

**Report to the Superintendent
Regarding the Status, Conditions,
Causes and Impact
of
School Choice
in the
Triton Regional School District**

April, 2008

Compiled by the Superintendent's
Task Force on School Choice

Preface

School Choice programs have been a component of the educational experience in Massachusetts for many years with history dating back to 1980. At that time, Cambridge launched an intradistrict K-8 program. In this program, families choose three schools and rank them according to preference. The district then assigns the student to a school based on preference, school capacity, and racial composition. Since 1989, the Boston school district has been divided into three school zones for kindergarten through 8th grade. Families choose a school and alternates within their zone. Half of a school's seats are reserved for students who live within walking distance.

Beginning in 1991, then-Governor William Weld, signed the Massachusetts interdistrict school choice law, allowing students to transfer to schools in other participating districts. The law specified that a student's former district must pay the tuition in the receiving district. In 1993, the law was amended to require districts that choose not to participate to opt out of the program through an annual vote of the local school committee. The Massachusetts Board of Education established an information system to help parents choose from among schools within participating districts. Transportation assistance is provided for low-income children.

A 1997 study of the interdistrict programs by the Boston-based Pioneer Institute found that those districts that lost large numbers of students at the outset of the program responded by improving their policies and programs to encourage students to return and to attract transfer students from other districts. Conversely, districts that initially lost only a small number of students made few improvements and lost more students in subsequent years. These findings provide evidence that a competitive market can have positive effects on the quality of public education.

The Triton District, made up of students from the towns of Newbury, Rowley and Salisbury, has experienced a constant outflow of students participating in the School Choice program dating back to 1996 with the current year and the last year representing by far the largest amount of students leaving the district. While the district has enjoyed the financial benefit of choice-in students, because the students who choice-out represent a far greater number and due to the State requirement to fund to the receiving district for costs of these students, the district has experienced a substantial net loss in operating funds, approaching nearly \$1 million in FY07 and \$700 thousand in FY 08. Based on the growing concern voiced by residents in each of the district's three towns regarding the financial burden this creates on the overall school budget, in the Spring of 2007 Superintendent Halloran convened this task force with the explicit directive to examine the School Choice phenomena in the Triton District and develop an overall strategy designed to help the district diminish the loss of students through choice and thereby lessen the negative financial impact on the district.

What follows is a report outlining in broad form the findings of this task force with regard to the matter and impact of school choice in our District and recommendations to the Superintendent specifying actions we believe can be taken to achieve the objective of diminishing the economic impact of choice programs.

School Choice Task Force Makeup

The Task Force (SCTF) consists of participants who represent the community at large in the Triton District. It includes parents of students in all school levels from each of the three district member towns, 3 members of the School Committee, a choice parent, and the Chair Brian Forget, Triton's School Business Administrator. Meetings have been held in the Superintendent's Office and have consisted of monthly meetings (except for July and August, 2007) to this date.

Defining Objectives

The first action the SCTF took was to define the task and then identify steps for achieving it. After considerable discussion and review the following process was undertaken:

Definition of Overall Goal –

To obtain as specific as possible an understanding about why families choice out of the district. Based on this understanding, we will develop a series of specific recommendations covering strategies the Superintendent can implement, beginning now, to diminish the current rate of choice-out students and increase, where feasible, the amount of choice-in students.

Methodologies

The SCTF believed that to obtain a complete understanding of the issues surrounding choicing we needed to gather as much data as possible about families who have chosen to do so. Two principle actions were chosen: 1) to gather from current district files all the data available regarding choice families; and 2) to assemble detail from a first ever district wide survey of choice out families allowing them a chance to state in their own words their reasons for making the decision to choice their children into another district.

Data Gathering

Brian Forget supplied the SCTF with current and historical data held by the district. This included historical information about the gross numbers of choice in and out families for the district from 1996 to the present. He also provided the STF with the most recent available compilation (FY07) as well as FY 04/05/06 of choicing families with the specifics of where "choice-in" students came from and where "choice-out" students elected to go. Those data sheets are length and are not attached but are available by request.

Survey Design and Distribution

The SCTF determined that the survey should attempt to uncover attitudes toward a range of content areas before narrowing the survey to specific questions. Content areas considered included the following:

- A) District and School Learning Culture
- B) Academic perceptions

- C) Academic deficiencies – perceived or otherwise
- D) Extracurricular activities
- E) Teacher – student relationships
- F) Teacher – parent relationships
- G) Parent – administration relationships
- H) Parent sense of District commitment to long term success of students
- I) Budgetary variables
- J) Presence of or lack of current technology in system
- K) Class structure/size
- L) Perception of administration
- M) Role of attrition in staff

The following demographic questions were also determined to be necessary for this analysis:

- A) Which schools did students choice to?
- B) Were there any geographic relationships to schools students choiced to?
- C) What trends if any can be identified?
- D) Is there any relationship between one student in a family choicing out and other siblings doing same?
- E) What grades did the greatest number of students typically choice-out in?

