

Executive Summary: Budget Outlook
Fiscal Year 2015
2014-2015 School Year

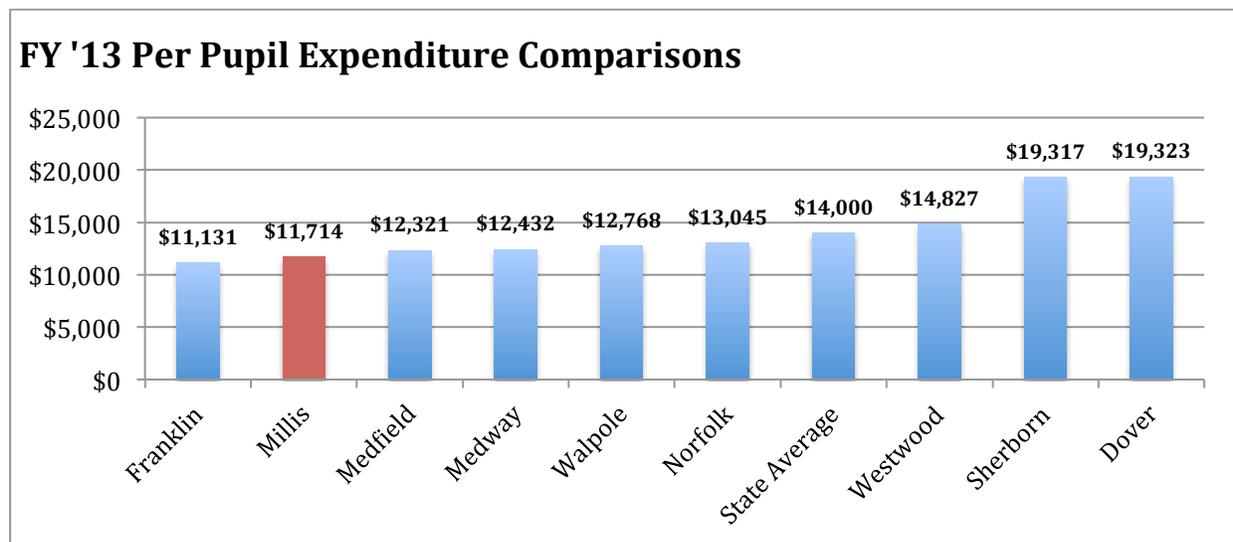
Dear Parents, Caregivers and Community Members,

In January, Governor Patrick released his proposed budget for fiscal year 2015 for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Following public hearings the House will release a fiscal 2015 budget bill in mid-March. The Senate is expected to work with the House to approve a final state budget by the end of May.

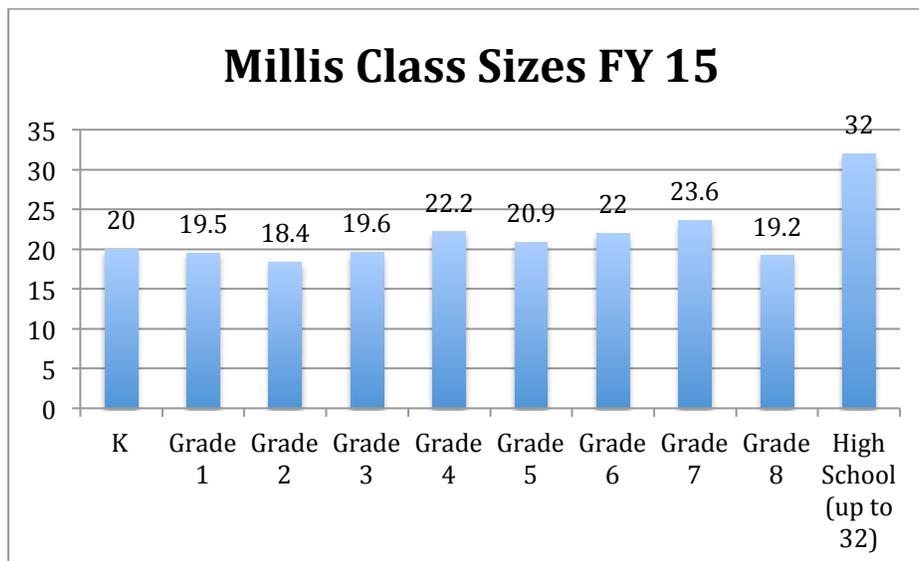
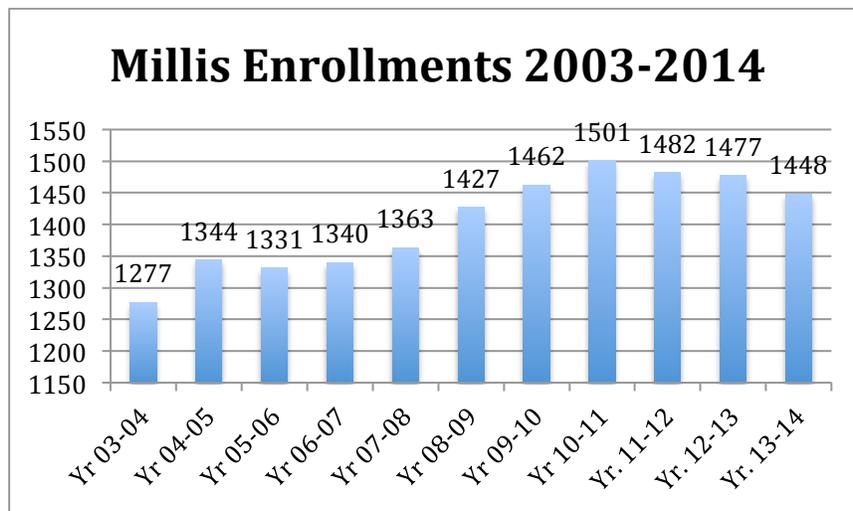
The state economy is improving and revenues have increased, but the Governor's proposed budget provides a very small increase of \$32,700 in Chapter 70 Education Aid to Millis. The House and Senate will make their recommendations and proposals in the spring months. Local tax revenues supplement this local aid and the combined amounts are split in Millis with 65% going to the school department and 35% going to town departments after fixed costs such as insurance and retirement benefits have been deducted. The amount of revenue available for FY15 may not cover the increase in fixed costs for the school department and the town.

