



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

Good evening. I am Julie Best. I live at 38 Red Rose Circle. I have three children; two at the middle school and one at Tokeneke. I am Sara Parent. I live at 227 Hollow Tree Ridge Road. I have two children; both at Holmes. We are the co-chairs of CDSP, the Council of Darien School Parents.

We wanted to start off by expressing our appreciation to the Board of Education for the extraordinary time and effort they put into helping to make our schools better for all children. We also want to thank Dr. Landon for leading our schools through this time of transition. We know how lucky we are to have him at the helm this year.

We also want to acknowledge some great progress in a few areas:

- Congratulations on the successful completion of the DHS cafeteria project. It was definitely not an easy process, but we recently attended the ribbon cutting and were impressed by the finished product. The whole high school community will no doubt enjoy and benefit from this multi-functional space now, and for many years into the future.
- Thank you for continuing to invest in the professional development of our teachers, for continuing to build on the success of Fitch Academy; for getting the new Ox Ridge School project underway; and for your focus on security so that our students are as safe as possible at all times.

On to the real reason we are here tonight; the 2019-20 budget. We thank Dr. Landon and his team for what we believe to be a lean and fiscally

responsible budget. Uncertain financial times and challenges within our state demand that we take care not to overburden our town and our tax payers. At the same time, our ever-changing world and the evolving needs of our students are of paramount concern. We believe that this budget is cognizant of both.

While you will hear later tonight from other CDSP members voicing support for the four additional elementary psychologists as well as the additional Guidance Counselor at Middlesex, we wanted to highlight a few things in regards to these additional hires:

- For those children in crisis and all the others who are struggling or suffering right beside them, the need for added support is urgent.
- For the teachers who don't have the tools and training to handle situations they are facing everyday, which disrupt their classrooms or leave their students unavailable to learn, the need for added support is urgent.
- For all of our children, whether they are in Special Education, General Education and/or the Gifted Program, who are facing personal, social and societal pressures, we must identify issues and manage them as early in the child's development as possible. The need for added support to make this happen, is urgent.

We implore you to recognize this urgency and approve the additional four elementary school psychologists. The time is now. The number is four, not two. The rationale for two full-time psychologists in each elementary school has been clearly laid out by the administration. The need for two full time psychologists in each school was unquestionably explained by all five elementary school principals. We have heard repeatedly that any other model would not be best practice and would not provide the support that is needed in our elementary schools. Simply put, it would not be money well-spent.

Thank you for supporting the additional guidance counselor at Middlesex. With two dedicated counselors per grade, this will allow for continuity of services across all grade levels at the middle school.

You will also hear tonight from a CDSP member addressing our facilities needs and concerns. While we have written a new speech for tonight, we honestly could have just dusted off an old one and it would still be perfectly applicable. Parents are frustrated that our facilities issues are not being addressed in a timely manner. To be perfectly honest, in a town that supposedly prides itself on a top-notch school system, our facilities are embarrassing. It is simply unacceptable.

Finally, we must take time to thank our fellow CDSP members for their work and dedication to this process and to their schools. Thank you to the Board for the opportunity to speak tonight. The Council of Darien School Parents is in full support of this budget tonight as we believe it supports all learners and allows for an excellent education of all students in Darien.

1/29/19

not
a budget
speech



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

Good evening. I am Leila Buckjune. I live at 12 Dubois St. and have two children; one at Middlesex and one at Hindley. I am Michele Treacy. I live at 13 Dubois St. and also have one child at Middlesex and one child at Hindley. We are the Budget Chairs of CDSP.

We would like to say thank you for what we believe to be a fiscally responsible budget which will allow Darien to continue its tradition of excellence in education. We appreciate the time and energy required from the many people involved in creating and analyzing this budget.

Throughout this year's process, we have had many questions and concerns from parents and would like to share them with you now.

As we look to future budgets, there are several areas we'd like to see the Board consider in greater detail, with an eye toward improving overall **Transparency and Accountability**.

- Regarding **Safety**: We would like more discussion on our overall school security. We believe that safety is a top priority for the Board, and we understand that you can not share all the details of the plans and provisions. However, we would like information presented to parents to illustrate that your security plan is deliberate, thoughtful and future-focused.
- There is a proposed cut to **Budget Control** on the table: We ask you to tread lightly here. If you reduce the budget to this year's number, what happens if an additional section breaks and another teacher is needed? Can you ensure that the money would be found before violating our class-size policy?

