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EDITOR'S PICK

School audit highlights disparities of opinions between schools

By Teddy Tauscher | ttauscher@eagletribune.com
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METHUEN —While an audit of the public school revealed frustrations with administration, resources, bullying and more participating staff generally expressed more discontent at the Timony, Tenney and Marsh grammar schools.

Employees were broadly more content with their situation at the high school and Comprehensive Grammar School. Officials aim to use a recently completed audit by the accounting firm CBIZ to find inadequacies and come up with an improvement plan for the district.

The surveys, which were sent out last school year, were completed by 35% of staff who were reached out to, 18% of parents and 20% of students. Comments highlighted by auditors were generally very positive or very negative. In most cases parents rated aspects of the schools far higher than staff with their average satisfaction with their child's experience ranging from 3.6/5 at the Timony to 4.3/5 at the CGS, not including data from the early childhood center.

Concerns about the budget were expressed throughout the district.

Overall, the schools' composite reviews put the CGS at the top with 71.9%, high school 70%, Tenney 65.4%, Marsh 64.9% and Timony 62%.

The audit highlighted concerns about the disconnect between teachers and administrators with staff at Timony reporting the highest level of frustration on the issue.

“When we do reach out for help with students, there is absolutely no consistency and sometimes, we wait days for a reply,” a staff member said.

According to the auditors, positive comments generally spoke about supportive staff and dedicated teachers while negative comments expressed concerns about safety, management and educational standards.

“I absolutely love my colleagues here at the Timony School. They are incredibly hard-working and passionate about what they do,” another staff member said.

Students reported feeling the least safe at the school compared to the district on average rating their feeling of security at 3.3/5.

Parents’ responses varied, some praising the support their children receive and others voicing concern about the lack of attention, particularly for students with special needs or behavioral problems, according to the more than 100-page report.

With the exception of the high school, the Tenney Grammar School had the most students last school year with 1,246 enrolled, followed by the Timney at 1,172, CGS at 1,046 and Marsh Grammar School at 996 students.

Staff at the Marsh reported the worst general sentiment at 2.5/5. By the same metric, parents had rated the school 4/5.

“Positive feedback often highlights individual teacher efforts, but broader dissatisfaction centers on administration and resource limitations,” auditors said.

“I expected active communication from my child’s teacher after being informed they were struggling with social emotional behaviors... Instead, I have to consistently reach out for updates and receive minimal response,” a parent said.

In another comment a parent asked for improved communication and collaboration with parents particularly when it comes to discipline and special needs services. Other comments were more favorable.

“Special education staff has supported my student. Kudos to them! It is appreciated,” another parent said.

Staff at the Tenney gave the worst of the district’s rating to the school’s special education services, rating support for students in this area 2.5/5, though varying opinions were given. Parents and students gave mixed responses with some praising the staff and others expressing concerns.

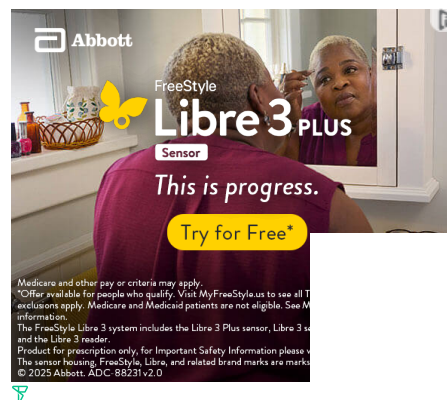
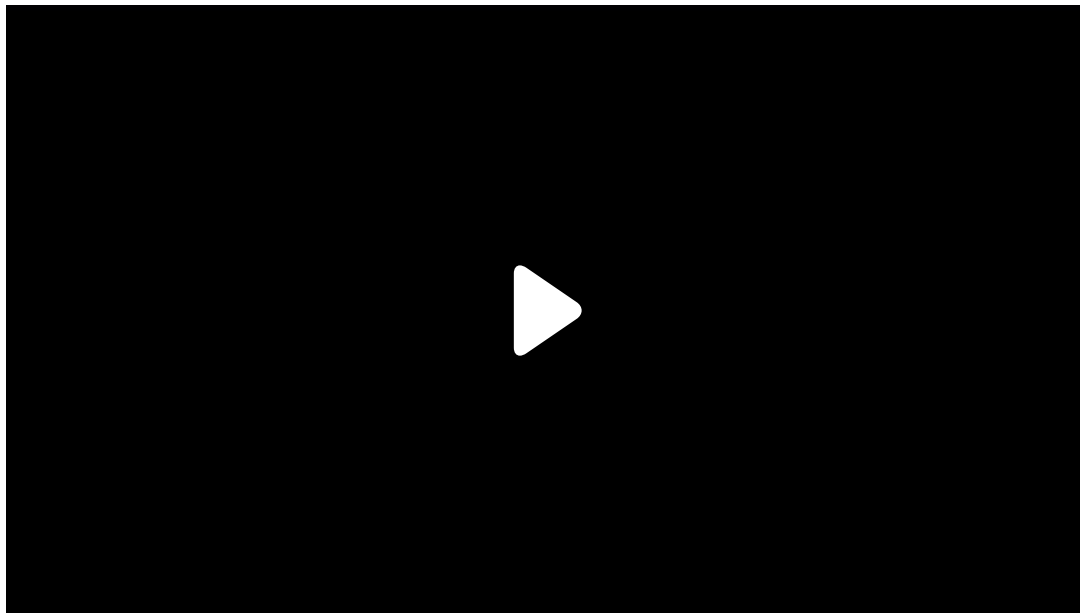
“The school is well on point; with the academic program my children are getting, their education going well — I thank God for Tenney Grammar School and all the staffers,” a parent said.

“My school feels like a ghetto sometimes,” a student said.

Staff also rated the support for English as a second language the worst in the district at 2.9/5. The next lowest score by staff for English-as-a-second-language students support was 3.2/5 at the Marsh Grammar School

The results of the CBIZ audit, which cost \$140,000, will likely be discussed at future meetings of the School Committee and City Council. Officials plan to send out surveys later to gauge improvement.

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