



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

**CDSP General Meeting
April 11, 2024, 10 a.m.
At the Board of Education**

In person: Joanna Walsh, Crystal Hill, Byrne Pozzi, Carrie Vomacka, Jessica Levey, Christina Kreuz, Caitlin Cahill, Adrienne Kelly, Beth Lane, Kelly Scallon, Caroline Jennings, Katie D'Acunto, Cameron Sokolik, Kathy Jabara, Kate Kaufman, Daisy Strauss, Vanessa Donatello, Lauren Adkins, Amy Reid, Lauren Swenson, Whitney Ranson. Heather Druge & Laura Pesce Gray (Music for Youth), Sarah Woodbury (Darien Foundation).

Meeting called to order by Joanna Walsh at 10:07 a.m.

Vote to approve the minutes from March 7, 2024. Motion to approve by Joanna Walsh. Beth Lane, First; Lauren Adkins, Second. Passed unanimously.

Presentation from Community Partners:

Heather & Laura (Music for Youth)

Music for Youth is a 501c3 volunteer run group with 50 years of bringing music to students. They rotate yearly between band, strings and chorus and bring artists for all students to experience. These professional groups collaborate with our students. PTO annual contributions go directly to students centered activities.

Sarah (Darien Foundation): Executive Director of the Darien Foundation visited to thank PTO's for past contributions and solicit a donation for next year. Darien Foundation was founded by school parents in 1998 to introduce technology into our schools (originally Darien Technology Foundation); the first grant was awarded in 1999, \$140,000 teacher training grant. The partnership with Darien Public Schools has culminated in a \$1.5 million donation to our schools over the last 25 years.

Co-Chair Updates:

Ox Ridge and Hindley Principals have been hired. Christopher Melillo, who is currently the Superintendent of Newtown public schools, will be the new Ox Ridge principal. Ross Cooper, currently the assistant principal of an elementary school in Chappaqua, will be Hindley's new principal. Both men will begin their positions on July 1st.

Anonymous Alerts went live at the end of March at DHS and MMS. Parents and students have been offered presentations on the app. MMS has some kinks to work out for students to understand the purpose and intent. Responses from administrators are immediate.

The last Day of school and graduation were announced by BOE. The last day of school is Friday, June 14th which is a half day. Graduation is set for June 13th. Seniors do not need to return to school; rain date is

June 14th. MMS graduation will be the 12th and elementary schools are determined by the principals but will likely be the week before.

The curriculum committee voted to change the pathway for 8th and 9th grade English. They will eliminate the 8th grade advanced class in the 25/26 school year. They will change the 9th advanced to 9th grade Honors (weighted more heavily in their GPA); students will be allowed to waive in if they are not automatically placed. 8th grade is changing because students who have waived in (even when not placed in) have benefited from the advanced material; they are increasing rigor for all 8th graders so they are better prepared.

Appropriations:

The excess cost reimbursement has been set, by the state, at 66.7% (DPS budgeted for 70%, which was originally considered conservative). The ECR is a pool for all schools within the state; and the reimbursement fluctuates based on the number of schools submitting requests for reimbursement. This year's submissions were much higher than anticipated, thus the lower percentage returned to Darien. The BOE will approach the BOF for an appropriation of roughly \$150,000.

Transportation appropriation: Rich Rudl and his team originally proposed bringing SE bussing in house to decrease spending overtime, with an initial cash outlay to purchase the vehicles. After presenting the plan to the BOF and hearing their questions and comments the district went back and reduced the number of buses to add sprinter vans and has reduced their ask to \$750,000. This appropriation was approved on Tuesday night by the BOF. The district will begin the process of purchasing vehicles to be operational in the 24/25 school year.

Security: The BOE is asking for a \$1,000,000 appropriation for security; details have been discussed in executive session so the public won't know what the project is. The BOE is attempting to bring all 7 schools up to the same security standard. The Board of Selectman has not voted on it yet but once they vote it will move to BOF and then RTM.

Proposed policy Changes by the BOE:

Public Comment: the communications sub-committee is looking at putting limits on public comment during BOE meetings; the policy states that the board can decide to do this at each meeting or for a particular topic but doesn't need to. CDSP does not agree with this policy as public comment is the only opportunity for our parents, teachers and students to voice opinions. Additionally, the parents who participated in the district focus group voiced concern that the district is not listening to them; this would be reinforced if their time was eliminated or cut short.

Meeting start time and end time: Start time to 7pm and end time 10/10:30. With a 2/3rd's vote of the board they can extend the meeting.

At the previous BOE meeting Dr. Addley commented on the state mandated School climate survey, which is coming out soon for grades 3 – 12. This will be administered every year. Parents can choose to have their children opt out of the survey. DPS are using an outside company – if parent's want to see the survey they must come into the BOE and sign an NDA; they cannot have a cell phone with them; these regulations are set by the company administering the survey.

