

March 9, 2021

Subject: Property Tax relief for Chesterfield residents

Dear Chesterfield School Board of Education,

This email is to strongly urge the board to give the property tax relief based on the State aid numbers going up for Chesterfield. According to the New Jersey Department of Education, the Chesterfield Township School District will receive an additional \$541,038 in state aid bringing the total aid number to \$ 3,298,783.

During the February 24, 2021 meeting of the Chesterfield Township Board of Education (CTBOE), the auditor's presentation indicated that all of the school's reserves are at maximum levels allowed by law. With the additional aid from the state, the CTBOE should provide tax payers with property tax relief in these difficult times. Me and other residents of Chesterfield, have been carrying the burden for last 7 years at the tax rate of 120 to 140 percent of the local fair share for the school portion of the taxes. It's time for fair share for the residents.

This school district had provided thorough and efficient education with minimal funding levels from the state between the 2007-08 and 2016-17 school years (at one point only 9% of Chesterfield's funding came from the state). However, now that the funding has been increased again for the 4th year in a row, tax payers should be given well deserved tax relief. Many of the current sitting board members ran for the school board on the promise of tax relief once funding was increased by the state. Despite receiving millions more than just about 3 years ago, we tax payers have not received tax relief. Since Chesterfield tax payers paid way above 100 percent of the local fair share to subsidize the lack of state funding in the past 7 years, it is now time to provide the community with property tax relief.

As of February 24th, 2021, there were 716 enrolled students compared to 799 students (the maximum number document per the CTBOE meeting materials) on April 17th, 2017. The reduction of 83 students equates to approximately four fewer classrooms. However, the school currently employs a Superintendent, two fulltime principals, one recently approved Interim principal, a special services administrator, a curriculum, and instruction administrator, and two instructional coaches. However, this has coincided with a steady decline in academic performance as measured by the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment scores. Chesterfield historically was the highest performing district in the region and now ranks near the bottom. Spending more money does not translates to better results without a vision and an effective action plan to implement it.

I implore the CTBOE to reevaluate the quality and effectiveness of the education provided to students and the cost and value provided to the taxpayers of Chesterfield.

Again, I hope this board considers tax relief to its residents especially in these difficult times.

There are many families living on a fixed income that could benefit from significant tax relief.

On another topic, I request this board sell the old fire house in Crosswicks as soon as possible (now) instead of wasting any more money as was the case with the old elementary school where \$240k in tax dollars were spent with no returns.

Sharing some reviews –

“Why does a district with one building, 750 students, and around 60 teachers need two principals, a superintendent, and two supervisors. And why do they need two instructional

coaches. The new principal is worse than the old one. What is wrong with this place? Where is our tax money going?"

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"This school has a lot of potential. The teachers are pretty good, the building is really nice and new, and parents are supportive. Administration in this building are terrible. The new principal is totally ineffective and rude."

"It is a beautiful building, but a terrible school. Where are all of my tax \$ going? I have listened to some of these board meetings and the principal and superintendent do not seem to know what they are doing. Time for a change there. I am considering moving or taking my kids to a private school. It would be horrible to have to pay for that on top of these crazy taxes, but my kids would get a better education. Teachers here are okay but the people running this place do not know what they are doing."

Sincerely,
Thank you
Bhaskara

March 10, 2021

Subject: Board of Education Meeting

Chesterfield School Board of Education,

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“Why does a district with one building, 750 students, and around 60 teachers need two principals, a superintendent, and two supervisors. And why do they need two instructional coaches. The new principal is worse than the old one. What is wrong with this place? Where is our tax money going?”

Excerpt “I wish my students had the school that we used to have, this has been a decline since there has been a change in administration.”

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“It is a beautiful building, but a terrible school. Where are all of my tax \$ going? I have listened to some of these board meetings and the principal and superintendent do not seem to know what they are doing. Time for a change there. I am considering moving or taking my kids to a private school. It would be horrible to have to pay for that on top of these crazy taxes, but my kids would get a better education. Teachers here are okay but the people running this place do not know what they are doing.”

“Glad I removed my kids from the district.”

Please include this letter in the correspondence for March 10th meeting.

