

To: Cambridge City Council
From: Emily Dexter, 9 Fenno St.
Date: June 1, 2015
Re: School Department component of FY16 City Budget

Dear Mr. Mayor and other members of the City Council:

As a Cambridge resident and taxpayer, I am grateful that our city is well-managed, and that we have excellent programs, services, and well-maintained public spaces. But I would like to see more of my tax dollars going into our public school classrooms than I see in this budget and in and past budgets. For that reason, I ask you to work with the city manager, school committee, and superintendent to increase FY16 spending on teachers, paraprofessionals, and other staff who work directly with students.

I know that budgeting is a difficult balancing act. I'll just mention some distressing facts, though, about the CPS budget, particularly in terms of classroom staffing:

- In terms of our total per pupil spending, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education shows that Cambridge is ranked second only to Provincetown. On Professional Development, our per pupil spending is second only to Boston. On Classroom & Specialist teachers, however, we are ranked 29th.
http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/ppx.aspx.
- In terms of General Education teachers, our teacher:student ratios are almost exactly the same as in Framingham, Waltham, and Salem, which spend far less per pupil than we do.
- In the early grades, the department's target class sizes for 1st and 2nd graders is 22 students per teacher, which research suggests is too large for low-income students. But the departments' projections show that 30% of all first graders next year will be in classes even larger than that target.
- At the high school level, class sizes for students who are in lower level CP classes because they are *behind their peers* are in classes that are the same size as for students in the more advanced Honors classes. Students assigned to Sheltered English Immersion classrooms because they are just learning English are in classes that are the same size as those for students who are fluent English speakers.
- The city has a new Office of College Success, which I applaud. Note, however, that we still have only eight guidance counselors at CRLS, each responsible for well over 200 students. The primary job of guidance counselors is to help students enroll in classes that will prepare them for college or other post-secondary opportunities, and to help them identify appropriate colleges to apply to. Lexington High School and Brookline High School, where almost every student has two parents with graduate degrees, have more guidance counselors and lower student:counselor ratios than CRLS.

- I'll end just by reading an excerpt from the website description of Beacon Academy in Boston, which has had an excellent college enrollment rate:

Beacon Academy is dedicated to providing its students with a rigorous academic program...*We emphasize problem solving, collaborative education, culturally inclusive learning and sensitivity to students' cognitive styles. Our small classes foster a high degree of student-teacher interaction, and our teachers are committed to addressing the individual needs of each student.* (My emphasis.)
<http://www.beaconacademy.org/our-school/academics-2/>

In summary, decades of educational research suggests that having more teachers per student and more trained adults in the classroom will improve the achievement of low-income students, yet our staffing relative to other districts is not particularly high. For this reason I hope you will revise the city budget to include more money for teachers, paraprofessionals, and other direct service staff in our public schools.

Thank you for your consideration.