



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

Co-chair remarks

Good evening. My name is Wendy Ward and I live at 11 Stanley Road. My name is Beth Lane and I live at 16 Hillcrest Avenue. We are the co-chairs of the Council of Darien School Parents, or CDSP. CDSP represents all seven PTOs and all parents with a child or children in the Darien public schools are members.

We want to thank the Board of Education and administration for hearing us throughout the years, even when we have not always agreed. We are here tonight to express our overall support for the 2018/19 Proposed Darien Public School Budget. We understand that there are many external factors coming to bear on Darien and that we, as a town, need to be prepared to deal with them while striking a balance between excellent schools, valued town services, and fiscal responsibility. Overall, we feel that this is a very responsible budget and that it maintains the support of the items that our parent community values most.

In the past we have advocated for accountability, budget transparency, curricular consistency, and equity among schools. We remain committed to smaller class sizes, adequate professional development, enhanced integration of technology in the classroom, teaching that encompasses differentiation to meet the needs of all learners, and responsible maintenance of our buildings. We strongly support continued funding in these areas as outlined by the administration's' budget. They must be managed continually so as not to become stagnant. When our school system does not grow and adapt, our children are left behind. We are educating 21st century children to be 21st century adults. The Council of Darien Parents wants to applaud the Board of Education and administration's commitment to that endeavor.

We warn that making sweeping cuts for the sake of making cuts would be dangerous and short-sighted. Scrutiny is always wise, but it must be made in the context of a larger discussion that includes an understanding of what it really costs to run our schools and what priorities we hold most dear.

We know that we are here tonight to discuss the budget. However, we feel that--in this turbulent economic climate--the district and the BOE have to address some global issues that have been plaguing us for years. It's time to face what it actually costs to deliver academic and extracurricular services in Darien. It's time to address who is currently providing the funding and how our priorities will layout moving forward.

We have heard--multiple times and from multiple sources--that the district should look to public and private partnerships for funding in order to keep budget increases to a minimum. The truth is



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

that many of these partnerships already exist--formally or informally. Our PTOs support building improvements, playgrounds enhancements, field trips, enrichment, Veteran's Day Programs, moving up ceremonies including Graduation, and high school and college prep materials and programming. Outside of the PTO, parents are also asked to provide financial support for extracurriculars in several ways depending on the activity. Further, many non-profit organizations regularly support the school system. Until we have a complete understanding of the total contributions that are made to our schools, we operate without complete control of our own initiatives.

Darien School Parents would like explicit answers to: What is the right balance between fiscal responsibility and academic excellence? Do we value extracurricular activities including a 'college level' sports program, theater, social and academic clubs? Do we believe that all extracurricular activities should be funded with parity? For example, should the district be responsible for the cost of all practice venues? Further, funding criteria should be established that aligns with those values. These questions will only become more vital as budgets tighten.

The district should be able to articulate a coherent policy regarding what it will fund versus what parents or community organizations will fund. To avoid the tempting desire to rely on outside funding, as is custom in Darien, we would like the district to establish criteria for asking parents or private partners to fill the gaps. The truth is money is finite for everyone and private funds should be directed towards initiatives of the highest priority.

We want to thank all the parents who participate in this process. Tonight you will hear more from our members on several topics of primary importance to them including: Technology, Curriculum, Social Emotional Learning and Facilities. CDSP represents ALL parents: the athletic enthusiast and the arts and music enthusiast, the highly satisfied and the highly dissatisfied. As an organization we work with differing perspectives and tonight we will attempt to represent a collective voice.

In closing, we would like to thank the Board of Education for your dedication and many hours of work on behalf of our children. We know you have a tough job in balancing all the needs of Darien families. The Council of Darien School Parents supports this budget as being a measured response to the pressures exerted by outside forces. Supporting the budget supports our ultimate goal - helping our children become resilient, capable, contributing members of society.



My name is Holley Cavanna and I have three children, ranging from 9-14.

I am here to talk to you tonight about the impact and use of technology.

As parents and members of the Council of Darien School Parents, we are excited about the 1:1 initiative and how the active use of technology can positively impact learning. Technology can personalize learning experiences and make them more engaging, enable more project based learning, provide rich resources beyond the classroom, and help our children discover their passions and interests. At the same time, however, Darien school parents continue to be concerned by the amount of screen time students are exposed to and want to be sure that the digital activities are well-thought out and enriching.

