

**APPROVED
BOARD OF EDUCATION
MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING
February 2, 2016**

PLACE:

Darien Town Hall
Auditorium
7:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Harman, Chair; Mesdames Stein, Hagerty-Ross, Zuro, McNamara (7:12), and Sullivan; and Messrs. Burke, Dineen and Martens.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None.

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT:

Dr. Dan Brenner, Superintendent of Schools; Dr. Susie DaSilva, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Ms. Shirley Klein, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services; Mr. Michael Feeney, Director of Finance; Ms. Marjorie Cion, Director of Human Resources.

ADMINISTRATION ABSENT:

None.

CALL TO ORDER.

Ms. Harman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. He stated there was a sign in sheet available for anyone who wished to speak. The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Education will be held on February 9, 2016 at 7:30 p.m. in the Board of Education meeting room at 35 Leroy Avenue.

Mr. Harman announced this was a public hearing and an opportunity for the public to make their comments to the Board.

The speakers were as follows:

1. Ms. Cathy Butcher, Thomasina Lane - CDSP Budget Chair
2. Ms. Shelly Skoglund, Leroy Avenue and Ms. Jill McCammon, Old Kings Highway South - CDSP Co-Chairs
3. Ms. Wendy Ward, Stanley Road - CDSP
4. Ms. Tara Ochman, Mansfield Ave. - CDSP
5. Mr. Peter Orphanos, Raymond St., - DHSPA Representative
6. Ms. Valerie Horne, Concord Lane, - CDSP Special Education Sub-Committee Representative
7. Ms. Stacey Tie, Clocks Lane and Ms. Christina Irwin, Mansfield Ave., - CDSP ELP Representatives
8. Ms. Beth Lane, Hillcrest Ave., and Ms. Karen Wilber, Birch Rd., - CDSP
9. Ms. Theresa Vogt, Circle Rd., - MMS Co-Chair
10. Ms. Marli Hayes, Hickory Lane - Parent

11. Mr. Robbie Gaaserud, Driftway Lane - DHS student
12. Ms. Meredith Cauvin, Pinebrook Lane - Parent
13. Ms. Cassie Yusi, Old Kings Highway South - Parent
14. Ms. Sivan Hong, Highland Avenue, Parent
15. Ms. Karina Morales, Maple St., - Parent
16. Ms. Mary Jo Miller, Relihan Rd., - Parent
17. Ms. Courtney Darby, Old Parish Rd., and Ms. Tricia Bresnahan, Glenvale Ave., - SEPAC Co-Chairs
18. Ms. Andrea Callagy, Delafield Island Rd., - Parent
19. Ms. Tara Wurm, Mystic Lane - Parent

Mr. Harman asked if there was anyone else present who wished to address the Board. No one came forward.

Mr. Harman asked for a motion to adjourn the public hearing portion of the meeting. Mr. Burke motioned and Ms. Zuro seconded.

The hearing was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Schneider Zuro
Secretary



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

Members of the Board of Education, Darien Public School Administration and general public, thank you for your time tonight. My name is Cathy Butcher, and I'm the Budget Chair for the Council of Darien School Parents, or CDSP.

CDSP is the umbrella organization for the parent-teacher organizations at all seven public schools in town, and our mission is to promote understanding and communication among parents, schools, the administration and the Board of Education. Because informed communication is a key component of our mission, PTO co-chairs and budget representatives from each of the Darien Public Schools are voting members of CDSP, and all parents and guardians of public school students are non-voting members.

Given how connected our members are to their various school communities, CDSP is in a unique position to gather feedback from a large number of parents throughout the year about a full range of issues affecting our schools, and during the budget season, we solicit targeted feedback about parents' priorities and concerns.

Consistent with our purpose of communicating the varied voices of school parents, tonight you will hear from the CDSP co-chairs, then from several members of CDSP, who will speak about the following subjects:

Technology;
Capital expenditures;
High school;
Special education;
Early Learning Program;
World Language; and
Curriculum.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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

My name is Jill McCammon of 81 Old Kings Hwy South. I am a co-chair of the Council of Darien School Parents. My name is Shelly Skoglund. I live at 139 Leroy Ave and I serve with Jill as co-chair of the CDSP.

We'd like to begin tonight by acknowledging the very positive shifts we have seen in the district this year, particularly in the hiring of Dr. Brenner and his very experienced cabinet. Parents are excited and optimistic about what this team of seasoned, proven professionals can bring to our district and grateful for the enthusiasm and joy with which they do it. We are encouraged by what we have seen so far and anticipate great things as this leadership team transitions from recovery to transformation into a district that prepares children for the challenges of the 21st century.

We are asking our community to support our school's leadership by supporting this budget. In our opinion, a budget should not be a one year snapshot, but a multi-year view into the future. And we think that future holds great promise for our district. Let's give Dr. Brenner and his team the time and resources to show us what their leadership can bring to our students.

With regards to this year's budget we believe the underlying theme is redefinition: of how work is done, how budgets are created and how budget transparency can transform management accountability. Of the total proposed increase, \$1.5 MM or about 70%, is contractual salary adjustments. With minimal additional funding, Dr. Brenner has been able to add significant and meaningful program change by redefining how we work. Dr. Brenner has been clear since his first day here that "because we always did it this way" is never an acceptable answer. For example, he has asked our elementary schools to redefine the work done by aides and identify efficiencies in order to do more with less. Another example is the 1:1 tech initiative, which provides a robust addition to our curriculum delivery, and also allows us to repurpose computer labs as classrooms without significant construction costs. We are also thrilled to see the increasing focus on budget transparency and the recoding this year will provide us excellent visibility and increased management accountability at the school level in years to come.

