

STATE OF THE SCHOOLS 2007

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Superintendent of Schools
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Good evening, ladies and gentleman and thank you all for coming tonight. I'd like to begin by extending my thanks to the City-Wide PTO for hosting this annual event and giving me the opportunity to publicly reflect on the state of our school system and comment about where the district needs to be heading. Beverly is clearly the beneficiary of the volunteer efforts of these and many other parents throughout the district. Thank you so much for all that you do.

As we begin 2007, the state of our school system can be characterized through three broad categories. I am pleased to report that the district continues to make good, steady progress towards its primary goals of improving student achievement and providing supportive environments for student growth. Our schools are headed in the right direction, and the results of our hard work show that progress.

Another positive aspect to report is the work that is being done to improve our facilities and technology infrastructure. We are fortunate to have a surplus at the present time that is being used to make significant improvements to our facilities, to upgrade a good portion of instructional technology, and, at long last, to create a network for the entire district. Most notably, we have begun the exciting work of designing our new Beverly High School.

The financial picture continues to be an area of worry, however. While surplus funds have made this year's budget easier to manage, we continue to face significant increases in health insurance, utilities, and special education. With limited financial resources, we will again be challenged to adequately fund all that we need.

Financial Picture

Let me talk more specifically about these three broad categories, starting with the financial picture first. We have been told to plan for a 10% increase for health insurance for next year, including the increased contribution of employees from 17.5% to 20% of the premiums. In this current year, the district budget was balanced by carrying forward \$500,000 from the previous year to fully fund health insurance in this year. In other words, the half million was not part of the FY07 approved budget, the figure was actually a half million less. In round numbers, the approved budget for FY07 has an approved amount of \$4.8 million while we are covering a full cost of \$5.3 million. Now put 10% on top of that and we see a jump in health insurance that goes from \$4.85 million in FY07 to \$5.88 million for next year – roughly, a \$1 million increase in health insurance alone!

Let's consider utilities. Electricity is budgeted with a 25% increase over FY07 budgeted. In round dollars, our electricity costs rise from \$550,000 to \$690,000, an increase of nearly \$140,000. Gas and heating oil are projecting at a 10% increase. The total for utilities is projected to increase roughly \$230,000, an overall increase of 14.23%.

Special education cost increases are greatly driven by transportation costs and tuitions for out-of-district placements. Advocates at the state level are pressing the need to include special education transportation in the Circuit Breaker reimbursement program, but this is not a certainty. Out-of-district special education placements are projected to increase by \$570,000, from roughly \$4.2 million to \$4.77 million.

When you combine just these three issues alone, the challenge we are facing becomes quite stark. If we were to freeze all salaries and contractual obligations, level fund all programs and operating budgets, and add only the increases for health insurance, utilities, and tuition out, our projected budget would increase by over \$1.8 million, an increase of 4.26%. And a freeze of salaries and other obligations is not going to happen.

Management has put in place protocols and procedures to be sure that we get the best value for our dollar in the purchases we make. We continue to look for ways to spend our money wisely and to bring new revenue to the district. The School Committee receives various budget reports that keep them well informed, and the administration carefully scrutinizes expenditures. It is imperative that we manage our money well, and we are working hard to do just that. Likewise, the School Committee has spent much of the fall considering changes to our system that might bring a reduction in cost while still providing a quality education. None of the options that we have looked at to date have proven to promise significant financial gains.

I believe that the City of Beverly has responded well to its responsibility in supporting our public schools. This is reflected not only in the budgetary revenues allocated to the school department but also through a very strong partnership that has been forged in recent years. Working together, we are addressing the needs of the school system and the City through the best use of local and state revenue, personnel, and related services.

As I stated in last year's State of the Schools address, much of our problem stems from inadequate funding at the state level. We will continue to monitor closely what happens with the state budget in the months ahead and advocate for more support for Beverly.

The district relies heavily on state and federal grants to fund essential positions and programs in our schools. We have yet to learn the funding level we might expect for FY08. The trend in recent years has been to either level fund or decrease amounts for the various grants. Again, we have used these grants to fund professional development and to a great extent salaries of positions that provide essential services to our district. Any reduction in these funds adds to our financial challenge.

The financial picture for next year is clear – we will be challenged again to set a budget for next year that will meet all our wants and needs.

