

Sue Hayes  
6 Tanglewood Trail  
DHS Parents Association Co-chair

I am here to voice concerns and express requests from the parent community at DHS on four brief points.

- 1) to ask the Board to put their full support behind the expansion of the cafeteria. Everything that can be done through scheduling, has been done. We are already not coping with the demand – the problem is being masked by the number of kids already eating in the chill zone, library, auditorium foyer, guidance or on the bridge. We question what the overcrowding might be if everyone did eat in the cafeteria, and whether there would even be a health and safety issue? With the current 7<sup>th</sup> grade on their way in, we ask that this project be moved forward quickly.
- 2) Please support the extra trainer. The level of speed strength and physicality on our sports fields is scary. Injuries happen, but it is vital that the correct immediate care is given to our athletes. This is a health and safety issue.
- 3) The more helpful, useful and valued a guidance department is, the more it is used by both students and parents. Guidance seminars, started 3 years ago with no extra resource, have built so much trust that kids turn to their counselors more and more. Guidance are on the front line – for emotional, academic and college related problems. We are very concerned about the counselor being split half and half between the high school and middle school. We do not think it is practical and we do not believe it is fair to the kids allocated to that counselor – we never know when a teenage crisis will hit, and do not want to have to hope it occurs on the half day their support is in the building. We consider this a mental health and safety issue, it would be a shrewd investment in our children and sincerely ask the board to consider giving each school a whole counselor.
- 4) We have heard differing views from teachers, unions and administrators on the matter of Departmental Chairs, so we would like to put forward what is really important to parents, regardless of what model is adopted. Firstly, to improve the consistency across the subject with a grade. No kid should be at a disadvantage because of the teacher he gets (content, grading, deadlines). Secondly we want to bridge the middle to high school gap and prepare 6/7/8 graders mindfully for the transition, demands and pre-requisites of high school. Thirdly, it seems to me that the best way to improve best practice within an academic discipline is to be evaluated coached and supported by someone understanding that discipline. I worked in the airline business and we would never have had non-pilots evaluating pilots. Furthermore, our building administrators need time freeing up. As PTO chair I have observed things being added to their schedule like running an advisory class or sitting in on all teacher recruitment interviews, but what tends to be lost is more time for strategic thinking and taking our high school forward. Finally, I would ask if all these departmental jobs are really the same size – of most

concern to us is the size of the special ed job. We would than in the field of special ed the middle to high school transition is less important than coping with the size of the task and would ask that the board consider giving one departmental chair to each school.

Thank you.



Council of Darien School Parents P.O. Box 2643, Darien, CT 06820

January 24, 2017

My name is Catherine Piorkowski. I am here tonight speaking on behalf of CDSP's Special Education Subcommittee. I have met with all the school representatives from MMS and DHS to discuss the proposed position of Special Education Chairperson. We would like to share with you a parent perspective on the role, based on our understanding of it from previous board discussions. We are not educators and, therefore, we will not attempt to prescribe a job description or the number of staff needed to fulfill the needs of this position. We speak as parents of children with special needs--and as such--we bring a valuable perspective to the struggles and successes our children face in school.

In general, there is support of administrative oversight that would:

- be geared toward helping the articulation between middle and high school
- provide supervision and enhance evaluation of special education teachers
- provide an additional touch point for parents
- assist in targeting and implementing appropriate professional development
- have the ability to do 'hand' scheduling to meet specific students needs

We feel there are other areas of student support that require additional oversight and/or development. Many parents see a gap between designing an IEP and implementing it with fidelity, which necessitates:

- Development of best practices and strategies for regular education teachers and special education teachers to work collaboratively to provide accommodations and instructional support as determined by the PPT
- Thoughtful creation of student teams where teacher and paraprofessional strengths are matched to students needs
- Further examination of the evaluation, training, and management of paraprofessionals
- and Administrative oversight of progress monitoring

Finally, one concern, shared by many, is the fact that this Chairperson would be handling PPTs. It is our hope that the building administrators will continue to play an integral role in PPTs. This seems to fit with the district perspective that building administrators are involved in the education of all students.