As a parent body, we value excellence, but for years have been settling for mediocrity, band aid solutions and following where others districts have led. We have seen the unsustainable growth in Out of District placements because we failed to build our own capacity to serve those children. We continue to make reconfigurations of recently built schools because we built for value vs. building for the future. We strongly believe that while we may have saved money in the short term, the long term costs of fixing these mistakes will be steep.

As I stand up here reading remarks from a piece of paper, I realize how different this same experience will be 20 years from now when our children are in our shoes. The skills our children will need to thrive are changing rapidly. We will expect children to be able to use technology fluidly. To communicate in a way that engages their audience with more than just words. Our children need to be able to speak multiple languages, including computer coding, systems navigation, mathematics and the languages of our



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

global world. Children will need to be flexible, adaptable and resilient. Our district needs to support them on this evolution.

21st century learning assumes that neither development nor learning are linear. It inspires students with rich content and experiences to cultivate their natural enthusiasm for learning. We need flexibility throughout our school system in both content and setting so that all students can rise to the challenge. The proposal for the 200/300 models at the high school is an example of flexibility in setting. We look forward to more details about how this will roll out and to evaluation of how well it works for our different learners.

Our teachers and administrators are the foundation upon which success is built and they too must have the professional development to build their own adaptability and flexibility. This is a paradigm shift for our school system and it will require ongoing investment in the development of our human capital, Pre-K through high school.

Our thinking and planning for school facilities must outpace our current needs. We must incorporate flexibility and adaptability to allow for fluctuations in enrollment and evolving uses of physical spaces. We know SOME of what we need right now. We need a new gym floor at Ox Ridge. We need enough classrooms to teach our children with the right teacher:student ratio. Some things we can readily imagine - libraries as maker spaces for creativity and collaboration. We must plan better than we ever have. We WILL be required to make capital investments in our schools over the next few years, and we expect those investments to sustain educational integrity, proper fiscal management and future flexibility.

Dr. Brenner has developed this budget with diligence. We urge all town boards to use that same diligence as they review for approval. We have heard talk of across the board cuts of \$1MM to \$2MM from factions within the RTM. In terms of any across the board reductions in this budget we urge our town representatives to **represent** their constituents. A majority of taxpayers in Darien are the parents of school children and they value investing their tax dollars in high performing public schools. Indiscriminate cuts will have a detrimental impact all of on our children.

We have also heard a request for an increase to the Educational Cost Sharing estimate in next year's budget. Over the past decade, the state of CT has reduced reimbursement for Excess Costs from 100% to the low 70s. Given that the state is now facing unprecedented fiscal pressure, it is reasonable to expect a lower reimbursement rate.

Members of the Board of Education, thank you for your continued hard work on behalf of the families of this town. The Council of Darien School Parents stands here tonight in support of this budget because of what it represents: a long term vision crafted by a cabinet of educational leaders. We urge you to make that vision a reality for every single one of our students.



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

My name is Wendy Ward, and I live at 11 Stanley Road. I am speaking tonight in support of the Proposed Budget's technology initiatives.

Parents have asked for a plan that meaningfully integrates technology into our school curriculum. The current administration has crafted a robust technology initiative that will carry our students well into the 21st century, and we are excited to support that initiative.

Specifically, we look for the technology initiative to:

- enhance delivery of current core curriculum;
- customize instruction to optimize individual learning styles for all students, including those with identified learning needs;
- facilitate instruction in computer science;
- improve the teacher-student connection through use of a device at home and in school; and
- facilitate any state-mandated testing that must be completed using a computer.

In addition to benefiting our students from an educational perspective, the proposed technology plan also will achieve economic efficiencies. The use of 1:1 devices will eliminate the need for dedicated computer labs at all school levels, allowing the labs to be repurposed as much-needed classroom spaces. There are also economic efficiencies to be achieved by moving away from textbooks and paper copies to electronic versions. The proposed technology plan also makes use of existing Chromebooks. Smart use of the existing infrastructure will help defray the cost and allow for an equal technology deployment in the Elementary and Middle Schools. It is the combination of using existing resources and new solutions that will ultimately benefit all students.

While Darien High School represents the last phase of the rollout, Principal Dunn, as well as all the principals, have expressed their enthusiasm for and commitment to the technology initiative. DHS has begun preparing for its deployment and is already engaged in thoughtful research to identify the right hardware. Teachers are employing Google classroom, having recognized the uniform qualitative benefits. We cannot delay or interrupt this momentum.

While CDSP strongly supports the technology initiative, we urge the administration to ensure that there is adequate electrical and broadband access, and to be thoughtful about how students will receive support for inevitable problems with their devices. Because deployment of these devices will result in a steep learning curve for our dedicated teachers, we support the proposed funding for professional development as an integral part of the technology plan. Further in addressing safety concerns, as well as appropriate use and behavior with devices, we urge the district to teach and enforce digital citizenship and literacy Pre-K-12.

In summary, we support the administration's proposal to implement a technology plan. We recognize that this is a fundamental element of a 21st Century school system that Darien is currently lacking. We also support the proposed implementation schedule, which phases in the devices in a thoughtful way and should allow for problems to be identified and rectified before full implementation. We view this initiative as an exciting, cost-effective way to deliver a well-rounded education.