First -- teachers have the biggest impact on student learning out of all other school factors. As such, one of our biggest priorities must be to support teachers in learning how to use technology effectively. We cannot expect them to assume full responsibility for bringing technology-based learning experiences into Darien schools. Funding and supporting professional development will enable our teachers to select the most appropriate tools, explore new learning models, and create experiences that advance student engagement. It will also invigorate projects that have been taught within the district for many years and have become stale.

Second, clearly and repeatedly educating parents how to appropriately shadow and monitor their children on their 1:1 devices is both foundational and critical.

And finally, we encourage the board to continue to think of ways to embed technology into the curriculum. Examples include expanding the day of code, the fuel cell program, -- and coding, robotics and STEM classes at all levels.

Darien Schools have a great start, and we encourage you to continue to push forward to ensure the curriculum is always innovating and improving. The World Economic Forum this year reported that 60% of the jobs our kids will have don't exist yet - and our students need to have the skills to adapt, fully engage and excel.



My name is Sara Goertel and I live at 22 Brushy Hill Road and have four children, ranging from 6 years old to 12 years old, 3 of whom are in the public schools.

CDSP has been highly encouraged by the district's efforts over the past few years to improve consistency, support the professional development of our teachers and continue to refine our curriculum at all school levels. We fully support the spending for all of these categories in the Proposed 2018-2019 budget.

We are here tonight to talk about transition years, evaluation of the Department Chairs and curriculum development and measurement. We recognize that much of what we will say is already on your radar. However, our goal tonight is to shed light on issues we hear frequently from parents and share their perspective with you.

A key reason we supported the Department Chair positions was to address the difficulty with transition years. While we do not claim every student issues transitioning, there are a large number of parents who tell us that their children face hurdles meeting the expectations of the middle and high school, whether due to lack of content, poorly developed executive functioning skills, or any other deficit which causes undue stress and anxiety. We are eager to hear more about how the Chairs will develop appropriate scaffolding and supports between grade levels. As parents we want reassurance that our children have the skills and preparation they need to meet the expectations of each new school year, as well as an appropriate safety net for those who falter.

We would also ask that this work include a look at parent orientation and education. We understand that with each step up, students are expected to be more independent and thus, our role as parents should change. We want a school system that develops resilience and student success without parental or paid-tutoring intervention with the goal of fostering preparedness and independence. However, open lines of communication and clear expectations will allow us to provide age-appropriate support for our children. For example, district websites should be intuitive and easy to navigate and parents should have a full understanding of how to use ASPEN and the Google platform to access information about their children.

The Department Chairs have been in place for six months and we are interested in learning more about their effectiveness. What metrics are in place for student progress and consistency and continuity across and between programs? We are encouraged to have heard anecdotal evidence of common midterms at DHS. How successful were those common tests? How did they affect students? Were there deviations in performance among classes and how will that be managed to ensure that



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

consistency is being achieved? We look forward to hearing more updates on the success metrics for the Chairs in the months to come.

Related to curriculum development, we strongly advocate for continued investment in this area. We have noticed a decline in spending in this category since 2016 and would like to understand what is driving that change. We have been encouraged with the process and rigor applied to curriculum decisions in recent years, yet still hope to see more evidence-based curriculum decisions to come. As technology becomes ever present in our students' school day, we would also challenge the district to ensure that devices, software and curriculum are interwoven seamlessly. Our teachers should be use these powerful tools to support their curricular objectives and have sufficient professional development to use them purposefully and effectively.

In closing, we believe Darien has made a leap forward in the past three years. We applaud the effort and professionalism of Dr. Brenner and his team. We thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the parents and students of Darien.

Good evening-I'm Marla Chandler-co-chair of the Middlesex Parents Association.

I'm here tonight to voice our support for continued social and emotional learning within the curriculum at Middlesex .

The other day, a friend of mine said something that resonated with me. She said, "No one really cares about this stuff or talks about this stuff **UNTIL it's THEIR KID.**"

Whether it's a child not having someone to sit with at lunch, or who is getting teased about being overweight, or maybe experimenting with alcohol or drugs ... as a parent, you may not even notice its going on—that it's happening right here in our town—in our schools...**UNTIL it's YOUR KID.**

It's a silent epidemic—that no one wants to talk about. People will say, "Oh, it's just a phase"... or..."everyone goes through that".. or "it's kids being kids". And that may sound reasonable...**until it's your kid.**

Fact: One in five kids in the U.S. shows signs of a mental health disorder during a given year--anxiety...depression...substance abuse, and 50% of lifetime cases start before the age of 14 Most of them--80 percent--won't get help, but they will show up for school.

