

On School Spending, PART 4: Statements from Budget Hearing

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Here are statements on improving teaching, teaching the gifted and supporting Schools Superintendent Dan Brenner, all from the Board of Education's Feb. 2 public hearing on the school budget.

Darienite.com will publish the full text of every statement from the public hearing that we receive by email. If you didn't give your statement to the CDSP, please email it to us at dave@darienite.com; we encourage readers to send in letters to the editor on this or any other topic by emailing to the same address.

See also:

- [Superintendent Proposes 3.85% Increase in Darien Education Budget](#) (Jan. 8)
- [Support for Early Learning Program, Teacher Training at Board of Ed Budget Hearing](#) (main article,

Feb. 2)

- [Mother of Autistic Child Explains How Early Learning Program Changed His Life \[VIDEO\]](#) (Feb. 2)
- [Freshman Soccer Team Captain to Board of Ed: Please, Can We Get Team Shorts That Won't Fall Down?](#) (Feb. 2)
- [On School Spending, PART 1: Statements at Feb 2 Budget Hearing](#) (Feb. 3)
- [On School Spending, PART 2: What Parent Groups Said About Special Ed at Feb 2 Hearing](#) (Feb. 3)
- [On School Spending, PART 3: Statements from Budget Hearing](#) (Feb. 3)

Theresa Vogt, Co-Chair of Middlesex Parent Assn for the CDSP on Curriculum Initiatives

Hello, my name is Theresa Vogt. I live at 22 Circle Road. I am co-chair of the Middlesex Parent Association.

Last year at this time we spoke of looking forward to having a vision for our schools. This year I am happy to say that we believe Dr. Brenner has that vision, and I am thrilled to support it.

The vision, as I understand it, is to provide a meaningful and challenging educational experience for every student in the district and to develop the skills they need to transition through every stage of their academic careers and beyond.

The world of education is rapidly changing. Initiatives like the implementation of the Core Curriculum nationally and the increasing proliferation of technology in our lives puts all schools, not just Darien, in a position of having to adapt quickly and to anticipate the future needs of our students. Rather than trying to play catch-up in this ever changing world, Darien should strive to lead.

This year's budget provides funding for some of the resources required to fully implement curricular initiatives already underway. The addition of non-fiction works, periodicals, and new textbooks will ensure that Darien is able to provide its students the classroom tools they need to continue to improve their critical thinking and have access to the latest innovations and information in each of the academic disciplines.

However, none of these investments can be utilized effectively without a strong, cohesive, and purposeful professional development program for our teachers. We would argue that professional development may very well be the most important line item in our school budget and has been underfunded for far too long.

Earlier tonight you heard us say that children need to be flexible, adaptable and resilient. For our teachers this evolution is even more complex, and we urge you to support the professional development budgets to assist them in their own transitions as 21st century learners.

We don't need to reinvent the wheel in Darien. We already have effective curricula in place for elementary

[school] math and literacy. However, these programs are presently under-delivering relative to expectations because we haven't given our teachers the training they need to execute effectively.

As a result, we are finding many students are underprepared for the rigors and challenges of the middle school curriculum. Elementary professional development, along with consultant services, will help build expertise in the areas of literacy, technology, math, science, world language and social studies.

These consultants will also provide best practice training on differentiation, which is a support to ALL our learners including the gifted, those who need curriculum support, and those with special needs.

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In order to effectively differentiate, we need tools for progress monitoring and identification of students requiring intervention. The inclusion of funds for the continued use of a Universal Screener and for tracking software is essential for monitoring progress and ensuring that resources are used correctly and effectively for the best outcomes for all children.

It is important that these services and supports, like SRBI, are maintained and delivered with continuity as a child moves from school to school. We also hope that the greater availability of progress data can be used to help keep parents more informed on their child's progression.

While much of the focus this year has been on the elementary level, we look forward to hearing plans to support the middle and high school, including the hiring of the reading specialists.

Our schools are only as good as the people inside them. Dr. Brenner has proposed a substantial increase in professional development for all our staff, to support our district's initiatives, and in turn, our students. We believe that as a community, it is imperative that we support this very necessary element of the school budget.

Tara Wurm on Educating Gifted Children

Good evening, my name is Tara Wurm. I live at 17 Mystic Lane, I have two children at Royle School, one in 2nd and one in 5th.

I am happy to see that this budget contains funds for professional development since that is the fix for some of the issues in our elementary schools. I would like to focus on one this evening which is differentiation in the classroom.

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In Darien we strive to constantly produce the very best educational experience for all students so they may successfully realize great achievement academically, artistically and athletically.

An overlooked and underserved spectrum of our student body are those students that have tested at the very highest levels of learning potential. The gifted child is deemed privileged given their inherent intellectual ability. But it is just that, an ability, that if not nourished will not develop and reach its full potential.

It goes against our natural sense of fairness to treat them as we should, CHILDREN with their own special learning needs. Since they have already been gifted so much, why should they get more?

But to these students it is not more but what they crave. These students spend the majority of their day unchallenged, unengaged and uninspired because they are perceived as not needing any instruction; the common refrain is "they will be fine". Why is fine acceptable? Fine is not the excellence we strive for in any other endeavor in Darien.

We need to change the culture of ignoring our Gifted students, embrace their potential and nurture their growth. We must acknowledge their appropriate curriculum is also specialized and different from the norm.

Our teachers need to be given the tools and professional development to give our gifted students the education they need. These students are capable of so much more and could truly reach amazing heights with the proper educational path.

I leave you with this quote from Nelson Mandela

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world"

Please give our children the chance to change the world.

Thank you.

Marli Hayes on Supporting Superintendent Brenner

Thank you to the Board of Education for the thousands of hours of time that you VOLUNTEER on behalf of the children and parents in our school district. Thank you too for finding and hiring Dr. Brenner. The patience in your search has paid off.

Since I moved to Darien almost four years ago, largely to be in a top-performing school district, Darien's school administration has been in a state of flux and uncertainty. Thanks to Dr. Brenner's leadership we are now finally righting the ship. What a relief!

Dr. Brenner has come to us with years of experience. He is using his experience and expertise to make innovative substantial changes in our schools, and we are already seeing the positive results.

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Since his arrival in July he has already made many skilled and well-informed decisions to improve the quality of education for all of our children. He is not interested in "how we've always done it"; he is interested in doing it RIGHT.

He is fully committed to rebuilding the trust of parents that was lost during the special education crisis, and he is doing so by building an excellent school system that meets the needs of ALL of our learners.

Now it is time for us to start trusting him.

We need to trust him to do the job that he was hired to do.

He has dedicated himself to our school district and it is time for us to truly demonstrate our commitment to him in return.

Accepting this budget isn't giving him a free pass; nobody gets one of those. It is enabling him to build and RE-build the top-quality school district we expect for our children and for our town. He has demonstrated success elsewhere; let's trust him by giving him the tools he needs to succeed in Darien.

Thank you.

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