Good evening. My name is Tara Ochman and I live at 476 Mansfield Avenue. As mentioned in earlier remarks, the Council of Darien School Parents continues to advocate for a long-range plan for our school facilities that provides adaptability and flexibility to meet the rapidly evolving requirements of our world. As parents we have accepted substandard, outdated facilities for our children for long enough. We fully expect that the district is going to move forward with a plan for the future. In the meantime, however, we simply must address some basic safety issues in our schools.

There are three proposed projects in particular we urge you to support.

The first project is the relocation of the main office at Hindley. Visibility and safety in today's world is key. Hindley's main office is located 200 feet from the front entrance. All visitors, including deliveries and parents, must walk past six Kindergarten and first grade classrooms, as well as the gym and common room, to reach the secretary and the main office. To address this security concern, the main office and nurse's office will be relocated to the front of the building - and the vacated space will be turned into usable instructional space at a cost of \$230,000.

The second project is the Ox Ridge gym floor. The Ox Ridge gym floor is cracked, warped to the point of unevenness, and continues to produce slippery residue - all creating an unsafe and inequitable environment for Ox Ridge students to access their physical education. The Physical Education teachers have been forced to alter their curriculum in order to facilitate safety. This project is proposed at a much lower cost than original estimates of \$150,000 in an effort to provide for children's safety while recognizing that Ox Ridge requires a more permanent solution.

Finally, sidewalks at Holmes: Existing sidewalks are uneven and in great need of repair. We are all aware that Hoyt Street has high-volume, high-speed commuter traffic that causes additional safety risk to pedestrians and Holmes has a very high percentage of students who walk to school. A timely sidewalk fix promotes both health and safety for our many student walkers at cost of \$45,000.

We recognize these are necessary short-term patches as you work on a thoughtful, strategic approach to a long-term school facilities plan. We give sincere thanks to Superintendent of Schools Dr. Dan Brenner, Director of Facilities Mike Lynch and to the Darien Board of Education for proposing cost effective solutions and prioritizing the pressing safety needs of our children.



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

Good evening -- members of the Board of Education, Dr. Brenner, the Darien Public School Administration and general public, thank you for your time tonight. My name is Peter Orphanos, 67 Raymond Street, and I have a ninth grade daughter at Darien High School. I speak to you tonight on behalf of Darien High School Parents Association in support of the Superintendent's proposed 2016-2017 budget, specifically as it pertains to DHS.

Darien's commitment to excellence in public education is why many of us chose to live here. We must, however, continue moving forward and strengthening the quality of education at Darien High School and throughout the whole district.

We wish to acknowledge and support the work of Principal Dunn and her team at DHS in enhancing and enriching the learning experience and expanding our course offering in response to student interest and achievement, while maintaining current staffing levels. The small group guidance seminars are offering students at every grade level the opportunity to build skills and prepare for college applications and admissions. The new communication structure for Special Education families is creating stronger connections between school and home. Homeroom has been replaced by the Link Advisory program, which is fostering a greater sense of community among our students. The proposed 2016-2017 DHS budget includes no FTE requests even though three new courses will be added and the school plans to adopt three new classroom structures for 300 level classes in the fall of 2016.

I would like to focus on five important areas of the proposed DHS Budget: The first three areas represent capital expenses: 1) Darien High School cafeteria expansion; 2) replacement of the stadium turf field; and 3) athletic equipment storage. The fourth and fifth areas concern operating expenses: 4) athletic funding; and 5) enhanced student supports.

Capital expenditures:

1. **Darien High School cafeteria expansion:** Rising enrollment has placed increasing space constraints on Darien High School. Locker pods are now classrooms, the auxiliary cafeteria is now a classroom and every available space is used to its fullest. It should come as no surprise that DHS has a significant overcrowding problem in the cafeteria, and this problem cannot be solved without expansion. It is common for students to squeeze two or three to a seat; others eat in the hallways, in the "Chill Zone," on the sky bridge next to the auditorium, in coaches offices, or outside when feasible. Lower-cost alternatives have been explored and implemented to address this issue, including adding cafe tables and chairs to the vending machine area, and converting from three lunch shifts to four, yet the problem persists.

Expansion is the only solution. Enrollment is projected to rise and the current situation will only get worse without attention. October 1, 2015 enrollment was 1,358 and is projected to rise to 1,400 by 2018, putting the school at maximum capacity. Only with approval of this project as a part of this budget can we reasonably expect to have the project completed prior to the anticipated 2018 enrollment. The proposed expansion offers our town solid value. This expansion



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

will allow for 100-125 additional seats for each of the four lunch shifts, or approximately 400 seats per day. A cafeteria where more of our students can gather with their peers helps to create an important sense of community. This project is also eligible for a 20% reimbursement from the State.

2. **Stadium turf field:** The predicted life of a turf field is between 8-10 years, and the stadium turf field, which was installed in 2004-05, has exceeded that number. There is a trend away from grass fields because turf fields offer better long-term value for the town: they allow for play in and immediately following inclement weather, especially in the spring, and turf fields hold up to intense use from high school and youth programs. Given Darien's overall shortage of field space, turf fields' additional utility is invaluable, and the stadium field is an important part of the field inventory.
3. **Athletic equipment storage:** Storage space for valuable athletic equipment is deficient. Current "facilities" consist of five commercial containers and there is inadequate storage space for expensive athletic equipment, including the brand new netting system (nets and poles) which surround the oval turf fields and keep balls from hitting cars and spectators. With equipment located all over the campus, inventory control is a problem. The only responsible course is to properly store and care for the equipment that the town has already invested in, in one central location with better control and management of items.