Sincerely,
Utpal Desai

March 10, 2021

Subject: Chesterfield School and Property Taxes

Chesterfield School Board of Education,

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“Why does a district with one building, 750 students, and around 60 teachers need two principals, a superintendent, and two supervisors. And why do they need two instructional coaches. The new principal is worse than the old one. What is wrong with this place? Where is our tax money going?”

Excerpt "I wish my students had the school that we used to have, this has been a decline since there has been a change in administration."

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"Glad I removed my kids from the district."

Please include this letter in the correspondence for the March 10th meeting.

Sincerely,
Hanish Valeti

March 10, 2021

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Please include this letter in the correspondence for March 10th meeting.

Sincerely,
Vamsi Jamalapuram.

March 10, 2021

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coaches. The new principal is worse than the old one. What is wrong with this place? Where is our tax money going?"

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"Glad I removed my kids from the district."

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Sincerely,
Nirav Mehta

March 8, 2021

Subject: Requesting tax break

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- "Why does a district with one building, 750 students, and around 60 teachers need two principals, a superintendent, and two supervisors. And why do they need two instructional coaches. The new

principal is worse than the old one. What is wrong with this place? Where is our tax money going?"

- Excerpt "I wish my students had the school that we used to have, this has been a decline since there has been a change in administration."
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- "Glad I removed my kids from the district."

Please include this letter in the correspondence for March 10th meeting.

Sincerely,

Jignesh Shah

Chesterfield tax payer and resident

3/9/2021

Chesterfield Board of Education and Administration-

This letter is being written after my most recent comments that were spoken during public comments on February 24, 2021. It was very disheartening that no comments regarding the number of students in decline, the hiring of a new administrator, no comments regarding the tax impact on a proposed Warehouse that would have an impact on our taxes, the Old School otherwise known as the Crosswicks Firehouse is still sitting vacant and explanation was not provided in my opinion on most of these items.

The District last year received additional State Aid and this Board made the decision against the request of Taxpayers to not return anything and even went to cap in 2020. According to the Dept. of Education, Chesterfield will be receiving over \$540,000 in aid, which is bringing the total aid to over \$3.2 million. Your auditor's presentation shows a very high number in reserve and would like to point out that any money whether from the State or taxes belongs to the TAXPAYERS and not the school. The time has come to tighten this budget and start returning. Every year when Board members run, they promise to give back and work towards those who pay, but for some reason, this has not been happening with this Board year after year. You owe it to those in Chesterfield to show some tax relief once you received it, but instead, last year you hired a new Principal on top of already having one and here we are now fighting a lawsuit during Covid. While this new hire is an interim, \$28,000 plus a pending lawsuit and Covid is what many in the community, including myself sees as "Top Heavy" and irresponsible.

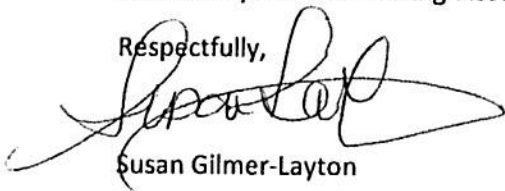
Your report as of February 24th, 2021, shows 716 students and back in 2017, we had over 799. We now have less students with now 3 Paid Principals and a Superintendent. That is totally unreasonable and financially irresponsible. That \$28,000 could and should have been returned to the tax burden. We all understand tough times and we all understand Budgets, but why is the WANT list more important than a true NEED list. These are difficult times for so many people, especially our children. You are responsible for being responsible and you are not. The Budget is not and should not be a BLANK CHECK and you refuse to allow a Budget Advisory Committee from the community to review things and be transparent like the Twp. Committee does. WHY???? You are asked questions for explanation and you refuse to respond. WHY????

The Crosswicks Firehouse is the Property of the School and has been a known fact for a long time when we were building the new school in 2008. Now that the property is no longer occupied by the Crosswicks firehouse, lets learn by prior situations. When we built the new school, the prior school built in 1964 had to be demolished because of mold and the amount of time it sat vacant. At the March 2021 Twp. meeting we now must demolish the other OLD School that housed the Township offices, due to the fact that 2 sitting Committee members spent the last 3 years trying to get this building used by the Library or some sort of community center. Again, the value 3 years ago depreciated more than half and the cost to remediate exceeds the value and has been voted to be demolished. The time has come to sell it and use the money to pay off the existing debt on the current school.

