

January 26, 2017

## **Michael Silverstone: Small schools, close to children, provide best outcomes**

**Split vote in Town is not sufficient support for the school project**

**Michael Silverstone**

Published in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette, Friday Jan. 27, 2017.*

Dear Town Meeting Members:

During the course of some 3000 days over 15 years, working in Amherst elementary school buildings as a 2nd grade teacher I had many occasions to wonder what must have possessed the community in the early 1970s to have approved flat roofed, warm-weather California designs for not one, but two identical elementary school buildings on concrete slabs adjacent to New England wetlands.

What once seemed like the latest cool thing, the “maker spaces” of their time, became problematic to this day, leading to what is now a burning impatience for a potential remedy that potentially compounds the original error with a flawed proposal that does disservice the youngest students and their families by separating 2nd graders from their natural K-2 cohort (and early literacy specialists), and by requiring 1st graders and their families to make transitions out of an early childhood focused school at a developmentally inappropriate time. Beyond the other flaws, such as the sacrifice of playground space to the staff parking lot is perhaps the the biggest drawback of all—the plan brings us farther, and more permanently away from the possibility of responsive neighborhood schools.

Smaller schools, closer to where children live, provide the best outcomes for students according to school size research. A more human scale makes it easier to develop closer understanding collaborations, personal trust, and a sense of safety among staff, students and parents in small schools. They allow fewer barriers to parent involvement and promote a feeling of belonging—which are key to promoting the success of children from economically disadvantaged families and for all families, ultimately.

I respect the sense of urgency many feel to do something now but the split vote of the voters and town meeting suggests that there isn't the kind of support that would justify approval of a plan with so many potential problems.

Michael Silverstone  
35 Pomeroy Ct.  
Amherst, MA 01002

Precinct 7