

Hi! My name is Cecilia Matullo, I live at 15 Greenwood Avenue. I'm currently one of the PTO chairs for Ox Ridge. I have an only child, she's in 4th grade and we've been at Ox Ridge since K. Looking at the timing for all the proposed Ox Ridge projects, our family will not necessarily benefit from them because we only have a little over a year left at Ox Ridge until my daughter goes to middle school. But I still would like to speak tonight on behalf of Ox Ridge and as a Darien parent in support of the administration's proposal for a new school for Ox Ridge which is Option 3. Yes, it costs more money compared to Options 1 and 2, but looking at it long term, it is the most financially responsible choice for our town. Some of the highlights from Option 3 that stood out for me are the demolition of the portables. It is time that we house all of our students' classes within the 4 walls of one school building. Option 3 will also provide one dedicated location for ELP. This will eliminate the yearly reshuffling of our ELP students and staff amongst the 3 schools that are currently housing ELP. A new Ox Ridge school offers a separate and secured access to the gym and cafeteria commons which will further promote security for our students during school events where visitors are allowed within the school premises:

I ask the board to consider this option. Thank you to all the families who are here tonight. Thanks for listening and have a great evening.

Alex Eising
15 Pilgrim Road
Darien

I think that almost everyone in this room can agree on the fact that we moved to Darien because we value Excellence in Education for our children.

Since moving to this town and being part of the public-school system for five years – I can confidently say that the quality of the Administration and the teaching faculty in Darien is excellent. However, I can also confidently say that 4/5 of our elementary school facilities, particularly Ox Ridge do not come close to living up to this standard of Excellence.

Our children should not be attending classes in modular units, our children should not have to wear their jackets in school when the heating system is having issues and our children should not have to go to a library whose exit door is being held together by duct tape because we continue to band-aid Ox Ridge School. Our faculty should not have to teach in these conditions either.

Let's bring our facilities up to the level of excellence of our education. Let's give our kids the cutting-edge education that they need in the 21st century.

Option 3 is the fastest, less intrusive, and most risk averse option and will in the long run absolutely be the most cost-effective option. We deserve this, the amazing teaching faculty deserve this, our town deserves this, and most importantly, our children deserve this.

Vasil, Nadine

From: Ochman, Tara
Sent: Wednesday, April 25, 2018 8:33 PM
To: Board of Education
Cc: Brenner, Daniel; Vasil, Nadine
Subject: Fwd: BOE 4/24 Mtg comments

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Adrienne Kelly <adkelly1@gmail.com>
Date: April 25, 2018 at 8:24:13 PM EDT
To: TOchman@darienps.org
Subject: BOE 4/24 Mtg comments

Tara,
Thank you for the time to speak at the Darien Board of Education public hearing last night.

Please find a written version of my comments below:

“Adrienne Kelly, 16 Sherry Lane. I have 3 children currently attending Ox Ridge, in 5th, 3rd, & 1st grades. I fully support Option 3 to rebuild Ox Ridge School. While my children may not enjoy the end result directly, I believe this option is the best value for our town and is most considerate of our children with respect to the least disruption during construction. Thank you.”

Adrienne Kelly
Adkelly1@gmail.com
617-335-4729 cell#

Hello. My name is Lindsey DeVito and I have been living in Darien since 2009. I have two children – one in first grade at Hindley and one finishing her second year of ELP at Royle.

When my daughter got into ELP at Tokeneke, we were excited, nervous, and anxious. Within one week, we were so happy with our decision, finding ourselves part of a supportive and loving community. We quickly discovered that outstanding teachers, staff and parents participate in this program because it helps children understand kindness, empathy, differences, and friendship in addition to reading, writing, counting, skipping, drawing, and everything else in between.

I could go on about the benefits of ELP but I am here tonight to speak on behalf of many Royle ELP families who feel that having this program in one location is necessary and long overdue. ELP has been shuffled around Darien for several years. Our elementary schools have seen ELP come and go. Teachers, staff, students, and parents have also been shuffled around and this has been challenging for all parties involved. Often times, parents think that their child will be placed in an ELP classroom at their home school and often this isn't the case. This leaves families confused and upset. Teachers and staff have to work even harder to streamline curriculum and share ideas. Laura Straiton has done an amazing job coordinating all of these moving pieces but logistically, it hasn't been easy. Most of our elementary schools are stressed for space and some relying on portables to make up for this. Every other community pre-school in Darien is in one location, under one roof so why should ELP be spread all over town? This model may have worked well in past but we're seeing it fail now. It has carried the major benefit of being linked to our elementary schools. Potential ELP consolidation at Ox Ridge could address this beautifully.

Challenges aside, I'd like the Board, administration, and residents to understand the importance of doing this project right. We cannot cut corners at Ox Ridge because in the long run, or even short, taxpayers, parents, teachers, and administrators who are proud of our schools, will end up frustrated. Darien's Early Learning Program is growing every year. There is a need for an integrated pre-

school to accommodate both peer models and students with special needs. Therefore, when we think about the 'new' ELP, I want everyone involved considering the future and providing ELP with space to grow. If the 1996 wing isn't big enough then we should make it big enough. I want ELP teachers, staff and parents to be consulted when designing these spaces and make sure teachers needs and those of 3 and 4 year olds are met. These might include: age appropriate bathrooms in each classroom, a common space for students to utilize when there is inclement weather or a pre-school event, a state-of-the art playground, rooms for each support staff member, a teachers lounge, and a well thought out system for pick up and drop off.