Survey Questions -

The survey questions and format were reviewed and after analysis and input regarding other district survey models and private sector studies, the survey would utilize a two tiered question format: 1) a yes/no model to encourage responses and for easy analysis; and 2) open ended response format to obtain an “in your own words” response to questions which were not deemed to be of a yes/no category. See attached Survey noted as Appendix I

A preliminary list of 33 questions was generated for review and revision. Care was taken to avoid questions which might be specific to only one school or department as this would tend to limit respondents. Questions which addressed district politics associated with making budgetary decisions were also deemed as unnecessary since the school district can exercise little influence over each town’s actions on that subject.

It was also decided that a lengthy survey could also become a disincentive for readers to complete the form and as a result the SCTF chose to cut the survey down in size from the original 33 questions to a more workable number. By grouping a number of demographic and content areas under one question, the final number was able to be refined to six line item questions either requiring a yes/no answer or a fill in the box form A final question was open-ended in order to encourage the survey reader to explain their views in their own words.

Distribution –

The target audience of Choice-out families totaled 253 students and the mailing was 197 letters. Mr. Forget was able to provide mailing addresses for each family. The decision was

made to provide a bi-level response system whereby a parent could elect to complete and return via mail the completed survey or could access the survey via a confidential link to the survey on line on the Triton Regional District website. It was agreed that a good response level from which we might reasonably be able to draw conclusions would be 20%. This was based on feedback from members who have extensive experience with surveys of this type or with direct mail marketing programs.

The first survey and link was mailed on November 8th, 2007 and asked for a response within 2 weeks. The December meeting reviewed the initial returns on the survey noting that there were 19 responses, approximately 10% of the mailing. In January, the decision was made to re-mail the survey with an additional request for input (see Appendix II) in an attempt to expand the sample respondent group to at least our 20% target number. On February 4th, the second survey was mailed, again with a two week response request window. At the February 26th meeting the second mailing results were compiled and we were pleased to note additional responses brought the new total to 42, nearly 20% of our mailing. While the SCTF continues to welcome responses and encourages all choice families to participate, at this point it was agreed that we had performed our due diligence in obtaining this response level and would use them to develop conclusions and formulate strategies for the Superintendent to consider implementing.

Compiling Survey Findings

We have included the detailed results of the survey (Appendix III) for review but a number of preliminary conclusions became immediately evident and warrant highlighting due to their importance to the SCTF's belief that many residents are unfamiliar with these most basic aspects of school choice in the Triton District.

- 1) 70% of choice families have resided in the district's three towns for 10 years or more, with the predominant majority being 10-15 years
- 2) Nearly a third of all respondents indicated their children had never attended any school within the district
- 3) Key exit points for students are during the middle school years with the highest percentage in grade eight with the second largest being Kindergarten
- 4) Nearly 83% of our respondents indicated that they do not have additional children who may be choicing, suggesting that it is typical for a family to choice all children as opposed to part of the family
- 5) By a large majority, high activity user fees, extra curricular scope, athletic programs, performing arts programs and the AP/Honor Class availability WERE NOT major factors influencing choicing decisions
- 6) Factors which a majority said were significant influencers included MCAS Scores, the amount of rigor and challenge in the academic programs, the reputation of the school, class size, and to a somewhat smaller degree, budgetary issues.

- 7) Finally, it was clear that choice families actively research their alternative educational choices as well as exploring Triton programs before making their final decision.

Geographic Factors –

It is also clear from an analysis of demographic data concerning the current choice population that there are clear trends relating to the choices families appear to make. Principle among these is the proximity to the chosen choice school. Our review indicates that most families living in Newbury and Salisbury are likely to choose to Newburyport and Amesbury while Rowley almost exclusively chooses to Ipswich.

Other receiving districts include Beverly, Georgetown, Hamilton-Wenham and to a lesser extent, Haverhill, Manchester-Essex, Methuen and Pentucket Regional. (See appendix IV)

Vocational Factors –

In some instances, though clearly a minority case, parental work schedules necessitated a choicing decision so that a parent was better able to be responsive to their students varying activity and after school schedules.