They will be in classrooms, hallways, the cafeteria, and will need help... help to get through the day, both academically and emotionally. They will need support!

Principal Somers needs our support to continue her social and emotional learning initiatives at MMS. She needs more support to provide continued and expanded outdoor recess time, field trips that focus on team building, assemblies that promote social and emotional learning through music, high ropes courses, or days at the beach to build a raft.

We are the largest middle school in the state with more than 1,100 students walking those halls. Some are kids showing signs of anxiety or stress right now...kids whose grades are dropping.. kids who are experimenting with drugs or alcohol... and perhaps, kids who no one thinks about or worries about... **until it's their kid.**

These kids are ALL OF OUR KIDS... right here in our town and in our schools, and we must support them along with guidance counselors, teachers and administrators who want the best for them. Please support Principal Somers... continue to fund and encourage her efforts in bringing more social and emotional learning to the current curriculum at Middlesex.

Thank you.



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

Hello. My name is Kadi Lublin. I have two children at Ox Ridge Elementary in 2nd and 4th grade. I am speaking to you tonight on behalf of the Council for Darien School Parents, (CDSP), about our School Facilities.

We urge the Board of Education to take action to propose a comprehensive facilities plan, now. Many of the points we are making tonight are identical to what we said last year at this time. We support all of the capital items in this year's budget, and we are encouraged to see the district reverse a decades old habit of ignoring the maintenance needs of our schools. However, patching up urgent problem areas is not enough to maintain Darien's standard of excellent schools. For this reason, we wholeheartedly support the BOE Facilities Committee's priorities to eliminate portables, find a central location for ELP, and adopt a thorough plan to address the urgent needs of Ox Ridge school.

CDSP strongly supports the removal of all portables from the Darien School System. The average age of these portables is more than 25 years. Their separation from the main school buildings creates serious security challenges for our district, inefficiencies for staff, and anxieties for children. Simply put, we believe that, with the exception of playgrounds, our elementary schools should be sized appropriately to provide all of the necessary facilities for our children within the walls of the school. We have ignored this problem long enough.

CDSP also supports consolidating the Early Learning Program into one location. ELP is currently spread across three elementary schools. The distribution of ELP classrooms changes annually based on space constraints within the three hosting schools. Providing a single location would make the program more efficient and alleviate crowding at Royle and Tokeneke. We also believe that students and families will experience a much greater sense of community when housed together in a single location.

Finally, CDSP strongly supports the rebuilding of Ox Ridge Elementary School. The current facility has failing infrastructure with limited ventilation, inadequate lighting, low ceilings and an inefficient layout. A renovation may address some of those concerns, but we would still be left with a campus with structural deficiencies. A new build will allow the district to consolidate ELP and provide additional capacity to absorb students from new developments in town. We believe further capital investment into the current Ox Ridge building would be a shortsighted waste of money for our town, with little benefit in capacity, and no benefit to the ELP. As stated at the December 18th Facilities meeting, Ox Ridge will need to spend at least \$6mm in the next 5 years just to keep it as is. We believe that allowing this course of inaction to proceed would be a detrimental misuse of town funds and do nothing to improve the conditions for students.

The requirements for an excellent education change over time, as we come to understand more about how children learn. We now know that poor conditions, such as small, crowded, noisy classrooms with bad lighting, have a real and measurable negative impact on children's learning and behavior. Makerspaces, flexible seating for collaboration, and laboratory spaces are necessary to support 21st Century learning. In addition, uncomfortable, subpar facilities are also damaging to teacher recruitment and retention. Without a proposal, we fear that Darien's students will ultimately be left behind.



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

We believe Darien needs a forward thinking, long term proposal to ensure that our town continues to offer a compelling educational opportunity to families. Many of the improvements we are talking about tonight may not be implemented in time to directly benefit our own children; but we believe that our community must plan, not only for tomorrow or the next year, but for the future. This is critical to Darien's continued vitality and we owe it to Darien's current students to act expeditiously and execute a thoughtful plan.

We are not blind to the importance of fiscal responsibility. We believe facilities improvements will benefit Darien in ways that justify investment, and that this investment can be done responsibly. Darien is currently in an attractive environment for financing construction-related debt and the town balance sheet is well positioned to manage additional obligations. Now is the time to move forward with an actionable proposal.

