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## Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/06/23 10:31

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There was much discussion at the 6/19 school committee meeting about Thomson probably failing the English Language Arts (ELA) for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/ayp/>

Will parents be notified of this in time to transfer to other schools for Fall 2008?

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by sigleed - 2008/06/24 21:52

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Dear Potentially Honest,

First, a little clarification is in order.

The School Committee discussion was focused on "if" the Thomson School failed for a second consecutive year to reach Adequate Yearly Progress, not "probably".

The Federal No Child Left Behind Act requires the School Department to offer a choice of two alternative school choices to certain children who meet specific criteria, not to the entire student body, if Thomson fails to attain AYP this year.

I raised two children in the Thomson School, spent nine years there, served four years on the School Council, and was a very active volunteer parent there in several capacities. I believe I have a very good understanding of the education offered at Thomson.

If my own child were still at Thomson and were offered school choice, would I choose to move them? I don't know yet. The school department spent considerable time at their last meeting discussing funding, educational resources, and improvements they will make at Thomson School next year, regardless of whether they make AYP.

Children struggling at Thomson won't necessarily fare better just by moving to a different school. And there's an emotional factor to consider: would a child learn better in a new school environment where they have no familiarity with the building, the staff, or other students? And possibly to a more crowded classroom?

I have seen wonderful work done at the Thomson. I have seen children leave very well prepared and excel at the Middle School because they have a strong desire to learn and are motivated to do the work. My quibble has always been with the administrative leadership at Thomson - a string of ineffectual principals and school superintendents who ignored the needs of Thomson contributed to the lack of direction, lack of staff support, and lack of follow-up on students who needed additional instruction. John McAleer's arrival helped reverse the situation, but his two year tenure hasn't been long enough to fix the years of neglect that preceded him.

I'm hoping the School Department follows through with its promises and devotes the resources they say they will to Thomson. It's high time Thomson students received an equitable education in North Andover.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Gleed

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by PhilDeco - 2008/06/24 23:04

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Sandy,

When you say "a string of ineffectual principals", which Principals are you talking about, and what do you feel could have been done differently by each of those?

I only ask because I feel that Nancy Jukins, who was the Principal while I was at Thomson, did a phenomenal job.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/06/25 15:03

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<http://www.doe.mass.edu/nclb/choice.html>

Sandy,

The Mass Department of Education site states that ALL children in a failing school (presuming Title I applies) get the option of transferring to another school...

No Child Left Behind

NCLB School Choice

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a school that does not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts (ELA)/reading or mathematics in the aggregate and/or for student subgroups for two consecutive years is considered to be in its first year of improvement status. While a school receiving federal Title I funds is in improvement status, the district is required to offer all students enrolled in the school the option to transfer to another public school served by the district that has not been identified for school improvement.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by sigleed - 2008/06/26 21:11

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In response to two prior postings...

First, I both attended and taped the June 19th School Committee meeting that included the discussion of school choice if Thomson failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress for the second year in a row. I went back and watched the tape again tonight. I interpreted the discussion to refer to students who failed the MCAS tests.

Yes, it's possible that I misunderstood and the law may actually allow the entire student body to evaluate the school choice option – I've asked for clarification of this. But in the meantime, I think the reality is that students who are doing well and have been doing well all along would not leave. It's the families with students who are really struggling that may exercise the option...and it's a risky option...to leave just when help is arriving may not necessarily be the best option...

In response to Phil's question, during the nine years my children were students at Thomson, there were three principals and one interim principal: Nancy Jukins, Kathy Kostan, John McAleer and Deb Colura . There were also three Superintendents: Bill Allen, Harry Harutunian, and Dan O'Connor . There were also two assistant superintendents, whose jobs were curriculum oversight: Ron Binkney and Dick Bergeron.

Nancy was incredibly warm and caring and I think she knew the name of every student in the building. She loved science, loved teaching, and it showed. I will be forever grateful to her, that she took a chance and allowed me to create the Academic Opportunities Program and wholeheartedly supported it.

As an administrator, I think she was hampered by the fact that she was promoted from a teaching position. It's incredibly difficult to manage the very same employees that you had been friends with for years. Couple that with Superintendents who at best ignored her school's needs and at worst made decisions that they knew would be detrimental to her school, and you can see that the leadership structure was compromised. Nancy needed help in following through with changes that would make things better, and she didn't get it.

At one point, while Nancy was out on temporary disability, Deb Collura filled in. Deb later went on to an assistant principal position in a neighboring town. I thought Deb was very good for Thomson...this town never should have let her go...

Kathy Kostan was a joke. Harry ignored the recommendation of the principal search committee and hired his friend's wife instead. She was wrong from the start. I won't go into it any further, but if she hadn't "retired" or "resigned", there was good reason to fire her.

As for the assistant superintendents, Ron Binkney never came to Thomson, and never adequately responded to parents' concerns about the inequity and inadequacy of curriculum resources and standards at Thomson compared to the other schools in the district. By the time Harry allowed Dick Bergeron to try to make a difference, Harry was gone and Dick

had other issues to deal with.

John McAleer has worked very hard to bring consistency, support, and strong direction to the staff at Thomson. I'm sure they will miss him, but I'm sure that Mr. Gilligan will continue the good work that John started. Rome wasn't built in a day and it may take a few more years to turn things around at Thomson. I am very optimistic that the tide is turning in a positive direction.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Gleed

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; parents need notice NOW!

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/06/27 09:56

<http://www.northandover.org/images/fbfiles/files/schoolchoiceguid.doc>

Sandy,

Your 'a few more years to turn things around at Thomson' is no doubt true. It is also the motivating reason for parents to leave a failing school. One presumes attempts have been already made for years to improve the poor results. Why should attempts begun next year fare any better? Will parents accept 'we really mean it this time'?

I have attached a file that describes NCLB requirements for Public School Choice.

As required by NCLB (see below) will North Andover be able to notify parents of Thomson School children about their options to transfer before the beginning of the 2008/2009 school year?

Shouldn't the town notify the parents now and describe the plan is a plan I hope] to accommodate requests to move to another school? It will be a huge disservice to 'spring' this on the parents just days before school begins.

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B-2. When must an LEA make public school choice available to eligible students?

An LEA must make choice available for students not later than the first day of the school year following the school year in which the LEA administered the assessments that resulted in the school being identified as in need of school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring . If possible, an LEA should notify parents about their available choices well before the beginning of the school year in which those choices will be available.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; parents need notice NOW!

Posted by sigleed - 2008/06/27 15:48

Dear PHA,

I thought from your initial posting on this topic that you had watched the June 19th School Committee meeting ...the questions you are now asking were answered during that meeting, probably as best as the School Committee, Dr. Marini and Dr. Hutchinson were able to at the time.

Dr. Hutchinson said that the School Department wouldn't know if Thomson had made AYP until they received MCAS scores that were being sent to the School Dept. before the end of June.

School Committee members expressed concern that there was little time to put a plan in place and notify parents so that they could weigh their options before the start of school.

Parents won't know MCAS scores until October - so they won't officially know if school choice is on the table until the school department informs them that it is.

Dr. Hutchinson indicated that meetings and/or discussions were already underway to determine which schools could best accommodate school choice enrollees, and which grades within those schools could handle increased enrollment.

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I share your concern that the urgency and importance of such decisions shouldn't be short-changed. One could argue that as soon as Thomson failed to make the AYP the first year, they could have begun to work on the plan for if they failed again. I believe Dr. Hutchinson, John McAleer, and the rest of the staff and administration have probably been discussing the "what ifs" all along. Concurrently, their effort was concentrated on addressing the teaching and curriculum issues that would improve scores; they focused on prevention.

I believe the School Department intention is to officially notify the Thomson parents in August, if school choice is mandated. The matter is already being reported in the newspapers, and I'm sure the possibility will come as no surprise to Thomson parents. My guess is they're already thinking about it. Is August too late? Parents aren't notified about regular class assignments until August 15th. I am hoping that if school choice is an option, that the information will be released either prior to that date or no later than that date.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Gleed

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; excuses don't help

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/06/27 17:29

'Planning' is generally understood to be something done in advance of an event. For example, we have a Fire Department that exists in anticipation of a fire. It is the result of a plan and the plan has been executed.

Under NCLB a school that fails AYP two years in a row must inform parents of all students about the option to go to another school before the next school year begins. After Thomson failed the first year, the contingency plan to coordinate sending children to other schools should have been demanded and approved by the School Committee. This is just basic competence. Why do you make excuses for the failure to have a plan? 'The School Committee expressed concern...' and '... they focused on prevention.' is just pablum.

I have not seen the possibility of Thomson failing AYP this second year and its implications in the newspapers. What newspaper covered it? I certainly want to see how it was presented.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; excuses don't help

Posted by sigleed - 2008/06/27 20:39

Dear PHA,

Rather than condemn them, I'd like to give Dr. Hutchinson and Dr. Marini a chance to present their plan. Dr. Marini has proven himself as a very capable steward of our schools this year. I think it's premature to criticize them for a "failure to have a plan"; I'm giving them latitude in case it exists but they weren't ready to present it.

There are five School Committee members, seven if you include the two that left in March. I watch or attend all School Committee meetings. You are right - I do not recall this issue being discussed this year. Is your frustration with the administration or the School Committee that did not direct the superintendent to put this issue on the table earlier in the year?

