

March 13, 2003

To His Honor the Mayor and the honorable City Councilors

On Tuesday, March 18, the Cambridge community expects to be informed of a school consolidation plan that will not, in all likelihood, be the plan that the children, parents, and teachers of Cambridge deserve.

- This plan appears likely to meet the needed goals of removing empty seats from the system and reducing School Department expenditures, but without substantially addressing needed educational and management reform and declining enrollment.
- The closure of underperforming schools on an extremely rapid schedule, without sufficient time for planning and for formulating the best approach to relocating displaced students, will greatly increase the negative educational and social consequences of these closures on many of the children and families who most need the support provided by their schools and school communities.
- The dislocation of successful, highly chosen schools, again on an extremely rapid schedule, will, in the opinions of many parents and teachers at those schools, damage their educational programs, reducing their ability to serve both their current students and students transferred from the closed schools, resulting in little if any educational improvement, and perhaps overall educational loss.
- The root cause of declining enrollment despite an increase in school-age population between 1990 and 2000 will not be addressed, and is likely in fact to be exacerbated by the negative impression made on families with options other than the Cambridge public schools.
- Historic concerns about mismanagement of School Department resources and the influence of politics on educational policy, some of which are detailed in the Spence Report, will not be addressed.

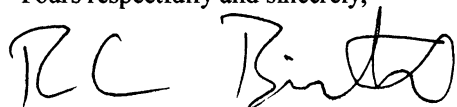
I believe this plan will result from mandating a cut of 3.8 million dollars in the 2004 School Department budget *without* requiring supporting material to demonstrate that the most constructive possible approach to educational improvement and consolidation is being taken. These requirements might have included:

- An independent audit of the School Department budget to determine and publish savings available by nonconsolidation means, for example in central administration.
- A specific accounting of the educational benefits and risks of each change being made, including a strictly-educationally based assessment of both closures of underchosen schools and dislocation of overchosen schools.
- An assessment of the changes made will address the root cause of declining enrollment.
- A plan for implementation of needed management and fiscal reforms.

I believe the schoolchildren of Cambridge, their parents, and citizens generally were entitled to such measures in effort to secure the sort of constructive, future-oriented consolidation that would improve education, shed empty seats, save money, and address declining enrollment, thereby ensuring a positive future for the Cambridge public schools and thus for our city.

I call on you now to begin the process of creating specific, formal mechanisms for ensuring that true educational progress and true reform are the basis for future changes to the Cambridge public schools.

Yours respectfully and sincerely,



R.C. (Bob) Binstock
157 Hamilton Street

