

State of the Town Addresses for 2016: Part 3, Board of Education Chairperson Michael Harman's

Author : David Gurliacci

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

Tagged as : [Michael Harman](#), [State of the Town 2016](#)

Date : December 12, 2016

Good Evening,

Mister Moderator, Members of the RTM, fellow elected officials and community members of the Town of Darien. On behalf of my colleagues on the Darien Board of Education (BoE), I welcome the opportunity to update our community on the accomplishments that have been taking place in the past year in the Darien Public Schools.

We are now into the second year of our new Administration; under the guidance of Superintendent Dr. Brenner, the District has transitioned from ensuring compliance to focusing on how to build and improve the educational service delivery in the Darien Public Schools.

Darienite

News for Darien

<https://darienite.com>

It is easy to cite awards and championships, whether test results, college admissions percentages, music competitions, arts fairs, or athletic team successes. The real work is taking place in the classroom and our Administration including Ms. Marjorie Cion, Director of Human Resources, Dr. Susie Da Silva, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Ms. Shirley Klein, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services, and Michael Feeney, Director of Finance, have been busy making sure the District is providing our students with the educational services they deserve.

Let me highlight some of changes taking place in our schools:

- At the elementary schools, SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Interventions) is in full roll out
- Hindley is home to the new DLC 3 (Developmental Learning Centers) program for students with autism spectrum disorders
- At the Middle School, we now have the first year of our full year 6th grade world language
- DHS has implemented the team taught and lab classes
- The District finalized concurrent contract negotiations with the Darien Teachers Associations and the Darien Administrators Association
- And a copy center has been installed at Central Office, with Tokeneke as the first school to implement.

This year, three of our seven buildings welcomed new Principals, beginning with Principal Shelley Somers, who replaced long-time Principal Dr. Debbie Boccanfusa at Middlesex Middle School. Principal DJ Collela replaced another long-time principal, Ms. Rita Ferri, at Hindley Elementary. Royle Elementary welcomed their new principal, Principal Dean Ketchum, who relieved Mr. John Grasso, interim principal for the past two years.

Last year, the Board laid out several goals for the new Administration including Community Relationships, Special Education, General Education, Common Core, Technology and Facilities. The Administration has worked diligently on these goals, and as I attempted to highlight, made significant progress there. However, for our discussion tonight, I would like to focus on the last two items, **Technology** and **Facilities**, as these will be relevant to the 2017-2018 Budget discussions moving forward.

Our students already use technology in the classroom and when they take their annual Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC). Last year, the Administration proposed an initiative to integrate **Technology** into the curriculum and teaching that takes place in the classrooms.

The Vision was for Darien to become a 1:1 school district, grades 5-12 over the next 3 years. Starting this week, our Sixth Graders are receiving their Chromebooks to use in the classroom and at home. Next week, Seventh Graders will receive their devices and most of our Fifth Graders should have them before Christmas Break.

Much work has been done to arrive at this point, including Professional Development for our teachers, pilot programs, student digital citizenship training and updated digital use policy. The District is now at the point

of transition to a technology program developing 21st century skills in our students.

The rest of Darienite.com's coverage of the State of the Town Addresses:

- [The State of Darien as Seen in Four State of the Town Addresses Monday Night Before the RTM](#)
 - [State of the Town Addresses for 2016: Part 1, First Selectman Jayme Stevenson's](#)
 - [State of the Town Addresses for 2016: Part 2, Finance Board Chairman Jon Zagrodzky's](#)

 - **State of the Town Addresses for 2016: Part 3, Board of Education Chairperson Michael Harman's**
 - [State of the Town Addresses for 2016, Part 4: Planning & Zoning Commission Chairman John Sini's](#)
-

This roll-out is part of a 3-year long budget initiative to bring Technology to all the classrooms, comparable to the introduction of Smart Boards in the classrooms. Next year, the 1:1 roll-out will continue with the introduction of a tablet device at Darien High School while continuing the Chromebook deployment to the current Fourth Graders when they transition to fifth grade. The Superintendent's Proposed Budget will reflect the continued investment in our students' technology initiative.

Facilities will be another major consideration moving forward. For the past several years, the Board has focused on Facilities and in particular the need to address projected enrollment and classroom capacity. However, it has become apparent that this needs to be a broader focus, and I would like to speak tonight about **Infrastructure**, as there are in reality two separate issues.

The continued stress of creating and converting classroom space in our buildings, led the Administration to seek to develop a Masterplan for the District's facilities. This study was conducted by KD&G over the summer, and included both a Building Conditions Study (BCS) as well as a Facility Utilization Plan (Masterplan). The challenge has always been how to plan in the face of uncertainty regarding enrollment projections.

The proposed large-scale redevelopment projects that have been identified in town have the potential to significantly impact the student population, so it becomes even more important to plan how the District can address those potential impacts. However, the KD&G study also identified a range of maintenance requirements in the BCS study, which the Administration with Mike Lynch, Director of Facilities, is incorporating into a planning schedule for the Board of Education's Capital Plan.