The Millis Public School proposed budget for FY15 is 4% higher than the previous year. In order to cover the one-year increase in contracted salaries for the approximately 240 staff members in the schools, an additional \$458,000 is needed. We have made salary reductions of \$115,500, but have had to increase expenses by \$63,500 due to software license and contract increases, an increase in athletic league dues and equipment and assessments.

Therefore, a total of \$521,700 more of local appropriation than last year will be required to fund a "Level Service" budget for the Millis Schools in order to keep the staff and programs we currently have. However, this does not address the needs due to greater enrollment in the High School. The district still has one of the lowest per pupil expenditures in the state and \$187,200 more is requested to address essential needs.



In fiscal years 2011 and 2012 the Millis School District had to reduce the budget by \$989,967. During those years over 25 staff members either were laid off or had their hours reduced. Of this amount, \$862,380 was due to these salary reductions, yet our enrollments had been growing at a rate of about 30 students per year. This past year we had a slight decline in enrollment in the Elementary grades, especially in Kindergarten, due to lower birth rates. However, classes in Grades 4-12 are large and we are not able to offer the electives or courses at the high school that the increase in enrollment necessitates. Kindergarten enrollment for FY15 is projected to be, once again, between 95-100 students as it had been in the past. Lower enrollment results in lower state funding but since the enrollment declines are spread across grades K-3, with approximately ten fewer students per grade, it is imprudent to reduce those grades by an entire classroom teacher, as this would result in very high class sizes. Grade 1 is the exception and we are able to shift a teacher from grade 1 and still maintain class sizes of about 20 students in that grade for next year.



There are several innovative ways that we have continued to increase our efficiency and improve quality such as within collective bargaining agreements, seeking grants, redefining staff roles and responsibilities, utilizing powerful learning tools such as iPads instead of purchasing textbooks, and developing creative programming for students with special needs to keep them in our schools rather than in out-of-district placements, to name just a few. However, the quality of education students receive in Millis is becoming more and more compromised by large class sizes at the high school, resulting in a reduction in electives and extra-curricular offerings, and the lack of instructional resources and support personnel to reduce achievement gaps for low income and special needs students as required by law.

The Millis Public Schools are high performing and have received several awards and high rankings over the past five years:

- 2007 U.S. National Blue Ribbon Award for Excellence at the High School.
- Over the past three years we have won the 1st place award for Best Spanish Immersion School in the U.S. and Canada for the Middle School, 2nd Place for Millis High School and 4th place for Clyde Brown Elementary (there are more elementary programs and thus, competition is greater.)
- US. News and World Report and Newsweek have consistently ranked our high school as in the top 5-6% in the entire nation.
- Boston Magazine designated our high school as one of the top 50 in Massachusetts in 2012 and “Most Likely to Win a Pulitzer Prize” as well as “Most Improved” in 2011.
- Our Middle School has been awarded the designation as “Apple Distinguished School” for the past two years for innovative leadership in improving student engagement and learning with effective uses of technology.
- Millis is recognized throughout Massachusetts and even New England for integrating technology to personalize learning and for the New Media Video Production and Arts program.
- The Center for American Education recognized the Millis School district as a “High Return on Investment” district based on high student achievement and low per pupil costs.
- A focus on personalizing the educational experience of all of our students through project-based, hands-on learning, a model Tiers of Support and Challenge program, and a focus on character attributes such as grit, self-direction, leadership and civic responsibility, and a strong work ethic as well as 21st century skills such as creative problem solving, cultural awareness, and collaboration.
- The Millis Public Schools dropout rate is 0% due to the personalized educational approach.

