

Nauset High School Project  
Brewster Finance Committee Vote  
Submitted by Harvey Dahl, Chair

On Jan 27, 2021 the Brewster Finance Committee voted 3 in favor and 5 against a motion to support the NRHS project.

I have put together a summary of comments and statements made by the Brewster Finance Committee during discussion of the vote on this project.

All Members of the Finance Committee Agreed:

- Nauset Regional High School needs to be addressed with a comprehensive project.
- The School Building Committee did a good job at designing a school for 905 students.
- The analysis on the cost of School Choice is valid and does result in district households paying a significant premium to subsidize Choice students
- If approved the project cost will inequitably fall on Brewster taxpayers

Those voting **against** the project expressed the following concerns:

- The proposed project is being designed around the inter-district school choice program (Choice) and tuition-in students which comprise 30% of the student population. The towns and families that send students through Choice and Tuition-in will not pay the debt on the project. The debt of \$95M will be the responsibility of the Taxpayers of Brewster (48% going to 50%), Orleans, Eastham and Wellfleet.
- The subsidy the member district towns pay as taxpayers for School Choice and to a lesser extent Tuition-in, would be better spent financing the annual debt of a smaller project, leaving more capacity for Brewster to issue bonds for future projects like the Ladies Library.
- Approving this program would be asking the voters of Brewster to pay for a building, and continue to subsidize the education, for students from Barnstable, Dennis, Yarmouth, Harwich and Chatham and will possibly institutionalize the School Choice and Tuition-in programs. The large number of Choice students being designed into the Nauset High project is unique in the MSBA program. Choice was intended to add marginal number of students, not a distinctly large part of the student body
- If we can successfully limit Choice, we could build a facility, at least partially out of Choice savings and can educate our students at the current per pupil cost of \$20,000 per student (reported to DESE by the NRHS administration). If we need to spend more per in-district student to achieve our educational goals and preserve our status as one of the top 25 districts in the state, we can and should, but the overall cost to do that with the fewer students that live in-district will be significantly lower than maintaining the current Choice enrollment.
- We are in favor of expanding the district to include Provincetown and Truro. But this is not on the table and to the best of my knowledge is not being actively pursued.
- We should not equate a smaller school with a lesser quality one. Smaller schools have shown stellar results, are in the top 25 and spend less than NRHS on a per pupil basis. (Subcommittee Report)

Those voting **in support** of the project expressed the following concerns:

- We all recognize that much of the present NRHS physical plant is outdated and in need of replacement/improvement. The new plan appears to be very supportive of the educational program.
- We are very disappointed that District households are paying a premium to provide schooling for School Choice, and to a lesser extent, tuition agreement students from outside the District. Without any immediate prospect of increasing the CHOICE students' tuition, a significant inequitable share of the cost of this project will fall on Brewster taxpayers.
- If we were to realize savings by eliminating or greatly reducing School Choice and the premium we pay, we could substantially reduce the debt burden on the District and the Town, enough to perhaps pay for over half of the cost of a new smaller 600 student \$126M school with those savings.
- But, it is a hypothetical that the NRSB could actually realize the savings by eliminating school choice and still maintain the educational achievement level we enjoy. We suspect it would not be easy to cut costs and retain effectiveness.
- It's possible with the new Brewster Woods additional affordable housing of thirty units and the Millstone Road project's pf perhaps 50 affordable housing units coming on line in the next 3-5 years, such projects could add 50-150 new students to our District, and would require cutting back on Choice students.
- Therefore, we support the school building project as proposed. We don't want to risk our educational achievement level for the possible opportunity to secure savings that may not be realized. Not supporting this project will not further the education of our students.
- In addition, we believe that we should make every effort to inform Town and District taxpayers that they are indeed paying a premium to maintain the excellence achieved. We have a highly ranked high-cost school district. District taxpayers should understand the impact on their taxes. District taxpayers should understand they pay 70% of the average cost for School Choice students from outside the District to attend Nauset District Schools and that Nauset as a District takes in significantly more Choice kids than we send out.
- Further, we support making efforts to seek legislative relief to raise the reimbursement rate for Choice students; such reimbursement rate was set in the 1990's and has not been changed since, resulting in a reimbursement that falls far short of the level of equity that was originally intended. Unfortunately, we suspect that there will be little appetite in the Legislature for drawing further resources away from under-performing school districts that are sending students to higher performing districts.
- Finally, we support efforts to negotiate higher cost recovery from tuition agreement towns when the current agreement terms run out.