The improvements to the Darien School Facilities are of the utmost importance to CDSP. We urge you to move forward with these critical capital projects without delay. Thank you for your consideration.

Speech for Special BOE Meeting 1-30-18

Good evening. I'm Amy Zerbe, 9 Morehouse Dr. I have two children at Middlesex Middle School. I support the development and implementation of the long awaited social and emotional learning within the middle school curriculum. An SEL program can teach our children resilience, decrease the intensity of anxiety and depression, and potentially save the district money.

Anxiety and depression are increasing among our adolescents. Smart phones and social media have helped contribute to and elevate our children's anxiety and depression. There is bullying through social media, there are pictures of self-inflicted injuries on SnapChat, and disturbing videos on YouTube. From 2005 to 2014, in a study with over 172,000 adolescents ages 12-17, participants with major depressive episodes increased by almost 30%, from 8.7% in 2005 to 11.3% in 2014.ⁱ

It is in middle school where our children's stress, anxiety and depression explodes, and often leads to problem behaviors, anger and school avoidance, all of which I believe can be diminished if we can teach our kids how to cope with problems.

What has been happening in our own middle school? Our students are harming themselves, having suicidal thoughts, being sent to emergency rooms from school, and spending time in mental institutions. When recent DHS grad Britton Barthold was in 6th grade at Middlesex Middle School, he first encountered depression. He had his first suicidal thoughts and plan a year later.ⁱⁱ Britton's experience is not an isolated case.

Our children have difficulty dealing with the stressors of everyday life, especially in this area. One doctor that I have spoken with believes that our Darien students are more stressed out than students from similar districts within our DRG.

One problem behavior, self-injury, most often begins in early adolescence, around 13 or 14, and it affects an estimated 14 to 18% of the teenage population.ⁱⁱⁱ Our daughters are more likely to self-harm, but our sons are more successful in committing suicide. Unsurprisingly, people who self-harm are more likely to experience suicidality.

Given these statistics, it is not surprising that that outpatient mental health programs accept adolescents as young as 13. Furthermore, many therapeutic day and residential schools for children with emotional issues begin in 6th grade. Within the past decade, I know of two therapeutic day schools that have opened in Fairfield County for grades 6-12 – one in 2010 and one in 2013; both are potential schools for our out of district placements. Our own Fitch Academy is further evidence that there is a need for a strong SEL program; Fitch was already at

capacity within the first half of the school year. By the way, I read that New Canaan's alternative high school proposal includes grades 8-12.^{iv}

Social and emotional learning programs can help our children before mental health issues emerge and can help those with mental health needs from getting worse. In 2011, an analysis of 213 studies involving more than 270,000 students K-12, found that SEL could promote academic social and emotional benefits to students, while relieving emotional stress. SEL programs can also lead to fewer special education placements, including outplacements.^v

Whatever happened to Britton? At DHS, he continued to spiral downward, drinking heavily from his senior year at high school (up to 10-12 beers in two hours) through his first semester at college, before pointing a gun to his head, finger on the trigger. Eight months later, he quit drinking and began to address his issues.^{vi} Let's not have another Britton...or worse.

ⁱ Ramin Mojtabai, Mark Olfson, Beth Han. "National Trends in the Prevalence and Treatment of Depression in Adolescents and Young Adults", *Pediatrics.com*, 2016, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/11/10/peds.2016-1878>.

ⁱⁱ Britton Barthold, Op/ed: Depression and suicide — a survivor's story. *dariantimes.com*, 1-16-18, <https://www.dariantimes.com/96365/op-ed-depression-and-suicide-a-survivors-story/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Hollander, PhD, *Helping Teens Who Cut* (New York: The Guilford Press 2017), 2.

^{iv} Chandra Johnson-Greene. "Schools Superintendent: District Needs Alternative Program 'With an Identity' to Keep Students in New Canaan", *newcanaanite.com*, 1-16-18, <http://newcanaanite.com/schools-superintendent-district-needs-alternative-program-with-an-identity-to-keep-students-in-new-canaan-63361>.

^v "Connecting Social and Emotional Learning with Mental Health", *crisisresponse.promoteprevent.org*, 1-08, <http://crisisresponse.promoteprevent.org/sites/default/files/root/materials/NCPublicationsTools/ConnectingSEL.pdf>, 1.

^{vi} Barthold.