Open Ended Responses –

Perhaps the most compelling data collected comes from statements concerning the overall school experience in the Triton district. We have included the complete text of comments we received in this regard (see attached Appendix III – Total Survey Results) and encourage the reader to examine these in detail, but will summarize some of those we believe most reflect the others:

- 1) Teacher-parent communication substantially below what is needed
- 2) Teachers not allowed to think outside the box when teaching, feeling stifled at times and forced to focus on narrow curriculum scope
- 3) Administration often punitive in their disposition of discipline
- 4) Uninviting culture for parental involvement
- 5) Poor staff morale is tangible
- 6) Too heavy focus on improving MCAS scores and district reputation
- 7) Lack of readily available after school academic assistance
- 8) Disappointment with administration – lack of communication
- 9) From a parent with a child having gone through the district already; the district has too much emphasis on MCAS, lack of guidance in college prep issues, bare bones academic achievement expected, bar is too low in Triton.

10) Triton graduates themselves concerned about lack of consistency in hiring practices

11) Lack of a more personal, empowering, caring environment

Preliminary Conclusions

The presence of a substantial school choice program in the Triton District has always presented the district with a vexing management issue along with a negative economic one. While there are a large number of students who choice into this district from some of the same districts that we send students to, the magnitude of the variance and the substantial economic strain it places on the district demands that a meaningful strategy be developed to diminish this impact.

Choosing parents do more than simply "take their kids out" of the school. It is a decision that brings many additional burdens on their lifestyle and requires students to initiate new social relationships. These are not easy issues. The easy choice would be to not leave the district. But choice parents make these choices with their students in an effort to participate in environments they believe will best meet the interests of their children's academic journeys.

The STF believes that the key to eliminating these perceptions and deficiencies lies in the ability of the current administration to expand its' willingness to open its doors to greater community involvement and encourage broader communications in all aspects of district operations.

The STF also believes that the kinds of changes needed as identified in this survey cannot be accomplished by one set of actions over a brief period of time. Terms like "school culture" and "staff morale" and "reputation" are not changed easily or quickly. However, the STF also believes that the district is at a critical juncture and has demonstrated by the creation of this task force and others like it, a positive step in the direction needed to begin to establish the Triton district as one that its member towns can speak of proudly.

Dealing with school choice is but one part of the ultimate puzzle for the Triton district. The district has tremendous resources, great amounts of energy for potential parent involvement, talented students, sound policies, dedicated teachers and administrators, and procedures and programs in place that can support educational excellence. What the district needs to stress and communicate is its cultural vision, definition of respect, educational philosophy and the commitment to its students.

Recommended Strategies for Dealing with School Choice Issues -

In an effort to accomplish this, the SCTF would suggest the Superintendent consider implementing the following procedures to help reduce the negative economic impact the school choice program inflicts on the district:

- A) As a minimum implement "Exit Interviews" with all choicing families at the earliest convenient time, typically during the last month of the school year as this is the time when most choice decisions are finalized by the receiving district. This should be a personal interview conducted by the principal of the student's current school or other designated representative.
- B) Expand current programs that welcome 6th graders to the elementary school to include the 5th grade and showcase the Middle School facilities, programs and staff. Generate and distribute marketing material aimed at educating and informing the parents about Middle and High School programs. Include involvement by designated student "ambassadors" to add a real life tenor to the delivery.
- C) Continue to expand communication channels with email, send home, direct mail, online and rotating Superintendent "open café" meetings at each school designed to access and encourage parental involvement in all aspects of school functions.
- D) Develop consistent public relations outreach effort along with associated materials to communicate with the press and other recognizing bodies about student academic success. Create and distribute material aimed at reinforcing the values and benefits of attending Triton schools.
- E) Create a "Community Input Night", perhaps on a quarterly basis, to purely solicit views from the public about any subject they wish to discuss. Include commitment to respond to generated data at the next session. This is not to be a district presentation but rather a district "listen" session.
- F) Create and distribute a district calendar to be mailed to each student's home as part of the effort to solidify and add coherence to the concept of a "district-wide" schedule and to connect with all families.
- G) Request that at least one School Committee meeting per quarter is held at one of the three elementary schools in an effort to bring the administration and the school committee to the community. At each meeting, the host school will make a presentation to the committee about events, issues, successes and concerns which impact that particular school.
- H) Expand the use of technological communications to include video presentations available via online links. This can be an effective tool for communicating about administration needs, policies and upcoming events.
- I) Determine the available capacity for additional choice students
- J) Explore district programming at all levels to ensure that we are competitive in the "educational marketplace."