Operating expenditures:

4. **Athletic funding:** We know that the Board is awaiting a full by-sport report on athletic funding, to better understand funding inconsistencies and gaps. While establishing a philosophy to govern this funding is a laudable long-term goal, we cannot shortchange existing structure by failing to fund or reducing the budget for our athletics program in the short-term. We ask that the board fully support the current funding requests while pursuing a long-term solution to this issue.
5. **Enhanced student supports:** We are encouraged by Principal Dunn's 200/300 level classes initiative, including the lab, co-taught and team-taught models. We applaud the administration for bringing forward a creative and innovative approach which they believe can be achieved within in the current FTE budget.

The addition of these three instructional options has the potential to provide greater inclusion, opportunity and challenge for students currently in 200 level classes for whom success at the 300 level would be possible with the right supports. We look forward to hearing details about implementation, including the professional development and planning time that teachers will receive, the plans for communicating with parents so that they are prepared to make the most appropriate class selection for their child, and the follow-through that will be in place to ensure that regardless of which option a student and their family may choose, the accommodations provided for under the student's IEP or 504 plan are maintained.

Others will speak/have spoken tonight to the district technology plan and professional development, but they merit additional, brief recognition. Specifically, the 1-2-1



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

computing program is of great importance to Darien High School -- which will be fully Google classroom enabled this fall. We commend the administration for its thoughtful and deliberate approach to selecting the most appropriate hardware for our students. Moreover, we fully support the professional development that will accompany the technology transformation, as it is critical to the success of this forward-thinking and long overdue initiative.

In sum, we believe that the targeted investments in the Proposed Budget will allow Darien High School to maintain excellence. We caution against illusions of short-term savings that ultimately compromise long-term goals and objectives.

Thank you.



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

My name is Valerie Horne, 9 Concord Lane. I am here tonight to address special education on behalf of CDSP's special education subcommittee—not only the initiatives funded by this budget, but also the vision and trajectory of special education that has been put forth by our new administration. As we gather here, it is simple enough to look back at the last few years and recognize that our district has been largely focusing on the issue of compliance. We must acknowledge and address the unsustainable growth in spending on outplacement that is the result—at least in part—of past non-compliance and lack of meaningful programming for some children with special needs. And we must ask ourselves how to move forward in a way that is best for our district and all learners.

I would argue that the path forward has two key components: building a *culture* of compliance and creating programming so that more students' needs may be met within our school system.

The establishment of standardized operating procedures for students in special education is a foundation on which the design and delivery of an appropriate education is built. A failure to consistently implement those procedures and policies as part of a broader culture of compliance can lead to a failure to create meaningful and effective programming for children, uneven delivery of that programming, and wasteful spending. Through his Chain of Command, Dr. Brenner has articulated that teachers, case managers, psychologists, and building administrators must take ownership of, and have accountability for, students in special education. The next step for our district to create a *culture* of compliance is appropriate professional development in areas of compliance, reading, math, technology, social skills and differentiation of instruction. Professional development also is required in the area of IEP development, so that appropriate personnel know how to write valid and measurable goals for children with special needs. Each of these areas is supported in the proposed budget. It is worth noting that training in most of these areas supports the district's entire range of learners.

An equally critical step to building a strong and fiscally responsible school system is building programming in-house to serve the needs of our student population, thereby avoiding unsustainable growth in outplacements. The school district has a legal and ethical obligation to offer children with special needs a free and appropriate education. The district may offer that education in-house, or it may outsource that education to another school at the district's expense. As a result of past compliance problems, out-of-district placement has grown significantly in recent years, and associated out-of-district costs have risen in conjunction. Reversing this trend so that the district retains more children with special needs, and possibly even retrieves some children who already have been outplaced, will require development of appropriate and specialized programming.

In this regard, Dr. Brenner is employing his "work smarter, not harder" mentality by repurposing funds for two SESS facilitators who resigned from the district and restructuring the special education department to include another director for elementary students. The goal of this change is to allow the Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services, Shirley Klein, to focus on assessing the needs of the student population and to build programming and capacity within the district. Developing appropriate programming is crucial to the district's ability to satisfy its legal and ethical obligation to educate children with special needs, and eventually should result in



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

significant economic efficiencies and cost savings. Although we support Dr. Brenner's goal of creating efficiencies and focusing administrative time on building capacity, it remains critical that an appropriate structure be in place in the secondary setting to ensure fidelity in programming and case management.

Finally, I would like to share with you a story about a young girl who attends an elementary school in town. This young girl likes books and Barbies. This young girl also has a disability that is, in part, physical. She wanted more than anything to be able to cross the monkey bars like her peers. At first, she stood on the playground and watched. Eventually, she had to courage to try--first holding onto a bar and dropping down. Each day--with the support of staff and cheered on by her friends--she tackled those bars. Over a period of many, many, months she made progress--slowed at times by the appearance of blisters--but not discouraged. Eventually those blisters became calluses. And, finally, one day she made it all the way to the end. That victory was not hers alone; it was shared and celebrated by all those who had cheered, witnessed, and helped her work toward her accomplishment. This is a story about struggle, persistence, and--eventually--success. It is a microcosm of what our community can accomplish when we support and embrace a challenge.