Good evening. My name is Sarah Neumann and I live at 94 Gardiner Street. Joanna Garrett and I are co-chairs of the Darien High School Parents' Association. On behalf of our parent community I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening in support of Superintendents 2018-2019 proposed budget, specifically as it pertains to DHS.

The reductions to the DHS budget that the Board is considering – eliminating the proposed part-time assistant athletic director, all freshman and JV sports, a new tuba, funding for four new clubs, and the purchase of new art equipment, target the very programs that create a bond between our students and our school. Through participating in these programs, our students build deep and meaningful connections with their peers, coaches, and teacher-advisors while learning the importance of effort, hard work, self-discipline and teamwork. The experience is invaluable and rewarding, and fosters a sense of community and school pride that unites our students.

Athletics are an integral part of DHS community. The level of student participation demonstrates the passion and enthusiasm students have for their sport and the pride they take in being part of a team. In any given year, between 950-1100 students participate in athletics, at the freshman, JV and Varsity levels. DHS has 66 teams; 34 Varsity, 21 Junior Varsity and 11 freshman and 109 coaches. Our athletes distinguish themselves on the fields and courts, in the pool and gym, on the water, ski slopes, golf courses and ice, winning 25 FCIAC Championships and 23 State Championships since 2014/2015.

Running an athletics program of this caliber and size requires tremendous management, oversight and coordination. Practices, games, buses, referees, umpires and officials need to be scheduled for each team at each level for every game or meet played at home. Practice field assignments must be made, managed and outfitted with the proper equipment. Uniforms and athletic equipment must be inventoried, distributed at the start and collected at the end of each season, and a uniform replacement schedule maintained and managed. Practice sites on campus and off campus for the approximately 250 athletes whose sport cannot be accommodated on the DHS campus, must be scheduled and overseen. Game day site management at all venues, home and away, on campus and off, during the school week, evenings and weekends must take place to ensure the safety of our athletes and the integrity of their competitions. An assistant athletic director will support our athletes, coaches and athletic director, and ensure the DHS athletic program continues to run properly, smoothly and in adherence with district policy.

This proposed position eliminates the 6 stipend faculty managers who currently assist with the athletic program. The incremental cost for this part-time position is \$18,432. We ask that you support this request and include this position in the 2018/2019 schools budget.

Our Varsity teams are a source of tremendous pride and recognition for our school and town, and the skill, athleticism, sportsmanship and teamwork our varsity athletes display is cultivated and nurtured on our freshman and JV teams. The athletes who play freshman and JV sports represent the majority of students involved in our athletic program, and we oppose this cut for a number of reasons.

Being on a freshman team, particularly in the fall, eases the often anxiety ridden transition from middle to high school. A team is an instant community, a source of support, encouragement, and camaraderie. It is an anchor in a school that at times can seem very big. Our freshman and JV programs provide an opportunity for athletes who may not make a varsity team to continue to participate in the DHS athletic program. Eliminating these programs will put added pressure on clubs and councils to absorb hundreds of students left without an after school activity.

This proposed cut sends the message that non-varsity sports are expendable, unappreciated and unvalued. It is arbitrary, effecting football, soccer, field hockey, lacrosse and volleyball, the sports with the highest student participation. It is a draconian and reactionary tactic rather than a reasonable, responsible and thoughtful approach to budgeting. And the bottom line: it hurts our students.

We would never support the elimination of student programming, especially when the discussion is unfolding without input from key stakeholders, including Principal Dunn, students and parents.

In addition to our talented teachers, dedicated administrators, our high school curriculum is significantly enriched by extra curricular activities. The DHS clubs and councils are a vibrant, engaging, enriching offering of extracurricular activities that extend classroom learning beyond the school day. The increase in this line item for DHS supports four clubs that have completed the mandatory three-year vetting process for proving themselves worthy of official designation as a DHS club. This is a rigorous, three-year process during which clubs must demonstrate vitality, a clear mission and purpose and secure a faculty advisor who serves in the role without pay. The students and teachers involved in these four clubs achieved this milestone, demonstrated their worthiness and value to the DHS community. We fully support the funding necessary to offer these clubs in the coming school year as well as to support club and activities in general for our students.