Will you attend the next School Committee meeting to discuss this? Will this be an issue for you during the next election of school committee members?

Since you are not a Thomson parent, and I am no longer a Thomson parent, rather than us continuing this conversation, I'd really like to hear some feedback from the people most affected and see if they share your concerns. If readers are reluctant to weigh in, perhaps I can invite some Thomson parents to visit the site and offer their perspective.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Gleed

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

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Posted by Thomsonparent - 2008/06/28 11:29

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I received a message from an Eagle Tribune reporter for my comment on the Thomson failing AYP. I didn't call back because I didn't want to comment on something that I don't have all the facts on. Now that I know that the Thomson might fail AYP for the 2nd year, this is really troubling to me. I have 3 children at the Thomson. I'm not pulling out yet. My 3 kids personally had a wonderful year.

They each had really good teachers and had a successful year of learning in my opinion.

My goal now is to know all the facts and I hope I can get them. Maybe someone can help me. I am looking forward to seeing the MCAS scores of my children and the whole school. What about the other schools in town? Where can I see their scores? Will my children be better off in another school in town? Are their scores so much higher?

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by dromano - 2008/06/28 13:20

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Being a Thomson parent of two myself (one going into 5th and one going into 2nd) I find myself troubled by this but also willing to give Gregg Gilligan a chance to see how things go. I've seen positive steps taken the last couple of years and I'm hoping that Mr. Gilligan can accelerate things even more.

Thomson, in particular, seems to be hit with many challenges... although I'm not aware of what other schools face so I'm not sure if we are so unique from other schools. It just feels like Thomson has been climbing a higher hill and the results seem to bear that out with having the worst results. So I'm not sure if Thomson has different challenges (facility, curriculum, etc) or different 'effectiveness' relating to the teaching. I can only say that for both of my children for the 4 years we've been there... we've always been extremely happy with the teachers so I lean to the former being the challenge.

That said... going to another school seems to invite many other problems... overcrowding at other schools, the trauma of changing schools for children, logistics (and possible expenses) of getting children to and from the schools, etc. It seems that a better approach is active participation and support of the entire community to identify and fix any problems vs. 'cutting bait'. Thomson has been fairly instable and it needs to be stabilized. The schools system is very integrated and if one school suffers... they all do... or will when the kids get to the Middle and High School.

In short, we will remain at and actively involved in improving Thomson... and the overall North Andover School System in general.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by sigleed - 2008/06/29 22:36

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Dear Thomson Parent,

The Massachusetts Department of Education has a wealth of information you can dig into if you have a ton of time, but you may find it easiest to go to this link:

<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/home.asp?mode=so&view=tst&mcasyear=2007&ot=5&o=1233&so=1239-6>

If you copy and paste this link into your browser, you'll come up with the summary of Thomson 2007 scores. Near the top of the page, on the right, you'll see a pull-down menu where you can look at the other North Andover schools' scores.

Note that these are 2007 scores - 2008 scores aren't available on the website yet. Scores are not released to parents until October of the year in which the tests are taken. The School Department, however, is sent results in an earlier report, expected to arrive this month, in June.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Gleed

p.s. You can actually just click on the link in this posting and it will take you directly to the Dept. of Ed. webpage.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/06/30 11:01

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Sandy,

The 'chance to present their plan' was the School Committee meeting on June 19. This issue was simply ignored this past year. The 'Dr. Hutchinson indicated that meetings and/or discussions were already underway to determine which schools could best accommodate school choice enrollees, and which grades within those schools could handle increased enrollment.' is CYA.

The problem is not limited to Thomson in that at least two other schools will be designated to accept transfers from Thomson. Will these parents be given the ability to comment on the increasing class sizes forced by the failure at Thomson? August 15 (class assignments sent to parents) is only 6.5 weeks away so it seems unlikely.

The most likely result of the current situation IMHO is that parents will not be notified with any meaningful time to make crucial decisions about transferring their kids and so few will do so. This will make it easier on the school system but is a disservice to the parents.

A 'plan' of such importance should not be cobbled together without community discussion immediately before a known deadline. Why has it come to this?

Do Thomson parents feel they've been adequately informed about A) the issue of failing AYP two years in a row and B.) what the proposed mitigation plan is? Have they been 'notified' by the school administration in any way?

If you have the ear of school committee members NAU supported in the past, how about getting one to respond to this issue in this thread?

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; excuses don't help

Posted by sigleed - 2008/06/30 20:34

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Dear Readers,

Dawn Crescitelli asked me to post her comments to the website for her, because her comcast was acting up. Dawn, by the way, is the only person who I have ever heard speak up at a School Committee meeting and ask for explanations as to Thomson's Title I status, it's Title I funding, and what was being done to address the problems. I don't recall that she ever got a satisfactory answer to her questions...

Here's her posting:

My name is Dawn Crescitelli. I am the past pto co-president for the Thomson school for 2 years. Prior to my role as president, I was the VP. I was also deeply involved at the Bradstreet school. I worked with Sandy and the NAU team to promote passage of the over ride. For many years I have been an involved citizen. I regularly attend or watch school committee and BoS meetings. From time to time, I pop in to FinComm meetings. I try to be educated in the town government of North Andover because I believe it is my responsibility as a citizen and a parent. Am I surprised that Thomson will likely fail MCAS again? Not at all. For the past 4 years, I have been a very vocal advocate at SC meetings. I warned time and again that Thomson was in rapid downward spiral. I was also the parent that INSISTED that Thomson MCAS issues be placed on the June 19th SC agenda. The story was then picked up by the Eagle Tribune. I felt it was entirely unfair to parents to have only 10 days to make a critical school choice decision for their children. Why will Thomson fail? It is all a direct result of lack of leadership. The chronic changes in Administration, budget cuts, misappropriation of Title 1 funds and a school committee that was apathetic to the needs of the Thomson have compounded the problems created by past Supt. Harutunian who used the Thomson school as his dumping station. This past year, I was again vocal at SC meetings to address the enormous class sizes in grade 1. We had only 3 teachers for 97 1st grade students. I was appalled that no one on the SC knew about this situation and that a parent, not the principal, was the one to ask for additional staffing. The Thomson failure was preventable. School officials should be ashamed of themselves. As usual the problem will be addressed in reactive manner when all of this could have been prevented.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; excuses don't help

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/01 08:46

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It certainly seems that Dawn diligently and repeatedly brought this issue to the School Committee.

Why did the School Committee ignore her?

Dawn's description of life at Thomson ('rapid downward spiral...') certainly seems at odds with Sandy's generally positive description ('My quibble has always been with the administrative leadership...').

(Comment to webmaster: why does this editor insert underscores into the text sometimes?)

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by StoneCutter - 2008/07/01 10:04

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Dear All,

I too am a Thomson parent. I concur that there was little or no communication around what AYPs are, what they mean, and how they affect students and their families. Thank you, Sandy for providing the link.

While I share many of the same feelings of frustration, I think it's time to turn our energies toward more positive and constructive outcomes.

What ought to be done today, and what are each of US willing to commit to, in time and effort?

I've been involved at various levels, and have spoken with many people, mainly focused on the education side of things. In short, it often appears to be the few that carry the many, and the difficulty lies in motivating enough people to achieve a critical mass that overcomes the negative perspectives and bad histories, resulting in more meaningful results.

What's required and currently lacking, IMHO, are the following:

1. Greater involvement from a larger number of concerned NA citizens, willing and able to address complex problems and present "best case" solutions. This is often very difficult and sometimes not possible.
2. Better communications between our boards, elected officials, and the general public. Would an SC member or BOS member maintain a BLOG detailing decisions made, and rationale, etc.?
3. Longer term perspectives and planning, meaning application of our own lessons learned. This will also address accountability.
4. Constructive feedback. If a person isn't part of the solution...

The topic at hand, Thomson status, is only one symptom of the larger issues enumerated above. I am doing my part, and I invite the reader to do the same, if not already doing so.

When is the next SC meeting? I couldn't find it on the calendar. Can we request the SC to send out a "what if" scenario letter at this point in time? Is it OK to do this?

Thanks,  
StoneCutter

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/01 11:52

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I tried to find the SC meeting schedule on the NAPS site but the entire site is down .

<http://www.northandoverpublicschools.com/schoolcommittee/index.php>

I also can't find it on the town site. [http://www.townofnorthandover.com/Pages/NAndoverMA\\_BComm/schoolcomm](http://www.townofnorthandover.com/Pages/NAndoverMA_BComm/schoolcomm)

I guess we're all supposed to be away on vacation.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by dromano - 2008/07/01 12:28

Hmmm I can get to <http://www.northandoverpublicschools.com>... maybe there is an issue with a service provider locally (Comcast?) for name resolution. Someone else mentioned having a problem to me relating to this site this morning.

The link to the School Committee Schedule is found at <http://www.northandoverpublicschools.com/school-committee-meetings.html> but there are no meeting publicized after June 19th on it.

FYI... PotentiallyHonestAnswer... I'm not sure why '\_' get thrown in to things on this forum. Some bug. I'm looking to upgrade the forum technology shortly to a newer version to hopefully resolve the issue. I agree it is annoying.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by StoneCutter - 2008/07/01 21:19

PHA,

I agree that not being able to find information can be a little bit frustrating, or irritating. But I don't think I need to say that comments like this do not help "I guess we're all supposed to be away on vacation. "

Do you know what I mean?  
I'm guilty of this at times too.  
But come on.... play nice. Please?

