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Former Board of Ed Members Say Caucusing Reduces Public Understanding of Issues

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To the editor:

As former Darien Board of Education (BoE) members, it was disappointing to hear that five Republican members of the BoE (a majority of the board), met, privately, calling their meeting a “caucus,” to discuss the BoE budget.

Here’s why we care and why we all should care.

Members of the BoE are elected by Darien voters to represent us as residents, taxpayers and to advocate on behalf of our children. When a majority of one party meets, in private, to make decisions on how money is spent on educating our children, those decisions have an end result of setting education policy for the district,

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thus impacting the quality of the education our children receive.

Typically, these budget discussions are held in public with all nine BoE members. The public can listen, participate, understand what decisions are being made and how those decisions will impact the education of Darien's children. By holding this private meeting, these five members denied the public their right to access those discussions.

To explain further, the BoE is a governmental body, the actions of the board are governed by the Freedom of Information Act. The Connecticut Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), enacted in 1975, is a series of laws that guarantees the public access to public meetings and public records of governmental bodies in Connecticut. There are some exceptions to this law.

The participants may say, holding a political party caucus is one of those exemptions from FOIA. Unless a formal complaint is made to the FOI Commission and a decision rendered, we will not know if a political caucus with a majority from a board is exempt from these laws.

We, as residents, taxpayers and on behalf of our children will never know for sure what was discussed by these five members or why they couldn't have this meeting in public.

Private meetings like this are rare and set a dangerous precedent, but when they occur, we need to shine a light on them, to protect the public trust, transparency and teamwork which are the bedrock of good governmental decisions.

—Jan Raymond served 1988-1994

—Evonne Klein served 1995- 2001

—Callie Sullivan served 2014 - 2017