This school year, 118 students are enrolled in Band, which is the second highest enrollment in 20 years. Our Band program welcomes students who are beginners as well as students who compete on a state and national level and go on to pursue music in college and as a career. Our student musicians are dedicated, talented and continue to distinguish and bring recognition to themselves and our music program. Musical instruments are of course a necessary investment in our program, and our music department takes the stewardship of our district's instruments seriously. A number of years ago the department instituted an instrument replacement program, putting in place a methodical and planned approach to ensuring instruments are replaced near the end of their useful life while minimizing the financial impact of purchasing replacement instruments in any given budget year. The time has come to replace one of the tubas at DHS and add another to meet the growing enrollment in Band. The first tuba scheduled for replacement is over 25 years old, is not a full-sized instrument and as such, is more suitable for middle school students. The purchase of a new tuba at DHS will allow for the existing tuba to be reassigned to the middle

school, where it will live out its remaining four to five year life. We fully support the tuba purchase for the Band program.

The art courses at DHS engage, inspire and challenge artists at every level and offer students whose talents lay elsewhere the chance to stretch creatively in a supportive environment. Ceramics classes are particularly popular with our students, with ceramics 1 having a total enrollment of 80 students spread over four sections. We expect this enrollment level to stay the same for the 2018/2019 school year. The art department budget includes funding for new art equipment, specifically four new pottery wheels and banding wheels to meet the needs of ceramics. The art department has secured a bulk purchase discount for the four wheels, which evaporates if we reduce the number of wheels to be purchased and forces the art department to purchase fewer wheels at a higher price. The addition of four new wheels allows for an equal distribution of pottery wheels between the two classrooms where pottery is taught, and thus an equitable learning environment for all ceramics students. Additionally, the total art department budget request is lower than the current year's approved budget. We are perplexed as to why a reduction is even under consideration and oppose this cut.

The cuts under consideration impact activities that make the DHS community stronger. These programs give students the tools that they need to become well rounded individuals. They can build the connections that help them develop maturity, confidence and problem-solving abilities, all of which are necessary life skills. We respectfully request that the Board reject the proposed cuts to the DHS budget.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Darien High School community.

Hello,

My name is Sara Parent. I live at 227 Hollow Tree Ridge Road. I am one of the PTO Co-Chairs at Holmes School, and I am standing here tonight to ask that the Holmes roof project remain in this year's budget as a priority one project. This project is not a "nice to have." It is a clear "need to have."

I have spoken to Holmes School's principal Paula Bleakley, as well as our head custodian Rich Stofko about the consistent roof leaks that occur at Holmes. They have outlined the various places in the building that leak:

- There are six classrooms on the second floor with leaky ceilings, creating damage and disruption to student learning. (Rooms 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, and 216)
- The third-grade hallway ceiling consistently leaks when it rains.
- There is damage to the terrazzo flooring on the second floor due to water damage from the leaking roof.
- The ceiling in the library of Holmes is crumbling and cracks are becoming increasingly large and growing. During the rainstorm on January 12 of this year, the staff at Holmes had to place large tarps over more than half of the library's shelves and furniture and place large garbage barrels around the room because the water was gushing from the ceiling. Had this rain storm occurred in the evening or on a weekend when no one was in the building, there is no doubt that the Holmes library would have lost a significant portion of its library collection, its furniture and its carpeting due to water damage.

These leaks are spread out across the building and not localized. This is indeed a problem concerning the entire roof.

The chance of more water damage to the physical building is great. I urge you today to recognize the need for this project to remain in this budget.

Thank you.

My name is Millyn Gaaserud and I live at 35 Driftway Lane. I have two children in the Darien schools; a son at DHS, and a daughter at Middlesex.

Last fall, in English class, my daughter Ellie was asked to write a formal letter to a business leader. She decided to write to Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook and was beyond thrilled when, weeks later, she received a response. The letter was short and I don't remember many of the details except for the closing which simply said, "Study computer science." I thought that was odd. Why would Sheryl Sandberg recommend a particular career path to a 13 year old that she has never met?

Two weeks later I began to get my answer when Ellie started her rotation through "Computers" as part of the 7th grade curriculum. Every day she would come home talking about her program, the "language" that she was using, what the teacher was requiring. A recap of computer class was *always* the first thing that Ellie shared. Clearly, this class was captivating to her, inspiring her and challenging her to think in a new way...perfect for Ellie.

It is critical that our schools develop a thoughtful, robust pathway for the study of computer science. No longer is it sufficient for our students to master "Word" and "Google Docs", making an i-movie with a phone, and preparing a three minute slideshow. Kids that graduate from Darien High School with those skills will barely be ordinary on the technology stage.

