” This does a disservice to both the town and the FinCom.

Finance Committee, Town of Weston

John McDonald, Chair

Gabrielle Clemens

Gerard Jansen

James Jarrett

Keith Johnson

Sandy Metraux

James Philipkosky

Lisa Reitano

Ellen Richstone