**From:** "Harman, Michael A." <MHarman@darienps.org>  
**Date:** January 25, 2017 at 10:19:53 AM EST  
**To:** "Hagerty-Ross, Elizabeth A." <EHagerty-Ross@darienps.org>, "Zuro, Sarah S." <SZuro@darienps.org>, "Stein, Kathrine G." <KStein@darienps.org>, "McNamara, Christa S." <CMcNamara@darienps.org>, "McCammon, D. Jill" <JMcCammon@darienps.org>, "Ochman, Tara" <TOchman@darienps.org>, "Burke, Michael J." <MJBurke@darienps.org>, "Dineen, David P." <DDineen@darienps.org>, "Brenner, Daniel" <DBrenner@darienps.org>  
**Subject:** Fwd: BOE Jan. 24th meeting

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** MARK STRAUBEL  
**Date:** January 25, 2017 at 10:11:47 AM EST  
**To:** "MHarman@darienps.org" <MHarman@darienps.org>  
**Cc:** "JMcCammon@darienps.org" <JMcCammon@darienps.org>  
**Subject:** BOE Jan. 24th meeting  
**Reply-To:** MARK STRAUBEL

Question to Board Of Education - January 24, 2017

Linda Straubel  
1640 Post Road  
Darien, CT

Mr. Harman,

My question is regarding the proposed new subject-area curriculum administrators for 6-12 grades. I would like to know if the Balanced Literacy Methodology currently in place for grade k-8, is being considered for grades 9-12 as part of an effort to align the curriculum between buildings. I have raised concerns to administrators in the past regarding the effectiveness of the methodology for the general education population as well as children with language based disabilities. In addition, as a new parent to DHS, I have also received many comments from teachers and parents particularly of 9th grades students implying or directly stating that students do not have the skill sets or depth of knowledge particularly in writing upon entering

DHS. Teachers in English and Social Studies have talked openly about the perceived deficit of their incoming students and their focus on helping student's develop the skill sets they were not taught in MMS in order to be successful in DHS. This knowledge deficit causes significant stress as well as makes the transition to high school extremely difficult for many students. Given my concerns regarding the MMS us of Balanced Literacy approach, I want to know if the new administrators will change the curriculum at the high school. My hope is that the DHS program continues as is and that DHS will not shift its curriculum to balanced literacy methodology.

My second question also regarding the proposed new subject-area curriculum administrators is whether they will review the current Balance Literacy methodology at MMS. I would like to know if the current methodology and curriculum in place prepares our children properly for the challenges at DHS and addresses the needs of our diverse population.

Best,  
Linda Straubel

## **RTM Finance & Budget Committee**

### **Comments for Superintendent's Proposed Budget for 2017-18 to the Darien Board of Education**

**January 24, 2017**

The RTM Finance & Budget Committee would like to thank the BOE for this opportunity to present our preliminary observations and questions on the Administration's proposed 2017-18 education budget and capital budget. We recognize our presentation is prior to the BOE deliberations. We thank the Superintendent and all administrators for their hard work putting together this proposed budget. I would like to thank the members of F&B for their contributions to this process. I also would like to thank Jim Cameron and channel 79 for their support in providing our citizens with the ability to attend every Board of Education meeting virtually. Some of our schedules do not allow for attendance at every committee and board meeting so the ability to watch whenever we can is appreciated. I have especially enjoyed the pause and rewind functions.

Our annual disclaimer – our comments reflect the considered views of several members on this budget and we did not take a formal vote on each item. We are requesting formal answers to all questions. We feel the answers are necessary for an informed deliberation and decision on the budget by F&B and the entire RTM. In order to keep our public comments brief, we have provided in advance to the board a memorandum containing our questions and concerns. This statement will be a brief summary of that memorandum.