Summary –

The efforts of the SCTF have been aimed at creating a better understanding of some of the core reasons behind the incidence of school choice students leaving the Triton district and providing the Superintendent with some strategies for mitigating its impact in the schools. To be sure, this is a complex issue with many subjective aspects. Each family has many different reasons behind the decisions they make. This is not an effort to suggest that the Triton school district can become the only answer for every student in our district. It is however part of an ongoing effort to enable the Triton district to pursue a direction that embodies a culture of respect between the school administration and in this instance most importantly, its students and their parents. To that end the SCTF believes this report can serve as an initial cornerstone for constructive discussion about this subject.

Respectively submitted:

Brian Forget – Chair

Janet Bridges

Patrice Ciccone

Deborah Choate

Darcy Culverwell

Suzanne Densmore

Thomas Heidgerd

John Matthews

Ed Mavragis

Stacey Seward

Jodi Wolpert

April, 2008

Appendix I

Sample Survey Document



TRITON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

NEWBURY • ROWLEY • SALISBURY

Sandra J. Halloran, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Kathleen M. Willis
Assistant Superintendent

Christine A. Kneeland
Administrator of Pupil Services

Brian L. Forget
School Business Administrator

November 8, 2007

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The attached School Choice Parent Survey is being mailed to parents who currently have students enrolled in other Massachusetts school systems through the School Choice Program. In order to get an accurate sense of your reasons for enrolling your child(ren) outside the Triton Regional School District, please provide answers to all questions. The survey is also available on the website http://dev.smartedu.net/sstriton/display_template/welcome.cfm?survey_id=156. The survey will be available on this website until November 21, 2007. This survey is not available on the Triton website. We anticipate that this survey should take you no more than two to three minutes to complete. A completed survey either by mail or website before November 21, 2007 would be appreciated.

Thank you for your participation in this School Choice Parent Survey.

Sincerely,

Sandra J. Halloran, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



1.

How many years have you lived in the district?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10-15	15-20	20+
Years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. **Did your child ever attend school within the Triton Regional School District?**

- Yes
- No

3.

At what grade did your child leave Triton through the Choice program?

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Child 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. **Do you have additional children who will also attend other Massachusetts schools through the School Choice program in the future?**

- YES
- NO

5.

Please indicate below for each question whether the item listed was a factor which influenced your decision to place your child outside of the Triton Regional School District.

	YES	NO
Advance Placement/Honors Classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Performing Arts Programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Athletics Programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extra Curricular Activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Class Size	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reputation of the School	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

High User Fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Budgetary Issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rigor and Currency in the Curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to Current Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information from Local Newspapers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MCAS Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other - Please detail below	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. **Did the NEAS&C (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) Accreditation warning status at the Triton Regional High School influence your decision regarding your child's placement?**

YES

NO

7.

Before making your decision to send your child to another school, did you research:

	YES	NO
What the Triton Regional School District had to offer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What your Choice School had to offer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. **As indicated in question 5, if there are additional reasons that influenced your decision regarding your child's placement, please enter the information below.**

Appendix II

Survey Resend Letter



TRITON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

NEWBURY • ROWLEY • SALISBURY

Sandra J. Halloran, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Kathleen M. Willis
Assistant Superintendent

Christine A. Kneeland
Administrator of Pupil Services

Brian L. Forget
School Business Administrator

February 4, 2008

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The attached School Choice Parent Survey is being resent to all parents who currently have students enrolled in other Massachusetts school districts through the School Choice Program. On behalf of the School Choice Task Force, I want to convey our appreciation to those who were able to complete the survey. However, we regret not being able to have data which represents a majority of the students currently enrolled in other districts through School Choice. To that end, we are mailing this survey to all parents again in an effort to garner additional feedback.

The results of this survey and discussion through the School Choice Task Force will be presented to the School Committee this spring in an effort to bring the current issues that are prompting parents to send their students to other districts into the forefront. By doing so, we can then proactively address these concerns and make efforts towards improvement.

We have made strides during the current school year with the passage of an override and funding of many important initiatives, the most notable being the removal of the Triton Regional High School from the NEAS&C Accreditation warning list. While positive change has begun, we ask for your input on this survey. The survey is also available on the website at http://dev.smartedu.net/sstriton/display_template/welcome.cfm?survey_id=156.

We anticipate that this survey should take you no more than two to three minutes to complete. A completed survey either by mail or website before February 25th, 2008 would be appreciated.

Thank you for your participation in this School Choice Parent Survey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sandra J. Halloran'.

Sandra J. Halloran, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Forget'.