Student Achievement

I want to talk next about the good, steady progress we are experiencing in our schools. In the area of student achievement, we look to a number of measures to determine progress. These include results on MCAS, AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress), Competency Determination (MCAS graduation requirement), national honors, and the rate at which our graduates continue their education. We are continuing to utilize interim assessments to adjust instructional programming throughout the year.

When it comes to MCAS, our schools are in very good shape when we consider the performance of all of our students. Our achievement has regularly placed us at or above the state average, and we continue to show the steady progress that has been our goal. I am most impressed with the progress shown at the High School. Of all the tenth graders tested last spring, 84% scored either advanced or proficient in English Language Arts, and 86% scored at those levels in Mathematics. For English Language Arts, that performance is 15% above the state average, and for Math it's a full 19% higher than the state average. Beverly High School is one of a handful of high schools in the state to have demonstrated improvement on the MCAS for five (5) years in a row. Those are outstanding results!

Other district highlights include:

- The percentage of advanced/proficient students in Grade 3 Reading exceeds the percentage of advanced/proficient students at the state level by 7%. This is an increase of 2% from 2005.
- Two-thirds (67%) of Grade 6 students received either advanced or proficient ratings in English Language Arts (240 or higher). This is 3% higher than the state average.
- Four out of five students (80%) in grades 8 and 10 received advanced or proficient scores in English Language Arts. This is 6% higher at Grade 8 and 11% higher at Grade 10 than the state average.
- Grades 7 and 10 exceeded the state average for the number of points attained in the writing composition.
- Grades 3, 6, and 10 exceeded the state average for the number of points attained in Open Response questions.

- 62% of the students in Grade 3 scored in the advanced and proficient range in mathematics. They exceeded the state average by 10%.
- The percentage of sophomores (class of 2008) who achieved the competency determination (passed both tests ELA and Math) exceeded the state average by 2%.

We need to continue to give a special focus to helping students with disabilities and low-income students achieve at higher levels. Through the leadership of school and district administrators, our schools are actively analyzing achievement data for such groups and developing strategies to further improve student achievement. We are directing special attention toward those two subgroups. School Improvement Plans reflect these efforts.

Earlier this year, 94 Beverly High School seniors, 10 more than last year, were notified that they were among the students statewide to receive the state's John and Abigail Adams Scholarship. This scholarship is available to students whose MCAS performance puts them at the top 25 percent of their district. To be eligible, students must either score Advanced on one exam and Proficient on the other, or Advanced on both the English and the Math exams. Recipients of the Adams Scholarship are granted four years of free tuition at any Massachusetts state college or university. Again – 94 seniors! We couldn't be more pleased for these students and their families and hope that their example will spur other students to excel on the MCAS.

In the National Merit Scholarship competition, three Beverly High School seniors were named Commended Scholars. In the Advanced Placement programs, ten members of last year's graduating class received AP Scholar Awards, another six received AP Scholar with Honors Awards, and another six received AP Scholar with Distinction Awards. This represents nine more award winners than there were in the Class of 2005.

Verbal and Math SAT scores soared to the highest levels they have been in years, while at the same time, state, national, and many local high school averages declined. Nearly 90% of our graduating seniors moved on to higher education in 2006, pursuing goals for which they were well prepared. Their success in gaining entrance to the colleges of their choice, some of them at the most competitive colleges in the country, is good evidence of the comprehensive program and quality instruction we provide for our students.

Programs

The Beverly Public Schools have established excellent programs to meet the needs of over 4,600 young people on a daily basis, programs that serve students well at all levels. There are several programs that I would like to highlight this evening.

- The *Everyday Math* program now reaches students in grades K-5. This program continues to be well received, and its success truly bodes well for improvement in math achievement in the district.
- Two literacy programs, *Wilson Foundations* and *Rigby Literacy*, are now reaching students in grades K-3 and this is also showing evidence of improvements in literacy achievement. As with *Everyday Math*, we are planning to add an additional grade for these programs in each successive year.
- We continue to implement the *Second Step- Violence Prevention Program* in grades 1-8. *Second Step* teaches social and emotional skills for violence prevention and will enable students to better deal with conflicts and decision-making. We are seeing a drop in our discipline referrals as a result of implementing this program.
- I am very pleased in our progress in developing our schools as "Professional Learning Communities". A Professional Learning Community is one in which the teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share data about learning and then act on what they learn. The goal of their actions is to improve instruction so that students benefit. The Professional Learning Community is seen as a powerful staff development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement. Teachers and administrators are doing terrific work in analyzing data from various assessments in math and English Language Arts and devising strategies to improve student performance in areas of need. This process will continue to be

developed and will become even more critical in the years ahead as the bar for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress continues to be raised.