Thanks for your consideration,  
StoneCutter

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/02 09:14

StoneCutter,

In deference to your request I have chanted 'Kumbaya' three times. Do you feel better? (After all, that's all that counts.)

Being 'nice' and 'understanding' and 'meaning well' have resulted in a school system that:

1. Has a school on the brink of being notified it failed to make AYP two years in a row.
2. Can not keep a principal at Thomson for any length of time.
3. A school committee that can not hire a permanent Superintendent.
4. The last Superintendent that was hired was ethically challenged (at best) or criminal (at worst).

These are facts. Unpleasant but true. Circling the wagons and demanding 'we all play nice' won't change that.

Get upset that don't have a clue from the school system about the 'plan' for mitigating AYP at Thomson.

Accepting excuses for failure just guarantees more failure in the future.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by StoneCutter - 2008/07/02 10:13

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PHA,

Using sarcasm is your right and I respect that. Thank you for sharing your thoughts.

You seem interested, somewhat knowledgeable, as well as concerned. It also appears to me that you also have some time. Perhaps you can provide some constructive approaches to the concerns you've raised?

I am not looking to avoid confrontation, nor ignore real issues. It is not about me feeling better. My point is, you may be able to help make the situation better, if you want to. Do you?

-StoneCutter

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by ahbgone - 2008/07/02 12:07

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IMHO, I don't think PHA has the time or the "power" to make the situation much better or worse.

We elected our School Committee and we've had our Town Meeting. Now we have to play the season with the team we assembled. We hired the School Committee (for better or worse) and, for the most part, we have to watch them do their jobs from a distance - with the occasional sarcasm thrown in.

Best wishes,  
ahbgone

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/02 12:26

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Stonecutter,

Thank you for validating my rhetorical rights. However, this is not about me.

These school system problems exist.

I suggest (again) that the community not accept excuses, not accept no communication from the school system, not just hope the issues go away.

Waiting a couple of years for 'things to work out' is the easiest (and most likely) approach but it has also given us the AYP situation at Thomson.

The school system needs to adopt real standards (not just talk about having standards someday). This includes adopting more stringent curricula. Our school committees have 'kicked the can' on standards for years.

The MCAS is just a snapshot in time of particular groups (grades) of kids. The information it feeds back to the community must already be well known by the teachers who routinely give and grade the tests, papers, etc. of the children.

The reason MCAS exists is because school systems failed to give objective measurement of the children and convey accurate information to parents and the public. MCAS is a system-independent method for the public to get this information in a trustworthy way.

These MCAS results hopefully will prod the community to not conduct school affairs in the same way as we have for the last ten years. Per NCLB all grades must be 100% proficient by 2014 and progress must be made toward this goal each year. This requirement will bite harder every year and the later proficiency improvements will be much harder to meet. If we don't change, MCAS AYP failure will spread across all the schools and will be nearly impossible to avoid.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by StoneCutter - 2008/07/02 14:32

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"IMHO, I don't think PHA has the time or the "power" to make the situation much better or worse."  
I leave it up to PHA to define how much time and/or effort he has. I thank you for your perspective.

My point is exactly this: You, me, PHA, and others CAN make a difference, if you are willing to sacrifice some time, money and energy to do so. Yes, others are directly responsible, and WE are in-directly responsible.

So I ask again: What are you specifically willing and able to do to address some of the concerns raised?

PHA, do you have an educational background or experience setting school system wide standards? Have you spoken with Dr. Hutchinson? I think he has some role in this area, but could be wrong.

This is OUR problem, that WE solve together. What are YOU going to do?

-StoneCutter

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by ahhgone - 2008/07/02 15:02

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Here's an three examples -

I kind of like the idea that if a student who isn't deemed proficient on an MCAS test (or some similar academic test) to repeat a grade until they become proficient.

I also think a large amount of our problems are due to state mandates and regulations.

I could volunteer to tutor Thomson students.

I don't think I can do much to have more students repeat grades. I also don't think I can do much that's practical to reduce state regulations because most voters seem to like the state regulations.

Rather than tutor the Thomson students, I choose to concentrate on tutoring my own family.

Instead of asking anyone who thinks they've discovered a problem and possibly a solution to a problem what they can do the help, I suggest that the town or the schools or StoneCutter describe what help they need and ask for volunteers to meet that need.

Best wishes,  
ahhgone

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by StoneCutter - 2008/07/02 15:32

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Ahhgone,

Wow! I love it! Next school year, Gregg Gilligan is the interim principal for Thomson. You can contact him, or members of the PTO. You can find their contact info here: <http://www.thomsonelementary.com/pto.html>

Thank you so much! I am encouraged.  
StoneCutter

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; mantra calling...

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/02 16:00

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Why doesn't North Andover allocate \$35M a year so we can hire professional school management, dozens of teaching staff, purchase the latest curricula, and annually test students to confirm the teaching is effective.

We could also elect a supervisory committee of citizens to ensure only the highest outcomes are acceptable.

That should work!

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; mantra calling...

Posted by StoneCutter - 2008/07/02 17:32

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OK. Where and how do we acquire \$35M/year ?

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; mantra calling...

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/02 20:57

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I think a catchy name is 'property taxes.'

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; mantra calling...

Posted by willkell1 - 2008/07/02 21:35

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StoneCutter,

In my opinion you are wasting your time in attempting to converse sensibly and logically with PHA. He has proven to be nothing more than an agitator (" one that agitates: as a: one who stirs up public feeling on controversial issues " source Webster) with an anti-public school/Property tax agenda. I base this on his many bombastic posts on this site over the past months.

Regards,

Bill Kelly

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; he awakes...

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/02 22:23

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StoneCutter,

In my opinion you are tarnishing your reputation by associating with Bill Kelly.

He has proven to be nothing more than an prevaricator (" ... 2. a person who speaks so as to avoid the precise truth; quibbler; equivocator." source Random House Unabridged Dictionary) with an self-righteous agenda.

I base this on his public promise not to accept payment for services on the school committee during the School Committee campaign in 2005 and also on his switching his registration to Republican to appear conservative and claim to be fiscally responsible. Of course, his subsequent actions proved otherwise.

We could ask him why Thomson was ignored during his tenure but (see above) nevermind.

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Regards,

Potentially Honest Answer

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## Re: Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Dawn Cres - 2008/07/02 22:48

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A quick addendum:

PHA, you are wrong about Bill K. He was the ONLY SC member to actively attend/visit the Thomson. He came to PTO meetings and he kept in contact with me. I think he was swayed by Babs at the very end but for a long time he was a lone advocate. I am appreciative of his efforts. I too would take the stipend as a good SC member puts in many hours to perform duties. Your quibble is straight from the NATA playbook. Politics really has no place in this. (as an FYI, I am undeclared but usually vote R), but it doesn't matter your political affiliation. What matters is that kids are being left behind. I defended your positions as correct about many issues but in this, you were not present and I was.

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## Re: Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by sjgleed - 2008/07/02 23:00

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Dear Readers,

Sometimes when we have passionate feelings about our municipal services, there's a tendency to use issues, like Thomson's AYP status, as a lightning rod to express our frustrations with prior or non-related issues.

Let's bring this topic right back to where it should be: what's in the best interests of the students, both Thomson and the four other elementary schools' students in town? How can we best serve the interests of ALL of our students?

No Child Left Behind, using federal funding as a threat, forces public schools to try to jam square pegs into round holes. If you were a teacher of a struggling 3rd grade Thomson child and his/her family are struggling at home, English may not even be their primary language, and they have no extra money to hire tutors, teaching the standard curriculum is not going to overcome either the language barrier or the cultural barrier that MCAS test results regularly highlight. It doesn't matter which school that child attends, standard teaching practices and standard curriculum are not the solution. Now give that same teacher 24 additional children in the classroom, many of whom qualify for special education services or have ed plans to address learning difficulties, and make sure there's at least one behavioral complication on a regular basis that state and federal law prohibit you from handling in an effective and expedient manner. The teacher knows she/he needs to spend more one-on-one time working with these children, but there aren't enough hours in the day. The teacher is doing the best they can with the resources at their disposal. That's the reality every day in Thomson classrooms. That's the reality in classrooms all over town, but it's been more difficult at Thomson for years because of the weak leadership structure. Teachers need strong leadership to advocate for books, training, staff, and district recognition that additional resources and/or alternative methods of teaching need implementation.

NCLB doesn't look at children as individuals; it looks at statistics, numbers on a page. It even requires testing of children whose needs are so complicated that they will never pass the tests, regardless of which school they attend or which town they live in. And if a school fails to make the AYP – possibly Thomson, for instance – it mandates school choice, regardless if a town can afford it or if the other schools can even accommodate increased enrollment .

I spoke with Dr. Marini today. He's forwarding documentation explaining school choice that I will be happy to post when I receive it. He confirmed that yes, school choice must be offered to all Thomson students, if we fail to make AYP with our 2008 scores. He also said that I was incorrect, his office would not receive notice from the Dept. of Education until August.

I urged Dr. Marini to schedule an informational evening to answer questions for parents, both on the school choice issue if it indeed must be offered, and on the improvements Mr. Gilligan and Dr. Hutchinson will be implementing to improve the Thomson educational services. He fully understands the concerns expressed in the postings to the NAU website. He said he'd see what he could do to try to schedule a meeting as soon as possible.