The Board of Education has not finalized the current project list, we hope to have that discussion tomorrow at our regular Board Meeting, but KD&G has identified significant maintenance that the District will need to plan for over the next few years.

The official October 1, 2016 enrollment, excluding the ELP Pre-Kindergarten program, was 4,722 students K-12, which represents a decrease of 45 students over last year's projection of 4,767 students. The current projection for 2017-2018 has a slight decrease of six students over current enrollment.

Like this article? ...

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

However, total enrollment does not tell the whole story. At the elementary schools, classroom capacity remains an issue, with the number of sections at our elementary schools at the current level of 118. At the same time, our temporary portables are coming at the end of their service life, having been refurbished at least once. Darien High School will be facing a capacity issue when the current seventh grade class enters in fall of 2018.

Previous locker room conversions have provided added classroom capacity, but cafeteria and storage needs have not been increased. The Board's Capital Plan will mostly likely include a recommendation for a cafeteria expansion, with the goal of combining it with changeover of the stadium turf this summer.

The Masterplan is still being discussed at the Board's Facilities sub-committee meeting and has not been presented to the full Board yet, but it is evident from the KD&G study that in particular, Ox Ridge Elementary School is in need of significant maintenance upgrades. These costs might warrant a reconstruction project option instead, which could allow the Early Learning Program (ELP) to be housed in a single facility. Such a facility would relieve enrollment pressures at two of the Elementary Schools, which currently house the ELP.

These discussions are still in the preliminary stage and the Board has not opined on the matter, but I feel obliged to make this body aware that there is a potential for some major infrastructure projects, regardless of the outcome of any of the proposed developments in town.

The goal of the Board and the Administration is to develop a Masterplan that will incorporate the needs of our students and educators to provide the excellence in education we come to expect. It will also need to incorporate flexibility in capacity as well as preserve the structure of our neighborhood elementary schools, the team-based middle school and our successful high school.

Forty-six percent, or almost half of our current DHS Seniors were enrolled at one of our five neighborhood elementary schools when they started Kindergarten, and I believe that shows the trust and belief in our

schools that our parents and students have.

Here's the video of the RTM meeting from Darien TV79 (lasts 1 hour, 20 minutes):

[RTM State of The Town 12-12-16](#) from [Darien TV79](#) on [Vimeo](#).

The Board of Education thanks the RTM and our community for supporting our school budget every year. This year's Superintendent's Budget will build on the experience gained last year, continuing the zero-based budgeting philosophy and the single budget session schedule.

Our Superintendent will present the budget book structure and proposed budget on January 5th, kicking off the Budget Season. The Board expects to review the full budget book on Saturday, January 7th starting at 8:30am (snow-date Jan 21) including a discussion of all Responsibility Centers (RCs) and Question and Answer sessions.

The Darien Board of Education invites all RTM members, elected officials, and community members to join us at 35 Leroy to hear first-hand our school district leaders explain their financial requests for the 2017-2018 school year. The Board of Education hopes the community shares our commitment to support what we value.

On behalf of the Board of Education, we would like to thank and acknowledge a number of people:

The Board extends a special thanks to all our parents, volunteers, and donors who contribute so much to our children and to our schools. Over the past year, the support of our community, the RTM and Town officials have helped the District continue to move in a positive direction.

The Board would like to thank the staff at our schools and our Central office. We entrust our children to them every day and we need to acknowledge the outstanding job they do in educating the young people of Darien.

We would like to acknowledge the various volunteer organizations that support and enhance our students' success and wellbeing, whether in the classrooms or after school programs. The Board thanks you for your generosity and hopes to continue the successful partnership with the Administration.

Personally, I want to thank my fellow Board members: Vice Chair, Mrs. Betsy Hagerty-Ross, Secretary, Mrs. Sarah Schneider-Zuro, Mr. Michael Burke, Mr. David Dineen, Mrs. Christa McNamara, Mrs. Katie Stein, and to introduce our two new members Mrs. Jill McCammon and Mrs. Tara Ochman.

Darienite

News for Darien

<https://darienite.com>

It is a privilege to work with this exceptional group of volunteers, who contribute countless hours to the welfare of our schools. This Board continues to have the well-being and education of Darien's children at the heart of every decision it makes.

To the parents of all Darien Public School children: The Board of Education and the administrative team continue to make strides to move the district forward. One of the core goals of our Board of Education and our Administrative team is excellence in our educational system for the children of Darien. Our schools exist for our children and the Board expects everyone involved to have our children's best interests at the forefront of their minds.

Finally, on behalf of the Darien Board of Education, we wish you and your families a joyous Holiday season, and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Editor's note: This article was published at 12:15 a.m., Tuesday. The time stamp has been changed for layout purposes on the home page.