This evening we stand in support of the district's proposed 2016-17 budget and the vision of the new administration. In doing so, we want to express that it is a first step; the district is hanging onto the first rung and swinging forward. There will be blisters, but those will form into strong calluses. We believe that with persistence and with the support of the community, we can succeed in building a solid, financially sound school system that meets learners at varied levels and supports meaningful education outcomes for all.



My name is Stacey Tié and I live at 10 Clocks Lane. I am a parent of children in the district's Early Learning Program, also known as ELP, and am excited to highlight the impact and ongoing needs of this crucial program. We have 3 goals tonight: remind everyone of the importance of the Early Learning Program, encourage support for professional development opportunities for our teachers and paraprofessionals, and encourage development of carefully designed programs that will help all of our children transition smoothly into elementary school.

First, the importance of ELP. While most of us in this room are familiar with the Early Learning Program, we think it's important to remind everyone how imperative this program is for our youngest students, that is, for both our special needs and typical population. ELP provides special needs families with an educational community where their children feel included and supported. It also enables our typically developing children an opportunity to be educated alongside children with differences, which provides a foundation of awareness and acceptance.

Since ELP's inception, its size and impact has grown immensely, and more professional development needs to be offered to and required of our teachers in order to support this diverse group of children. Most of these teachers have advanced degrees in education, but need further training in specialized areas that affect preschoolers in general as well as specific disabilities found within the ELP population. For example, this year Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) training is being offered to teachers and paraprofessionals. ABA is a proven approach to treating children with Autism and related developmental disorders, and typically-developing children in ELP classrooms also may benefit from having teachers who are trained in this approach. In addition to supporting ELP specific needs, we would like to see further emphasis on educating the ELP staff on the new and existing elementary school curriculums, such as the Wilson's Foundations Program, Orton Gillingham or the Teachers College Reading and Writing Program in order to make the academic transitions smoother for our children. This would provide better standards of practice across ELP classrooms. As we see it, highly-trained, effective teachers are the most important asset of a quality early childhood program.

Third, we need to create alternative programming to help children transition from the ELP classroom into Kindergarten. We would like to see the district continue to support initiatives like the co-taught model at elementary schools and consider a carefully designed program for children with more significant needs. Failure to address this issue will result in additional outplacements.

We urge the Board of Education to support the allocations for professional development in ELP and to monitor placement options for rising Kindergarteners. We appreciate your support and look forward to working together to build an even stronger school district.



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My name is Karen Wilber and I live at 19 Birch Road. My name is Beth Lane and I live at 16 Hillcrest Avenue. We are here tonight to express our support for the proposed budget and specifically to commend the administration for its commitment to World Language. We believe that language proficiency is a skill that will help our children succeed and adapt along with making them better citizens of the world.

This year's budget increases frequency of instruction in sixth grade and provides more professional development for teachers. We also appreciate the district's commitment to evaluate the curriculum over the K-12 continuum to better facilitate transitions between school levels.

The addition of World Language to our elementary schools was a very important milestone in our district. We are enthusiastic about the continued prioritization of World Language as a content area, and we ask the Board of Education to support this budget.



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

Hello, my name is Theresa Vogt and I live at 22 Circle Road. I am co-chair of the Middlesex Parent Association.

Last year at this time we spoke of looking forward to having a vision for our schools. This year I am happy to say that we believe Dr. Brenner has that vision, and I am thrilled to support it. The vision, as I understand it, is to provide a meaningful and challenging educational experience for every student in the district and to develop the skills they need to transition through every stage of their academic careers and beyond.

The world of education is rapidly changing. Initiatives like the implementation of the Core Curriculum nationally and the increasing proliferation of technology in our lives puts all schools, not just Darien, in a position of having to adapt quickly and to anticipate the future needs of our students. Rather than trying to play catch-up in this ever-changing world, Darien should strive to lead.

This year's budget provides funding for some of the resources required to fully implement curricular initiatives already underway. The addition of non-fiction works, periodicals, and new textbooks will ensure that Darien is able to provide its students the classroom tools they need to continue to improve their critical thinking and have access to the latest innovations and information in each of the academic disciplines.

However, none of these investments can be utilized effectively without a strong, cohesive, and purposeful Professional Development program for our teachers. We would argue that Professional Development may very well be the most important line item in our school budget, and it has been underfunded for far too long. Earlier tonight you heard us say that children need to be flexible, adaptable and resilient. For our teachers this evolution is even more complex, and we urge you to support the Professional Development budgets to assist them in their own transitions as 21st century learners.

We don't need to reinvent the wheel in Darien. We already have effective curricula in place for Elementary Math and Literacy. However, these programs are presently under delivering relative to expectations because we haven't given our teachers the training they need to execute effectively. As a result, we are finding many students are under-prepared for the rigors and challenges of the Middle School curriculum. Elementary Professional Development, along with consultant services, will help build expertise in the areas of literacy, technology, math, science, world language and social studies. These consultants will also provide best practice training on differentiation, which is a support to ALL our learners, including the gifted, those who need curriculum support, and those with special needs.

In order to effectively differentiate, we need tools for progress monitoring and identification of students requiring intervention. The inclusion of funds for the continued use of a Universal Screener and for tracking software is essential for monitoring progress and ensuring that resources are used correctly and effectively for the best outcomes for all children. It is important that these services and supports, like SRBI, are maintained and delivered with continuity as a child moves from school to school. We also hope that greater availability of progress data can be used to help keep parents more informed on their child's progression. While much of the focus this year has been on the elementary level, we look forward to hearing plans to support the middle and high schools, including the hiring of the reading specialists.