We all need to be reasonable about this – scheduling a meeting in the midst of summer vacation, one that's meaningful and well attended, is a challenge in and of itself. If he can organize one, we parents need to attend if we can, or watch it

if we can't .

I'd like to suggest that Thomson parents take an active, constructive approach in compiling a list of concise questions that would help parents make the school choice decision, if it becomes a reality.

I'll start: a Thomson parent asked me yesterday, "If I move my son to a different school, will the pull-out special needs services he receives change?"

If readers are uncomfortable posting questions on this website, I'm more than happy to add your questions to the list if you want to send them to my email address at [sjgleed@yahoo.com](mailto:sjgleed@yahoo.com). Confidentiality is always an option – just tell me if you want your name included or deleted from your question(s).

Parents & citizens are partners with our school system – we all have a vested interest in its success, and we also own a share in its disappointments. No system is perfect, there's always room for improvement...if we desire high standards, let's do what we can to help achieve those goals. Respectfully.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Gleed

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; he awakes...

Posted by StoneCutter - 2008/07/02 23:04

PHA, I have read enough to form my own opinion. I'm sorry you feel so frustrated and helpless.

To The Readers,  
I would like to return this thread back to a more positive and constructive focus.

Let's try to get some information from the S.C. and others about what to expect for Thomson families, and other affected families.

And let's try to better understand what the real options are, and how best to communicate our own needs, with regard to the situation at hand. Get that information, and post it here or elsewhere and link to it!!

No matter what the AYP outcome is, Thomson has some significant challenges that require attention and resources. I can tell you, that they also have a committed PTO, and a larger community of involved parents that are making a big difference TODAY. Gregg G. has some good ideas, passion, and skills and experience to help in addressing the specific needs of this elementary school.

I have made my commitment, and bring some fresh ideas as well. Personally, my son has done very well at Thomson. I am pleased with his performance and how his teachers have enriched his learning experience. At the end of the day, it's about children learning inside and outside the classroom.

Thanks for your time,  
StoneCutter

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/02 23:07

The truth is out there. I'm glad you're OK. I feared you might have been sent to a re-education camp.

Still have not heard anything about a mitigation plan from the school administration. The Mass DOE site contains several sample documents (e.g. notification letter) regarding the explaining the process to citizens. It could be as simple revising those, cleaning them up a little and then a basic plan would exist.

The timeline for the state getting the information to the town and then the town being responsible to convey the same to parents before school starts seems almost impossible.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Dawn Cres - 2008/07/03 00:13

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Well, they(NAPS and the SC) would like to send me to a camp but it wouldn't be a fun filled summer camp!

The planning info is in the NCLB guidelines. It has been available to the SC for many weeks as I sent it to them in MAY! They likely will not reply to anyone about AYP issues til they meet in mid July. They MUST notify parents before the start of school. Why do you think I made them put it on the June agenda? The DOE told me they will notify the school dept no later than Aug 15th. The DOE also stated that failure should not be a surprise and pre-planning should have already been in place. If they don't notify me, I'll be having serious fits and become very upset...my Sicilian blood will be boiling!

I did ask the SC to take a survey of Thomson parents in June to see how many would potentially move their kids. As usual, they ignored my request. Parents at the receiving schools should be outraged that pre-planning was not implemented!

BTW, what about the free transportation. Did anyone know about that budget buster? Yep, free rides for 20% of students who wish to move(but that can be subject to financial need, I was advised with much glee, that I would not qualify). If they keep the distance under 2 miles for the working shmucks like my family, they can forgo the free busride. However, if a child has a financial need, they must bus the child for free.

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## DOE info links for NCLB info

Posted by Dawn Cres - 2008/07/03 01:19

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To all,

below are the links the AYP coordinator for the Massachusetts DOE sent me in early June. The NCLB guidelines is very helpful. Hope this helps!

Also to answer a question Sandy posted earlier about IEP's. Yes, the IEP must follow a child if the child moves to another school under school choice. SPED concerns are a sub category in the NCLB guidelines.

Ms Crescitelli,

In reference to our telephone conversation and your request for information on the subject of NCLB School Choice, I am attaching the following links:

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/schoolchoiceguid.doc>

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/nclb/choice.html>

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/03 09:40

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Dawn,

Is the two miles calculated from your home to the new school or from the existing school to the transfer school?

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; he awakes...

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/03 12:54

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StoneCutter,

Thank-you for your concern. I can only hope to one day achieve your sense of equanimity. You are truly blessed.

Potentially Honest Answer

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Helen - 2008/07/03 13:51

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I am a Thomson parent. During the past 6 years, I have served on the School Council, volunteered in the (now closed) library, and in classrooms for academic assistance and enrichment. I am a NH certified k-12 teacher.

I am not a fan of NCLB and the current weight given to standardized testing in public education. However, that is the law of the land at this time, providing certain rights and responsibilities.

In past years, when Thomson met its AYP goals, the full results of MCAS and the NCBL school report card were reported on paper copy in the backpacks. This year, when Thomson did not meet its AYP goals, a paper letter was sent home in the backpacks that referred parents to a website. This was an unnecessary and inconvenient step, and one that some families could not take from their homes. Further, for those who do receive electronic communications from school, I do not believe that the MCAS web link was provided on the electronic copy of the "Tickler". I spoke to several parents, who are generally informed and concerned, who failed to take that extra step and were not aware of our failing status well into the spring.

This is one time when "saving paper" was not the best use of our resources. Earlier, broader knowledge of the concerns, and specific forums to address them, help the community to plan together and foster trust in elected and employed leadership. If the district were aware of this failing status in Aug. 2007 (as we anticipate in 2008), we missed an important opportunity for preliminary reporting and planning. Further, the SC and administration missed an opportunity to set the public tone for this topic.

These failures, of the AYP, reporting, and planning, I believe have a lot to do with the on-going flux in our district.

For 2 years, Thomson has hired additional teaching staff and re-assigned students mid-year, because of unreasonably large class sizes. This cannot have a positive affect on standardized testing or any other measure of educational excellence. For 2 years our school library has been closed. Statistics show schools with professionally staffed libraries have higher test scores.

If preliminary MCAS results were available in Aug 2007, Dr. Marini was just coming into the district. Our administration continues in flux with both interim supt, and interim principal at Thomson. I do not question the qualifications of those currently in the positions, but don't believe Thomson and North Andover can move forward without stable leadership and broad community support. It is short sighted to believe this is a single school issue, for reasons already noted by other contributors.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by PotentiallyHonestAnswer - 2008/07/08 09:44

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No Child Left Behind, using federal funding as a threat, forces public schools to try to jam square pegs into round holes. If you were a teacher of a struggling 3rd grade Thomson child and his/her family are struggling at home, English may not even be their primary language, and they have no extra money to hire tutors, teaching the standard curriculum is not going to overcome either the language barrier or the cultural barrier that MCAS test results regularly highlight. It doesn't matter which school that child attends, standard teaching practices and standard curriculum are not the solution. Now give that same teacher 24 additional children in the classroom, many of whom qualify for special education services or have ed plans to address learning difficulties, and make sure there's at least one behavioral complication on a regular basis that state and federal law prohibit you from handling in an effective and expedient manner. The teacher knows she/he needs to spend more one-on-one time working with these children, but there aren't enough hours in the day. The teacher is doing the best they can with the resources at their disposal. That's the reality every day in Thomson classrooms. That's the reality in classrooms all over town, but it's been more difficult at Thomson for years because of the weak leadership structure. Teachers need strong leadership to advocate for books, training, staff, and district recognition that additional resources and/or alternative methods of teaching need implementation. -- Sandy Gleed 7/3/08

Sandy,

I can't believe things are this bad at Thomson. Won't just a couple of minor changes be needed to get Thomson back on track. We should think positively.

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## Re:School Choice - Questions & Answers

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/08 14:28

The following questions are answered in the attached schoolchoiceguid.doc from MCAS site:  
<http://www.northandover.org/images/fbfiles/files/schoolchoiceguid-f8ad1448de0cc464021067f57870df68.doc>

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**Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?**

Posted by Helen - 2008/07/08 15:58

PHA,

I find what Sandy describes to be accurate. Further, bright students who need a push to perform do not get it. Consequently they too under perform of the MCAS.

Helen

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**Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?**

Posted by sigleed - 2008/07/08 23:49

RE: PHA quote of: I can't believe things are this bad at Thomson. Won't just a couple of minor changes be needed to get Thomson back on track. We should think positively.

Dear PHA,

You have overlooked an important detail I mentioned, namely that the classroom issues I described are found all over town . This is National public school educational reality in the year 2008. Like Helen confirmed, parents who have children enrolled in public schools recognize this.

Funny that you now say we should think positively. Do I detect a note of sarcasm? You have approached this topic, since your initial posting, mostly from a negative viewpoint, rather than a constructive approach. I will interpret this latest posting as you choosing to come around to my way of thinking. I am not entirely sold on that conclusion though – when

you post under anonymous names, your motive is in question.

Back to the topic at hand: which minor changes would you suggest? Please enlighten me. I confess I am curious. I trust that if an easy answer existed, the educational professionals would have already tried it. I'm not a fan of minor changes; they've been implemented every year, for the nine years my family was at Thomson and this past year. Minor changes will not fix our problems. Major leadership changes and consistency of high quality curriculum implementation will help.