Brian L. Forget
School Business Administrator

Appendix III

Total Survey Results

Triton Regional School District: 2/25/2008 Total School Choice Survey Results

1. How many years have you lived in the district?		
Years		
1	4.76%	2
2	4.76%	2
3	0.00%	0
4	2.38%	1
5	2.38%	1
6	0.00%	0
7	2.38%	1
8	7.14%	3
9	4.76%	2
10	7.14%	3
10-15	35.72%	15
15-20	16.68%	7
20+	11.90%	5
Totals	100.00%	42

2. Did your child ever attend school within the Triton Regional School District?		
Yes	61.90%	26
No	35.72%	15
No Answer	2.38%	1
Totals	100.00%	42

3. At what grade did your child leave Triton through the Choice program?		
K	N/A	13
1	N/A	4
2	N/A	4
3	N/A	5
4	N/A	3
5	N/A	6
6	N/A	6
7	N/A	6
8	N/A	11
9	N/A	2
10	N/A	1
11	N/A	0
12	N/A	0
Totals	N/A	61

4. Do you have additional children who will also		
YES	14.29%	6
NO	83.33%	35
No Answer	2.38%	1
Totals	100.00%	42

5. Please indicate below for each question whether the item listed was a factor which influenced your decision to place your child outside of the Triton		
Advance Placement/Honors Classes		
YES	19.05%	8
NO	64.29%	27
Performing Arts Programs		
YES	16.67%	7
NO	69.05%	29
Athletics Programs		
YES	16.67%	7
NO	64.29%	27
Extra Curricular Activities		
YES	14.29%	6
NO	64.29%	27
Class Size		
YES	50.00%	21
NO	35.71%	15
Reputation of the School		
YES	61.90%	26
NO	33.33%	14
High User Fees		
YES	11.90%	5
NO	64.29%	27
Budgetary Issues		
YES	40.48%	17
NO	50.00%	21
Rigor and Currency in the Curriculum		
YES	47.62%	20
NO	45.24%	19
Access to Current Technology		
YES	16.67%	7
NO	71.43%	30
Information from Local Newspapers		
YES	14.29%	6
NO	69.05%	29
MCAS Performance		
YES	45.24%	19
NO	42.86%	18
Other - PLEASE SEE COMMENTS		
YES	69.05%	29
NO	11.90%	5

6. Did the NEAS&C (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) Accreditation warning status at the Triton Regional High School influence your decision regarding your child's placement?

YES	28.57%	12
NO	69.05%	29
No Answer	2.38%	1
Totals	100.00%	42

7. Before making your decision to send your child to another school, did you research:

What the Triton Regional School District had to

YES	71.43%	30
NO	28.57%	12
Totals	100.00%	42

What your Choice School had to offer?

YES	83.33%	35
NO	16.67%	7
Totals	100.00%	42

8. As indicated in question 5, if there are additional reasons that influenced your decision regarding your child's placement, please enter the information below.

1. This survey is lacking in the depth of the reasons for choice. You could have put more effort into your questions if you really wanted answers that reflected the reasons for choice 2. Unfortunately there were no openings. 5. Reputation of administration 6. Happened after choice decision but helped solidify our decision. 8. We've experienced Triton District through older siblings. Dissatisfaction with the lack of emphasis on academics! Status of current administration.

1. Poor Leadership in Middle School 2. Lack of differentiated instruction 3. Poor parental communication (from teachers & administration.)

2. My other child did, but not the child who is choiced out. Quality of teaching approaches disproportionate focus on MCAS restrictions, vitality of teaching. My daughter currently is in Triton. I have found the curriculum and the culture to be more narrow than what I witness in Newburyport. Very disconnected from the community at and larger world. Strong sports and business-type culture. I compared Triton's electives, after-school activities and P.T.A. events to Newburyport's. Triton's electives had a strong business focus and Newburyport offered electives that were more along the line of "journalism", "world history." My daughter watched more Disney videos than I can count (7 in one winter/spring period.) I have tried to participate at NES but felt shut down (not by Sylvia Jordan.) for example, I tried to rejuvenate the then dormant after-school program and had even (with appropriate green lights) scheduled teachers from the community to teach, pending final steps of process CORI's, etc. However, the district was unwilling to let a volunteer proceed with this (unlike every other district in the area) and almost all of the teachers were lost by the time anyone followed up with them officially. This lack of openness and adaptability was evident at other times as well. The leadership in Newburyport - even when faced with a severe budget shortfall - focused on identifying academic concerns, priorities, and strategies to address them. What I hear from Triton is a focus on improving the school's reputation and MCAS scores, as compared to academic issues. I have liked most of my daughter's teachers, but I believe they are not able to teach to their own best potential.

3. Began kindergarten in Ipswich - never attended Triton Schools. 5. We choiced-out for demographic purposes, our children attend Ipswich because I work there. There are no additional reasons - I expect our children to complete school in Ipswich unless a job change or home relocation occurs.

