

Town of Darien
RTM Education Committee
Meeting: April 29, 2013, 8:00pm

Attendees: Dennis Maroney, Lois Schneider, Peter Kelly, Sandy Savage, Arden Broecking, Susan Morrison, Barbara Thorne, Joan Davis, Christa McNamara, Sumathi Ebrahimi, Mike Burke, David Martens

Guests: Betsy Hagerty-Ross (BOE Chair) and other BOE members, Dr Falcone (School Superintendent) and other school administrators

Meeting Minutes:

Quorum for the meeting was met. Meeting commenced at 8pm

1. BOE and school administrators addressed each questions submitted by the RTM Education Committee on Jan 17, 2013. See below for questions submitted.
2. School administrators briefly discussed that they were working with the CT Department of Education and had hired a consultant to review the issues raised by the Darien parents relating to Special Education.
3. BOE stated that they were discussing the 6 day class rotation schedule and would report when those discussions were complete.
4. RTM Education Committee praised the BOE and school administrators for their recent #1 ranking in CT. A brief discussion was also held on the need for awareness of the seriousness concussions can have on all young people (athletic related or not).
5. Motion by Barbara Thorne to accept the 2013/2014 BOE budget as proposed. Motion seconded.
Results: Yea - 12, Nay - 0, Abstain - 0
6. Motion made by Peter Kelly to accept the minutes of Mar 4th. Motion seconded.
Results: Yea - 9, Nay - 0, Abstain - 3

Motion to adjourn by Lois Schneider. Motion seconded
Meeting adjourned at 9:20pm

Peter Kelly
May 6, 2013

Questions for Board of Education from RTM Education Committee

1. The budget proposes Language Arts and Math specialists for the secondary level. These resources are to oversee the curriculum, do teacher training and act as a resource to teachers. Our question is: "Have you been measurably successful at the elementary level that would warrant expanding to the secondary teachers?" Before expanding a position, there should be some evidence - other than anecdotal - that these positions have added value. Is there any data that you have collected on its success?
2. Remaining one of the best school systems in CT is costly. Could you please provide us with a brief analysis of the growth in number of classroom teachers, administrators, specialists and non-teacher/non administrators in Darien schools over the last 5 years?
3. With the increase in the last several years in the hiring of reading and math specialists have you seen an increase in testing scores? Do you challenge yourselves each year to see if the money spent for new teachers, administrators, specialists are a good use of funds? How do you determine if the schools are run well from an educational and administrative standpoint?
4. We are concerned about the school administrations understanding and control of the ELP budget. Is there a 3-5 year plan for the classrooms and budget needed for the ELP program? We believe that the pricing of the ELP program needs to be in line with other local pre-school programs.
5. Has SRBI lowered our Special Education numbers both in total number of students as well as lowering the spend per pupil by diagnosing earlier students with difficulties?
6. Kensett and The Heights will likely increase our school enrollment while our neighboring towns have seen a decrease/smaller growth in enrollment. Have you worked with the Board of Planning & Zoning to estimate the potential growth and impact zoning changes are having on our school enrollment? Do you have an estimate of the number of students per Darien home over the last 5 years?
7. Security of our school children is a concern and has been heightened by the tragedy in Newtown. We hope that the BOE takes reasonable steps to deter any act of violence in Darien schools. Adding physical security personnel is very expensive and exploring technology options along with the Darien police is recommended before assigning additional security personnel to the schools.
8. Facilities Costs - How often does the Administration review the potential cost benefits to using outside vendors for Food Service, facilities maintenance, grounds maintenance and other non-teaching related activities? We hope with the shared space of BOE and Town maintenance facilities that better coordination, sharing of resources and equipment will reduce on going and capital expenditures.
9. Generators and Darien schools – Generators are important to keep shelters and refrigeration units running during an outage. If the Mather Community Center will serve as a shelter, is the high school shelter also necessary? You are projecting to spend almost \$1million over the next several years upgrading generators in the schools. Is this necessary as a BOE budget item for the schools or is it a Town expense for emergency services? Have you worked with the Town to develop a plan for best use of generators for schools, food service, emergency services?
10. 46 Orton Gillingham training for Middle School and High School might be better spent training more elementary teachers to help with those who do not qualify for Special Ed but are not reading at a high level to help the borderline students.