- On the subject of **Athletics**: We find that, among parents, there is a lack of understanding around policy and procedures. We are hearing a lot of questions, such as: what is the philosophy around cut or no cut? When do we add or cut a coach? What is the threshold for creating and/or disbanding a team? Who should pay for what? What are the responsibilities of the Assistant Athletic Director? Darien High School Clubs & Councils go through a very thorough and clearly defined vetting process, and yet they make up a very small piece of the budget as compared to athletics. It is time to impose some clear guidelines and improve the overall transparency of the procedures for our high school athletics. It is time for a real discussion about Darien's athletic program and its funding.
- We would like to address the idea of **Open Gov**: This idea keeps surfacing as means to improve transparency around the Board of Education spending. We are not certain if it should be a priority; however the school budget represents over 75% of the total tax bill for a Darien household. We would like to ask that the Board engage in a public discussion on the idea of Open Gov and therefore, we ask that it be included as part of the next Objectives & Initiatives conversation.
- Hand in hand with transparency are **metrics and accountability**. Year after year, we ask for performance metrics to quantify the relative success of initiatives undertaken by the district in previous years. For example, how has the 1:1 initiative changed instruction and learning? What positive or negative changes have you seen? How much school-related screen time are children exposed to and what are the implications of that? What are the instructional advantages of the 1:1 model?

We would like the same feedback on the Department Chairs. Have you been able to assess consistency within a department? How are common exams affecting children at DHS? How are we monitoring

and responding to teacher fidelity to curriculum? Are students and parents reporting improvements?

Budget initiatives are costly. And each time we propose a new one, it is even more important to be able to gauge the successes of past initiatives.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.



Good evening. My name is Anne Fox. I live at 1741 Boston Post Road. I have three children: two at Middlesex and one at Hindley. Tonight I am speaking on behalf of the CDSP about our district's facilities.

First, we want to thank the Board for their time and effort to improve the high school cafeteria. The new space is a much needed change. We are also grateful to Dr. Landon for presenting the proposal to update the electrical panels at Hindley, Holmes and Royle. Parents have been asking for air conditioning in all classrooms for years. We are thrilled that the district has finally addressed this issue.

We must also thank Mike Lynch for his incredible expertise and leadership. He and his team are to be commended for what they do each day within their limited budget.

In 2016, KG&D architects presented the Board with a comprehensive facilities Master Plan for our district which focused on three priorities: the elimination of portables, centrally locating ELP and addressing the urgent needs of Ox Ridge school. We are pleased to see the process of rebuilding Ox Ridge and centralizing ELP is underway. We hope the members of the newly formed building committee will work as quickly and efficiently as possible to develop a plan for a school with an eye towards the future.

However, major concerns remain: specifically the portables and the overall maintenance of our aging buildings. We encourage the district and Board to **faithfully** adhere to the recommendations in the Building Conditions Survey conducted two years ago. We are concerned that the proposed capital items do not adhere to the timeline of projects recommended in the survey.

According to the district's website, the last meeting of the Board's Facilities Committee was over a year ago on December 17, 2017. We understand there was great effort put into the cafeteria and Ox Ridge since then, but we don't understand why the discussion of the remaining items in the Master Plan, including removing the portables and adjusting the traffic patterns, has ceased.

There are still 14 portables in use in Darien. They are not energy efficient and difficult to secure. In our post-Sandy Hook world, security cannot be optimized when children are outside the walls of the school. Children move between the school and the portables numerous times per day, often without an adult. On a regular basis, children get locked out as they return from portables to the main school building.

Darien parents have asked the Board to remove the portables at every public hearing for at least the past 5 years. The Board has heard parents' express their frustration and concern and yet little has been done. There has been no meaningful conversation or action from the Board to remove the portables from Darien schools. We are asking for a timeline on when the portables will be removed. This is simply unacceptable. Our children deserve to be safe.

Lastly, the Board has repeatedly heard parents' concerns about the traffic patterns at our schools, primarily at drop off and pick up times. Any of our principals can provide examples of near misses in parking lots, involving both pedestrians and other cars. Like the issue of portables, it seems that this issue is not getting the attention it deserves.

