

Thom's Thoughts on Fiscal Responsibility and Shared Services:

Dear Neighbors and Fellow Mendham Township Residents:

Over the past recent past, I have received requests from township residents for me to provide more information on both Fiscal Responsibility and Shared Services. What do these terms really mean and what ideas do I have concerning them? These are great questions and I am happy to provide the following in an attempt to provide more visibility into my thinking and proposed approach:

First, before addressing the questions, I want to reemphasize that I believe that Mendham can continue to offer a world class education to its students and that we can and must do this in a fiscally responsible way. Also, I want to make clear that I do not profess to have all the answers. I have many ideas on how we can do more and achieve more within our budget constraints and I am confident that through a collaborative process with the other school board members and the superintendent, many of these ideas may bear benefits to the district.

Shared Services: We need to engage with neighboring school districts and explore ways to effectively partner together that can be mutually beneficial ("Shared Services"). Benefits from Shared Services may include: (1) Enhanced educational opportunities for the students, (2) Budgetary benefits that would improve the fiscal security of each school district, and (3) potential reductions in the local school taxes for each community.

Shared Services is not just about looking for ways to reduce costs; it is also about enhancing services for a given budget level. A shared services approach may offer a way to increase the breadth of educational and extra-curricular opportunities for our students. For example, our district is behind some area districts in our technology offerings. A comparison of the [MTMS Technology Curriculum](#) with the [Bernards Township William Annin Middle School](#) shows that Bernards Township has a broader offering of technology-related courses and programs. Bernards Township offers its 8th graders "Computer Programming" and "Computer Game Design & Development" in addition to many other options beyond what we offer in Mendham Township. While we may not have the budget for some of this on our own, we could team up with a neighboring district to make these types of opportunities more cost economic.

Here's another example. A few years ago, a group of MTMS students wanted to form a debate team and a toast masters club. Unfortunately, they were unable to do this because of budgetary constraints given the relatively small number of interested students. I think it makes sense to explore these types of opportunities (or similar opportunities such as in special music/dance/arts programs) in the context of a special services framework where we can achieve critical mass/scale by engaging with a neighboring district and add such programs at low-to-no cost.

Fiscal Responsibility: Outside of Shared Services, I would encourage the Board to take a disciplined approach in making sure that we get real value for every budget dollar. I would start by taking a fresh look at expense categories that have no bearing on the quality of the education our students receive in the classroom. For example, I would examine opportunities for realizing lower interest rates on our outstanding school bonds. Are there savings to be had there? We should go line item by line item and explore opportunities to realize savings in areas that have no bearing on the education our children receive.

To be clear, I will vehemently defend the quality of education offered by our schools. **Mendham Township School District** is the only National Blue-Ribbon Award school district in the state of New Jersey. We have amazing teachers and administrators who have done a great job of laying a solid educational foundation for our students. I will support our schools to ensure that we provide our students with a world class education and will oppose anything that would put this at risk. I will, however, insist that we do this in a fiscally responsible way.

I hope that I have given you, at least, a little insight into my thinking and approach. Feel free to contact me if you would like more information or would like to discuss this or any other topic with me.

Thanks,

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