Our schools are only as good as the people inside them. Dr. Brenner has proposed a substantial increase in Professional Development for all our staff to support our district's initiatives, and in turn, our students. We believe that as a community, it is imperative that we support this very necessary element of the school budget.

Marli Hayes

10 Hickory Lane Darien CT 06820

Good Evening.

Thank you to the Board of Education for the thousands of hours of time that you VOLUNTEER on behalf of the children and parents in our school district. Thank you too for finding and hiring Dr. Brenner. The patience in your search has paid off.

Since I moved to Darien almost 4 years ago, largely to be in a top performing school district, Darien's school administration has been in a state of flux and uncertainty. Thanks to Dr. Brenner's leadership we are now finally "righting the ship." What a relief!

Dr. Brenner has come to us with years of experience. He is using his experience and expertise to make innovative substantial changes in our schools and we are already seeing the positive results. Since his arrival in July he has already made many skilled and well informed decisions to improve the quality of education for all of our children. He is not interested in "how we've always done it;" he is interested in doing it RIGHT. He is fully committed to rebuilding the trust of parents that was lost during the Special Education crisis, and he is doing so by building an excellent school system that meets the needs of ALL of our learners.

Now it is time for us to start trusting him.

We need to trust him to do the job that he was hired to do.

He has dedicated himself to our school district and it is time for us to truly demonstrate our commitment to him in return.

Accepting this budget isn't giving him a free pass; nobody gets one of those. It is enabling him to build and RE-build the top quality school district we expect for our children and for our town. He has demonstrated success elsewhere, let's trust him by giving him the tools he needs to succeed in Darien.

Thank you.

Good evening. My name is Robbie Gaaserud, I live at 35 Driftway Lane, and I am a 9th grader at Darien High School. This fall I had the honor of serving as a captain of the 9th grade soccer team. I have been playing soccer since I was 4 years old and I've been looking forward to the day that I could represent my high school on the soccer field.

My enthusiasm for the coming season was crushed the day that the coach handed out uniforms to the team. The uniforms were in poor shape, dirty, and, worst of all, did not match. At times, we fielded a team of 11 players in FOUR different styles of jerseys. Many of my teammates did not wear the shorts issued, because they were either so dirty, large, or had no elastic left. In one of my games, I couldn't focus on playing my best because I was more concentrated on making sure my shorts didn't fall off. Some players' movements were restricted by the shorts because their knees would be completely covered by the shorts. Soccer shorts are meant to end a bit above the knee. As a result of these issues, our moms had to go purchase shorts for us.

I understand that the tradition in Darien is for uniforms to be "handed down" from the varsity team. I don't think this is a great practice, at least for boys freshman uniforms. Most of my teammates are 14 years old, as I am, and we are not as large as the 16, 17 and 18 year old boys playing on the varsity team. When you order uniforms for a varsity team, they are going to be too large, generally, for a freshman team. Some of my teammates had jerseys that almost came down to their knees. It is difficult enough to win games in our conference, but, even more difficult when you're trying to play while readjusting an ill-fitting jersey or holding up shorts so that they don't fall down. To make things worse, none of our FCIAC opponents had uniforms that didn't match, and they all seemed to be outfitted in jerseys that fit properly.

This year, the boys varsity soccer team finished 2nd in the state, a huge accomplishment. It would have been nice for the freshman team to feel like the "younger brothers" of the varsity team; instead we felt like outsiders with our mismatched, extra large jerseys. If you believe that we should have a 9th grade team, then I believe that you should provide the proper equipment to support the team. To do anything less isn't fair to players who are working hard every day in practice. Please approve the request of the DHS soccer coach and purchase new uniforms for the boys freshman team.

Cassie Yusi- 102 Old Kings Hwy S.
Re: ELP

Good evening members of the Board,

My name is Cassie Yusi. I live at 102 Old Kings Hwy S. I am here to speak about ELP. My daughter, Violet, is a student in ELP at Tokeneke and my son, Jack, will join the program next November when he turns three.

Darien is so fortunate to have a program like ELP as many similar communities do not. As someone who spent much time researching where to lay down roots, I truly feel that ELP sets the Darien Schools apart in many ways. Most specifically because it speaks to the fact that the community and board value early childhood education and early intervention and are invested in the development of their youngest students.

I have spent the last 12 years as a special education and AIS teacher in Rye, NY and I see daily the benefit and impact of early childhood education and early intervention with my own students. Solid, meaningful, well-executed experiences with both things are crucial and the investment in these things pays dividends when those children reach kindergarten and begin their journey through the Darien schools. Thanks to the hard work of the truly amazing teachers, aides, and administrators of ELP, Darien is so very fortunate to have a huge leg up on neighboring districts in this area. ELP is a treasure of the Darien Schools and should be nurtured and treated as such because investing in the program is an investment in the elementary schools, the middle school, and the high school. The success of those higher education experiences begins with high quality early childhood education and early intervention for those who need it.

I am so grateful for the experience that my daughter is having in ELP and I applaud the board for their investment thus far in the program. My hope is that you continue to demonstrate your understanding of how important ELP is by providing the funds for the teachers to have access to high quality professional development, by continuing to foster a connection between ELP and the kindergarten curriculum, by valuing the ELP curriculum and investing the time and effort into its development, and by recognizing the importance of providing our youngest learners with the support and tools they need to begin their academic journey. Thank you for your time.