People with an agenda of trying to put down the North Andover school system regularly fail to acknowledge that the lack of professional training support for our former math curriculum, the time it took to obtain and implement our new math curriculum, the lack of a science curriculum until last year, the lack of an ELA curriculum, and the lack of stability in our system district-wide, all had a hand in Thomson's troubles. The lack of leadership at Thomson just served to magnify a problem that also exists at Sargent, Franklin, Kittredge and at Atkinson. Let's not even get into the Middle School or High School woes...

The problems noted in the prior paragraph were due in large part to short-sighted political maneuverings by a combination of elected officials, town employees on both sides of the equation, and political activists, and annual budget limitations, NOT anything teachers in the trenches or the actual students were or were not doing.

It is time to put the best interests of the children first. This time, the Federal government will require us to do so.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Gleed

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## Re: Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/09 10:33

Sandy,

Politics defines and governs the North Andover school system as you well know. You were involved closely at Thomson for nine years and saw a never-ending stream of minor changes which accomplished little besides enabling school system administrations to claim 'something's being done.' Over those nine years, how many school committee members have you supported that continued this charade? How many state reps have you supported that voted for all the 'mandates' and 'guidelines' and 'least restrictive environments' that make a modern public classroom all but ungovernable? The system was created step by step over many years; it will not change easily. Your kids are now out of Thomson and the system remains unchanged. It appears the system has 'waited you out'. Also, sounds like the system is broken.

Do you favor reevaluating use of the non-curriculum currently used at Thomson? Is this same method / technique / non-curriculum used at all other elementary schools in North Andover? Is this part of the 'standardization' of curriculum that is hoped to help performance in the Middle School?

The problems at Thomson could be used as an impetus for significant system reevaluation. Do you think it will be? A 'school insider', Dawn Crescitelli, brought up these issues repeatedly to the school committee for years and got stifled. I'm sure you've worked harder for many years than anyone in North Andover on parents' interaction with school issues. You know far more about day-to-day issues in the schools than almost anyone in North Andover (and certainly more than I ever will). You've given disturbing testimony about your impressions on the state of classrooms. Others confirmed your analysis.

The only way to get change to occur is to get your liberal supporters and Thomson parents to protest in front of the school committee and not allow them to be mollified by 'We'll get them this year!' (Conservatives need not bother as their concerns will be summarily dismissed, 4-1. After all, Chuck Ormsby's on the committee and he's routinely ignored. It'd be like Ayn Rand lecturing the USSR Politburo in the 1930s.) The cause and solution is political; success is not guaranteed. The majority voted again and again to renew the current system; maybe it's what they want.

Succeeding on MCAS gets harder every year because the bar gets a little higher due to the NCLB requirement that each grade (and subgroup) achieve 100% proficiency by 2014. (I believe this 'requirement' will be relaxed by the Mass. General Court as more 'good' school districts begin to fail as the noose tightens.) This is the current law that governs schools taking Federal money (Title I) so it can't be avoided. Do you think the current North Andover school system can meet these 2014 requirements?

Mike Quinlan

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(2008 School Committee candidate – seriously crushed in election)

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by dromano - 2008/07/09 11:41

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Hi Mike,

Although this will come across as political correctness... I bristle at being labeled 'a liberal'...or a 'conservative' or whatever. If there is any 'us' and 'them' I think it's more along the lines of 'moderates' vs. 'not moderates'... with 'moderates' being the majority. Better yet... just skip the labels. I'm not promoting holding hands and singing "Kumbaya"... just an observation that reading replies in forums that take unnecessary swipes at people (ironically possibly insulting people you may want to work with in this particular case) is not productive.

BTW... everyone... this is not an invitation of digressing into a North Andover Liberal vs. Conservative discussion. Please take that somewhere else.

Returning to the core of this topic... it sounds like the ball is in the School System's (administration and School Committee) court. Anyone have any facts of the current state? I know that we have three SC members that occasionally frequent this forum... any updates? Any timeline for information? What are the options in place based on potential outcomes and the timeline? Yes... we have information on school choice... but what are the 'real' options that people will have to evaluate vs. policy outlines. Are there any SC or other meetings being set up to communicate this information?

I don't mind people (town/school system) thinking things through... but I do think people need to be kept 'in the loop' and know that issues are being actively addressed and have some idea of when to expect some communications/instructions.

Thanks,

Don

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by sjgleed - 2008/07/09 12:10

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Dear Mike,

I'll keep this very brief, because I'm far more inclined to hang out with my family today than I am to hanging out with my keyboard!

You're mistaken when you characterize either myself or all NAU supporters as liberals. I find myself agreeing with you and Chuck more frequently than you give me credit for. In actuality, I'm registered as non-committed to give me flexibility, but I usually vote republican .

I do not share many of your thoughts on our school system. I think we have very complex problems that cannot be brought down to simple terms or simple fixes.

You did not answer my question about the "minor changes". Please specify what minor changes you'd like to see. What do you think could or should have been done differently educationally, not politically? As to non-performing curriculum, Chuck and NATA have been part of the problem, continually putting obstacles in the way of adopting curriculum for elementary ELA.

Tell me specifically what you would do differently. Show me any Massachusetts municipality not struggling right now. I spent three hours in Andover last night, a high-performing community generally recognized as managing their town well. They're very worried too.

You are right, it's getting more difficult to live up to the politically-enforced standards every year. But you are trying to fight national-level battles at the local level. You are blaming the passengers, rather than the people holding the reins. When was the last time we saw Senator Kerry or Senator Kennedy in North Andover or the Merrimack Valley? Congressman Tierney was here in the fall – I don't recall seeing you in the room – and he was very willing to talk about national achievements irrelevant to our local difficulties.

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As to being seriously crushed in the election, if you had found your way to the keyboard during the election process you would have had a better chance. And you should have taken advantage of the opportunity to meet with NAU when we invited you to. Above all else, we try to be fair. We're not about telling people what to think – we're interested in providing accurate information and trusting that people can sift through the information and decide the truth for themselves.

Off to summer fun! --Sandy Gleed

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/09 14:36

'I bristle at being labeled 'a liberal'...or a 'conservative' or whatever. If there is any 'us' and 'them' I think it's more along the lines of 'moderates' vs. 'not moderates'... with 'moderates' being the majority. Better yet... just skip the labels.' - DRomano 7/9/08

You're mistaken when you characterize either myself or all NAU supporters as liberals. I find myself agreeing with you and Chuck more frequently than you give me credit for. In actuality, I'm registered as non-committed to give me flexibility, but I usually vote republican . - SGleed 7/9/08

Sandy and Don,

I may vote for McCain but I'll certainly 'hold my nose' (as McCain's Mom suggested) and perhaps retreat to the desert to atone.

I apologize for using the apparently strident term 'liberal supporters' in my previous post. 'Liberal' is a relative concept and if you perceive it as an insult that is not my intention. NAU is a big tent after all. Don seems to be in the 'moderate majority' (Hear me roar!) and Sandy is in the conservative wing.

However, somebody voted for the 'not to be labeled with the "L" word' state reps and school committee members over the years that have given us the current situation. I doubt those voters could be classified as conservative Republicans (and it is questionable as to how many such people actually exist.)

The school committee members are perfectly silent on the Thomson issue on this board. I agree with Don that even a 'We're working on it...' post would be appreciated.

I stand by my belief that past supporters (of whatever political or philosophical persuasion) of the current school committee regime and more importantly Thomson parents must protest en masse if anything is to change. Do you favor reevaluating use of the Lesley non-curriculum currently used at Thomson? In Sandy's previous post it sounded like you thought this teaching system was not working? Is that a mischaracterization? Is this same method / technique / non-curriculum used at all other elementary schools in North Andover? Is this part of the 'standardization' of curriculum that is hoped to help performance in the Middle School? This reevaluation of a curriculum is a very major undertaking and, presuming changes are recommended, a multi-year process to implement. It won't help Thomson in 2009.

I agree there are very significant management problems at Thomson as there have been for years.

Politics is the heart of the matter and money problems (as always) will be the next big issue.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by ahhgone - 2008/07/09 15:43

"You did not answer my question about the "minor changes". Please specify what minor changes you'd like to see. What do you think could or should have been done differently educationally, not politically? As to non-performing curriculum, Chuck and NATA have been part of the problem, continually putting obstacles in the way of adopting curriculum for elementary ELA."

I happen to be a big fan of Chuck's work on the changes to a more rigorous elementary math program. I also

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understand he was against the new science program that was more expensive and not as "good" as the alternative (as Ralph Wilbur thoroughly pointed out in the Valley Patriot - I haven't seen anyone defend the new program in writing).

I'm confident that any obstacles he may be putting in the way of ELA curriculum involve making the curriculum more rigorous.

Best wishes,  
ahbgone

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by sigleed - 2008/07/09 17:09

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Dear Ahbgone,

There is no elementary ELA curriculum. None. Town-wide.

Chuck isn't supporting rigor for something that doesn't exist. He's been very vocal about math and science but mostly silent about ELA. And it's the ELA scores that are causing problems for Thomson right now.

There are teaching techniques growing obsolete as each year passes and there are supplementary resources assembled by individual teachers that are specific to each school, not necessarily the entire district. That's a major problem when the students hit 6th grade. They are not all on the same page .

We have a science curriculum one year old. We have a math curriculum that's just a couple years old. We have no ELA nor Social Studies curriculum.