There is long list of things to be proud of in our Darien school system. It's time to make our facilities-- all of them-- part of that list. We urge the Board to make these buildings, and our children's safety, their top priority. Thank you



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

My name is Renee Bea, I live at 11 Sunswyck Road, and am here to speak on behalf of the Council for Darien School Parents to urge the Board of Education to approve the addition of four psychologists at our elementary schools. We want to thank the Board for supporting the recommendation of the additional guidance counselor at the middle school. We believe that this addition, if combined with the four additional psychologists, will work to address the mental health needs of all of our students.

The [Child Mind Institute](#) reports that half of all mental illness occurs before the age of 14, with the onset of anxiety disorders at a median age of 6. The world today is not easy for our children. Close to twenty years ago, the No Child Left Behind Act effectively brought first grade curriculum into Kindergarten, significantly lessening the time available for unstructured play and for our youngest learners. Internet use was in its infancy and the Columbine massacre shocked the country. Google was brand new. Facebook and Instagram did not exist. Since then, social interaction has been intensified by the ever present internet and sadly, school shootings are now routine.

One of the district's 2018-2019 goals is to "[s]upport students in being productive citizens and practicing healthy behaviors through a Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model." A growing body of evidence, culminating in a major [report](#) released two weeks ago by the Aspen Institute's Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development, confirms this goal and confirms that cognitive, social, and emotional development are inextricably linked. Children with more developed social and emotional skills are more adept at paying attention, setting goals, persevering, thinking critically, and problem solving. Their grades, graduation rates, and post-secondary outcomes improve.

A second, full time psychologist in all five elementary schools is the most efficient and effective way to address the currently unmet mental health issues presenting in our elementary schools. Our schools could finally be in a position to be proactive in serving all students by educating the whole student, meeting students' emotional needs, and implementing the social emotional curriculum currently being developed by the administration. Issues would be caught early, preventing them from becoming crises, and children could learn to be empathetic towards their struggling peers. The additional resource would also ensure follow up and consistent tracking of students.

These issues affect all of our children. A child in crisis impacts the entire classroom and school community. Our teachers, who currently shoulder the burden of managing behavioral issues and children in crisis on the front line, do not have the skills or experience to manage every situation effectively. A psychologist who is available to our teachers and students would be able to step in and help so that classrooms can return to being a place where teachers can teach and students can learn.

Investing in our students' mental health is not about parents abdicating responsibility. Our schools are mandated to teach social emotional skills. At present they simply do not have the resources to implement that mandate. Moreover, parents do not necessarily have the skill set to address the issues we are seeing. A second psychologist could help the district deliver on its goal to be a community resource on education and clinical topics, working in partnership with teachers and families to address these issues in our schools.

Approving the addition of a psychologist at each of our elementary schools and the addition of the guidance counselor at Middlesex will not only benefit all of our students, and staff but it will also benefit our community as Darien continues its tradition of excellence in education.

BOE Public Hearing: January 29, 2019

Remarks by Amy Daniels

Good evening. My name is Amy Daniels and I live at 94 Old Kings Highway South.

I want to start by thanking the Board for your time and hard work on behalf of all of the students in Darien. You each sacrifice so much and you're all superheroes in my book!

I am the co-chair of the Tokeneke PTO as well as the Director of Strategic Marketing for Greenwich Education Group. As part of my role, I oversee the marketing for three private day schools, including The Spire School, a therapeutic day school that is a resource for many local school districts, including Darien, for Out-of-District placement of students in grades 6 through 12. The students that come to Spire are often frustrated, avoidant, lacking confidence, and reluctant to engage and to take risks when they arrive. Anxiety, depression, bullying, school avoidance, or self-harming behaviors have made school an unhappy place for them. Their social-emotional challenges have made them unable and unavailable to learn in a traditional setting. By integrating life coaches that are trained therapists into their daily school experience, Spire students are able to reengage and rediscover their love of learning.

I am not suggesting that Darien needs to implement this model. However, I do believe that the addition of these psychologists will provide EVERY student, and not just those receiving special education services, with social-emotional resources and support. I believe additional school psychologists combined with the planned roll-out of the Social-Emotional Learning curriculum will over time result in fewer kids from our district needing a school like Spire.