- The district continues to monitor student progress towards meeting standards using interim assessments in math and reading. We have added the dimension of on-line assessment through Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) in grades 4 and 6. This is a test that tells us where students fall on the continuum of instruction and pinpoints the instructional level for students. Teachers receive detailed reports within 24 hours of testing and goal scores for individual students for the year. Students are tested three times a year to measure progress toward their goals in Reading and Math. This nationally normed assessment demonstrates that our students in grade 4 and 6 outscore their counterparts on questions of equal difficulty across the country.
- I am pleased to report that we were able this year to restore the staff cuts made several years ago in our elementary reading program. Struggling readers need this additional support, and I am so pleased that we are able to service their needs.
- At the middle school, a second health teacher was added this year, allowing us to provide health education for all middle school students and allowing us to provide a full compliment of expressive arts opportunities to all students. Also, a recent addition of a Student Assistance Counselor at Briscoe through a partnership with Endicott College will be a big help to students who are struggling the most.

These are all examples of how the district is moving forward. There are areas where we still hope to improve. Although class size has not been a major issue for most classrooms, we are still operating in some classrooms at levels higher than we really should be. Restoring adequate numbers of adjustment counselors in our elementary schools is important. Lastly, our school libraries need to be staffed for effective full-time operation. While we see these as important goals, they will probably not happen in the year ahead.

Technology

Thanks to district, city, grant, and PTO funding, the district's technology status has made significant strides this year.

At Briscoe,

- Lexia software was purchased to help older students who have reading difficulties. Our SPED teachers were trained and provided the hardware they need to integrate this research-based software program with instruction for students who need remediation.
- Middle School grade 6 math teachers have received intensive training in the use of web-based virtual manipulatives to teach math using techniques never before possible with traditional methods. We have set these math classrooms up to model what we consider to be true technology-enabled classrooms. They have access to wireless laptop carts equipped with 30 laptops as well as ceiling mounted projectors with Smartboard, i.e., interactive whiteboard, technology. We see these classrooms as "laboratories" for the future of technology in our district.
- This spring we will be able to upgrade two instructional labs at Briscoe and almost all teacher workstations in the building with new computers. Most of our computers are 5 -6 years old and in desperate need to be replaced. This project will give all teachers much better access to technology and help them tremendously in all aspects of their jobs.

At the elementary level,

- We were able to build new labs at three of our elementary schools this year. We replaced the aging computers with new workstations with flat panel monitors and installed ceiling mounted projectors. As a result Ayers, McKeown and Hannah have up-to-date computer labs.

At Beverly High School,

- We are in the process of setting up classrooms that will model what we envision will be the technology-enabled classrooms in our new high school building. This includes ceiling mounted projectors, Smartboard technology, and the use of wireless laptops in the classroom. We are

setting up different configurations in math, science, social studies and marketing classrooms in the building. As with the middle school, we envision that these classrooms will serve as laboratories for professional development needed to prepare teachers for the new building. In addition to these model classrooms, LCD projectors have been ceiling mounted in as many classrooms as possible throughout the building.

- We have also made great strides in replacing old computers at the high school. The PTSO bought new computers for the entire guidance department, the district replaced many old administrative computers, and we are in the process of replacing many outdated teacher and lab workstations.

We have always believed that our investment in hardware for teachers and students will only pay off if we provide the necessary professional development for teachers. In addition to training in virtual manipulatives and Lexia, we offered graduate level courses last summer in technology and a series of technology-related classes for Middle and High school teachers were scheduled during our professional development days. We plan to continue to offer this technology professional development this coming summer and into next year.