We have students required to pass mcas tests with questions regarding content they've never even seen.

Is it a surprise that some Thomson students are struggling with writing and reading? Shouldn't be.

Purchasing new curriculum and training teachers to use it costs money and takes time. Chuck has been very vocal on high standards, and I have always applauded him for that and he knows that. But it's the school committee's job to see that the School Department has the tools to get the job done. Without curriculum, high standards - even passing scores - is a huge reach, regardless of which school your child attends.

We can't even restore the elementary librarians, let alone take care of our curriculum needs.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Gleed

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/09 17:32

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Sandy,

Why don't we have curricula for ELA or Social Studies? Chuck's been relegated to comic relief the last few years. The non-Chuck group have always controlled the committee; why haven't they acted (successfully I mean)? Have we never had curricula in these areas? (Please tell we did but just don't use them anymore. It doesn't seem possible to run a school system without them.)

Mike

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by ccormsby - 2008/07/09 17:59

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Sandy Gleed wrote, "As to non-performing curriculum, Chuck and NATA have been part of the problem, continually putting obstacles in the way of adopting curriculum for elementary ELA."

I challenge you to support this statement with facts. I have ALWAYS declared reading/writing (Oh, sorry, ELA) to be the NUMBER ONE PRIORITY of our elementary schools AND I have always supported any curriculum improvement within the budget that would further academic achievement in this area. As far as I know NATA has never taken any position on any specific ELA curriculum, but has always shared the sentiment that ELA was a Number ONE priority.

I place math as the NUMBER TWO priority in the elementary grades and led the fight to adopt a decent math curriculum - which we now have (not the best, I preferred Singapore Math, but still a substantial improvement over TERC.)

While I consider science to be of lesser importance in the elementary grades I fought to get a better and more balanced curriculum than the FOSS materials which are vary shallow on substance , which encourage a lot of "busy time" in the classroom, and which hinder parental involvement (no real textbooks).

Since this is the season for political apologies and I will commit to accepting yours with my usual grace and charm. :lol:

I'm not so sure about Ted (Mr. NATA), but I have always found him to be exceptionally forgiving.

Chuck

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by sigleed - 2008/07/09 23:36

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Sorry Chuck, no apology extended. My opinions are based on what I've experienced in nearly three decades of living in North Andover, nearly two decades of which I've spent as a homeowner attending meetings long before you moved to town, and as a parent of children who have actually attended the schools we're talking about. You are entitled to disagree with me, and I'm always ok with that. I credit readers with the ability to discern when comments are sincere and made to illuminate an issue, not to further an agenda.

If I had the time that you and Mike have, I would dig out the details . But I'm not an elected official, I don't get paid \$5,000 for that responsibility, I do this on my own time for free. I'll leave it at saying that not once in all these years when I have spoken to you and received emails from you about improving educational standards do I recall you ever mentioning ELA...it was always in the context of math and science. And ALL of the school committee members – not just you – spent far too little time, two years in a row, discussing the impact and consequences when the elementary principals got up and said that our kids can't write at the level they should and it's reflected in their mcas scores.

We've moved off topic again; let's move back to the issues at Thomson.

Please explain for Mike why we have no ELA or social studies curriculum. And please tell us what you are doing to persuade your fellow committee members and Dr. Marini that holding a school committee meeting as soon as possible would be in the best interests of the elementary parents . I have tried my best on my end. I understand that a workshop meeting has been scheduled for July 30th in the High School library. Workshop meetings do not allow public comment and are not always televised. And it is not at all clear that the school choice issue will be discussed.

Mike did a good job getting the school choice discussion topic underway on our website, but I think we've exhausted the topic until there's factual information directly from the School Committee or the School Administration.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Gleed

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/10 09:24

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At least Chuck responded. Why can't Whidden, Allen, Limpert or Nobile reply?

I'd like to know which school committee members (i.e. leadership) are on the 'Thomson AYP Committee'.

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We've even (albiet briefly) heard from former school committee member, Bill Kelly.

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## Discussion summary and action plan

Posted by mreed - 2008/07/10 09:33

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Hello Everyone,

I've had a chance to read through the comments and postings and here's a summary to the situation at hand.

There are three main issues that need to be addressed:

1. Pending Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) results for Thomson Elementary School, and related urgent needs at that school in particular.
2. Need for greater communications between the School Committee (SC), the School Administration (SA), and North Andover residents.
3. A coordinated curriculum between the elementary schools, with a priority need in ELA.

Here is a proposal that formulates an action plan to address those needs listed above.

For issue #1, AYPs: The SC and SA will address next month when the AYP results are given. I call on these two groups to do the right thing, do what's possible, and do what's prudent given the current state of affairs. Longer term priorities will need to be articulated, but the urgency of the AYPs and school choice must first be addressed, before discussing the specific longer term strategies. Focus must remain at the urgent and immediate need. (Who is the responsible person for AYPs and can get semi-annual updates?)

For issue #2, Communications: At one point, one SC member did offer to begin a "blog", detailing things like meeting items discussed, action items, and updates. I think this is an excellent idea. I'm sure there are some policy/procedures that need to be worked through by the SC before something like that this can happen, e.g. meeting minutes are voted upon prior to entering them into the record. But in an informal way, I'm certain that at some level, information can be disseminated through a communication channel such as a "blog", after each SC meeting.

For issue#3, ELA: Beginning with the 2008-2009 school year, make it a funded priority to evaluate and implement a coordinated ELA curriculum across all five elementary schools. As part of that, hire at least three (3) elementary school librarians with the following assignments: one position shared between Kittridge and Atkinson, one between Sargent and Franklin, and one full time at the elementary school where I understand the need is greatest, Thomson. (For those of you who are not aware of this, allow me to briefly state that a school librarian is a teaching position which compliments the subject curriculums being taught in the classrooms. A school librarian is much more than a book sign in/out person. But that is for a different discussion and not here.)

With these three issues detailed and a suggested action plan proposed, who is willing to step up and commit to one or more of these three areas?

Chuck O., are you willing to commit, at some level, to instituting more significant communication channels, both formal and informal, between the SC and the N.A. residents, or at least be the point person responsible? This would be a communication channel, not a venue for opinions and commentary. It would be for facts, decisions, findings, action items, etc. only.

Mike Q., are you willing to commit to being the community point person on providing facts and information, on the ELA curriculum development at the elementary schools? It is not being suggested that this be a place for opinions and commentary, as that belongs elsewhere. But are you willing to provide a public service in communicating objective facts in this area?

Myself? I am committed in several keys ways. Although it is too early to announce anything, look forward to reading some good news in one or more of these three areas.

While I think this forum is useful, I also think its naturally limiting as a public debate channel. I request at least a response to the ideas above, keeping in mind that face-to-face dialogs are required to make constructive and measurable steps forward.

I hope that both active readers and casual ones find this posting both informative and helpful. I am open to other ideas and suggestions, but would like to keep them focused to the three listed in this post.

Sincerely,

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Michael Reed

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by ccormsby - 2008/07/10 10:14

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My Dear Sandy,

Let me remind you again of your complaint, "As to non-performing curriculum, Chuck and NATA have been part of the problem, continually putting obstacles in the way of adopting curriculum for elementary ELA." :ohmy:

I asked for you to justify this statement or apologize.

You answered, "I'll leave it at saying that not once in all these years when I have spoken to you and received emails from you about improving educational standards do I recall you ever mentioning ELA ... it was always in the context of math and science." :angry:

This defends claiming that I was "continually putting obstacles in the way of adopting curriculum for elementary ELA"??? Obstacles? WHAT OBSTACLES?? Continually??? When????

You go further and state that, "And ALL of the school committee members – not just you – spent far too little time, two years in a row, discussing the impact and consequences when the elementary principals got up and said that our kids can't write at the level they should and it's reflected in their mcas scores."

Wow! I guess that is why you singled out "Chuck and NATA" for "continually putting obstacles in the way of adopting curriculum for elementary ELA"!

Have I focused more on math than ELA? Guilty. I have more personal knowledge of math than ELA and I can only fight so many battles. Science? No, you just have strong recollections of the science debate that was very heated because I didn't want to see us make a wrong turn, which, unfortunately, we did.

I have spent MUCH more time reviewing curricula and textbooks than any school committee member I have been associated with. I have taken home all the piloted elementary math texts and read them (plus TERC). What other member did this? Ditto the elementary science texts. WOMDT? Ditto the HS math texts recently adopted. WOMDT? Ditto the Leslie Literacy textbooks. WOMDT? Ditto the materials on the recently proposed ELA initiative (PLUS I was the only member of the Committee who insisted that this initiative be briefed to the SC). WOMDT? Ditto the MS & HS Social Study texts. WOMDT?

Did I mention that I have taken the time to sit in on classes in the HS AND MS to assess for myself the level of these courses? Before you complain that I didn't do this in the elementary grades, I confess. I felt my presence would distract the kids and make the teachers particularly uncomfortable (the MS & HS teachers were uncomfortable enough). BTW .... I'm not aware that any other SC member has attended any such classes ... so how do I get selected as the enemy of good curriculum?

Did I mention that I have read EVERY year since I have been a member to 2nd grade classes at the Franklin School and once at the Thomson School (the other invites I had at the Thomson School had conflicts I couldn't avoid).

