Gmail Stephen Callahan <callahanstephend@gmail.com>

Thoughts Across Committees

Emily C McCabe <ecoombs@gmail.com> Mon, Jan 19, 2026 at 5:28 PM
To: Jeff Marsden <Jmarsden@email.medfield.net>, "mkirkby@email.medfield.net" <mkirkby@email.medfield.net>
Cc: Stephen Callahan <callahanstephend@gmail.com>

Dear Jeff and Michelle,
I watched the School Committee meeting from January 15, 2026 and I felt compelled to meet with you both, but figured I would start with an email.

First of all, watching that meeting was distressing to me as a fellow parent and volunteer in this wonderful town I call home. I have no agenda and in fact, when our co-chair Bob Sliney left last year his parting words to me were “Keep advocating for the children, Emily”. Second, it is not lost on me that sitting in front of 30 teachers and doing your job to fight for them and the children is very real and I respect you for that. I want you to know that I am fighting too.

Putting my emotions aside; however, I put some thought into how fellow residents, parents, staff or teachers might have interpreted some of the discussion at your meeting. Frankly, the way it was presented made it seem like the town has underestimated revenue at the school department’s expense and/or is hoarding “free cash” at the expense of our dear teachers. I expect that you don’t believe that, but I would hope that you can see how that sort of interpretation erodes trust in our town government when we need it most.

For example, the reference to “a 7 million underestimation of revenue” would have landed very differently had it been noted that a substantial portion of that amount has been prudently allocated to school-related priorities — including the Elementary School Tax Stabilization Fund, the Special Education Stabilization Fund, the feasibility study for the Dale Street School project, and the School Department’s IT capital budget, among others. Without that context, the comment can easily be misconstrued as evidence of discretionary funds being withheld from the School Department, which is not accurate.

The way I see it and what was missing from that meeting is the stark, sad reality that we are a town that is funded largely by personal property taxes and we are limited in raising that by Prop 2 ½. I have no problem that level funding in the school department is 5% but I did not see any reference to that structural problem at your meeting. I saw quite a bit of blaming the town and the Warrant Committee without that important context. I think there is room for us all to be on the same team while not disparaging each other. If members of our respective committees are doing so; we should call that out in the interest of mutual respect and in the interest of gaining trust and votes from our fellow citizens.

Thank you for listening and for all you do,
Emily McCabe

Gmail **Stephen Callahan <callahanstephend@gmail.com>**

Last School Committee meeting

Peter Michelson <michelson_sbc@medfield.net> Mon, Jan 19, 2026 at 4:59 PM
To: Jeff Marsden <Jmarsden@email.medfield.net>, Michelle Kirkby <mkirkby@email.medfield.net>
Cc: Callahanstephend@gmail.com

Hi Jeff and Michelle, I hope you are enjoying this snowy day. I just wanted to share some thoughts about the recent school committee meeting.

This is a very hard budget year. I get that. Everyone gets that. I like the Medfield school system a great deal. It provided a good education for my daughters. However, I don't think that casting the Town, and the Warrant Committee, as the villains in the current budget crisis serves you well. And I don't think that when members of the School Committee start talking about how the Town and Warrant Committee are underfunding the schools, you do yourselves a lot of good. All town budgets are being squeezed this year.

As you know, the budget for health insurance, for all Town employees, including all School Department employees, went up by over 15%, or $1 million. I would add that since roughly 75% of the Town's employees are School Department employees, 75% of that budget increase is going to support School Department personnel.

I hate the phrase "free cash." It suggests, hey, I've got some free cash, let's go see a show at the Wang Center. It's not that at all, as I'm confident you know. The Town uses cash that is turned back to pay a range of necessary expenses, such as capital expenses and the like. And it is also currently being used to fund the tax abatement fund that will be used once the Town approves a new Dale Street school. I assume that you approve of that use of free cash.

Also, prudent use of free cash has an impact on the Town's bond rating. Having a good bond rating decreases the cost of borrowing. So having a bond rating of double A versus triple A can be the difference of approximately $3 million over the course of a 30 year bond. (I am using very rough numbers there. Steve Callahan, copied on this email, could provide a more detailed analysis on this matter. However, the point remains: a better bond rating leads to lower long-term costs for the town. And how prudently the Town uses free cash affects the bond rating.)

Jeff, I really do respect you, but I also really don't think that comments like, "people don't move to Medfield for the Fire Department" do you or the School Department any good. There are a range of services that go into making a Town. Yes, the School Department is important, but that does not make the Police Dept. or the Fire Dept. or the Library unimportant. I think you are well aware of that, but again, comments like the one you made don't do any good. As Dustin Pedroia said, "if we don't hang together, we'll all hang separately." (At least I think it was Dustin who said that.)

I could go on, but I'll stop here. I'm of course happy to talk to you, Jeff, or you, Michelle, if you wish to do so.

Thanks, Peter Michelson

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