Darien residents value and pride ourselves on our strong education system (pre-K through 12). Therefore, let us see the value in consolidating ELP but let's do it right so we're not here again in 5 years saying 'why did we cut corners'.

Thank you very much.

Hi my name is Stacey Tié, I live at 10 Clocks Lane. Thank you to Lindsey DeVito for reading this speech on my behalf. I apologize I can't be here in person. As I was preparing to write my thoughts and opinions to give to the public on the consolidation of ELP, I decided to go back and review all the previous speeches I have delivered on the behalf of ELP to the town boards. I will be echoing some sentiments in this speech. While I support the concept of consolidating ELP into one location, this town has a history of short term thinking and value engineering projects which makes me concerned.

When we build a new building the first thing we do is prepare and build the foundation. Preschool and Elementary school is a child's foundation. We want to make it sturdy and strong so it is prepared for the many storms life throws at it. Research suggests that the rate of human learning and development is most rapid in the first five years of life. As a former parent, I wholeheartedly support the CONCEPT of consolidating of ELP into one location.

I believe consolidating ELP will allow staff, together under one roof, to share ideas and best practices. It will also provide space for staff to problem solve and streamline curriculum more efficiently and effectively. This will give our children in ELP the best experience, in one location with access to more peers to learn and grow with.

I'd like to ask you to think of your core parent friend groups in Darien. Where did you first meet them? I am willing to bet that most of you said you met them when your children were in preschool together. There is something about this vulnerable age in a child and parents life that bonds us. Consolidating ELP into one location would give families an opportunity to build community and long lasting friendships. We all moved here to raise our kids in a village. We need each other as parents to support one another as our children challenge us daily.

However, as parent who values ELP and has big dreams for the future of this program, I am concerned about retrofitting the 1996 space of Ox Ridge Elementary School. I am not confident that this is the right space for ELP. I don't understand what the goals and the vision are for the future of ELP in Darien. I also don't have a clear understanding of what enrollment projections are for ELP. As stated by Debbie Farber and John Verre in their January 6th 2015 presentation to the Board, best practices require that ELP classes contain about 12 students with a 50/50 ratio of typical to children with special needs. But true inclusion would be 75/25 ratio. Whichever, ratio the board decides affects the amount of classrooms you need.

I would also like to hear conversation about what the Educations Specifications for ELP are, in order to have confidence that all that is needed to support this growing

population is included in that space. As stated above this age group is an intricate part of a child's development. For example, ELP needs bathrooms, with farm doors that are the right size for 3-5 year olds in the classroom. This would promote potty training independence. Current bathrooms in the elementary schools are too large for little bodies. Another important need for this program is a multipurpose common space for indoor recess or PE or music shares or parent workshops or lunch etc. Having this multipurpose common space would allow the teachers to prepare children for transition to elementary school, to move little bodies that need to move, and to help families build community. Adequate spaces for Therapy such as PT, OT, Speech, Psych, Social Skills etc is also necessary. As well as the need for office space, and conference room space for PPTs and Team meetings. Finally, and most importantly, safety. These are our youngest children with the littlest bodies that need very specific protection.

I believe an investment in the ELP will reap long-term dividends for our students, and for the district as a whole. The National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (NEILS) found that overall outcomes for infants and toddlers participating in early intervention included: increased motor, social, and cognitive functioning; and reduced negative impacts of their disabilities. NEILS also found that 46% of children who had received early intervention were performing just as well in early reading and mathematics as the general population of children in kindergarten. Additionally, based on research done by the Department of Education, children with early interventions need fewer services later in life, have fewer instances of failing a grade and offer more long-term benefits for society. These benefits include more dedication to school, more college attendees, higher reading/arithmetic/language test scores, fewer instances of delinquent behavior and a 50% reduction in the need for special education services in high school.

Darien is an ELP through 12 district and we best ensure the success of our twelfth graders by building a strong foundation at the earliest level. I feel strongly that the community, administration and the Board of Education will continue to recognize the importance of early education, and that we can go on making strides in the development and foundation of our children by providing the appropriate facilities to deliver services at an early age.

Sited: <http://www.articlesbase.com/health-articles/why-is-early-intervention-of-great-importance-543277.html>

<http://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/pubs/outcomesofearlyintervention.pdf>

Good Evening. My name is Lisa Cerussi. I live at 12 Rings End Road. I have twins who are currently in 8th grade at Middlesex Middle School.

I support the consolidation of the Early Learning Program classrooms into one school location. My children attended ELP from April 2007 through June 2009. One of my boys had significant developmental delays requiring support, while the other attended as a typical peer student.