Sivan Hong: School Board Comments on ELP
February 2, 2016

Prepared comments:

To help you understand why I came here tonight, I want to introduce you to my son, Benjamin, and what he was like, a year and a half ago, before ELP.

Benjamin was diagnosed with Autism at 2.5. And like all kids on the spectrum, he is unique. When he was diagnosed, he had an amazing vocabulary. At 2, his favorite word was crestfallen and he taught himself to count to 50. I remember realizing that Benjamin had a different relationship with numbers than most people have. He could see a group of objects and tell you how many were in the group without actually counting them. Yup, just like *Rainman*... and that is not a good thing. You don't want your child to become an adult living in an institution only to leave to go to a casino. Benjamin was scared to interact with other kids. As a parent your heart breaks when your child tells you that he does not want to go to the playground because he is afraid of kids. When I would enroll him in preschool, and there were several, he had to be removed because interacting with other children overwhelmed him so much he would want to run away and he would repeatedly bolt for the doors. He was a danger to himself.

Those months before ELP were some of the toughest of my life.

And then Laura, Ms. Jo-Ann and their team came into the picture. They just "got" him. It was instant. And it was just not an in school thing, but they helped me to understand how to make his world at home as safe as his world at school felt. From understanding how to leverage structure in his day, to visual stories to finding techniques to talk about what he was feeling. By mid year, he had made a best friend... and it was a real friend. My son no longer walks around counting by 13. He plays with Lightning McQueen and watches Toy Story. He loves going to the playground and I can drop him off at Chelsea Piers for vacation camp and he acts like any typically developing kid. All this change happened, in just over a year in ELP.

ELP played a critical role to shifting the trajectory of my child's life. You have saved him from becoming *Rainman*.

And if my emotional thanks is not enough to convince you to strengthen your support of ELP, think about this. Without ELP, Benjamin would have likely had to go to a private school for children with autism – costing the district far more over the next 12 years than the 2 years he had in ELP. And it could have resulted in an even great expense on society to support him long term. Early intervention works. And while my son is one data point, he is a little boy who goes to school at Royle and who will grow up to be a productive member of society, thanks to ELP. I am forever grateful.

Good evening. I'm Karina Morales from 77 Maple St. Thank you for this space.

Tonight I'd like to talk about my experience with the Early Learning Program (ELP) as the mother of a current special education student. Last fall, my son started ELP and he made significant progress within two months. This was more than what had been achieved in over two years of other programs and therapies including Birth to Three.

Our ELP teachers have been instrumental in detecting and tackling the areas where my son needs most support. To build on this progress and further improve the quality of ELP services, ongoing professional development with special attention to differentiated instruction and curriculum development (especially in math) is needed.

Furthermore, because of the high risk of setbacks that special education students have with every school break, an extension of the ELP Summer School duration is highly desired.

In terms of space, some occupational therapy rooms need updates and basic renovations such as padded surfaces in order to meet minimum safety guidelines.

Regarding technology, the acquisition of new classroom computers is needed since the current ones are very outdated and make the use of the Smart Board very challenging.

In terms of outreach and resources for parents, the teacher-parent workshops have been helpful in providing an interactive space. It would be highly beneficial to increase the workshops' scope and bring expert speakers to discuss best practices.

Early recognition of learning disabilities and special needs combined with timely, effective intervening services provided by highly trained professionals are critical components of any successful early childhood program.

Thank you.

Mary Jo Miller (52 Relihan Rd)

I came to tonight's meeting to express my support of Darien's Early Learning Program. I know there has been a lot of discussion about the cost of out placement expenses and the district's desire to reduce this by providing more rich and diverse programs that drive parents to keep their children in district.

My son is a graduate of ELP and currently attending kindergarten in district. However, you should be aware that he is an extremely complex case, nonverbal, with low functioning autism. He is a prime candidate for outplacement based on his complex needs.

However, because of ELP and the intense amount of work that went into his kindergarten programming, he has been able to stay in district with a wonderful support system and program individualized to meet his needs. So far he is an in district success story.

But this success did not come easily. ELP was a fantastic experience but he was very challenging and required a lot of out of the box thinking by his teachers, therapists and administrators. In many ways, they were not prepared to offer him the interventions he required and it was with tremendous effort on everyone's part to develop the programming he needed.

ELP is a gem of a program, but the special needs children admitted at age 3 often have many challenges that an educator, even with a master's degree, may not be prepared to teach. I can say this because I hold a master's in early education myself, and I know that the complexity and diversity of disabilities our ELP teachers are faced with are far beyond what they are sometimes prepared for. Recognizing that these teachers are encountering a multitude of disabilities at the most critical development time in a child's life, we need to continue to support them. Professional development will help prepare them to successfully educate the youngest and most vulnerable students with proper intervention and programming so that, hopefully, these children will require less support as they move forward. And more importantly, those with the greatest needs can stay in district because our teachers are prepared to educate them. They so desperately want to do this. Please give them the means to be successful.

Additionally, I ask that you consider two important steps for ELP. The first being the establishment of a curriculum that is consistent with kindergarten preparation. The standards for kindergarten have increased significantly, and considering that ELP not only has special needs students to support, but typical students to prepare for kindergarten as well, an investment into the ELP curriculum should be supported. It's important that we not lose sight of the fact that ELP is not just a special needs program but a mainstream one as well, that it is preparing ALL our children.