Last week, my company leaders were in a meeting with the head of Pupil Services from a Lower Fairfield County school district. When asked the biggest trend she's seeing in her District, her response was mental health at the elementary level. Anxiety, depression and self-harm. Things like 3rd and 4th graders cutting themselves. It's appalling and unthinkable, yet it's happening. This issue is not unique to Darien and, unfortunately, parent intervention alone is not going to solve it.

The Board is familiar with the cost of adding these psychologists. In closing, I ask the Board to consider the long-term costs of NOT adding them. The cost of diluting each dollar we put into the education of our children because many students are coming to school unavailable to learn due to whatever issues they are struggling with. The cost and implications of one child distracting from every student in class due to his or her disruptive or withdrawn behavior and our teachers' inability to provide the scaffolding needed to address it. The cost of teacher absenteeism and the related substitute teacher budgetary implications, which we've heard are higher in Darien than elsewhere. By not having students' mental health issues identified and addressed early on, something that could have been managed and mitigated ends up being exacerbated. Some of these kids could likely end up with a District outplacement to a school like Spire, with tuition around \$70k per year.

And yet, the biggest cost of not adding these psychologists cannot be measured financially. Many of our elementary kids are unhappy. They are anxious. They are depressed. They are hurting. You're hearing it firsthand from our principals and administrators.

What are we saying as a school district-- and as a community-- if we put success, performance, and "winning" above the health and happiness of our youngest students? What is the cost associated with that?

Doreen Godfrey - Board of Education Speech:

"I'm not good enough"

"I can't do this" ☒

"I'm not getting it so I want to quit"

"I don't want to make a mistake"

These are the statements I hear every week coming from children ages 5-8. I stand before you today as a mother of three elementary school age girls, the co-chair of the Tokeneke PTO and a small business owner in town. As co-owner of DL Studio in town, I teach dance to over 300 children ages 4-15 with the vast majority of these families residing in Darien. These three roles position me to offer a unique perspective on the different challenges that our children are facing growing up here.

I think most of us, if not all, can agree that the current state of our nation and society make the challenge of raising children a particularly fearful one. We are not dealing with what you and I or our parents dealt with as kids. Adolescent depression and anxiety have skyrocketed since the advent of the "smart phone". But this didn't happen overnight. Could this be a parenting issue? Yes, it could be. Could this be a social media issue? Absolutely. But if a psychologist can help with both sides of the coin then there is no question that the addition of another one in our schools is a necessity. The pressures of social media coupled with trying to keep up with friends and peers in sports, academics and activities ...it's a lot. This is tough time to be a kid!

To most of our students their favorite part of class is when they can "freestyle" dance at the end of class. When we first started the business a few years ago it was just one child at the back of the room, but now in every class there are a handful that just stand there frozen. When asked why they aren't moving they say "I don't want to do the wrong thing" or "I'm afraid I'm going to lose". My partner and I are baffled by it, because there is no wrong thing and there is nothing to lose. To my own child having the most silent piano lesson known to man because she was afraid to press the wrong keys so she pressed none at all! These societal pressures are paralyzing our children with fear.

Children need someone to talk to other than parents and teachers to guide them and give them the tools to understand their emotions, verbalize their stress and identify what is causing it. By the time they reach middle school I have seen these issues become so deep-seeded that they do not know how to function in a classroom of their peers because they are stricken with anxiety.

I could go on and on about this, for as a parent and teacher it is a topic I'm particularly passionate about. Unfortunately, I've only have three minutes. Suffice to say, I support the increase in the school budget and I think the need for four additional school psychologists is nothing short of a necessity. Let's do all we can to arm our children with the tools necessary to navigate an extraordinarily difficult time to be a child. We are doing a disservice to US ALL if we do anything to the contrary!

****INSERT THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE HERE****

1/29/19

Speech to Board of Education supporting the addition of 4 elementary based school psychologists.

