

Superintendent's Task Force:
**Communicating the
Challenges Facing the
Belmont Public Schools**

January 10th, 2006

Presentation Outline

- I. The Work of the Task Force**
- II. "The Challenge Paradigm"**
- III. Communicating the Paradigm**
- IV. Five Questions about the Paradigm**
- V. Moving Forward:
Recommendations**

Work of the Task Force

The Charge:

The Task Force will establish a process and produce a variety of products that will inform and engage the residents of Belmont in a conversation about the current status of the Belmont Public Schools, the challenges facing the schools, and the resources needed to meet those challenges.

Work of the Task Force

The Participants:

Patricia Aubin	Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Julie Barton	Parent and Wellington PTO Co-President
Denis Fitzpatrick	Director of English
Amanda Green	Parent and BSEAC Past President
Deb Lockett	Parent
Bruce MacDonald	Principal, Butler School
Lee McCanne	Director of Technology
Margaret Reynolds	Parent and Co-Chair of the BHS PTO
Ann Rittenburg	School Committee Member
Scott Stratford	School Committee Member

Work of the Task Force

Process & Activities

- Weekly Meetings
- Document Review
- Categories of Concern
- Written Work and Critique
- A Theme Emerges:

Proficiency for All

“The Challenge Paradigm”

- The Thesis
- The Core of the Challenge
- The Expectations
- The Changes in Education
- State & Federal Mandates
- The Constraints
- Strategic Improvement Plan

“To a greater extent than ever before, the Belmont Public Schools face challenges that put their continued excellence at risk. Expectations for the performance of our schools have never been higher. Today’s classrooms must meet the varying learning styles and skill sets of every child as an individual, while moving steadily towards an unprecedented mandate of universal academic proficiency. Meanwhile, financial, regulatory, and political constraints become more pressing each year. Increasing student learning and behavioral needs, coupled with increasing social and family pressures that affect students’ readiness for the work of school, put further stress on our system. Through the Strategic Improvement Plan, Belmont’s schools can address the most pressing elements of these many challenges. However, doing so will require even more support than our community has been able to provide in the past.”

Core of the Challenge

“Our school system is caught between the pressure of ever-increasing expectations, on the one hand, and steadily increasing financial, political, social, and developmental concerns on the other.”

Changes in Education

- Differentiated Instruction
- Class Size Considerations
- Staffing Needs

Mandates

- Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA)
- No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Constraints

- Financial
- Political
- Regulatory
- Student Learning Needs
- Socio-Economic

The Strategic Improvement Plan

- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Student Life
- School Management & Leadership
- Human Resource Development
- Communications and Community Relations
- Facilities and Financial Planning and Management

Our Conclusion:

“We recognize, and can articulate, these ever-mounting challenges. What we cannot do, in isolation from the rest of the Belmont community, is to continue meeting them without more support.”

Communicating The “Challenge Paradigm”

- Consideration of the Audience being addressed
- The Breadth and Depth of the Message
- The Method or Format of Presentation.

Five Questions

- One: Is the Paradigm simply “déjà vu all over again”?
- Two: Do we run the risk of alarming the community unduly?
- Three: Can we increase support from residents other than parents?
- Four: Can we document the Paradigm?
- Five: Is more funding the real issue?

Moving Forward

- Our recommendations for communicating these challenges over the next few months:
 - Develop a calendar of 30- to 45-minute public presentations
 - Submit a weekly series of at least six “op-ed” opinion pieces
 - Consider the creation of a formal “rapid response” capability

Moving Forward

- Our recommendations for potential further work:
 - Develop a “Speakers Bureau”
 - Investigate more in-depth projects
 - Determine potential sources of funding
 - Create an ongoing Superintendent’s Communications Advisory Council

Conclusions

The Task Force believes that the Belmont Public Schools faces a set of challenges that are unparalleled in the system’s history.

These challenges pose a real and growing threat to the sustainability of the system.