For the capital budget items, F&B requests more detail for the capital projects in the format as provided last year. We request that the Capital Projects 2017-18 Priority 1 descriptions memorandum be available so it can be distributed to the entire RTM well in advance of the budget vote.

Regarding the Superintendent's Proposed Budget for 2017-18 most of our committee discussion and comments pertain to the overall spending increase, cafeteria expansion, the additional of six department heads and the proposed Alternative High School.

The proposed budget for 2017-18 requests Education funding of \$95,751,137. That represents an increase of almost \$25 million over an 8 year period. During that same period of time, total enrollment has declined from 4,841 students to 4,806 students projected for 2017-18 school year. With the likelihood of state grants continuing to decrease and potentially be eliminated our committee continues to be concerned with the level of spending and the need for more efficient and effective delivery of educational services. Moreover Darien cannot participate in the sales tax sharing agreement with the state if our spending increase exceeds 2.5%.

Members of F&B would like to see an overall increase lower than the 2.03% proposed. Members of the committee believe that decrease to the healthcare cost is temporary and has a significant impact on the proposed budget. We are hopeful that additional cost savings can be realized during the BOE budget deliberations.

As we review the projected future enrollment, some on our committee feel that the cost for the cafeteria expansion is high. Currently the capacity of the cafeteria is 340 students. With four lunch waves, the cafeteria can accommodate 1360 students versus the current enrollment of 1356. The district is forecasting that enrollment at

DHS will peak at 1412 in 2019 or 56 more students than today. The proposed projects increase the capacity for the cafeteria between 80 and 96 students. This means for four lunch waves, the cafeteria could accommodate between 320 and 384 new students depending on the project, or between 264 and 328 more students than currently forecasted to be enrolled at the peak in 2019. Some members of F&B believe that the cafeteria expansion project is too big and too expensive during a period of uncertainty regarding state funding. With the unknown enrollment contribution of future town projects, we understand the need for additional capacity. Yet, we urge the BOE and superintendent to consider all the mentioned factors when selecting a final plan.

In the past new initiatives were presented to the BOE prior to the budget cycle. That allowed vetting and better understanding by the BOE, the community and elected officials that need to approve the funding. Since this did not take place for the Alternative High School and Department Chairs, we have questions and concerns that we outline in our memorandum.

Members of the committee expressed concern about adding another layer of management with the hiring of six department heads for the middle and high schools. F&B is always cautious about adding additional administrative staff due to the long term costs for the district.

In general, many on the committee felt that a more detailed overview of the budget impact and overall program is necessary before including the Alternative High School in the budget. There are still many financial implications surrounding the Alternative High School that are unknown. We look forward to the responses to our questions in my memorandum.

The total amount allocated to the ECR pool is at risk and this area needs to be monitored closely as more information is known in March.

We are concerned about the prospect of fully funding all varsity sports DHS offers. F&B requests that the BOE be presented with a full analysis with all considerations prior to taking any action on reducing the amount paid by parents.

We are glad to see that more progress has been made and the Building Conditions Survey has finally been completed. Our committee hopes that the progress will continue with a finalized plan for Ox Ridge and the other elementary schools in consultation with other town officials.

Again, we would like to thank the Administration and the BOE for this opportunity to present our thoughts on the Superintendent's proposed BOE budget for 2017-18. We look forward to working with all constituents during the coming months.