MCAS scores have risen steadily over the past seven years as well, going from around the state average in most grades and subjects to between 7-10% above the state average most years in most grades. However, last year we saw lower scores on MCAS in English Language Arts, especially in Gr. 3 and 4, perhaps due to larger class sizes and the reduction of a Reading Tutor in 2012. We have addressed the large class sizes in those two grades for this school year and reinstated the Reading Tutor position. A comprehensive Middle School math improvement plan is in place and we are starting to see the results of that focus.

We are proposing several additions to staff that are essential to address the targeted areas of most concern, especially at the high school level:

- .5 Technician (increase of current part-time position) needed due to greater number of devices and state mandates for computerized testing
- .4 Science increase (increasing part-time position) needed to offer additional section of Anatomy/Physiology and another section of Biology needed for the large Freshman class
- .2 Career and Internships/Community Liaison to strengthen career counseling in Gr. 8 and internship experiences during high school
- The Social Studies department has only 3 teachers at the high school and a part-time (.4) position is needed to offer electives and reduce class sizes.
- Funding for FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School) is needed to expand the program to Gr. 4
- .2 Health (increase of current part-time position) is needed for Gr. 9 with a large Freshman class
- .2 Art is also needed at the High School level (increase of part-time staff) due to high enrollments
- Athletic Coaching stipends of \$22,000 restored to the Operating Budget since the Revolving Account cannot sustain these costs without raising fees.
- The mounting of the LCD projectors in high schools classrooms would save space in overcrowded rooms as well as make it easier to use and calibrate interactive white boards.
- Round fold-up cafeteria tables would increase safety for students and make it easier to accomplish daily floor cleaning.

These additional positions and expenses total approximately \$187,200 and must be approved by the School Committee, recommended by the Finance Committee, and voted as part of the budget at Town meeting. Funding for these will be sought only after fixed costs are covered. We will continue to look for additional ways to increase efficiency and provide excellent educational services throughout the spring.

In Millis approximately \$320,000 of teaching salaries have been paid for out of School Choice dollars, supporting approximately 4.5 teachers. This amount has roughly equaled what we receive in School Choice funding from the state for students choicing into Millis. However, next year over \$500,000 in teachers' salaries and some additional expenses will need to come from the School Choice account to maintain staff and balance the budget. The district receives approximately \$5,000 for every student attending Millis from other towns, including students who used to live in town and have moved but wish to continue attending our schools. We currently have 71 choice students spread throughout the K-12 system. This does not require an addition of staff but these funds do enable us to provide a higher quality of educational programming.

Due to our space limitations and large class sizes in grades 4-12, we have been unable to accommodate the many requests we receive for additional Choice students except in lower grades. The reputation of our district as providing high quality, innovative, personalized education must be maintained so that we continue to attract Choice students and receive revenue of at least \$350,000 per year. If this flow of income ebbs, more revenue will be needed from local sources or reductions in staff will be necessary.

The positions above support the goals of the Millis Public Schools:

Our Vision

The Millis Public Schools are respected for high academic standards, committed to social responsibility, and dedicated to educating and inspiring every student to achieve personal excellence.

Our Mission

The Millis Public Schools Community is firmly committed to developing students as *independent, lifelong learners and leaders* who will contribute to a changing and complex society.

Overarching Personalized Learning Goal

In Millis we honor each student as an individual learner, recognizing that each student has his or her own learning style, interests, passions, challenges to learning and skill levels. We engage all students through varied instructional approaches so that students are afforded flexibility in how they learn and demonstrate their understanding.

Economic growth, quality of life and property values depend on good schools. Globalization and the information technology revolution have made almost all work more complex, requiring critical-thinking skills. It is widely accepted that students must be better educated than ever to secure and keep a well-paying job. It is crucial that we provide students in Millis with an education that will enable them to compete in this global economy where critical thinking, creativity, cultural and language fluency, and superb communication, technology and collaboration skills are the minimum requirements for the vast majority of jobs. Students learn best in personalized hands-on learning environments that ensure they apply skills and content knowledge to real-world problems. Our economic future and civic health depend on our students having a great educational foundation.

As the budget season unfolds, please stay informed. School Committee meets twice per month on the first and third Tuesdays of the month. Finance Committee meets Wednesdays and the Selectmen meet Mondays at 7:30 in Town Hall. Also, please feel free to contact me at ngustafson@millisps.org or call 508-376-7000.

Sincerely,

Nancy L. Gustafson,
Superintendent of Millis Public Schools