

LEADERSHIP FIDDLES WHILE THE CITY OF MELROSE BURNS

In just the latest sign that the present Mayor, School Committee, and School Administration are entirely in over their heads, the Melrose community learned last week that the schools were over budget by \$2,200,000. Apparently, no one in charge had any idea until July - after the year was over - leaving a massive structural deficit moving forward.

The many **questions** this announcement raises could be more concerning than the fact that, after the voters stood up and approved a \$5,000,000 override, the school department found a way to squander it in just a few short years.

Who is deceiving who in this process? Did Superintendent Kukenberger deceive the school committee during her appraisal period (and subsequent pay raise) by hiding the deficit until after the process was complete? Or did certain school committee members, if not all, deceive the public by waiting until the process was over to announce the deficit? Worst of all, I suppose, did the school committee knowingly give the Superintendent a positive review and salary raise in spite of the fact she had no control over school spending, blew the budget by over \$2,200,000, and didn't raise the alarm? Is there any leadership at all coming from Mayor Brodeur's office?

We know the school committee chair and Superintendent are comfortable deceiving the public. In the aftermath of the Red Raider controversy, the e-mails discovered during a FOIA request conclusively proved that the Chair of the School Committee, Jen McAndrews, and Superintendent Kukenberger completely and intentionally misled the public as to the origins of this movement. These two individuals sought to hide their complicity in the name change controversy when High School Principal Jason Merrill sent a letter to the school community stating that removing the Red Raider name was **his decision and his alone**. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

At its next meeting, the school committee should move to full disclosure and publish every e-mail and document concerning the timing of these budget events. It would be a complete abdication of the school committee's responsibility to the Melrose Community if this information came to light due to another FOIA request. If Mayor Brodeur and the Melrose School Committee want any credibility moving forward, they need to spell the timeline out in a public meeting.

Don't hold your breath. Instead, you can expect a litany of self-aggrandizing statements, pontifications and platitudes from the current members of the Melrose School Committee. Their greatest skill may be their ability to speak endlessly yet, actually say nothing at all. Thinking back on the ridiculous issues that consumed the School Superintendent and School Committee over the past 18 months, one can only think, "Nero fiddled while Rome burned ." Looking back at their behavior, it should be no surprise they created this mess and then hid it from the public.

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