

Muraco Elementary School Parents Association

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January 24, 2009

Dear School Committee Members:

On behalf of the parents and staff at Muraco, we are writing to follow up on our December 2, 2008 letter requesting that the School Committee act to address the space shortages we face due to growing enrollment.

The School Department has projected 456 students will attend the Muraco School in 2009-10 representing a 50% growth in enrollment over the past 5 years and 70% over the last 7 years. The EFPBC Master Plan states the building capacity is 340 students (it is 315 per the Statement of Interest submitted to the MSBA). Even including the additional 40 students accommodated by the portables, Muraco is projected to be 20% over capacity next year. We will have 46 more students than predicted in the EFPBC Master Plan (456 vs. 410) with one less portable than was recommended (2 vs. 3).

The EFPBC lists the building square footage at 54,800 sq.ft., but this includes approximately 10,000 sq.ft. of unusable space in the basement. Including roughly 2,100 sq.ft. of space in the new portables, the usable square footage is approximately 47,000 square feet. Using next year's projected enrollment numbers results in 103 sq.ft. per student, significantly below the 163 sq.ft. per student guideline established by the MSBA.

We understand that enrollment is an issue at other Elementary Schools, and our intention is not to diminish the concerns of our colleagues. However, as the following table shows, the situation is much more dire at Muraco.

<u>School</u>	<u>Projected 2009-10 Enrollment</u>	<u>EFPBC MP Capacity</u>	<u>2009-10 Enrollment vs. Capacity</u>	<u>Usable Square Footage</u>	<u>SQFT/ Student</u>
Ambrose	477	460	4%	66,000	138
Lincoln	450	400	13%	72,000	160
Lynch	372	360	3%	67,000	180
Muraco	456	380	20%	47,000	103
VO	282	320	-12%	36,000	127

Elementary Sum	2,037	1,920	6%	287,000	141
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Notes: Includes portables enrollment, capacity, square footage.

Lynch excludes Pre-school enrollment, capacity & space, Admin space & hall estimate.

While all of the elementary schools with the exception of VO are over capacity, Muraco is over capacity by a significant margin. The depth of the problem is further underscored when considering the sq.ft. per student figures, where Muraco ranks as the lowest by far. This translates into a diminishment of the quality of educational services that can be provided to students and a serious burden on staff. Muraco students do not have a cafeteria or auditorium. They do not have a computer lab (we do consider the recent suggestion of making Muraco wireless, with technology on a cart to be a good solution).

A walk-through of the building will show that every inch of available space is already being used. Walls have been added to existing classrooms to create more classrooms (17 converted to 20). ELL meets behind a partition in the reference section of the library and Speech is in a small pod. One of the Reading Specialists meets with her students in the foyer/hallway connecting to the new portables (not the quiet environment one would like for children who are experiencing difficulty with reading).

We are aware that the School Administration and School Committee have several options to consider, and urge you to evaluate these alternatives and any others you identify across a variety of metrics, including the quality of the educational experience it would provide, the impact on students and staff, capital expense, and effect on the operating budget.

Options we have heard or considered include:

- 1) Reconfiguring the office and special education area in the center of the building to gain one (only) classroom;
- 2) Using the Art and/or Music classrooms and providing Art and/or Music on a cart;
- 3) Modifying the basement area to make it habitable;
- 4) Adding portables; and
- 5) Moving the Central Office or Pre-School from Lynch and redistricting a segment of the Muraco population to Lynch.

With respect to Option # 2, we believe that eliminating the Art or Music rooms would be unacceptably detrimental to the children. We experienced two months without a Music room this fall because of the delayed availability of the portables. The Music teacher moved throughout the building to sing, dance and play instruments with the

children. It was particularly distracting since Muraco was built with an open classroom design, and still has several classrooms that are separated by accordion walls or no walls at all. Furthermore, the Music room is simply too small to function as a classroom on other than a very short-term basis. With respect to Art, there is no space in the (carpeted) classrooms for the type of messy projects that make Art so enjoyable in an elementary school and it would be a hardship on the Art teacher to cart around supplies for projects.

In addition to the disruption and burden concomitant with taking away the Music and/or Art rooms, there is the removal of yet another common area of the school. Muraco students are then left with only the library (used by enrichment, chorus, specialists and various meetings) and the gymnasium (also used for lunch, school assembly and musical/art performances). There is a benefit to allowing elementary school students to change locations during the day, allowing for a much needed release of energy and a change of scenery.

Without addressing the merits of the other options listed above, we note that all of the options require immediate attention and action if any of them is to become the plan for September 2009. We have heard concerns related to the financing of a Muraco project during this economic crisis, but would like to point out that there are funds available for urgent needs. The Schools are forecasting a \$320K surplus at this time, and while some of this money should be returned to the town, we believe a portion could be used to meet the space requirements at Muraco. Alternatively, FY10 Capital Stabilization Funding is to be approved at Spring Town Meeting and a case could be made to the Capital Planning Committee to add an unforeseen project.

We look forward to the opportunity to work with you on a resolution to this problem. As a first step, we ask that you come to Muraco, next week if possible, to talk with the parents and staff about potential solutions and to see the space for yourselves. Additionally, we request that you add Muraco overcrowding to the February 3rd School Committee Meeting agenda. Contact or correspondence may be sent to Muraco Elementary School Parents Association Co- Chairs Sue Kim or Christa Russo. On behalf of the parents, faculty, staff and particularly the children, we thank you for sharing our concerns.

Sincerely,

Muraco Elementary School Parents Association