4. My oldest has already gone through the TRSD school system. 5. Much too much emphasis on MCAS. Triton's most significant limitation is the lack of oversight of students' progress. The self-initiator does fine, but this is a fraction of the student population. It's too easy for kids to fall through the cracks. Minimal guidance and support by guidance department in the college preparation journey. More emphasis is on the passing those MCAS tests. Overall lack of focus on the importance of higher education. Too many teachers are not sufficiently skilled to instruct the level of course they are teaching (example includes last year's Spanish AP/honors teacher who was eventually removed, et al...) Inadequate science labs. Need for more interface with parents from middle school on! This is a small pet peeve, but the English curriculum in the high school does not include creative writing due to MCAS standards possibly? Yet again, an example of the bare bones academic focus. When we attended 3 area school's high school orientations (Triton was one of them), 2 of the schools talked dynamically about the various offerings toward helping their students get into college. Neither school mentioned MCAS. Alternatively, Triton spoke repeatedly about MCAS. The only mention of AP courses was in answer to my question. Adding to my dismay that my older child wanted to stay with his friends (after listening to this discouraging orientation) the head of foreign language stated that Spanish didn't offer the same exciting offer of a school trip as French because Triton's students aren't interested in going to Spain! The bar is way too low for Triton students.

4. Undecided. A completely unresponsive, antagonistic and unresponsive environment that was neither proactive or reactive to the individual needs of our autistic child. I would like to note that we are having a completely opposite experience in our new district and our child is happy and thriving as a result.

5. Have always attended Newburyport Public Schools. Lived in Newburyport for 14 years. All children attended Newburyport Public School.

5. Inept administration at the Central office level. The central office administration is poor and incompetent. The recent user fee fiasco was totally unacceptable, your district hiring practices are absolutely ridiculous. How can you hire a business manager who has never been a business manager? How could you let an outstanding AD/teacher such as Elizabeth McAndrews go to another district? How can a superintendent supervise principals and assistant principals and have absolutely no experience with either position? How can you hire a principal at a high school with no experience? How could you pass over an experienced assistant principal and name an inexperienced assistant principal to be principal? There is no way that my children will ever attend the Triton Schools. I am a Triton graduate and I am ashamed to admit it.

5. When I made the decision to choose child #1 I did a tour of several schools. I found the atmosphere at the Ipswich schools far different/more positive and more inviting than any of the other schools I visited.

5. - Limited World Language3 Program. The elementary school wanted to hold my daughter back for her math skills; then place her in the low track in 5th grade. I did not agree. Also, my son was given a behavior plan where he would receive one-half hour with the school psychologist if he received x amount of stars on his chart. Good behavior should be expected, not rewarded. Regarding my daughter - she passed MCAS with proficient status this year in the math category. Good thing her mother had faith in her and continues to do so.

5. Distance - sports practices, appointments, etc. Communication with front office. Unreturned phone calls. Salisbury Elementary was wonderful! Triton was the problem I left. I was particularly annoyed with not being able to communicate.

5. Weak academic rigor. This choice did not need to happen. Very unfortunate for the distinct, schools, and children. Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to express our thoughts.

A vote of no confidence that the new administration could develop and implement a turnaround plan required for long term stability. Apathetic teachers and guidance counselors. A lack of accountability for poor management decisions. Did not want to repeat history as one child graduated from Triton in 2006. He did not get the education he was entitled to.

Alex has been going to the Winthrop School in Ipswich since Kindergarten. He has a lot of friends there so he wanted to stay there and finish the fifth grade.

As a single parent working in Boston, it has been much simpler to have my daughter attend a school closer to home. (We live in Salisbury). I have family and friends in Newburyport who have been able to provide a place for her to go after school and for drop off/pick up to athletic practices/games, after school activities and school events.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE MIDDLE SCHOOL WAS EXTREMELY POOR. MY SON WAS ON A 504 PLAN AND WE DID NOT FIND OUT UNTIL FEB. THAT HE DID NOT TURN IN HIS HOMEWORK FREQUENTLY. MY SON NOW ATTENDS IPSWICH. SHOULD HE HAVE ONE MISSED ASSIGNMENT HE HAS TO STAY AFTERSCHOOL AND WE ARE NOTIFIED IMMEDIATELY. THIS IS ONE OF ONLY MANY MAJOR DIFFERENCES WE HAVE NOTICED

Culture of disrespect (between admin, teachers, students) & hostility toward parents who want change. Intolerance for bullying - seem more concerned about protecting the rights of the bully than supporting the victim. Acceptance of mediocrity. Unwillingness/defensiveness to accept & deal with real problems/issues. Entire "chain-of-command" resisting & attacking efforts to make Triton better. Now teacher morale and "paranoia" caused by overbearing administration that squashes teacher initiative and independence. "Tritonization" of PGS - not allowing PGS to preserve its own unique culture. School culture is more a bureaucracy than a community. Parents don't feel welcomed as part of the "teaching team." Poor reputation among college recruiters - programs are not rigorous enough preparation for competitive colleges.