Finally, this Board is fully aware of a pending proposal regarding the OYCC, otherwise known as the Old York Country Club. This will have a huge impact as a ratable and to date, we have heard no comments from any Board members or the Proposal. I do know that there are Board members attending the Zoom meetings (see attached) with those who are against this proposal. This is very concerning to me and many in the community are not happy that any Voted Committee person would attend or have any opinion on these calls. At this time, the Twp. Committee and Planning Board members were instructed and told that at no time should they be attending these resident meetings and having any opinions. Why is it once again the Board feels they are exempt from this? You refuse transparency with not allowing a Budget Advisory Committee and you are attending meetings that may shade your opinion for what might or might not benefit a community and our future budgets. I personally have not made my opinion and await to hear and see the studies and information on the proposal on 3/18/21. Sadly, many in the community are sharing opinions and not facts and that will taint the community and especially when they know some have chosen to attend these meetings and sessions while representing an entire community. Your commitment is to remain neutral and represent all. Seeing names of representatives such as Jackie Halaw and Andrea Katz as in attendance throws up RED flags immediately and hearsay states that both have spoken on these calls which was not in public session at a listed public meeting.

In Closing, in my many many years as being involved in this community, I have never seen such a disconnected School Board. Your positions are voted and while you many have no one that will run against you especially now, your position is important, and I applaud all like yourselves who give of your time and dedication. When you ignore your residents and when you lack the ability to remain neutral in the public eye, you become discredited. I spent 6 years on the Board and wanted another term, but when I left, I had to leave to establish the Grassroots to get that school built that you represent today. It would have been in bad taste to push residents to vote yes, while sitting there making decisions as an elected official. That in turn did not allow me the ability to make decisions on colors, voting on how to spend the referendum money and interior designs after leaving the board to do that, but that was my choice. You have a choice. Make it the right choice and connect to the parents, residents and community instead of being disconnected.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Gilmer-Layton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Susan Gilmer-Layton



Prior School Board member, Chesterfield Resident, and mother

*attached Zoom screen shot and private message from Jackie Halaw

Close

Participants (14)



H Agnes Marsala (Host)   >


L lorrie   >


SD Sherry Dudas   >

Phone icon 19082954940   >

AL Amanda Layendecker   >

AK Andrea Katz   >

B Barbara Eget   >

D Dan   >

JH Jaclyn Halaw   >

JC Jim Codella   >

MA Marc and Brett Liflanderson   >

T todd   >

B Vibhor Batra   >

Posted: Nextdoor -
Message

Started on 3/2

Jackie Halaw, Chesterfield Township

Chesterfield Township

Hello Susan,

Hope you are well. You posted false information that school board members are running the meetings opposing the warehouses. That is not true and I am asking that you remove that post. Agnes Marsala has been the person organizing the information meetings and started the petition.

I do not have a position about the OYCC warehouse development nor have I signed the petition made by Agnes because I don't know enough about the project yet. I do have environmental and traffic concerns that I hope will be addressed as the community learns more.

In the informational meetings run by Agnes, I did not give my personal opinion about the development. The only time I chimed in was to give a suggestion to Agnes to OPRA request the correspondence between OYCC developers and the township. And, when they were discussing residents who would potentially be affected, I suggested reaching out to the nuns living at Saint Claire's monastery and the Kusers so that they can learn about the proposed development and weigh in with the township with their perspectives.

As a school board member I have brought this up at meetings as far back as the summer, asked the district to gather information, and shared these resources with our board president:

<https://www.njsba.org/news-publications/school-leader/november-december-2017-volume-48-no-3/school-finance-overview-pilot-programs/>

<https://www.burlingtoncountytimes.com/story/news/2021/02/18/sj-town-use-pilot-payments-fund-public-safety-projects/6786347002/>

It has been publicly reported in our committee notes that are shared during public meetings that the finance committee has been gathering information and trying to determine the potential impact on the school budget, but still little is known at this point.

I appreciate that you are always on top of community issues and aim to share facts. Please remove the false information about school board members running the meetings opposing the warehouse.

Be well and take care,

Jackie Halaw