I am the only member who has fought to have the SC fulfill its responsibility to REVIEW and APPROVE all new school textbooks/curricula. The SC has either sided with the administration who said "It is none of the Committee's business" OR they have reluctantly agreed to vote BUT, even in the later case, they just rubber stamped the admin/teacher's recommendations. In my opinion they have abdicated their responsibility to the community and to our students by not actively assessing, for themselves and for the community, these textbook/curriculum changes.

None of this details the active role I have taken behind the scenes in these matters. I have routinely supported putting more phonics instruction in the classroom (private discussions with all Superintendents, Binkley, Bergeron, and Hutch) and I have even written articles discussing this need and the failure of "whole word" instruction. I recently pleaded with Hutch to add REAL science textbooks for the 5th grade to supplement FOSS and said that I would actively support finding the money for it. If you really cared about our elementary students getting at least one year of solid science instruction, you could lobby Hutch and the other SC members to make this happen.

So how do you justify singling me out as an OBSTRUCTIONIST when it comes to improving curriculum?

As someone said, "You can make up your own opinion, but not your own facts."

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You belittle "expectations and high standards," but the fact is that a competent teacher can get good results from students despite a poor curriculum if they set the right expectations and high standards (in some cases deviating from the bad curriculum to do so). Many of our very good elementary teachers did this with TERC and I have always given you credit for pushing Sunshine Math (resisted, as you know, by some administrators).

Finally, I find it VERY ODD that on a SC with a 4-1 Liberal super-majority, it is the single libertarian/conservative who is to blame for the school failings. The 4 status-quo liberals can pass any policy they want and support any re-arrangement of the budget they want. But the failures are my fault?? Only George Orwell would be able to explain such a ridiculous allegation.

Let me see if I understand this. ELA is the most important mission of our elementary schools. A good ELA curriculum is the most important ingredient for good ELA outcomes. We have over \$35 million to spend. You have 4 votes ... but the ELA curriculum improvements you think we need is not funded?????

Well, maybe you are half right. Let's blame NATA.

Chuck Ormsby, Obstructionist

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## Re:Discussion summary and action plan

Posted by ccoormsby - 2008/07/10 10:56

Michael,

You wrote, "Chuck O., are you willing to commit, at some level, to instituting more significant communication channels, both formal and informal, between the SC and the N.A. residents, or at least be the point person responsible? This would be a communication channel, not a venue for opinions and commentary. It would be for facts, decisions, findings, action items, etc. only."

We have public "open" meetings that are televised (over and over) and minutes that are recorded and published (if they are not on the web already, I would be glad to support that) ... not to mention reporting in TVP, NAC & ET.

I'm sorry to report that, if you want to know what is going on, you need to tune in. I was tuned out of local issues up until Spring 2002 when some silly people proposed a \$10 million operational override to be followed by another \$5 million override a few years later. So, guess what ... I tuned in.

I'm not going to spend more of my time, that clearly should be spent putting better science and phonics in our elementary schools, spoon feeding those who are unwilling to tune in to the highly available information you seek. That being said, I am a vocal and ardent supporter of the public's right to know. I even proposed that ALL SC e-mails (between SC members and or between SC members and admin) be made available on the web. This was several years ago, so current members were not responsible for denying this suggestion. As you might imagine, it got very little ... actually no ... support.

If you think this is needed, feel free to champion it.

Chuck

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## Re:Discussion summary and action plan

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/10 11:12

Michael,

I volunteer to research and then compare and contrast the ELA curricula when they are proposed by the school committee. I will most rigorously give my opinions and commentary as to their relative merits. I look forward to the school committee debates on the merits of these proposed curricula.

I hope you encourage the non-Chuck school committee members to participate and maybe put it on their agenda.

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I'm curious as to your analysis of 'For issue #1, AYPs: The SC and SA will address next month when the AYP results are given. I call on these two groups to do the right thing, do what's possible, and do what's prudent given the current state of affairs.'

This implies you think the SC and SA have not done the right thing in the past, done what's possible, or been prudent given the current state of affairs.

Do you agree with Sandy that long-standing lack of leadership is a core problem here?

Mike

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Helen - 2008/07/10 11:50

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I am "wicked" liberal – label me all you want. I support neighborhood schools, local control, teacher collaboration and decision-making for curriculum and teaching to strengths of individual students.

When Harry Harutunian was here, we talked about meetings of all grade level teachers from town and curriculum committees for all major areas. Whatever else Harry did or failed to do, this initiative that could be implemented any time by any admin. As Mike Q. said, it is a multi-year process, and there is no reason to delay its start.

As far as I can see, the Leslie collaborative technique/method has been largely dismissed from the primary and elementary classrooms at Thomson. Given the admin focused standardization of education, I am not aware of administrative overview of this change nor have parents been informed of changing priorities.

Quoting Mike Quinlan: "Is this same method / technique / non-curriculum used at all other elementary schools in North Andover? Is this part of the 'standardization' of curriculum that is hoped to help performance in the Middle School?" Mike, in my opinion, this lack of knowledge of our schools is the reason you were crushed in the SC election, not a political liberal leaning.

A new spelling and language approach, "Foundations" was piloted at Thomson this year, emphasizing spelling rules. It was implemented mid-year, and replaced the spelling program included with our new math curriculum. Will students who began the program in mid second grade complete the program in third grade? It would have been great to offer a parent ed session on the goals of the new program to bring parents on board. I heard it will be used district wide in the primary grades next year. Is this true? I hope parent ed sessions will be implemented with all new curriculums. This again is an important admin function, to bring teachers and parents together for the benefit of children.

As for Math: I liked TERC for the primary grade levels. It was hands-on, object manipulative and discovery focused. We know that learning by doing is the most effective teaching model. I am disappointed at the "worksheet" approach of the new curriculum. At the upper elementary I find the new curriculum better, as the students at this level are prepared for manipulation of symbols. Any curriculum needs to be adjusted by classroom teachers to address the holes in the curriculum and specific needs of the students on a given class.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by dromano - 2008/07/10 12:59

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I'm not going to try to distill out the multiple topics in this one topic... but if participants here have a specific interest in any of them (curriculum, communications, etc) I'd suggest starting a new topic so each topic can be more focused.

This one should be about the specific issue of Thomson AYP and the potential for school choice.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/10 13:13

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Michael,

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'Liberal' is a common descriptive term in politics connoting 'left-of-center'. It is not a pejorative.

Why didn't you address my question in the last post?

"I'm curious as to your analysis of 'For issue #1, AYPs: The SC and SA will address next month when the AYP results are given. I call on these two groups to do the right thing, do what's possible, and do what's prudent given the current state of affairs.'

This implies you think the SC and SA have not done the right thing in the past, done what's possible, or been prudent given the current state of affairs.

Do you agree with Sandy that long-standing lack of leadership is a core problem here?"

Seems simple enough.

How many parents of children exposed to years of TERC continue to support it as resoundingly as you do? Are they not sufficiently 'wicked'?"

Mike

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### Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Helen - 2008/07/10 13:28

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Mike,

Your last post seems to reply to mine- Helen- who is "wicked" liberal. Forgive the slang, I was using the NE "wicked" meaning "really, really" that is to say, "I am really, really liberal."

That being straightened out, I am retiring from this discussion for the time being.

Helen

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### Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Guy - 2008/07/10 13:50

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MikeQuinlan wrote:

'Liberal' is a common descriptive term in politics connoting 'left-of-center'. It is not a pejorative.

Pejorative depends on how it's used, of course.

But the only problem with "left-of-center" is the definition of "center". For example, we currently have two candidates for US President that are going to be trying very, very hard from now until November to define themselves as moderates or centrists. And there is no doubt in my mind that the Boston Globe is going to be defining one of them as a centrist or moderate and the other as a flaming zealot way off to one side. They're funny like that.

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### Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/10 14:19

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I think one of them is liberal and the other socialist. I do suppose it depends on what is the 'center'.

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### Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/10 14:23

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Helen,

I'm sorry, I was confused. I do understand the use of 'wicked'; I grew up in Boston. I did not look closely and thought the post was from Michael Reed.

Again I apologize.

Mike

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by dromano - 2008/07/10 14:24

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I guess I'll stick with 'independant'... ie sometimes I agree with one 'group' in areas and sometimes I agree with 'the other'... whatever those groups are. ;-) Bottom line, focus on the topics and not pigeonholing people. Things are very fluid. I know I am open to constantly evaluating facts when making decisions. I don't vote based on how someone else votes... the 'party line' or whatever. I vote based on my opinion on a topic.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Guy - 2008/07/10 14:31

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MikeQuinlan wrote:

I think one of them is liberal and the other socialist. I do suppose it depends on what is the 'center'. Pejorative socialist, or just plain socialist? :)

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/10 14:57

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In this case, a 'true-believer' - one who acts fervently to promote socialism.

Usually, the 'reasonable man\*' principle applies. If someone says the sky is 'blue' a 'reasonable man' is unlikely to look at the same sky at the same time and observe the sky is 'lime green'.

\* Note: this 'reasonable man' used in the example does not have visual impairments or enhancements, physical or chemical. The example does not constitute a preferment of any color, shade or hue.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Guy - 2008/07/11 09:02

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This got me to thinking...if the "Sky Blue" guy is a whack job with an AK47, of course a reasonable man is going to agree with him.

However, if the sky is really lime green, the reasonable man would say it is lime green no matter how many whack jobs think that it is sky blue.

