

# Muraco Elementary School Parents Association

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January 4, 2010

Dear Superintendent McAlduff and School Committee Members:

We are writing to follow up on our January 24 and March 27, 2009 letters regarding the ongoing space shortages we face due to growing enrollment at Muraco.

As you know, Muraco enrollment has consistently exceeded projections. Last year, when the School Department submitted its budget in December 2008, it projected Muraco's enrollment at 456 students for FY10. In December 2009, however, the School Department reported 472 students at Muraco (up nearly 50 students from the 425 reported by the School Department in December 2008), with additional students registered since that time. **At 472 students, Muraco is already currently 24% over capacity, with only 100 sq. ft. per student.**

As we pointed out last year, we understand that increased enrollment is a problem that is not unique to Muraco. However, the situation at Muraco continues to be much more severe. **Since FY06, Winchester Elementary School enrollment has increased by 189 students (+10% or 2.4% CAGR). 141 of these 189 students attend Muraco (+43% or 9.3% CAGR).**

Using the projected enrollment numbers presented at the 12/2/09 School Committee Meeting, we have created the following table:

<u>School</u>	<u>Projected 2010-11 Enrollment</u>	<u>EFPBC MP Capacity</u>	<u>2009-10 Enrollment vs. Capacity</u>	<u>Usable Square Footage</u>	<u>SQFT/ Student</u>
Ambrose	501	460	9%	66,000	131
Lincoln	475	400	19%	72,000	152
Lynch	360	360	0%	67,000	186
Muraco	510	380	34%	47,000	92

VO	287	320	-10%	36,000	125
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Notes: Includes portables enrollment, square footage; Lynch excludes Pre-school & Admin.

As the table above shows, while three of the five elementary schools will be over capacity next year, Muraco will continue to be over capacity by a significant margin. Using an average growth rate, Muraco is projected to be at 510 students in FY11 -- 38 more students than this year and **85 more students than in FY09. At 510 students, Muraco would be 34% over capacity, with only 92 sq. ft. per student.**

Using a school-specific survival rate rather than an average growth rate yields an even higher projection for Muraco for FY11. **Using a school-specific survival rate, next year Muraco is projected to be at 528 students, rather than 510.**

We greatly appreciate the efforts that the School Department and the School Committee expended last year, reconfiguring the existing interior space into two additional classrooms. Currently, one is being used as a fourth Grade 4 classroom and our three Reading Specialists are using the other. Next year, however, both new rooms will be needed as classrooms and the Reading Specialists will need to be relocated.

Accordingly, while the reconfiguration provided much needed classroom space, the following issues remain:

1. There is no capacity left in the building to handle the situation where more than one grade needs an additional classroom. At the moment, all grades except Grade 5 have four classrooms (Grade 5 has three). Next year, Grade 5 will need a fourth classroom and Grades 1 & 2 might each need a fifth classroom, given the recent School Department enrollment projections for those grades. Therefore, we could easily find ourselves needing 3 new classroom spaces in September 2010, but with only one classroom space available.
2. Even if enrollment doesn't continue to grow, at our current enrollment of 472 students, the building is severely overcrowded; well over the capacity identified in the EFPBC Master Plan, with inadequate square footage per student and insufficient space for staff (in particular, the three Reading Specialists).

3. Because of the overcrowding, Muraco students do not have access to the same educational services provided to other Winchester students at the elementary level.
4. Muraco students do not have a dedicated cafeteria, auditorium or computer lab (although we are pleased that the technology on a cart seems to be working well).
5. Apart from the gymnasium and the Library, there is no other common area in the building for students and staff.
6. In addition, because classrooms have been subdivided to create additional classroom space, some of the rooms are small, with decreased student capacity.

Studies have shown that overcrowding translates into a diminishment of the quality of educational services that can be provided because students do not have the space they need in which to learn effectively and staff is unduly burdened. See, e.g., <http://www.whitehutchinson.com/children/articles/35footmyth.shtml>. In addition, overcrowding in a school building means that the administration and staff do not have the physical space needed to design and implement a “21<sup>st</sup> Century” curriculum.

We understand that the current plan is to redistrict when the new Vinson Owen is built and we think that such a redistricting is both inevitable and necessary. However, we do not believe that we can afford to maintain the status quo at Muraco for at least two more full school years while we wait for a new Vinson Owen, given the projected increased enrollment over the next few years. It is one thing to increase class sizes beyond established guidelines in a building where there is capacity; and quite another to increase class sizes where the building is already severely overcrowded and some classrooms might not be physically large enough to accommodate larger class sizes. Moreover, questions of equity come into play when class size guidelines are suspended for one school only.

As a first step, therefore, we would like the School Department to use a school-specific method for projecting enrollment. Since Muraco is growing at a much higher rate than the district as a whole, using an average elementary school survival rate consistently underestimates future enrollment at Muraco. We are pleased that the Superintendent has formed an Enrollment Committee and hope that this committee will focus on each school individually, to ensure that enrollment projections more closely track actual enrollment.

In addition, we would like to work with the School Department, the School Committee and the Superintendent's Enrollment Committee to formulate a plan for FY11 and FY12 to deal with the rising enrollment at Muraco. In the event that 528 students do indeed show up at Muraco in September (or some number higher than the projected 510, resulting in an immediate need for additional classroom space), there must be a plan in place to accommodate these students. The same is true for the following year, if enrollment trends continue. Clearly, the one available classroom space that we have (where the Reading Specialists are currently) is insufficient to accommodate this kind of growth.

We know that you share our goal of making sure that Muraco students receive the best education possible and we look forward to an ongoing dialogue with you concerning these issues. If possible, we would like to meet with you within the next two weeks to discuss options and to prepare an action plan that takes into account varying enrollment scenarios, so that we can better prepare for the next few years.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Laura Colella and Maura Sullivan

*Co-Chairs, Muraco Elementary School Parents Association*

cc: Laurie Kirby, Muraco Principal  
Dr. Marc Kerble, Assistant Superintendent