Alexandra Hall, 14 Chester Road

Good evening to members of the Administration and members of the Board. Thank you very much for taking the time to listen during such a rigorous and busy budget season. I stand before you to show my unequivocal support for the hire of 4 full-time elementary-based psychologists. Anxiety and stress in school is not new and while the need has been there for many years, we have not proactively sought these positions until now. Now is the time. Darien has an amazing reputation as a school district for its academics and sports, however, the school system will not be able to sustain this high level of excellence and competition without the very fundamentals of its students feeling wholesome and psychologically nourished. Of course, parents play an enormous role in teaching and navigating their children on a daily basis. These new positions are not meant to dilute the efforts of parents, nor should they ever. However, it is undeniable that the current education system is becoming increasingly challenged with the need for more mental health resources in our schools.

As you know, our current psychologists are dealing with schedules so full they have become almost inaccessible. PPT/504 requirements, team meetings, counseling with parents, consultations, counseling and/or support for kids with real-life trauma, general education issues, kids with school avoidance issues, consults with classroom teachers on managing behaviors, testing/reporting for children who are referred - these are just a few of the responsibilities for just one psychologist in each school of approximately 450 students. Approving these hires would certainly aid in managing these responsibilities while facilitating a more proactive environment.

To conclude, these are different times we live in. Anxiety and social issues and pressures have always percolated in school, however, transparency and conversation around such issues was nowhere near where it is today. This is a non-stop, hyper-stimulating, wired world we live in. Currently, presentations on anxiety, followed by ADHD, continue to draw the greatest numbers of parents and educators when it comes to programming, so we all know it is something that is of great concern to many. And let it be clear, this is not just about Special Education. Psychologists have a trained eye and ear to address so many of the more fearful, intangible mental needs of our students. I implore you to consider these proposed hires in order to increase the psychological and behavioral support to our younger students. This would help to ensure and enhance Darien's ongoing reputation for its commitment to our schools. Thank you.

1/29/19

The mental health of our students is not secondary to education. Strong mental health is necessary in order for students to learn effectively. The Board of Education, the administration and the Darien community at large continuously invest in education, athletics and the arts for our children. In Darien, and throughout the rest of the country, the number of students with mental health issues has grown exponentially into an epidemic over the last several years. Unfortunately, like many other communities across our country, our school system is struggling to address this problem. In addition to the pressures created by our town's intense academic and athletic environment, students today have to contend with the realities of active shooter drills, lock-down drills, and societal pressures stemming from a globally connected, never-sleeping, world. It is time that investment in our students' mental health moves to the forefront.

Mental health distress is not something found only in upper schools. Academic and social anxiety, school avoidance and disruptive behaviors are all too common amongst our youngest students. These issues are present in Special Education, General Education and Gifted elementary classrooms and they require professional support for both our children and our staff. Sadly, our current resources do not have the capacity to meet these needs. Every student in the Darien Public Schools deserves to have access to the support necessary for them to be a successful, whole person.

While our district is working towards a well-thought out social-emotional curriculum, it simply cannot be implemented without the correct number of mental health professionals in our schools. Currently, the majority of our elementary psychologists' time is taken by mandated IEP meetings. There is limited time available for other students who need support. With additional staff, the schools can proactively help students, families and staff by identifying mental health issues and teaching skills that will move our children from coping to thriving. A shared or part time model will not work. These professionals need to be available in the school five days a week, where our students spend the majority of their time.

Our kids are struggling. Adding these additional four FTEs is the right thing to do. It is our job as responsible citizens – parents, educators, and board members - to ensure the next generation is able to succeed and flourish.

Kadiatu M. Lublin, 24 Maplewood Drive

1/29/19

January 29, 2018

John Long

400 Mansfield Avenue

Elementary School District – Ox Ridge

Dear School Board Members:

I support the budget and want to specifically speak to the addition of the four psychologists to the elementary schools.

We are currently understaffed and not fulfilling our obligation to support the full needs of all students.

Research shows early intervention is critical in preventing escalation of smaller mental health issues and decreasing the ultimate economic and social costs on our community.

I'm going to read off some statistics from the Center For Disease Control

According to the CDC, nearly 1 in 5 children age 3-17 have a mental, emotional or behavioral disorder like anxiety, depression, adhd, etc.

Furthermore, the percentage of children aged 6-17 suffering from depression or anxiety has increased from 5.4% in 2003 to over 8% a decade later. (Journal of Pediatrics – 2018).

I think we can all agree that children are growing up faster as they have different access to stimuli and information than many of us did when we were in elementary school. With this expedited mental maturity come bumps in the road and, we, as a community would be well served to establish proper levels of support.