Today's world requires thought leaders to have a basic proficiency and understanding of coding, how a computer is instructed to perform complex tasks. Computers, and the software that control them, dominate our lives. Computers manage our finances, telephones, television, retail needs, and a large portion of our communications with others. With the driverless car technology expected to be perfected soon, computer software will manage almost all of our transportation needs. Artificial intelligence will further impact our world beyond imagination. We need to prepare our children to succeed in a world where computer programming is not a specific job, it is a basic requirement for MOST jobs.

We owe it to our children to clearly articulate *what* computer science skills we think they should have, *when* they should learn these skills, and *how* the instruction should occur. Software is becoming the new language of our world and our children need to speak it...just as we require them to be fluent with the written word and proficient with mathematical facts. In fact, our children need to study computer science...just as Sheryl Sandberg recommended.

Vasil, Nadine

From: Kathrine Stein <kgeller21@icloud.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 30, 2018 8:27 PM
To: Vasil, Nadine
Cc: Ochman, Tara
Subject: Maggie Cellar speech notes

BoE meeting, Jan 30, 2018

Maggie Cellar

8 Old Farm Road

Lived in darien since 02

I have a junior and freshman at DHS

We have chosen this high school and one of the reasons is we want to build whole children, which has been DHS's focus as well.

Eliminating jv/freshman sports should not be considered as an option Ever These activities provides- Community, physical activity, sense of belonging, team work Relieves stress and anxiety Structure to their day Accountability to team/coaches Whether they actually play or not, Sports builds confidence and provides an instant community especially as a freshman. The change from middle school to high school can be a very tough time for some. Sports can aid kids to feel a part of the school immediately We are already concerned with social media and bullying along with alcohol and substance abuse in 06820. These activities provide kids with a positive outlet to relieve their stress and Less time for social media and drinking No other schools in our DRG have deleted these activities.

We are looking to build well rounded children, so the answer is not to take away these types of activities

Good evening, my name is Robin Nelson and I live at 51 Arrowhead Way. I have ^{3 children, including}

a son at Tokeneke and a son who will be in 6th grade at Middlesex next year. I support the Board of Ed's proposed budget and want to thank the Board and Dr. Brenner for putting together a thoughtful budget with only a modest 2.75% increase.

I would like to speak tonight to address the proposal last week ~~by a member of the Board of Ed~~ to potentially eliminate Darien High School JV and Freshman sports teams, as a way to cut the budget. As a parent whose children are all actively involved in multiple sports teams, I would respectfully request that the Board of Ed not eliminate the JV and Freshman sports teams. Darien High School has 1,000 students that participate on its 66 athletic teams, representing **over 70% of the student body**. Fifty-percent of this athletic participation, or 500 students, participate in the 21 JV and 11 Freshman teams. The JV and Freshman teams are a large and integral part of the overall DHS experience, providing a significant population of our students with a rewarding extracurricular learning opportunity outside of academics, that also serves as an important and healthy social outlet for our kids. Moreover, these teams serve as feeders for our successful varsity athletics program. I believe that a significant driver of our varsity program's success is due to the large number of 9th and 10th grade students that improve their skills under Darien High School's coaching, while competing on the JV and Freshman teams. Finally, if these teams were eliminated, this would force parents to pay for their children to participate in outside sports clinics and club teams in order to maintain and improve their skills during 9th and 10th grade in order to be competitive enough

to make the DHS varsity team. This would have the effect of exacerbating inequalities for DHS students between families who can afford these additional expenses and families for whom this might not be financially possible. For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Board of Ed not eliminate the JV and Freshman athletic teams. Thank you. *for your consideration.*

Vasil, Nadine

From: Kathrine Stein <kgeller21@mac.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 30, 2018 8:08 PM
To: Vasil, Nadine
Cc: Ochman, Tara
Subject: Fwd: Tonight's remarks.

Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: Rob Werner <robbyw@optonline.net>
Date: January 30, 2018 at 8:04:51 PM EST
To: Katie Stein <kgeller21@mac.com>
Subject: Tonight's remarks.

Here are my very brief remarks. Thanks for listening.

Best,
Rob

Rob Werner
21 Bailey Avenue

I'm here to briefly talk tuba and respectfully request that this board retain one new tuba for the high school in the band budget. Simply, there are five tuba players and three tubas. A lot of saliva goes into a tuba - if possible you don't want to play a tuba someone else just played.

That one tuba represents 9% of the band's budget. That's a very harsh and draconian cut for a curricular activity with 120 kids - I believe the largest such group at the high school.