Budget: Tuesday night the BOF discussed and voted on the BOE budget and voted to cut \$2,000,000. In addition to this cut, Rich Rudl recommends a more conservative ECR rate, and some fixed costs need to be adjusted. Overall, they will likely need to adjust the budget by \$2.4 million.

Dr. Addley and Rich Rudl will create a list of recommendations; on May 7th they will present the list to the BOE (special meeting); CDSP will receive those materials on May 6th, the BOE receives them on May 3rd. They will discuss each line item at the regularly scheduled BOE meeting on 5/14. They will vote on the changes at the May 28th meeting. There will be three opportunities for Public Comment (7th, 14th and 24th). The RTM vote is on May 13th; they can vote to accept the \$2 million reduction or vote to increase the cut. The BOE has until June 30th to accept their budget and if they aren't able to they must use the 23/24 budget. Joanna and Crystal will provide a blast to each school on the day they receive the materials.

Officer Updates:

(Special Education):

- Shirley Klien hosted a workshop on PPT invitations with all secretaries; all will now include standard wording offering meetings in person or on zoom.

Libby Cook (Treasurer):

- 2023/2024 Forecast: Expect to come in on budget. Slight savings for Quickbooks and Zoom due to changing payment plan. In generally, we have a very lean budget with not a lot of savings; our reserves to OpEx ratio for this year is .6x (we recommend PTO's have 1.0 - 1.5)
- 2024/2025 Budget: Two main drivers of expense increase: Accounting Fees and Website domain registration. Domain Registration renews every 2 years this is up for renewal in April 2025. Recommending PTO dues increase to \$850 (from \$800) - this will result in a Net Income of \$12 and a Reserve to OpEx ratio of .53.

Megan Thornton / Christina Kreutz (Budget):

- See update above.

Caitlin Cahill (Nominating/Special Projects):

- The nominating process is moving forward; the intention is to vote on the slate at the May meeting.

Byrne Pozzi (Communications/Community Partners):

- No update currently.

Diane Urban / Carrie Vomacka (DEI):

- DEI: Invitation to Book Club at Carrie's house on April 25th.
- The wire blurb advertising the May 7th belonging and identity talk hosted by Sasco will state that this is a PTO co-sponsored event, please post in your school news and not community section.
- The DEI committee is working with the district for consistent recognition of holidays and celebrations. They have used federal and state holidays as a benchmark.

School Updates:

- Hindley: Currently in the middle of Earth week. Author and illustrator Dan Santat visited yesterday and students and teachers had great feedback. The Girls Tall Small, with a Taylor Swift theme was very well attended. Preparations for the Hindley Happening, on May 11, are underway. Nominating is in good shape for next year. The new principal was announced and people are eager to meet him.

Holmes:

- Yearbook orders are due today. Dr. Dadd's last workshop is scheduled for April 30th Historically, they have not had good attendance to Yankees so switched to a professional soccer game. Field day is coming up and t-shirts have been ordered. Getting ready for K orientation. Having trouble getting contact information for incoming K families so they are asking the school secretary to send the information out.

Ox Ridge:

- The new principal has been announced; people were very impressed with his presentation during the interview panel. Bingo night was very successful and sold out. Book fair is next week. 2nd annual Ox rocks was a great event. Author and illustrator Dan Santat is visiting the students today. Upcoming events: Fun run fundraiser, Ox Ridge Hunt Club parent social.
- Nominating is moving along well; the treasurer is staying on for continuity and they have found a vice-chair.

Tokeneke:

- Passport night is tonight, bingo night and spring fling are coming up. Nominating is going well.

Royle:

- Alicia Dadd's last workshop is coming up soon. The Spring Fling was hosted this past weekend and was very successful, they raised over \$20,000 and are canceling the raffle. Getting ready for Teacher Appreciation week, book fair 4/26 – 5/2 and May 21st heritage night.

MMS:

- 8th grade graduation has been scheduled for June 12th so there is a full day and a half after graduation; the PTO is arranging a breakfast and a yearbook signing.
- 7th grade field trip was changed to Rye Playland; waiting on central services for sign off. Rye Playland is less expensive so people who have already paid will receive a refund.
- The group they had originally expected for a historical reenactment is not available, so they are now looking for Civil War re-enactors. MMS Enrichment committee is starting to work with the administration next year.
- There is a lady's night at OVME coming up as well as a Spring social on May 16th at 314 beer garden in Norwalk.
- The Rising 6th grade buddy program is moving forward.
- Teacher appreciation breakfast has been planned for May.

DHS:

- Upcoming events are the Junior and Senior prom in May. The rescheduled bonfire in the courtyard was well and will become a tradition moving forward.
- The PTO is currently planning a homecoming weekend for next fall – Hoho – will be a full weekend of events, including an alumni event on Friday, parade to football game and dance on Saturday. The date hasn't been set yet.

New Business:

None from the floor.

Motion to adjourn by Joanna Walsh at 11:34 am. Caroline Jennings First; Caitlyn Cahill, Second. Passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by Jessica Levey, CDSP Secretary.