

• **VIEWPOINT** •

**Thoughts on the
Jamestown school
administrative budget**

By Robert Sutton

One of the penalties of questioning the Jamestown school budget is that at least by some, you are immediately perceived as being anti-education, which I think is unfortunate. I currently support, and for the past 37 years have supported, the K-8 Jamestown School. I really like and respect the children of Jamestown personally, and I believe that the K-8 Jamestown School has always been and remains an integral part of our community's history, vitality and a necessary component of the sustainability of our island.

Most specifically, I believe as a taxpayer, a councilman and as a human being I have an irrevocable responsibility to educate our community's children and I believe that the Jamestown K-8 public school is a critical element of meeting that responsibility.

As has been reported, I have been very critical and raised questions of the administrative organizational structure that has evolved at the school. I did not begin with a predetermined notion or agenda that the administrative structure was wrong. I became critical after I looked at the numbers that the School Committee and school administration provided.

The Jamestown School administrative personnel have experienced a very high rate of turn over. Over the past nine years, (the time it took for this year's eighth grade class to matriculate through the system) there have been four different superintendents, several principals, two assistant principals, director of pupil services, etc. and at this year's eighth grade graduation there will not be a single administrator who was in an administrative position when those children started kindergarten. In and of itself this may not be too important, but it certainly raises a red flag and I think a reason to question.

During this same nine year time period the organizational structure has changed annually from full-time superintendent to part-time superintendent to superintendent/principal

and assistant principal to part-time superintendent, principal, and principal in training to part time superintendent and two principals. Each successive year involves new administrative positions and additional budgeted costs. The School Committee chairman says each school committee has "grappled with the challenge of creating an effective leadership structure," but that she believes that this time they have it right. I believe what they propose certainly raises questions and quite honestly I do not believe that they have it right this time.

To me, it is a constantly growing organizational system that is expensive and unplanned. During this same nine-year period, excluding all special education administration,

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the number of supervisory administrative personnel will have increased from two to six and an increase in cost from \$165,115 to \$527,220, up 219 percent. High salary costs increasing at 219 percent certainly raises a red flag and a reason to question.

As our most recent students were working their way from kindergarten to eighth grade graduation, they were accompanied by fewer friends and classmates as school populations dropped from 627 students to 477 students, a decrease of 24 percent. During the same time there was an increase in educational budgets (excluding special education) of 92 percent, which both exceeded inflation and seems non-reflective of having to educate fewer students. It certainly raises a red flag and a reason to ask questions.

In the "Viewpoint" commentary in the Jamestown Press, published

April, 24 2008, the School Committee chairwoman defends the next new school administrative structure saying essentially it was because of the added responsibility for state and federal reports and numerous new regulations. In her entire 700-word defense, she never once identifies the value for school children and she never once acknowledges that the local community's ability to pay may be an important consideration.

So that you didn't read this far for nothing, here is what I think. I think the organization being created will have difficulty responding to top down leadership from the Jamestown School Committee and the Jamestown community. The organization at the top will have an elected school committee, and a part-time semi-retired school superintendent. The two principals will each be responsible for their own school building, their own state and federal regulations, their own set of testing standards, with little responsibility for the overall school district. The two principals have advanced from the Jamestown teaching ranks and in their daily individual school building contact, their professional and social ties insure that the principal/teacher relationship will most likely remain a strong bond. The organizational bond to the part time, likely more transient, semi-retired school superintendent/elected school committee comprehensive big picture will probably not be as strong or as effective.

I do not personally dislike school teachers or school principals. My oldest son is a school teacher and high school baseball coach in the Chariho School District and he and my own experience have created within me a great respect for what school teachers accomplish every day. My concern is recognizing organizational structure and the way organizational structures act to define, reinforce and reward human activity, accomplishment and direction within the organization and I do not like the organizational structure being proposed for the Jamestown School system.

The writer is a member of the Town Council.

for at least one night of training a month to stay on top of skills. It is important to stay sharp because we don't get as many calls in the winter," Hodges said.

According to Hodges, JEMS is always looking for volunteers. There are 10 new EMTs coming in from the most recent training class and a new class is run every year to keep the numbers up. By becoming a JEMS volunteer there is some incentive in tax relief for homeowners or a small cash-in-kind stipend.

"There are the old regulars, like Vinny Vesella, Nancy Beye, Sandy Paterson, and there are probably eight or 10 other people who have been doing this for 10 to 25 years. That is your core of really committed people," Hodges said

One of the newer JEMS members is Linda Brown who is in her second year as an EMT. "It is just so much fun to be part of this organization because there are people from all walks of life. I find that camaraderie really fun. It is also very stimulating intellectually because you have to keep your skills up all the time," she said.

JEMS is always accepting monetary donations. The ambulances

were purchased and equipped with the help of community contributions and they are currently raising funds to purchase a new ambulance to be named in memory of Karl Smith. Donations were also used to give the garage a recent facelift. Improvements include a major cleanup and a new paint job. Those involved in the ongoing landscaping project include Dorothy Magratten, Linda Brown, Prim Bullock, Vinny Vesella, David Bento and Scott Rafferty. A Jamestown Brownie troop also planted flowers and bulbs as part of their troop project.

Brown admits that being an EMT is challenging and a time commitment. "I work with great people who put me in a position to help me test my skills," Hodges added. "When you hear the horns go off in the middle of the night you know that you may not be getting much sleep that night."

For more information about JEMS, call 423-7276. As part of EMT week and to show off the recent renovations, there will be an open house at the Ambulance Barn after the Memorial Day Parade on May 26 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

EMS

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made approximately 550 runs last year, which includes emergencies as well as community services such as standing by at the Save the Bay swim.

Hodges recalled some of his more memorable runs. "The situations that are not totally under control are exciting and then you have the more amusing calls, like you are called to Beavertail and you have a guy with an obviously broken hip who says 'don't step on the green algae, that stuff is really slippery.'"

JEMS is staffed entirely by volunteer EMTs, qualified drivers and back-up crews. EMTs complete a 140-hour training program, with written and practical exams. Both EMTs and drivers certify yearly in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Six of the 68 JEMS members are non-residents since there are few local communities who have a volunteer program. "Everybody is there because they want to be. Whether you are an EMT or a crew or a driver you are showing up

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