

## **Council of Darien School Parents: Budget Statements at the Board of Ed Public Hearing: PART 1**

**Author :** David Gurliacci

**Categories :** [Education](#), [Government & Politics](#)

**Tagged as :** [Board of Education 2017](#), [Council of Darien School Parents 2017](#), [Education Budget 2017-2018](#)

**Date :** February 6, 2017

Good Evening. My name is Shelly Skoglund. I have two children: one at the high school and one at Middlesex. My name is Julia Mengwall. I have three children: one at Middlesex and two at Tokeneke. Together, Shelly and I are co-chairs of the Council of Darien School Parents.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. We would like to start by thanking the Board of Education for giving so much of your volunteer time to improve our schools and your dedication to the education of all our children. As stewards of our district, your efforts provide the oversight and guidance to keep our district moving forward and we appreciate all you do.

We'd also like to express our gratitude to our teachers, principals and everyone who works to make the Darien Public school system the wonderful place that it is for our children. In particular, we have to

acknowledge Dr. Brenner, Dr. DaSilva, Shirley Klein and the entire leadership team that has been assembled over the past two years.

We have been thoroughly impressed with their professionalism, commitment to excellence and genuine care for our children and our town. We have also appreciated your work with other town bodies, such as the Board of Finance and the RTM, to support district initiatives. Thank you all for giving of yourselves so tirelessly on our behalf.

To start, we would like to express our support for the Superintendent's proposed budget for 2017-18. As you will hear tonight, our members are enthusiastic about the initiatives included in this budget.

We are supportive of the district's goals and objectives which will be reinforced with this spending. We believe that this budget is respectful of all taxpayers while balancing the need to continue to invest in our schools and our children.

The proposed budget is only a 2.02% increase over last year's approved budget. We are fully aware of the extreme financial difficulties facing our state and the potential for our town to sustain a significant financial burden.

**FULL COVERAGE of the Board of Education public hearing:**

[Topics at Education Budget Hearing: DHS Cafeteria, Dept Chairs, Guidance Counselors](#)

Council of Darien School Parents: Budget Statements at the Board of Ed Public Hearing: **PART 1**

[Budget Statements on High School, Middle School at the Board of Ed Public Hearing: PART 2](#)

[Elementary School PTO Statements on the Budget at the Board of Ed Public Hearing: PART 3](#)

[Special Education Parents Statements at the Public Hearing on the Schools Budget: PART 4](#)

However, we cannot lose sight of the need to protect the asset that keeps our community strong and attractive to incoming residents - Darien's public schools. While our community may have to make some sacrifices, we cannot sacrifice our schools.

For years, CDSP has been covering many of the same themes at these hearings: the need for transparency and accountability, differentiation to meet all learners at their level, smoother and more thoughtful transition planning between school levels, and communication to parents.

We are very pleased to say that we have seen real progress in some of these areas, and are hopeful that some of the initiatives in this year's budget will bring us even closer to our goals.

Last year, we labeled the theme of the budget as Redefinition. This year, we feel that this budget is finally about Reimagination. How can we use technology to build 21st century skills? How can we propagate academic excellence in our secondary schools? How can we create environments that address the very real social and emotional challenges of our youth?

[Board of Education - Budget Public Hearing 2-2-17](#) from [Darien TV79](#) on [Vimeo](#).

As we move forward, we still see a lot of work to be done. As the Department Chairs provide the promise for greater consistency and improved transitions between middle school and high school, we would also like to see the district focus on parity in other ways: for example, standards of practice regarding homework from class to class within elementary schools and middle school teams; and faithfulness to curriculum between elementary schools and classrooms.

It is still too early in the process for parents to opine on the proposal for the Alternative High School.

However, we recognize Dr. Brenner's unique experience in this area and we are interested to learn more details about the program, including its location and its potential to help Darien students as well as generate revenue for the district.

In regards to the long awaited Facilities Master Plan, we would ask the district to keep in mind not just the pressing needs for maintenance, but the need to provide some level of basic parity among the schools.

We want to understand what the requirements are, particularly for our elementary schools: What are the appropriate classroom sizes? How should specials be delivered in the elementary setting? What common areas are required in elementary schools and how large do they need to be? Minimal work will HAVE to be done to assure that children in all five elementary schools have a similar, not identical, experience with regards to their physical setting.

---

*Like this article? ...*

- Sign up for the [Darienite.com weekday newsletter](#).
- Like [Darienite.com on Facebook](#).
- Follow [Darienite.com on Twitter](#).

---

We would also ask the Board to consider HOW you will convert the Master Plan into an Action Plan within a reasonable amount of time. Your leadership will be required to set goals, establish criteria for decision-making and to set and achieve timelines for moving forward. Parents have patiently waited for the planning process to be completed and now we want to see action.

Moving ahead parents want to see more data about how the different initiatives are affecting students. For example, we would like to see evidence that the department chairs have impacted teacher quality and retention.

We would like to know how the restructuring of 300 level classes at DHS has impacted student outcomes.

Overall, we want to believe that district decisions are data driven and that meaningful outcomes are defined prior to implementation of new programs. Discipline in decision making and greater transparency will provide the entire community with greater confidence in budget proposals.

We are grateful to all the members of CDSP for their dedication to this process. Tonight, you will be hearing from our members on several topics of importance to our community including: the need for Guidance Counselors and Department Chairs in our schools, the proposed DHS cafeteria project and facilities planning.

The Council of Darien School Parents stands here tonight in support of this budget because it represents forward-looking initiatives that we believe will bring excellence to our children at every level. We urge you to make that vision a reality for every single one of our students.