

## STEPS program

Mandy Palmer <mandyann102576@gmail.com>

Sat 4/16/2022 3:20 PM

To: Board of Education <BoardofEducation@hamden.org>;input, public <publicinput@hamden.org>

Cc: Gwillis501@comcast.net <Gwillis501@comcast.net>

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Good Afternoon,

I am reaching out as a former student of the STEPS Program. My name is Amanda Palmer (formally Cavaiuolo) I am 45 years old and I currently live in Ocala Florida.

When I was in high school (1990-1993) I had such a hard time in mainstream classes, so much so I skipped school habitually. My issues were finally discovered and I was placed in STEPS. My fondest memories are from this program, I was finally in a place where I fit in and felt comfortable. The classes were at my pace and what I needed to cope with my issues and gave me the self esteem I needed to realize that I wasn't stupid, I was just different.

I had so many opportunities because of STEPS, I was enrolled in a employment program and worked for the school board as I attended school. It put me on the path for success. The memories made are fond and I still keep in touch with students I attended the program with.

The teachers are invaluable so much so that I was contacted by past teacher Gene Willis because of her concern for the continuance of the program...that alone should speak volumes to you on dedication there is to this program.

As mother of two children that are autistic and are in need of programs like STEPS I would encourage you to continue the program and realize that special needs students are precious and need you more than you would ever know. I fear to think what my life would have turned out to be if I wasn't never a part of something so great and rewarding.

So I will end this email asking you to please consider all the kids that need programs like this and keep the program intact.

If you need any further information from me or any other input please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Thank you,

Amanda Palmer  
3834 SW 133rd Loop  
Ocala, Florida 34473  
352-208-5504

Sent from my iPhone

## STEPS Program/HCLC

Ryan, Tonya <TRyan@institute.org>

Fri 4/29/2022 12:48 PM

To: Board of Education <BoardofEducation@hamden.org>;input, public <publicinput@hamden.org>

Cc: gwillis501@comcast.net <gwillis501@comcast.net>

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This Message was Encrypted.

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to express my sadness that the future of the STEPS Program is in jeopardy. I believe it is now known as HCLC. I would like to share my experience with you in hopes that you will understand the importance of programs like this.

Most of my life I've dealt with crippling anxiety. It kept me from talking to people, feeling comfortable in large groups, it made me so nervous I would actually make myself sick with migraines. You can imagine how well I did in school. No one knew what was wrong with me, I didn't even know what anxiety was back then. It was so bad that I refused to go to school most days because the thought of being in a room/school full of kids that thought I was "weird" because I couldn't be like them, was just too much. I knew I was smart; I knew I could do the work but my anxiety prevented me from doing any of it. I had no friends and it was awful.

When I was 14 (1988), my parents and I went to this school meeting where they talked about this alternative program. There were only a handful of students. I was skeptical I could even handle that. Well, I was welcomed with open arms by two teachers, two aides and a social worker who became very special to me. In fact, as an adult, I've reconnected with all of them and I was happy to be able to tell them what a difference they made in my life. They made me feel comfortable by not pushing me but letting me know that if I did want to share something or talk, they wanted to hear it. The fact that all of the kids that were there were struggling with their own issues, made me feel like, for the first time in my life, I wasn't alone. None of us were perfect but that was ok. The staff taught us to believe in ourselves, to like ourselves and most importantly taught us that we could be good students and we could learn in our own way. They taught us that we could be successful. The size of the program and the fact that it was away from the high school, made all the difference in the world. The things I learned at STEPS will stay with me forever. For the first time, I made friends. Friends that I am still in contact with today. These days, I am a pretty "normal" adult 😊. I am married with two children and two grandchildren. I also have a successful career that I've been with for over 25 years. I know I would have never graduated or come out of my shell if it hadn't been for that program and the wonderful teachers. I would not be the person I am today.

It is horrible to think that other students would not have the opportunity that I did. That they would fall through the cracks because no one is listening or helping them succeed.

Please keep the programs the way that they are. PLEASE don't forget about the students that feel like they are alone. I am living proof that programs like this can change lives.

Thank you,

May 9th,2022

Good Afternoon,

My name is Christine Vachon. My address is 27224 Townwalk Dr. Hamden, Ct. 06518. My son, Matthew Miele, currently attends HCLC.

I was sadden to hear that the town is selling the building to ACES Cooperative Education and trying to eliminate HCLC. What a HUGE mistake this would be for the future of our children. HCLC has been a successful program for 35 years! Why eliminate a good thing? There is approximately 60 children in this program. 60! Where are they going to go. The other school classrooms are already crammed. This merge would be detrimental to their emotional well being. This may emotionally and psychologically cripple them. It was already a tough enough transition to get them to HCLC. Why do this to them. It's like a family who moves all the time from place to place and their children need to constantly start over and change schools. This is traumatic for them. They are in the most safe and comfortable environment at HCLC, why change a GREAT thing?

These young teenagers have a "learning disability" and some behavioral disabilities. They do not have developmental disorders. They are well aware of the stigma that ACES represents; changing HCLC to ACES would crush their self esteem and their self confidence. Some students have already been heard stating that they will drop out if they are forced to go to ACES or back to the high school. Currently, Hamden already has enough problems with juvenile delinquents. It doesn't need anymore.