When they joined ELP, all classrooms and support services were located at Hindley Elementary School. We began working with District well before our child's 3rd birthday to develop his IEP and plan his transition to ELP. As a parent, the idea of dropping off our 3-year old (with disabilities) at large elementary school (versus a small nursery or pre-school) was daunting. However, our hesitation and concerns changed on Day 1 and the experience was overall positive. We quickly realized, and still believe, that ELP is a shining star of our school district, providing our youngest students the support they need to begin and succeed in their academic and personal journey.

ELP was located in a separate wing at Hindley, with a separate entrance and drop-off loop. It was a "school within a school." Our "school" had a separate conference room for PPT meetings, an OT/PT room and Speech room, four classrooms, a small playground with age appropriate equipment and bathrooms with small-scale facilities. We had a dedicated early-childhood psychologist, teachers who collaborated with one another, and a small group of dedicated related service providers who were always in the building and able to work with our children on the playground and in the classrooms. The ELP Administrator was always in the building and interacting with children, staff and parents.

Our little ones enjoyed a small pre-school environment and parents felt very comfortable knowing that our babies were in a very safe place. As parents and families, we also enjoyed a very strong sense community. Our children had exposure to a large group of peers and formed friendships that many still enjoy today. Parents had the opportunity to form friendships and share experiences ... and the program truly exemplified "inclusion" at its best.

In 2008, the district divided ELP into two locations. Service providers and some staff members were no longer dedicated to one building and had to travel back and forth between schools, which some parents felt changed the dynamics of the school. The opportunities for our children to have shared experiences with a wide range of children became fewer, and the amount of group activities and events was reduced. Our small "pre-school" environment and sense of community were minimized tremendously.

As the District looks to the future and has the opportunity renovate or re-build, please consider the advantages of bringing our pre-school aged children, ELP staff and parents together in one building. You will not only re-build a building and find efficiencies, but you will also build a community of support for our youngest and most vulnerable students.

Thank you.

My name is Millyn Gaaserud and I live at 35 Driftway Lane.

I would like to begin by thanking the Board of Education and the Administration for the work that they have done studying and formulating a plan to update our aging school facilities. In particular, I thought that the communication sent last week to all parents (The DPS Magazine, Ox Ridge Edition) answered many questions about the various options being considered to address the numerous challenges faced on that campus.

I am not clear, however, about how the Ox Ridge construction fits into the greater facilities plan. Clearly, there is a serious need for repairs or reconstruction at Ox Ridge, but there are also physical plant liabilities at other schools that should be taken into consideration.

Other school districts are facing a similar situation. Norwalk Public Schools, for example, commissioned a comprehensive study of their facilities in 2015. Since then, they have developed a districtwide facilities plan which is available for review on their website. The Norwalk plan begins by outlining guiding principles which clearly articulate the precepts that will govern the project as it moves forward over the next 10 years. These principles will help the organization make decisions as issues inevitably arise along the way. What are our guiding principles? The Norwalk plan also includes a timeline outlining when major milestones will be achieved, a useful communication tool that can be used to manage expectations. Where is our timeline?

You will be aware, of course, that the Norwalk plan has not been without controversy. Once the comprehensive plan was rolled out, many parents pushed back on the delay of renovating current facilities while a new building was constructed. Others argued that the enrollment figures did not support the construction of a new school. Certainly, seeing the plan in its entirety gave parents the information that they needed to inform the discussion and impart their point of view. I am looking for similar clarity and information with the Darien facilities plan.

Yes, facilities plans are complex and difficult to understand. They are difficult to communicate. However, I believe that a comprehensive plan should be delivered before you can expect the broader parent and Darien taxpayer community to give constructive comments. The question posed at the beginning of this evening was, "Should the Board of Education accept the recommendation of the administration to rebuild Ox Ridge Elementary School? My response is, "I don't know."

Public comments regarding OX building plans

My name is Catherine Piorkowski, and I live at 152 Old Kings Hwy N.

My comments will be brief. I have followed the conversation regarding facilities for the past couple of years and am in favor of Option 3: Rebuild and consolidation of ELP at Ox Ridge. I believe that any option that includes a renovation would be an irresponsible use of taxpayer dollars. I have toured the Ox Ridge building on two separate occasions. ^{Investing in} A building of this age and this condition seems like throwing money in a black hole; renovation is always unpredictable and you never know what you will find as soon as you start opening up walls. As a taxpayer, I want to be sure that any building dollars the town spends, are spent wisely investing in a space with a long life, a suitable educational design, and enhanced safety.

I am also in favor of the consolidation of the Early Learning Program for many of the reasons that have been discussed in this room. ELP is a district treasure for our youngest and most vulnerable population. These students deserve a space that is designed to maximize efficiencies, as well as built to the scale necessary for 3 to 5 year olds. Further, I feel that some of the advantages to consolidation will be intangibles—the ability for one teacher to learn from another by witnessing classroom and hallway interactions; the opportunity for children to interact with a larger same-age peer group, some of who will be in their home school as they enter Kindergarten; and the prospect of parents being able to make connections with each other as they face similar challenges.

I'd like to thank the board for the work they have done on the facilities plan thus far and for the opportunity to speak tonight.