

**Text taken from Prescott e-mail sent to Finance Committee and Selectman 2/27/2014:**

Thank you for your time and effort serving the town of Dunstable; it is greatly appreciated. We are looking for leadership and foresight from the Dunstable Finance Committee and town Selectman to provide a pathway for *level services* to the regular education students, even in light of the current financial challenges.

Though we are constrained with Prop 2 ½, the voters have not been provided a context for why there is such a need for increased funding beyond the 2 ½% bound. This leaves the false impression that the school system is not able "live within its means" while maintaining level services.

Over the last ten years, funding for the GDRSD has increased about 2 ½% per year on average, or a 28% total increase in 10 years. The voters have come to expect this as a reasonable budget increase, with a loss of a teacher or admin to make it work.

Essential to this discussion is that special education programs have increased from 13% of the budget in 2004, to 21.7% of the current total budget (<http://www.doe.mass.edu>). Put into perspective, if the budget in 2004 was ~\$27.5MM, then special education had ~\$3.6MM (13%), leaving ~\$24MM as the balance. In 2014 if the budget were \$35.2MM, then special education had ~\$7.6MM (21.7%), leaving ~\$27.6MM as the balance. For comparison this results in a 115% increase for special education over 10 years (about 8% annually) vs. a 15% increase over the same time for regular education (1.4% annually). This is a 5 ½ fold difference in funding increases.

We recognize there are constraints on what is to be spent on special education and we are not advocating taking away services that are required or essential for special education. However, the town must be made aware of how imbalanced the funding increases are, purely for the context of being able to vote in favor of a Prop 2 ½ override. We believe that the voters who passed Prop 2 1/2 did not envision a time when special education would be funded by sacrifices in regular education, and the people of Groton and Dunstable need to be aware that the funding increases for regular education have been much smaller than was intended by Prop 2 ½. In my opinion, the district's budgeting error is a concern but not the main contributor to the budget issue.

We would like the Selectman and Finance Committee to provide leadership in educating the voters and if there is an override. We also would like the committee to remind the residents as to where spending increases are out of our control, and how that affects *level services* to students. If the budget continues on its path, the schools won't have an emergency fund, class size will increase - Band-Aid solutions must end. If the override were to pass, the annual tax rate may increase about \$400 per house hold, that is \$4K over 10 years, vs. home values. If our town maintains excellent schools, the homeowner can count on about a 10% bump in their home's value. Based on an average home of \$400,000, that bump would exceed the taxes spent on a passed override.

The future generation of regular education children must have the skills and competitive advantages, so that they can be grow to be teachers, administrators, engineers, artists, or entrepreneurs with salaries that will allow strong support of their towns.

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