HCLC gave these young teenagers a safe haven to learn. It is a comfortable environment with some of the best teachers I have met throughout my son's school years. I've been to every single teachers conferences for my son. So I have met a lot of teachers. He had many good teachers but I met the BEST TEAM of teachers at HCLC. Mr. Pearce and some of these teachers have been there for a very long time and they still LOVE what they do and it shows! This makes a world of difference. They are positive. They are excellent problem solvers, always finding a way around difficult situations. They have an amazing way with these sometime difficult teenagers that lash out. They are brave and our children are safe with them. My son was diagnosed with ADHD as a child. Hamden High School was way too big for him. The large classrooms and the stimulation of so many students caused him stress and anxiety causing him to have behavioral problems. My son would have not made it through high school if he did not have the opportunity to go to HCLC. He was on ADHD medication when he was younger but as he got older and was able to express to me how they made him feel numb. We stopped them. This team of teachers were able to bring out of the best of my son's intelligence, without medication. They took the time and explored every learning strategy to help my son learn. They took the time to understand how my son learned. This will not happen in the high school or ACES. They will just be another number.

As a mother, I will forever be grateful to Mr. Pearce and his excellent team of teachers and to HCLC for giving my son the opportunity to learn and mostly, to STAY in school.

I hope that this letter will help the Board of Education understand the importance of HCLC and that the Board will vote in favor to keep it going. It should be about what is BEST for these teenagers and the HCLC program is what is best for them. I know, because it worked for my son. As I said in the beginning, it's been around for 35 years! This program WORKS; WHY CHANGE IT!!!!!!

Sincerely,

Christine Vachon

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## May 10 Board of Education Meeting

Tzovolos, Tracy <TTzovolos@hamden.org>

Tue 5/10/2022 12:55 PM

To: input, public <publicinput@hamden.org>

May 10, 2022

Good afternoon,

My name is Tracy Tzovolos and I live at 1355 Paradise Ave. and I am here to talk about the outsourcing of the alternative ed program, HCLC, to ACES. I wrote to the Board a few weeks ago about this issue, but I would like my concerns to be heard again.

As one of the only town residents, I am here representing our staff, many of whom drive over 45 minutes each way to get to school each day. Why do they do it? Because they love our school. I have worked at the alternative program here for 26 years. Why? Because I can honestly say that it is my home. These staff members are my family, and the students are like my own kids.

I cannot begin to tell you about how the news of our program possibly closing has affected all of us. We are sad, not just because of the unknown of what we (students and staff) are facing next year, but because our school district has yet again taken the quick, band-aid response instead of having any kind of long-term vision. We are confused because no matter how we try to look at the situation, we cannot imagine any scenario in which any of this makes any sense financially, educationally, emotionally, or practically.

Some short facts: HCLC currently has 60 + students in grades 9R through 12. These students are a combination of general education, special education, and 504. In the last 3-4 weeks we have added 6 new students, with the newest starting just yesterday.

As the Superintendent presents the ACES proposal, I ask that the Board dig deep and ask important questions. Please do not just take the information at face value. Consider the following:

- How many slots will be open for Hamden students? We currently have 60 plus in just our program and the Superintendent has asked for the ACES program to be open to grades 7-12. Will there be a rolling enrollment so that students like the 6 that just started with us will have a place to attend when they need it?
- What will the cost per student be, and for how long? Will the Board be stuck in a position a few years from now where the cost per student skyrockets because the initial deal is over?

- Whatever the tuition costs may be, how can the town possibly afford it? With tax increases being protested at town hall and the Council flat funding the Board for next year, how is there any scenario where this is ok?
- If the Superintendent gives you a current cost per pupil figure at HCLC, please ask how that figure was attained. I can guarantee that the reality is less than anything ACES would charge.
- What will the referral process look like and what will happen to those students who don't want to be placed at ACES? Will they be left to flounder at the high school, will they just drop out, or will they need another outplacement?
- Often, students with attendance issues are placed in the smaller, less overwhelming environment of HCLC where we can work more closely with the student and their families to obtain more consistent attendance. Will the district be willing to pay tuition for those students who have poor attendance at the high school?

I want to reiterate something that I stated in my previous letter to the Board: For 35 years, HCLC has been able to adapt and change to the needs of the students in the district. Often, we have been at the forefront with programming that includes social emotional learning, restorative practices, counseling services, and individualized learning. Just this morning, when there was a crisis in our Hamden community, we were strategizing in order to offer support today for this event. Will this ability to respond to Hamden community events get muddled when ACES has a regional approach?

We have always done what we needed to do for the students of Hamden. This has often been done without extra budget or major support. Now, Central Office wants to pull the rug out from underneath us and throw away what we have done over the last 35 years. Why? In this post Covid age, our town should be embracing more types of alternative education, not cutting it off completely and sending it elsewhere. I urge the Board to not take this decision lightly. These are real students and families of Hamden that will be affected. I would also invite any of you to come to our school, meet our staff and students and see what we do every day. In closing, as the Superintendent presents his proposal, please realize that this is not a simple issue. There are many complexities that go along with it. I ask you to please take all of those issues into consideration when you make your decision.

Thank you,

Tracy Tzovolos  
Teacher  
Hamden Collaborative Learning Center

## Mask policy

Avi Kamrat <akamrat@gmail.com>

Tue 5/10/2022 12:59 PM

To: input, public <publicinput@hamden.org>

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Dear Members of the Board of Education,

The community level is now "high". At an earlier BOE meeting, I believe the understanding was that the mask mandate would be reinstated if the levels increased. See the CDC guidelines below. Instead of requiring a BOE vote each time the level changes, please consider automatically adjusting the policy based on CDC risk levels.

In New Haven County, Connecticut, community level is High.

- Wear a [mask](#) indoors in public
- Stay [up to date](#) with COVID-19 vaccines
- [Get tested](#) if you have symptoms
- Additional precautions may be needed for people [at high risk for severe illness](#)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html>

Avi Kamrat

135 Dessa Dr

Hamden CT 06517