Thanks for your time.

1/29/19

My name is Samantha Gault. I live at 46 Birch Road. My husband and I have lived in Darien for nine years, and while I have worked in private schools in Greenwich and New York City for thirteen years now, it was always our expectation that our children would attend public school here. My son William started Kindergarten at Ox Ridge in August.

And five months later, I feel like Darien public schools have let us down.

I was told they would be ready for my son. So, I put him on the bus and waved goodbye. I had no concerns for him. He was so ready. I naively believed that kindergarten would be fun. He and I were both excited for the adventure of the bus and the new friends and the learning. As I said, I am a teacher, and my son was the ideal student, as most five-year-olds naturally are. Eager to please. Confident. Endlessly curious. Eager to make connections – with his peers and with his world. It took about a week of school to put him in his place.

A fever sore broke out on his lip from the stress of, as he would tell me before he went to bed at night, “not knowing everyone’s names” or “feeling dopey.” It didn’t help that an older boy on the bus subsequently called him booger dude. From there all of his energy went not toward learning or enjoying but rather toward managing his environment. Figuring out whom he could trust and how our system works.

There is very little joy as he goes off to school in the morning. He is emotionally exhausted.

Returning to school after winter break, I watched him in his own world, taking deep breaths as he waited for the bus: “focus, William, focus.”

One day early in the year he simply ran away from the bus in protest. When I drove him, it took AN HOUR of our wonderful and overworked Ox Ridge psychologist Annie Farson’s time to coax him inside and help him unpack his anxieties.

My son is not unique. He is like every other five or six-year-old in our schools who needs more love and more attention. More people letting him know they are glad he came to school. More people present in his day to answer his questions and encourage him to ask more. More people with whom to share stories about his weekend. More people present to validate his feelings, let him know that he is human.

When we give our children this attention, they pass it on. They take joy in each other’s presence, inquire about each other’s weekends. They recognize each other’s vulnerabilities as human. They treat each other with a little more kindness and a little more respect. We must do better at encouraging and modeling healthy relationships for our kids.

We can do these things at home, of course, but it is not enough. I put my son on the bus at 8:25a (because I have to on the days I go to work, and on the days I don’t, he is so afraid of breaking out of his routine that he will not let me drive him), and I do not see him again until 3:55. Seven and a half hours is a long day.

I would like to believe that those are quality hours our children spend at school. That they are hours in which our children feel safe enough, confident enough, and happy enough that learning happens in the way it should: joyfully, collaboratively, naturally.

I know from working in schools myself that it takes a lot of hard work on the part of a lot of dedicated adults to cultivate the kind of learning environment I dream of for our children.

At Ox Ridge Luke Forshaw, Christina Ulreich, Annie Farson, and others are doing that work. They need more support. Staffing an additional school psychologist at each of our elementary schools is an important step in the right direction.

Before I close, I would like to thank Dr. Forshaw, Ms. Ulreich, and Dr. Farson for everything they have done to let William know that he is part of a community that cares about him. I hope the board will do what it can to send him – and all of our children – that message as well.

1/29/19

Good evening. I'm Amy Zerbe, and I live at 9 Morehouse Dr. I have a seventh grader at Middlesex, and a freshman at the high school.

I'd like to thank the Board of Ed for holding this forum for public comment. I'd especially like to thank the district administration for the proposed mental health initiatives, which our district desperately needs.

I support the proposed additional guidance counselor at Middlesex. We have been asking for an additional counselor for years. Six guidance counselors will enable the school to establish an affective social and emotional learning program.

We have heard that our students need to learn resilience. Unfortunately, I have seen students move in the opposite direction. In recent years, suicide and self-harm have dramatically increased among our adolescents. According to the CDC, self-harm among 10-14 year old girls has tripled from 2009 to 2017; those are our 4th through 9th grade girls. In a July 2018 article, the *New York Times* stated that 18% of our adolescents have engaged in self-harm.

Researchers have suggested that we look at this phenomenon as a public health problem. Our schools need to be proactive in combatting these issues, but it has been practically impossible because our counselors are increasingly overburdened with meetings and student crises.

