

## Statewide Legislative Listening Tour

Comments by

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Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Jim Hayes and as Superintendent of the Beverly Public Schools, I am here today to speak on their behalf. I would first like to thank Representative Haddad, Senator Antonioni, and other participating legislators for conducting this listening tour. It is certainly an extraordinary effort on your part and provides a much-appreciated opportunity for those of us who work in and support schools at the local level.

If I can get you to take away one message from my comments today, it is this – AYF, Adequate Yearly Funding, is necessary for us to make AYP, Adequate Yearly Progress. The goals expressed through the Education Reform and No Child Left Behind acts have set a clear agenda for the schools of Massachusetts. And in Beverly, we have demonstrated a commitment toward achieving those goals. But our ability is severely compromised because of cuts in funding at both the state and federal levels, cuts that have hurt students and their learning.

In Beverly, we have less funding today from Chapter 70 than we had in FY02. In FY02, Beverly received over \$7.6 million. Our Chapter 70 allocation was level-funded in FY03. In FY04 it was cut by 20% to just over \$6.1 million. Level funded in FY05, today it has increased by only 3.7% to just over \$6.3 million. We are still \$1.3 million short of where we were four years ago. And in the meantime, costs for health care, energy and utilities, and out-of-district special education placements have skyrocketed. The only bright light in state funding has been through “circuit breaker.” I hate to think where Beverly would be had “circuit breaker” funding not improved.

These drastic cuts in revenue have led to drastic measures to control our expenses. In the past two years, we have cut the full time equivalent of 63 full time positions. For the past several years, we have faced increasing fees for parents and students as the only way to maintain programs and services that should be an essential part of our educational experience. To help us balance our budgets in FY03 through FY05, the City and schools used the proceeds from the sale of public buildings to support our operational budgets.

For FY06, the School Committee was forced to close one of our two middle schools. We have actively pursued other sources of revenue, but the small success we have made cannot make up the difference. Over these same years, there has been the loss of class size reduction funding, and MCAS support funding has dropped drastically, where only those who fail at the High School have any hope of support.

These cuts in revenues have affected every facet of our operation and affect schools and kids every day. Of greatest concern, class sizes have increased beyond appropriate levels and struggling readers are not getting the time they need with specialists. Our elementary libraries are only open half-time. Our staff and professional development program, once a force in implementing change in our district, has virtually disappeared. We are losing ground in the integration of technology. Our at-risk population is growing. The demands for data management have increased steadily. And all the while, there are more and higher expectations for student achievement and school success.

And in Beverly, where our High School is facing the loss of accreditation because the facility presents health, safety, and educational concerns, we are painfully aware of the need for a state school building program that can effectively reimburse new construction projects.

As I speak with groups throughout the Beverly community, one question that is always asked is "How do you see next year's budget?" Very honestly, I tell them to watch closely what happens at the state level. We have no more buildings to sell, no more staff to cut, no more schools to close. We can only turn to you.

We need Adequate Yearly Funding and here are my eight recommendations:

1. Revise the Foundation Formula and improve state funding to schools and communities for education. The Foundation Formula is simply not a realistic picture of what is necessary to provide even an adequate education.
2. Fully fund "circuit breaker." Help us control the costs of out-of-district special education placements, and include out-of-district transportation in "circuit breaker."
3. Help us control the spiraling costs of health insurance. It is consuming our ability to provide an adequate education.
4. Fund the Massachusetts School Building Authority so that communities can deal with their pressing facility issues. Without such a program, Beverly's future ability to adequately fund education is even further jeopardized.

5. Expand access to preschool programs, full day kindergarten programs, and programs that support improvements in reading, science, and math. These programs are critical to student performance.
6. Increase funding for professional development. It is an essential component for achieving education reform.
7. Provide support toward the important goals of technology integration and data management.
8. Join with us toward a goal of eliminating user fees. They are a tax on families who are willing and able to participate. An adequate public education should be publicly funded.

In closing, I want to thank you all for listening, for your commitment to this statewide tour, and for your commitment to the young people of Massachusetts in the important work ahead.