I guess it all comes down to perception.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by MikeQuinlan - 2008/07/11 10:43

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Well, the 'reasonable man' is a legal concept so has little bearing on the real world as experienced by real people.

There may be social pressure to claim the sky is lime green (or 'All is well!'). You could proclaim 'blue' before being splattered by a hail of bullets. But at least you'd have the satisfaction of knowing you'd been true. (Not that does much for paying your family's future bills...)

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Dawn Cres - 2008/07/12 01:01

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Oh my, I have been away for several days and I am quite dismayed at how far off track this discussion has gone!

First, I will add a little more to the off track.

1. I am not a school insider. When I attended the pto presidents mtg's, I was eyed warily for the following reasons:

a. I defended Chuck's perspectives at times.

b. I dared to vote R

c. I would question the status quo

d. I liked to think for myself...very dangerous!

2. I am not a liberal. I do like to weigh and study all issues. I do recycle. I think alternative sources of energy must be explored to decrease our reliance on Arab countries and to help our earth. I volunteer in the schools and I advocate for school issues that I believe warrant advocacy. I also work, vote, pay taxes, follow the news and most importantly, parent my children. I believe McCain is the only choice in this election so weeks ago, I made my campaign contribution and placed his bumper sticker on my car. McCain may not be beloved by the conservatives but I think he's our only hope and a heroic man.

Back to Thomson, are we talking about MCAS or the color of the sky? Sadly, the Thomson issues have become fodder for the political machines and that is exactly how Thomson came to be in such dire straights.

Please refer back to sc mtg minutes ( to tie into the communication thread...). I spoke about the enormous grade1 class sizes in relation to title 1 in late sept/early oct. Thankfully, Chuck and Bill K were supportive of adding another teacher, otherwise I would have been sent back to my seat after my 2 seconds were up at the mic. In December, I spoke about the MCAS/AYP scores, misappropriation of title 1 funds, and asked how come the title 1 kids were being used as a crutch to excuse mCAS scores. Don't we always hear educators claim that every child can learn? I got very little response and was sent back to my seat...again. I got a real boot in the backside for my title 1 comments as the recently retired principal called me into his office and essentially told me to clam up about title 1. I am all about asking honest questions and expecting honest answers. I don't care about making people uncomfortable if the welfare of children is at stake. The Dec. mtg minutes even quote my title 1 misappropriation comments.

However, I have to say, it was mighty lonesome at those meetings! I was often the sole Thomson advocate and because I was an army of 1, it was easy to marginalize me and label me a crazy lady.

Sadly, Thomson will be caught in a political storm for several years. If one reads NCLB, you'll see that the turnaround time for a school is 4-6 years. Add to this that the leadership issues will continue. Gregg Gilligan is ONLY a 1 year interim and Marini has only 1 year left on his term. That means the new faces gamble starts again in 2010. I can not put my faith in a SC that spent more time discussing athletic fees and a preschool building than MCAS failure at an elem school. Apparently, those issues were far more worthy of discussion than MCAS failure or NCLB and only reinforces my belief that the Thomson school is the bastard stepchild of the NAPS system. Not 1 SC member set foot in the Thomson school during the 07-08 school year.

I have some real insight and perspective into the road to failure and how to expedite the Thomson turnaround but no one from the SC/SA has given my historical perspective any credit, probably due in some part to my unwillingness to play the pc game. No one has even deemed me worthy to speak to. How very sad that the SC has become part of the "school insiders" instead of representing the parents and students as they were elected to do. Whidden, Allen, Limpert and Nobile have not even acknowledged my emails or concerns. Best to ignore the crazy one. However, the problems continue to exist and worsen. I can not speak at SC meetings per order of the Chairwomans new rules and she herself

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has stated publicly during meetings that parents should refer to the emails listed on the NAPS site. Hmmm, ignore me at meetings and ignore my emails. What an effective way to stall progress and keep me quiet. I think this plays beautifully into the current thread discussing communication. I have a BIG problem with the inability to comment on subjects as they are being discussed at SC meetings.

To answer a few earlier questions in posts:

1. IEP's follow a child if the child changes school per NCLB.

2. Receiving schools have no input. None. As an FYI, the principals at Franklin, Sargent and the past principal at Kittedge all knew they had NO RIGHT to touch the title 1 funds but they greedily stuck their forks in the pie. That greed has led their schools to the current position of receiving students. The title 1 issue has been corrected, I was told, by Marini. I will give him credit for addressing this but I also believe it was only addressed because I was making a stink. Title 1 funds are a federal grant and come with very strict rules and regs. The SC should not even claim ignorance about title 1. Ignorance is not a justifiable excuse. If you take the money, you need to be responsible for understanding the rules of appropriation.

In closing, the Thomson school children deserve better than they have rec'd. How very sad that despite all the efforts on the part of some parents that nothing has or will change. I expect a few minor changes and then resumption of the staus quo. My attitude stinks and I know it. That's why my younger child will be moved per NCLB. I've got no desire to beat my head a against a brick wall any longer but I do feel deep regret that 425 children will once again be left behind.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Helen - 2008/07/12 08:13

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Two questions:

1) Can students from other schools in town use SCHOOL CHOICE to opt IN to Thomson? With all the wonderful opportunities of extra tutoring and attention, and summer schooling available, maybe there are families who want to take advantage of Thomson's improvement process?

2) Do others believe the problems of one school are isolated, and do not affect the ed opportunities for the whole community?

Helen

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Dawn Cres - 2008/07/12 17:01

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Hi Helen,

I don't see why others couldn't opt in to Thomson but I seriously doubt anyone will choose to move to a failed school.

I believe, from my exposure during my pto pres time, that the Thomson is an island and our problems are very unique. The other schools don't seem to have the same issues we have.

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## Re:Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Helen - 2008/07/12 18:05

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Dawn,

My question really is: Does NCLB allow or require that kind of "reverse" school choice for those in the affected schools, those receiving Thomson students?

Comment: I would not characterize Thomson as a failed school, though I acknowledge the failure of the MCAS AYP in

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the prior year. My 6th grader is a very proficient reader and mathematician. My third grader has made significant academic strides. Both have experienced caring teachers and administrators. I also have a wee little plaque in my kitchen that says, "Thomson volunteers are the best." I think this is 100% true.

As you are well aware, but I will repeat for this public forum, the worst part of our time at Thomson was the beginning of the 06-07 school year, when 4th and 5th grades had 35+ students in classes, while 3rd had 30+ students, and we had a significant turn-over in staffing. It takes time to re-construct the school culture. This was not unique to Thomson, but common to many classrooms and schools all over the district. It is a contributing factor to any measure of school performance.

I am not dismissing the real concerns that must be addressed for Thomson and our other schools (transitory admin, lack of curriculum, poor communication, discouragement of parental participation, lack of school libraries) but I see these affecting the whole district, especially with all schools feeding into the middle and HS.

As I understand you intend to move your younger child if the opportunity presents itself, I wonder if you think that will improve these other areas. I wonder if you will experience the SC as more accepting of your comments and concerns. I wonder if district-wide curriculum will be developed and implemented. I wonder if you will find teachers who have more time built into their schedules for collaboration or administrators who can better relate to revolving superintendents. I just don't see this as isolated. I could be wrong. It will be interesting to hear your experience, if things play out that way.

Here's another question: I know some communities have had school choice between towns. I heard Boxford residents can go to Masco or Georgetown HS. Students from Lawrence have had school choice to enroll in Amesbury. Are these programs still going? Are they part of NCLB? How are they funded?

Helen

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## Re: Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Dawn Cres - 2008/07/12 19:39

Helen, you make some very interesting and valid points.

My responses below:

Helen: As I understand you intend to move your younger child if the opportunity presents itself, I wonder if you think that will improve these other areas.

Dawn: Nope. Won't improve other areas but will change the culture my child is submerged in. I tried to change the other areas to no avail. It time for someone else to step up to the plate.

Helen: I wonder if you will experience the SC as more accepting of your comments and concerns. I wonder if district-wide curriculum will be developed and implemented. I wonder if you will find teachers who have more time built into their schedules for collaboration or administrators who can better relate to revolving superintendents. I just don't see this as isolated. I could be wrong. It will be interesting to hear your experience, if things play out that way.

Dawn: I think the curriculum and teachers at the other schools are already better established as the other schools have not had the transient principal problems that Thomson has experienced. I am happy that your children have done well. My daughter has had 2 brand new teachers for grades k and 1. Nice ladies but not veterans. She is also in a mix of very needy kids as is my son who has had 4 awful years at Thomson. Based on my experience, I am jumping off the Titanic.

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## Re: Thomson failing AYP; anyone concerned?

Posted by Helen - 2008/07/12 20:08

Dawn,

I sincerely wish you and yours well in your schools. We will no doubt continue to interact on many levels. I appreciate your response.

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I still feel the other schools have had a share of changes and loss – when Harry shifted the principals, when budget cuts eliminated a principal in town, when Nancy Jukins retired. Maybe there was less teacher shuffling at other schools during those budget cuts, but I know some of our new Thomson staff came from other elementaries in town. Maybe at the bigger schools, enough veteran staff stayed to make it feel more stable. I'm sure the quick growth in the Thomson student body, through re-districting and turnover in the housing market has also impacted our sense of school community. I agree that the school culture is very important and that it needs attention Thomson.

All best,  
Helen

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