Lastly, I greatly hope that the district and Board continues to explore an addition of a pre-k program for the 4 year olds and 5 year olds who are simply not ready for kindergarten regardless of their preparation. The standards have become that much more demanding, many children are not emotionally, mentally or intellectually ready to handle those rigors, and they should have a public pre-k

option so they can begin their educational experience when appropriate, rather than having to attend a private pre-k or get lost in a kindergarten class.

Thank you for your time, and I hope I have provided some insight into a wonderful program in Darien that I hope you will support.

Public Hearing on 2016-17 Superintendent's Proposed Budget
February 2, 2016

Courtney Darby and Tricia Bresnahan
SEPAC co-chairs

Communication

We would like to thank Dr. Brenner, Shirley Klein, the administration and building principals for their efforts to better communicate with all parents.

We have heard many positive stories from parents regarding communication so far this year. We especially appreciate their time during public meetings to answer parent questions and inform parents on special and general education initiatives. In addition, we want to thank the many teachers who work tirelessly to support our children's learning.

In today's talk, we will be highlighting a few key areas based on parent feedback, and areas that are protected by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

For those who aren't familiar with IDEA, a few key points are:

- Special education means specially designed instruction
- To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are nondisabled;
- Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Professional Development

We are pleased to see the district's proposed investment in our teachers through professional development. We understand plans are underway to provide Teachers College training in writing for all of our students. As special education is about "specifically designed instruction" we encourage the district to provide specialized training in areas such as math and writing. To address the diverse needs of students---whether their disability is ADHD, autism or any disability ---all too often there is a gap between where a child is performing and where the class is--teachers need more training on how to close the gap.

Reading

We support the district's reading initiatives and the initial roll out of Orton Gillingham training for special education and general education teachers. It would be helpful if parents were provided a timetable outlining when *all* elementary and middle school special education teachers will be trained. In addition, we encourage the district to train all K to 3 teachers to ensure the implementation of this methodology in the classroom and

across settings. If you put yourself in the shoes of a parent with a 2nd grader who has a reading disability, you would want to understand how your child will be supported in the third grade and beyond. A comprehensive and effective reading program in district will help retain students and could eventually help reduce outplacement costs.

At the Middle School, parents need to better understand the system of supports through SRBI, as well as how teachers are being supported and specially trained in areas such as math and writing. We understand an open reading specialist position exists at the middle school. Based on parent feedback on middle school student needs, we urge you to fill this position as soon as possible, and make training in OG for existing teachers a priority.

Technology/ 1 to 1

We value Dr. Brenner's experience in educational technology and his leadership in creating a 1 to 1 initiative for late elementary and middle school, as well as the pilot proposal at the high school. We support this initiative and feel technology is an essential and important investment for all students.

As others have noted, the effectiveness of the proposal will be determined by a well-trained staff to implement it. In addition, for students who require assistive technology, a thoughtful collaboration between the technology department and special education will be of utmost importance. It has been shown that retrofitting is expensive (in dollars and to a student's growth) – and we need to plan now so that students who rely on technology have the same access as all students.

Along with training, we urge the district to develop a clear plan for assistive technology that they can share with all stakeholders. The current situation with pockets of expertise in assistive technology make it difficult for it to be shared across hundreds of students in the district.

DHS Academic Support Restructuring

We appreciate the district's effort to restructure academic support at the high school and ensure students are being educated in the least restrictive environment. This is an important issue for students in special education and those who may struggle in a particular subject so we encourage the district to get input from students and families. In order for these models to work we believe the following is needed:

- 1) Professional development for teachers who have never co-taught or team taught -- to collaborate and to provide effective differentiation and specialized instruction as needed.
- 2) Both team *and* co-taught teachers need common planning time.
- 3) We have heard from families that high school teachers do not consistently provide accommodations and modifications. We strongly believe that professional development on curriculum modification needs to be provided for all special education and content area teachers.

ELP. When it comes to the Early Learning Program, protect your investment is a good motto. A successful integrated pre-school, the program ensures that children with disabilities and without have a positive first experience with school and enter elementary school prepared. There is consistently a wait list for typical students, a testimony to the effectiveness of the program. And it makes money. ELP deserves attention, a long-term plan, a look at possible consolidation and an investment in professional development to ensure it continues its success.

Request to consider budgetary needs for ELP —>

Good Evening. My name is Andrea Callagy - I am the mother of 4 children here in Darien. Our 3rd child was fortunate enough to qualify for ELP's program 3 years ago. Her father and I could not feel more strongly that the early intervention and support she received gave her the confidence & tools needed to succeed in Kindergarten at Tokeneke. Without ELP, there is no doubt in our mind that her transition to Kindergarten would not be going as well as it is today. She is thriving, happy and learning.

Our 4th child was recently accepted as a typical student for next year's ELP program. We feel equally as strong, that he too will greatly benefit from ELP's curriculum, staff & children.

Our oldest child, is currently a 4th grader at The Windward School after struggling here in our public schools through 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade. In hindsight, we believe that he too would have benefitted tremendously from ELP.

As a mother of four children with 4 very different learning needs - I believe with all my heart that the investment made in early intervention and programs like ELP will continue to benefit ALL children, as well as the entire school system today and in the future. I kindly ask that you please consider ELP's budgetary needs knowing what an incredible difference this program makes to all the families fortunate enough to benefit.

Thank you for your time.
Andrea Callagy