

The CAG considered some possible choices to close the fiscal gap. However, there are pros and cons to each choice:

1. Since teacher and staff compensation is the largest component of the budget, reducing the number of teachers and staff and reducing salary increases and/or benefits will reduce the overall compensation costs.

However, teachers and staff are the lifeblood of a school system. Teachers and staff provide students the attention and guidance they need to develop into “lifelong learners, thinkers and productive contributors to our global society.”

2. While, generally speaking, smaller class sizes are better than larger ones, there are tradeoffs that the School Committee and the administration must consider in balancing class size with other considerations.

3. Similarly, smaller teacher course workloads are better than bigger ones. Nonetheless, many excellent school systems have their high school teachers teach more sections than those in Newton.

4. Decreasing teacher supervision is unappealing, but reducing the number of supervisors is nevertheless an option.

5. Teacher development is critical and there is much evidence that erosion of supervision and professional development has already occurred. Moreover, if class sizes and teacher loads increase (and the rate of growth in salaries and benefits moderate), it becomes even more critical to invest in supervision and development.

The bottom line is that the Newton Public Schools face difficult choices *right now*.

Every choice will be painful because most of the choices directly affect the quality of education.

We need to re-engage in a discussion about the future of the Newton Public Schools and discuss the following questions:

- What are the choices we need to make?
- How can we most effectively and efficiently meet the needs of all our students, including special education and METCO students?
- How do we maintain the high quality of our teachers?
- How can we control expenses, including benefits and utilities?

Most importantly, what are our priorities? What as a community are we willing to pay for and what are we willing to sacrifice?

Dates of Future Meetings:

- Municipal Cost Structure Report - Monday, April 6 at the Longyear Museum, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
- Capital Structure Report - Monday, May 4 at the Newton Free Library, 330 Homer St, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
- Performance Management Report / Renewing Newton - Wed., June 3 at the Newton Free Library, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF NEWTON/ CITIZEN ADVISORY GROUP FORUMS: CRITICAL CHOICES FOR NEWTON 2009 AND BEYOND

Five Forums to educate the city, and create opportunities for residents to discuss and consider the findings and recommendations of the CAG reports.

School Cost Structure Report

At Longyear Museum 7-9 pm
Tuesday, March 24

Please see the full School Cost report at:
[http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/
CitizenAdvisoryGroup/2009/01-20-
09CAGDraftSchoolCostStructure.pdf](http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/CitizenAdvisoryGroup/2009/01-20-09CAGDraftSchoolCostStructure.pdf)



WHAT IS THE CITIZEN ADVISORY GROUP (CAG)?

Mayor David Cohen, Board of Alderman President Lisle Baker, and School Committee Chair Dori Zaleznik formed a Citizen Advisory Group “to assist in planning for additional tactics and strategies to improve the City’s operational efficiency and effectiveness in future fiscal years including the functions of the Executive, School Committee, and Aldermanic branches of Newton’s government.”

WHAT KIND OF CITY DO WE WANT NEWTON TO BE? Newton is faced with some critical choices to ensure its financial health.

The School Committee and the Newton Public Schools are working proactively to develop a long-term strategic plan and re-think the current educational model, including using technology and online learning to improve education. In the absence of additional revenues, however, the Newton Public Schools cannot maintain its current level of programs and services and continuously improve, one of the essential elements of educational excellence.

There is a long-standing gap between the funding of the Newton Public Schools and what it costs to run the system under the current educational model.

Newton Public Schools costs increase by 5.9% annually to sustain programs, services, compensation, utilities, etc. Since 2003, the Newton Public Schools budget has grown at 4.3% annually

This gap between expenses and funding amounts to \$2.5 million next year, growing to almost \$20 million by FY15, with a cumulative deficit in the next six years of more than \$60 million.

Key costs increasing at a faster rate than the overall budget:

- Benefits
- Special education
- Utilities

These factors are contributing to erosion in quality as financial resources become more constrained:

- Diminished administrative and leadership support
- Reduced capacity to supervise teachers
- Shrinking professional development opportunities
- Insufficient technology
- Inadequate building maintenance
- Increases in class size

There are a few near-term opportunities to save money, perhaps as much as \$1 to \$2 million, in two areas:

- Transportation — by increasing user fees and reducing service
- Food Services — through outsourcing both management and labor

Newton must examine Special Education and METCO for both educational effectiveness and financial sustainability:

- Need to develop internal standards, perhaps using outside consultants for this examination
- Periodic assessment of the programs

Better communication with the community about how these programs support our core values and how effective they are for the beneficiaries.

In addition there is a need for enhanced long-term planning, budgeting, and scenario planning under the direction of a Chief Financial Officer.

It is necessary for the Newton Public Schools to distinguish between the *essential* and the *desirable* qualities of an excellent school system.

In the absence of new revenues, Newton Public Schools will need to reevaluate its practices and choices in order to sustain excellence in education, including:

- Class size
 - Teaching loads
 - Compensation
- Teacher development

Newton faces many challenges. The need for significantly increased investment in capital assets and retirement benefits, which are underfunded by as much as \$50 million annually, will put pressure on Newton’s budget.

In light of these factors, the Newton Public Schools may not receive in the future the percent increases in its budget that it has received in the past—with or without property tax increases through overrides.

Thus, it is critical for both Newton and the Newton Public Schools to lay out its priorities and expenditures through a process that enables the community to make choices, both short-term and long-term, in a thoughtful, deliberative way.

These will be difficult choices for the School Committee and the administration of the Newton Public Schools. None of the choices are appealing because of their immediate impact on the quality of education.

The School Committee has an almost infinite variety of ways to control costs. As a result, they will need a comprehensive, long-term vision for the Newton Public Schools and clarity about what it considers *essential* versus *desirable* as it makes its choices.

The Newton Public Schools administration and the School Committee must lead the community in this discussion. Their experience and expertise will help frame our long-term choices and priorities, present an overarching vision, and clarify our values.