I'm not a tuba parent. But I do recognize the enormous benefit the band program has for our town. They play the football games, three concerts a year, the jazz festival. Lots of these kids also play in the pit orchestra for the musicals and in the community band at the fireworks and at Weed Beach.

Music is a lifetime gift. Save the tuba.

On behalf of Darien SEPAC, we wanted to focus on budget items that are both universal and preventative—the goal being to avoid restrictive and often costly environments for students.

Improving Reading & Writing

Teaching children to read & write is what school is all about.

Over the last two years, Darien has made strides to implement a universal screener K-8, and phonics-based programs K-3. Phonics and spelling programs for upper elementary are needed. We support the district providing this critical instruction, and intensive instruction if necessary, to get children reading and writing on grade level.

Based on Darien's state profile, students with reading disabilities and ADHD are our biggest category of students with disabilities—learning disabilities and other health impaired make up over 61% of our students in special education. This does not include students who need reading interventions in other categories such as autism and intellectual disabilities.

Our personal story is based around these issues. My son couldn't read in 1st grade. His 1st grade teacher said but he is so smart he gets everything when we read to the class. Once he finally got SRBI the teacher questioned his kindergarten and not using his strategies. I was lucky to have a friend who was a child psychologist. Within 20 min she was able to tell me he had phonic awareness issues and needed Orton Gillingham type instruction. We have had tutors since then for 1 to 2 days a week from Windward School. We have done over 80 hours of Lindamood Bell to make up/catch up due to maternity leaves and miss management of subs and replacements. Not even to get to grade level but to just be able to keep up. The Special Ed world is confusing "you don't know what you don't know". There is no road map. The kids compare each other by reading level so now you have a confidence issue. If the teachers don't understand the issues they can't give you guidance and unless you are lucky like I was you don't even know where to start. ---we need to enhance reading and writing instruction and supports so that all children feel confident and meet grade level standards in district.

Improving Inclusion

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, the federal law that supports special education and related service programming for children with disabilities:

“Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible.”

Inclusive settings reflect the real world and have been shown to be a more effective learning environment for all students. For example in one recent study researchers examined academic progress for students with disabilities in general education and self-contained classrooms over two years. Forty seven percent of the students who were included in the general education classroom made progress in math, as compared to only 34% in self-contained classrooms. In addition, typical peers made higher gains in classrooms with students with disabilities.

Over the last two years, Darien has invested in professional development at MMS and DHS, led by Dr. Marilyn Friend, an expert on inclusive school practices. Dr. Friend’s work is critical in effectively addressing inclusion in our schools—by supporting all teachers – general education and special education teachers – to provide specialized instruction to a diverse group of learners. We support continued professional development in this model – and expanding training to all teachers in the district, including at the elementary level. To make inclusion meaningful, teacher training, along with supportive technology and other supplemental services are vital.

Successful and meaningful inclusion is not only best practice and beneficial for all students, it is more cost effective and allows students to be educated in their home schools with their peers.

Unified Sports/Flex Period

We support sports, activities and clubs for all students. Unified Sports, in which teams are made up of students with and without disabilities, promotes social inclusion and understanding for students of all abilities. DHS and Ox Ridge have implemented successful programs. We support expanding the opportunity to Middlesex so that students are included in sports before and when in the competitive sports world in high school. Unified Sports is a chance for any student to be part of a team.

Flex period

When students who receive support services reach middle school they are often faced with the hard decision to give up a language, an instrument, music and/or art, areas in which they may excel and enjoy. Moving the Flex period next to

lunch could help these students by creating an opportunity to receive services during this time period.

Improving Mental Health Support

As a community we need to address the reality that many students are under strain in our town---whether it be depression, anxiety or something else. We need to take action now to make sure students know the signs and where to go for help.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Health, 20% of youth ages 13-18 live with a mental health condition.

We have heard from some brave students and young adults in recent weeks---sharing personal stories about suicide and depression, which has driven the point home.

The idea that there are middle school and high school students cutting themselves in Darien is terrifying but true. At-risk behavior occurs in our community and is incredibly challenging for students, their families and their peers.

We know the statistics--Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death in youth ages 10 – 24. We know one of the highest-risk groups for depression are teenagers, and in many cases the warning signs from this patient population are missed or even ignored.

We support a longer-term social emotional curriculum but this should not wait. Whether it be for a personal reason or friend, we need to make sure our children and teens know the at-risk signs and know who to go to for help.