

Memo: Town Response to the email from the School District sent July 28, 2023

Date: August 1, 2023

To the Residents of Millville, MA and Parents of BMRSD Students:

The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator wanted to respond to the bullets in the email that was sent to the students at Millville Elementary School as there were significant gaps in the information provided and, in some cases, complete misrepresentations of facts.

First, we think it is important for everyone to know that MassDEP does not require moving the students. This was stated by MassDEP in an email on July 12th and again on July 25th. The only request from MassDEP is that the town provide bottled water as noted in recent emails. The Town will comply with all requirements and/or mandates from MassDEP. We do not want to draw any more issues or problems from MassDEP. This was incorrectly stated in an email to parents on July 28, 2023. The town will absolutely provide bottled water to the students. Additionally, the Board of Selectmen voted to provide funding for bulk water to the school during the last weeks of the school year. This was approved at the joint meeting on May 15, 2023. Please see this email from MassDEP showing that students can remain in the school: https://www.millvillema.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf906/f/uploads/email_from_mass_dep.pdf.

Second, it is important to know that the composition of the water has not dramatically changed in years and we have not moved students. Please review this report for an analysis:

https://www.millvillema.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf906/f/uploads/mes_drinking_water_health_perspective_with_executive_summary.pdf.

Third, the fact that the Superintendent would send a note saying that "The lack of action by the Town's governance and leadership just is not ok. They have moved with zero urgency on this very important health issue" is not true and defamatory remarks are not helpful. The Superintendent and Chair of the School Committee know that we have been working closely with our water quality consultant and have had multiple meetings with MassDEP and multiple communications with our previous water operator to get to the best solutions in the near term and long term. Please refer to the latest Corrective Action Plan submitted to MassDEP on June 13:

https://www.millvillema.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf906/f/uploads/millville_corrective_action_plan_-_updated_6-13-23.pdf

Fourth, the town is working to submit an application for an SRF loan to cover the long-term project right now. This is due August 11, 2023 and will be submitted on time. Additionally, we are in discussion with Blackstone on an alternative joint long-term solution. Our first meeting was on Tuesday, August 1, 2023 and we are very hopeful we can have a positive outcome that benefits both communities. We will also be submitting a grant application with MassDEP, anticipated to be submitted in October 2023 or so once the grant application period is open. If successful with the grant, there would be no cost to Millville or Blackstone taxpayers if approved by MassDEP.

In conclusion, this is not being requested or required by MassDEP. This is really what should be shocking to everyone – the students do not need to be moved. We encourage you to review the emails from MassDEP leadership referenced in this document. The town of Millville will provide clean drinking water at our cost until the water treatment is rectified and the infrastructure in the school can provide clean drinking water according to MassDEP. This disruption is not in the best interest in the students of the Blackstone-Millville Regional School District and not warranted by MassDEP nor the Board of Selectmen

in Millville, MA. Since the facts do not support the public health need for such a move, we can only speculate if there are alternative objectives.

We have also provided a point-by-point response to the bullets from the email that was sent last week:

- I have had multiple communications with the Millville Town Administrator and Chair of the Board of Selectmen (BOS) about the email sent on July 11th and the District's desire to not move the students and staff out of MES.
 - Response: This is true – we did not want to move the students – nor did we and nor do we see the need to move students based on water quality. We also do not believe MES has been “rendered unusable” as required under the Regional Agreement for such a change.
- No permits have been filed by the Town to start the work that needs to be done on the MES water system.
 - Response: This is also true – the desired permit application for a planned change in chemical treatment was drafted by the prior engineer/operator and edited by the town's water quality consultant, but was not completed nor submitted to MassDEP as required by the town due to unacceptable demands by the engineer.
 - Response: This probably sounds shocking but we believe the system as is, when operated properly and diligently, will provide healthy drinking water to the students. Again, shocking, but our water consultant provided by Congressman McGovern, Dr. Richard Gullick, and the engineers we have spoken to believe this to be the case. We may not need to make any significant changes.
- The \$25K that the Millville BOS put aside to engage in an engineering study to address the MES water issue has not been acted upon.
 - Response: Let's clarify this one. This money was set aside for the long-term solution and we haven't spent any of this money yet, but that does not mean work has not been done. We have reached out to Blackstone and due to schedules on both sides were not able to meet until this week and we are having ongoing discussions regarding a path forward. We believe we can partner together on this solution and it will benefit Blackstone and Millville. Efforts are also currently underway to apply for funding this through an SRF loan as recommended by MassDEP. This is currently in process.
- Literally, no work has been done on the water system at MES since the spring - nothing has changed.
 - Response: The water operator/engineer drafted the permit application as noted above, but did not complete it as the town requested on multiple occasions.
 - Our water consultant, Dr. Gullick has performed considerable analysis of treatment issues, solutions, and best paths forward as referenced above.
 - We also invited the Superintendent and Chair of the School Committee to meet with Dr. Gullick to learn much of the scientific facts regarding the water quality and treatment at MES. The email below was sent on May 6th at 8:02 AM to invite them to this session and they opted not to participate and get a different perspective based on scientific fact.



Town Admin <townadmin@millvillema.org>
to wcs.ltc, Jason, Erin, me

Sat, May 6, 8:02AM ☆ ↶ ⓘ

Good Morning Jason, Erin, and Jenn,

I asked Dr. Gullick to review the recent School Committee meeting with Mr. Ferrari as well as the email exchange below.

He has provided some comments below.

More importantly, he is inviting us four to a zoom meeting at your mutual convenience where he has prepared some slides and will provide some 'layman' education on the topics at hand.

I encourage you all to participate before misinformed decisions are made that may be regretted and which would cost taxpayer money unnecessarily.

Perhaps Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon may be the best times for this. Even Monday afternoon as at this point most preparations for Annual Town Meeting are complete.


Thanks,

Peter

PS - Please note his comments regarding owner and customer do not relate to the cost responsibilities of the agreements currently disputed. That is not something he is involved in.

- While MASSDEP states that the students do not need to be moved, they do state that bottled water must be provided. As recently as Monday evening (7/24) there was discussion at the Millville BOS meeting that they may not need to provide the school with bottled water going against MASSDEP's mandate.
 - Response: This is manipulative and a lie to be honest. We were shocked that this was stated in the email. Our town administrator correctly pointed out that other towns in similar situations do not need to provide bottled water (Springfield, MA for example). However, as you can imagine, MassDEP is not particularly happy with the town at this time and we will NOT do anything to draw any additional criticism or violations from them. We will absolutely provide bottled water to the school. We will follow ALL mandates from MassDEP as we have always done. We have NEVER ignored a mandate from MassDEP.
 - Please see this email from MassDEP stating we do not need to move the students: https://www.millvillema.org/sites/g/files/vyhli906/f/uploads/email_from_mass_dep.pdf
- We were out of compliance, again, with the same water quality standards for quarters 2 and 3. Meaning MES failed the water quality test.
 - Response: Yes and please see the above referenced document on water quality for more information.
- Lastly, yesterday, the Town's MES Water Operator of almost 20 years terminated his contract with the Town of Millville, setting back, even further, the work that needs to be done to ensure clean water for our kids and staff.
 - Response: We believe the operations will move forward without much delay. MassDEP requires an operator be replaced within 30 days of a predecessor's termination. Efforts are well underway to do that with much improved operator performance anticipated.


Jennifer Gill
Chair Millville Board of Selectmen


Peter D. Caruso
Millville Town Administrator