Grungy, crowded, outdated classrooms; disgust with budget issues including the top-heavy administrative salaries and needless positions (vice principals at elementary schools when no other surrounding towns have them. Triton's refusal/inability to apply for grants that would have allowed for full-day, tuition-free kindergarten.

I chose to leave Triton because my oldest daughter asked me to choose her out of Triton upon entering 8th grade. We all felt there wasn't enough teaching going on. She was getting A's in classes. She scored barely Proficient on MCAS. There were many disruptions from other kids in class (behavior) that never seemed to be corrected. As far as the Arts goes, there wasn't a lot of encouragement from teachers to join. The kids that did were teased. The after school enrichment programs were wonderful but never encouraged by teachers. The peer pressures in Ipswich are if you don't do your homework or get good grades, you are made to stay after in a homework club. Good grades, homework, sports, the arts are all encouraged greatly. A perfect example of this is: My daughter cheered for Pop Warner Triton in '06. The girls won every competition and went to nationals and took 1st place. My daughter was attending Ipswich Middle School. Unlike Triton, which didn't make mention of it. Ipswich announced the win on the loudspeaker, congratulated my daughter, put it in their monthly letter, and at their weekly meetings the class held, she was asked to speak about the team's win. On another note, the Triton teachers, according to some moms and kids gave the girls a hard time about taking time off for a national win. They also weren't giving homework to the girls ahead of time. Now, my daughter was the only one who went to nationals that attended Ipswich, and the support was light years away. The lack of teacher to student respect and support is not where it should be and how can the teachers gain respect when they don't give it. On a final note because I'm running out of space. Once I chose Danielle out, Stephanie was still in Pine Grove. The way Jennifer Roberts, and PTO President Hillary O'Doy treated me was disgraceful. They both told me I had a target on my back because I chose out.

I teach in Amesbury.

I work in another district so he attends school there.

I work in Ipswich - it made sense demographically for our kids to attend Ipswich.

In many ways we left because Triton administrators simply refused to listen to our concerns and those of other parents and students. Triton leaders have developed a bunker mentality and tend to blindly defend themselves rather than address problems to build solutions. A caustic attitude pervades the entire school system from the School Committee on down, resulting in an antagonistic culture routinely displayed between teachers and students and students among themselves. We were deeply involved with Pine Grove and the Middle School for 8 years and became increasingly alarmed about our children's quality of education. Having been involved in another school system for 2+ years now, we know we made the right decision. Although I doubt anyone at Triton wants to hear this, the difference between the schools is night and day. The good news is that Triton can (and must) improve. It starts with actually listening and then addressing their problems head on.

It really came down to a difference in educational philosophy. We chose a school system who focused on nurturing children, empowering them, and really working in partnership with the parents. Versus a system that is data driven and does most of its encounters behind power point presentation instead of honest discussion. Mcas are important-but so are many other aspects of education - a well rounded curriculum with arts, phys ed. and music. Schools, although they have to operate like a business- regarding budgets etc- do not need to facade itself behind a business like atmosphere. Educating children - for us as a family is something more personal, caring, nurturing, and empowering.

I'm a single parent who lives in Salisbury and works in Boston. Newburyport Schools were more convenient for after school arrangements for my daughter's care and for after school sports and activities.

Our child was diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder in the summer preceding his Kindergarten year, and based on our independent research and our brief experiences with the Triton District SPED staff during his evaluations; we were not comfortable with the quality of service available to him in this district as a student with special needs.

Since we moved out of the Newburyport school district after 5 years, it made sense to keep my middle school student in the familiar school district with his friends and activities.

Son was already enrolled in Ipswich Schools from K-5.

Spring of my son's 7th grade, spring of 2002, we interviewed 8th grade teachers at both Nock and Triton. He was at the Charter School where he'd been since 5th grade. We were unimpressed with both the Triton teachers' responses to our questions regarding attention given to gifted students as well as curriculum in English and with respect to educational enhancement activities in other areas - school trips/science fair, etc. My son has since graduated from NHS, 4th in his class, and is at UPenn. The reason we left Newbury Elementary at the end of the 4th grade (spring 1999) is because you dumped the gifted programs, and he spent huge amounts of time reading novels in class. This does not happen at the Charter School. My daughter is currently a sophomore at NHS. I believe in supporting the best education I can for my children, but Triton feels like getting a dinosaur to change. Feel free to call me if you'd like to further pick my brain - I'd love to see Triton improve! Meredith Toumayan, 978-465-4039

The administration in this district is extremely unresponsive; the cooperation between administration and teachers seems minimal. Administration has no leadership and an inability to listen to teacher's needs and concerns or parents concerns.