Facilities

Maintaining our facilities has remained a priority this year. The decision to hire a “tradesman” who is a licensed plumber has proven to be most beneficial. Rather than using outside vendors to meet our plumbing repair needs, this member of our Buildings & Grounds Department has been a key figure in upgrading our heating systems in several schools. His expertise has helped us in many other ways to address facility issues immediately and to conduct the preventive maintenance that is so important.

When surplus funds became available earlier this year, \$120,000 was directed to capital improvement projects, including such things as increasing parking at Ayers and performing roof maintenance at Ayers and McKeown. The biggest portion of these funds will be directed to Briscoe for such projects as repairing 100 additional windows, replacing the public address console, replacing the stage rigging, painting a considerable part of the interior, and conducting a masonry study for improvements to the exterior.

A year ago I reported that the Memorial Building was serving both the School Department and some City offices very well and that we were actively speaking with a third party about rental of unused space. Since that time both the police and fire departments were given a room for training activities. Most significantly, the remainder of the building has been rented to the Northshore Education Consortium. We house the first Recovery High School in Massachusetts on the lower floor and a program for elementary aged students on the upper floor. Revenue from this rental has far exceeded expectations.

The High School construction project will be a high priority as we move into the second half of this year. The High School staff and administration along with district administrators gave a great deal of time and thought earlier this year to develop an Educational Specifications document, which encompasses our collective thinking about the vision and program for the new school and how a new facility can support those views. In the second half, many meetings with the architectural firm will help bring shape to a design for our new high school. It is a very exciting time for the City and the school department.

I have prepared some slides to help you see better what is ahead of us.

First Slide

The first slide shows an aerial view of the High School and surrounding property. At the top of the slide is Sohler Road and at the bottom are Russell and Kittredge streets. You can see the footprint of the building, the athletic field and parking areas, and the Solar array which borders the property.

Second Slide

In 2002, it was decided that a combination of construction of new classroom space, an “academic wing”, and renovation of the common spaces (field house, cafeteria/kitchen, and auditorium/music areas), would be the best approach for building on the current site. What you see in this slide became known as “Option # 4”, because at the time several options were being considered. Option # 4 generally described a two-story building constructed in the upper parking lot flowing directly to a three-story building

constructed in the lower parking lot. Our Educational Specifications document has been written with this option in mind. The building is obviously close to Sohier Road, which has caused me concern from the beginning when you think about the location of the main entrance and traffic flow patterns on the site.

Third Slide

Once that first phase is completed, the second phase will take place. It involves demolition of the existing academic wings, to provide parking, open space, and other site needs. Renovation of the fields would take place at this time.

When I look at this slide, I still see the traffic flow concern. What I also see is that the traffic pattern inside the school is not the best. The two-story building in the upper parking lot leaves students and staff quite isolated from the common areas of this complex. Not only is this a travel time issue, it becomes a security issue. In any case, this was the option presented to the architects and one that we will work with.

Fourth Slide

This last slide shows an alternative design approach that I have become quite interested in. When the Designer Selection Committee interviewed, each firm was asked to consider an alternative to Option # 4 that might better serve our students and community. The designer firm that was selected suggested construction of a four-story academic wing in the lower parking lot. They emphasized that by building up, not out, we could incorporate a more efficient and less costly design, which would leave us money to purchase better quality within the building. They also believed that the school would be visually more pleasing since the first view of the school is often from the top of Sohier Road.

This was an approach we had never discussed, but the more I thought about it, the more I liked it. You can see how it changes the traffic flow pattern for vehicles. Just as Briscoe is a four-story school with the main entrance on the second floor, this new building could be the same. It also eliminates the traffic flow issues within the building for students and staff. I along with Carla Scuzzarella and Judy Miller toured the new Chicopee High School, which is almost identical to what this design would be and which was designed by the same firm that is doing our school. We came away impressed with the opportunities that such a design presented.

Needless to say, there is much work ahead to create a design that suits our needs and which is affordable. It is important, exciting work.

Conclusion

I cannot end my commentary on the state of the schools without noting the dedication and professionalism of those who work for the Beverly Public Schools. In all facets of our organization, I see employees working above and beyond to make this the best school system it can possibly be. They have the best interests of students at heart, and, on a daily basis, rise to that challenge. I am extremely proud and appreciative for all that they do, and I think it is important that you know that that kind of effort is being made.

Thank you.