I would also like to comment on the proposed athletics budget. I oppose the changes brought up for discussion during the January 22nd Board of Ed meeting regarding payments for off-site athletics practices. For years, the Board of Ed has been discussing the financing arrangements for teams that practice off-site, with no resolution. I request that you not change the payments in the proposed budget. Rather, at some point in the near future, I recommend that you establish definitive guidelines or a policy regarding financing for off-site athletics practices. I think that all parties would find that useful.

Thank you.

1/29/19

My name is Lisa Cerussi, I live at 12 Rings End Road, and I am here tonight to support the District's budget and ask the Board of Education to approve the addition of four school psychologists at our elementary schools and a middle school guidance counselor.

Our district is in need of psychologists and guidance support to effectively counsel the current and evolving needs of our students, and implement the Social Emotional Learning initiative that our Administration has developed. It is our hope that early intervention at the elementary and middle school levels will not only help the children who are in need of support today, but also provide them with the coping skills to access the curriculum and face the challenges of high school and beyond.

Psychological and guidance counseling is available to any student in need of emotional or behavioral support.... our athletic students, gifted students, music students, students with disabilities and any student who is having a bad day.

Darien parents are very aware of their children's mental health needs and many seek private therapy for social, emotional and psychiatric support. But our children also need the support of trained school professionals to help them navigate their day in our classrooms.

We provide our students with excellent teachers, technology, music programs, sports fields, unique enrichment programs and new or improved facilities. But if our students cannot attend school with a healthy mind, then all of our efforts fall short. Imagine, if we can help our emotionally fragile students confidently access the curriculum, play sports on our beautiful athletic fields, perform in one of our auditoriums, join their friends in the cafeteria, attend a class trip or represent our district at the Quiz Bowl. Imagine the success of all of our students, if our teachers can deliver an uninterrupted day of instruction to fully engaged students.

An effective Social Emotion Learning program will also provide all children with the tools and words to help their classmates who are struggling. Imagine a school environment where our children can develop empathy and compassion to say a kind word to a classmate in distress, or have the strength to find a teacher if they sense a friend is engaging in self-harm or risky behaviors.

We are fortunate to have a dedicated group of administrators who have developed a budget that addresses the current needs of our students. Each line item is important and necessary. But the emotional support of our students should be our primary focus now and always. The addition of four psychologists and a guidance counselor cannot wait until our next budget season.

Thank you for listening. I appreciate your time and dedication to our schools and to our children.

1/29/19

I'm Jamie Zionie, speaking on behalf of the Darien Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC). Thank you for your time and service during this lengthy budget cycle.

We not only ask the Board of Education to approve the addition of four psychologists, but also, to align these hires with the full implementation of Social Emotional Learning, SRBI for behavior and Dialectical Behavior Therapy, as outlined in our district goals. School and after school programming should be accessible to all students, as set out in the SEL model. At our schools, many children can't participate in afterschool programs because ADA accommodations aren't being provided. New hires are not enough, all teachers need to be trained in non-physical ways to support and positively incentivize students. Please don't allow force and exclusion to remain part of our social behavioral model.

We strongly support increasing BOE updates on general and special education support services to at least twice per year in order to monitor progress toward district goals. Please consider re-establishing a BOE sub-committee in this area to provide better understanding for all stakeholders and to minimize the need for lengthy BOE meetings.

I'm Kelly Dupont, speaking on behalf of the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC). The addition of a guidance counselor at Middlesex would provide two counselors per grade level to support the middle school model. This allows for increased and consistent participation in grade level/color team meetings for students -- and counselors would no longer need to be split across teams. Middlesex's guidance department's per student caseload average would decrease from 224 to 187 students. Darien would then be better aligned with counselor caseload averages in our DRG, and also aligned with the DHS counselor caseload averages.

An additional counselor could help facilitate a smoother transition for students entering middle school -- the big leap from 5th grade to 6th grade -- and eighth graders preparing for high school -- two anxious and stressful time periods for students.

Finally, we ask for more transparency in the district budget document. We encourage the district to recategorize RC-24 to Support Services, as there are many general education support services included in RC-24. Budget transparency will be improved by detailing the number of students who receive 504 accommodations in each school, documenting the hours logged in each category of psychological services and providing data as to the number and type of 211 requests logged by each district school. We ask that these items be clearly itemized in the district budget document.