The current administrative team at TRSD/PGS was the driving force in our desire to leave.

The low moral within the school, the fact that the school district and teachers tried to "scare" the voting public to vote for an override, the fact that there was such a high turnover of teachers, the fact that my older kids experienced having anywhere between 3-5 different teachers for one course and the fact that some teachers were pushing either democratic or republican ideas on my kids rather than giving both sides and letting the kids decide for themselves.

Upper administration was the reason I left. I saw how they manipulated others and were close minded to issues "outside the box". I did not feel this added to a positive academic environment for my children.

Word of mouth - we heard there were a lot of drug/alcohol behavioral issues at Triton High

Overcrowding @ SES. SES had very dedicated staff but overcrowding and class size were a large factor at the time.

Local daycare providers would not let me bring my child early. My husband and I worked in Burlington and Billerica. KinderCare opened by 7:00 a.m. and this was the only way we could get to our jobs by 7:00 a.m. Daycare providers did not start until 7:30 a.m. This provided a great deal of hardship for my husband and I. In 1999, you did not offer an early bird program; I wish you had. My youngest daughter attends SES and I am very satisfied with the curriculum and before/after school programs. She will not be attending the choice program.

I was worried that the low socio-economic statistics and transient population in Salisbury would drag down the learning opportunity. Yes, we live in Salisbury!!!

Appendix IV

Various Trend Analysis

Analysis of School Choice Data for FY 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008

Students choicing out of the Triton District

The data shows that there are established relationships between each town in the TRSD and an adjacent town. Newbury to Newburyport, Rowley to Ipswich and in Salisbury's case with two adjacent towns, Amesbury and Newburyport.

For FY2007: 270 students total

Of 68 students choicing out of Newbury, 76% go to Newburyport schools.

Of 86 students choicing out of Rowley, 89.5% go to Ipswich.

Of 116 students choicing out of Salisbury, 94% go to Amesbury or Newburyport.

For FY2008: 256 students total

Of 51 students choicing out of Newbury, 69% go to Newburyport schools.

Of 96 students choicing out of Rowley, 89% go to Ipswich schools.

Of 109 students choicing out of Salisbury, 94% go to Amesbury or Newburyport.

	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008
<u>Newbury to Newburyport</u>				
# choice students	45	54	52	35
# to NHS only	29	29	27	20
<u>Rowley to Ipswich</u>				
# choice students	26	35	77	85
# to IHS only	10	10	14	23
# grade 6 thru 8 only	8	16	39	32
# KP/KF only	1	1	12	1
<u>Salisbury to Newburyport and Amesbury</u>				
# choice students to Newburyport	56	63	51	54
# to NHS only	17	26	23	26
# choice students to Amesbury	45	36	58	48
# to AHS only	18	17	28	24

There is little change in the number of students leaving from Newbury and Salisbury from year to year. A growing number have been leaving Rowley for Ipswich largely in grades 6 through 8 and in KP/KF in FY2007.

Students Choicing Out of Triton by Grade

Grade	# students	
	<u>FY2007</u>	<u>FY2008</u>
12	30	17
11	22	33
10	31	30
9	28	24
8	26	24
7	21	32
6	26	15
5	16	12
4	11	15
3	16	14
2	15	9
1	10	17
KP/KF	18	3

Students Choicing Into the Triton District

In FY2007, 117 students choiced into Triton District schools from other towns. Of these 117, 30 students were sent from Newburyport and 45 from Amesbury, comprising 64 % of the total.

In FY2008, 141 students choiced into Triton District schools from other towns. This is a 20.5% increase over FY2007. Of these 141, 38 students were from Newburyport and 46 from Amesbury comprising 60% of the total. The number of students from Georgetown increased from seven in FY2007 to 16 in FY2008; 15 of the 16 students are in grades 7 through 12.

There was a substantial increase in the number of students choicing into the Triton District in FY2008. Nearly as many Amesbury students (46) choiced into Triton as Triton students (48) choiced out to Amesbury. Triton’s Middle and High Schools are increasingly attractive to Georgetown students.

The net loss of students to choice at Triton declined to 115 in FY2008 from 153 the previous year, a marked 25% decrease.

2004 to 2008 historical data used to generate this analysis is available by request. Please contact Brian Forget in the Superintendent's office at (978) 465 - 2397 to obtain a copy.