Respectfully submitted,  
Debra M. Ritchie  
Co-Vice Chairman  
RTM Finance and Budget Committee

RTM Education Committee Minutes  
18 January 2017

Members present – Dennis Maroney, Young Sup- Lee, Janet Grogan, Susan Morrison, Jay Hardison, Emily McDermott, Derek Lublin, JoAnn Sawitsky, Pam Sparkman, Sandy Savage, Shannon Silsby, and Lucy Fiore,  
Members absent – Ed Washecka, Ann Reed, and Barbara Thorne,

Meeting was called to order at 8:02 PM and discussion regarding Board of Education Budget

Questions for Darien Board of Education and Administration 2017-18 Budget

Curriculum Supervisors –

- What are the metrics of success or failure of the new positions?
- If they will be doing teacher evaluations, which will free up Asst Principals, what more extra responsibilities will the Asst Principals be undertaking.
- We are confused as to how we are able to fund the positions – could we have a clarification of where the money comes from.
- Will the supervisor have mentor responsibility to younger teachers?
- We think at teaching only 1 class the supervisors will lose touch with students
- The committee believes that the continuity mentioned between MSX and DHS could be done by staff development.
- If the Supervisors position is approved will this rectify the differences in classes across subjects. Meaning there are teachers who get through all material for midterms and finals and others that lack so some students are not as prepared for the midterm or final.
- Question of teachers teaching too few classes. How do we compare to our DIRG of how many classes do teachers teach.

Cafeteria

- Cafeteria currently holds 340 students for 4 waves - 1360 total. The largest estimated class is 1412 so a difference of 52 students. Those 52 divided by the four waves is 13 students per wave. So either we can look at the additional total of 80 more seats will cost us at the cheapest option being discussed is \$18,000 per seat or the need of those 13 seats it will cost \$110, 000 .
- How often does every student in the school eat in the cafeteria every day? Many eat in chill zone, learning centers, coaches offices, or students being out sick that would limit the total number of students in the cafeteria at any one day.
- In the scope of the projects the faculty cafeteria is being removed. How many seats could that encompass? Can we get 15 per wave that would make the difference.
- Another thought is to use benches as opposed to chairs and tables with single seats. University of Michigan has increased football stadium seating capacity not by



increasing size, but by making seats closer together. Can we swap out chairs for benches?

- Also the space could be optimized. We understand this is difficult as the senior section would be difficult for a freshman to sit, but should be looked at how we can best utilize the space.

- Our biggest concern is the scheduling of the waves. We are not sure the most efficient scheduling is occurring. Also the waves are not being enforced. Teachers who are in wave 2 will not send children until wave four if they are having a test or lab. The understanding of the committee is first and fourth waves are crowded, but waves two and three are not. We are not sure that wave one of English, reading, Tech Ed, Wave two Math, music, study halls, learning center, third wave, business, world language, social studies and fourth wave art, core, PE, Science and video are the best ways to divide. Study Hall is not in the schedule and teachers are not abiding by the schedule. Either it needs to be better enforced or better managed and should not be the major problem that we are told. Why not determine which specific classes together add up to 340 and have those classes be a wave?

#### Alternative School

- What data suggests the need for this school?
- Does the cost grow over time or reduce spending for out of district students?
- What style of learner will benefit from the school?
- Busing or transportation costs?
- Food costs? Nurse? Guidance counselor? Custodians?
- Are demographics of Darien similar to other areas where there are alternative schools?
- Would a dyslexic school, similar to Windward, serve more students as well as reduce the \$6 million out of district student cost? And be a better use of energy and funds?
- We are confused is this a school for 6-12 or an alternative High School?

#### Technology deployment

- Do all students in HS need to have an iPad? Is there an opt out program if they already have a computer or an iPad?
- What is the screen time for younger students? Does this conform to Pediatric recommendations?

#### Substitutes

- Can we use interns to reduce the cost of Subs?
- What is the break down of long term subs vs day subs, vs Professional development subs?
- Is there a breakout of subs per school?

## **Athletics**

- **Can we have a breakdown of cost per sport**
- **Should budgeting for State Finals for every team be standard?**
- **Additional Athletic trainer we think is a good idea**
- **Maintenance for Athletic Dept is located where?**
- **AD role of being on campus and accessible to students and attend games?**

**Our committee would like the Board and Administration think of 4 elements when evaluating this budget, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Transparency and Innovation.**

**Thank you for your time and consideration.**

**Meeting was adjourned at 10:07 PM**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Dennis Maroney**