

Dear members of the Boards of Finance and Representatives:

I am writing today to voice my support for the BOE's proposed 2024-25 operating budget. I understand that approving a 6.15% increase is unprecedented, but this is the only way to prevent devastating cuts to programs, services and staff that would be detrimental to Stamford's 16,400+ students.

Like you, I want to see Stamford succeed and thrive, and that is only possible if we invest in public education. Stamford currently ranks 13th in per pupil spending in Fairfield County, behind Greenwich (\$26,696), Westport (\$24,871), Darien (\$24,069) and New Canaan (\$23,054). Each of these well-funded districts requested FY25 budget increases similar to – or larger than – Stamford's. Danbury and Norwalk – the districts in lower Fairfield County most similar to Stamford – requested FY25 increases of 17.5% and 8.2%, respectively.

As you know, the district was forced to use federal COVID relief (ESSER) grants to preserve critical staff positions and student services after the BOF/BOR reduced the BOE's FY21 budget request by more than \$12 million in Spring 2020. In the intervening years, the BOF/BOR's approved budget increases did not keep pace with inflation, let alone prepare for the eventual expiration of the ESSER grants. Last year's approved increase of 3.88% was the largest in 15 years, but it was only enough to maintain existing programs and services in the operating budget and did not address the looming fiscal cliff.

**My third grader has thrived from the comprehensive academic opportunities provided by Stamford Public Schools over the last 3 years, and now my Kindergartner is on her own path for success as well.**

**We, like several others in our school, are an out-of-district family who CHOSE to send our children to**

**Stamford public schools for the robust I.B. curriculum offered at our school, diversity, and academic success rate.**

**As you know, 25% of the magnet student population must be from out-of-district to maintain magnet state funding.**

**If cuts were to be made to the budget, Stamford schools will no longer be a priority for those of us who have options**

**to choose other districts. Districts that support the developmental needs and safety of their students, as well staff,**

**would become more desirable to us, as well as residents who may choose to leave Stamford.**

If the BOF/BOR approves anything less than the 6.15% increase, it will mean a reduction in, or loss of, many programs, services, and staff that are integral to the operation of our schools and help enrich the academic experiences of our students, such as:

- **Instructional paraprofessionals in kindergarten classrooms**

**My daughter's paraprofessional is VITAL not only for her academic and social success, but also for classroom**

**safety due to unforeseen incidents occurring. The younger children who were toddlers during the beginning of covid**

**need more support than ever and the >15:1 ratio for a classroom is no longer acceptable due to these demands.**

**Kindergarten is the foundation for each student, teaching the basics of how to actually be a student, as well as the**

**educational content needed to read and write effectively. If you want a successful school district, which will drive**

**more residents and ultimately tax dollars, YOU NEED TO SUPPORT THE YOUNGEST STUDENTS.**

- Instrumental music in our elementary schools

**My third grader is already VERY excited about his ability to play an instrument next year. Playing musical instruments bring not only joy to so many children, but support the development of motor skills, self-confidence, patience, coordination, independence, and strengthens concentration skills – all of which are needed to be a successful student and adult.**

- High school elective course offerings

**High school students need a diverse course selection!**

- High school specialized programs (i.e. Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Early College Studies, Agriscience)

**Parents and students choose your schools for these programs. Schools outside of Stamford or the private route will be considered as an alternative to obtain what they need.**

- School safety workers

**THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE!!! WITH THE AMOUNT OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL THREATS AND INTERNAL CONFLICTS AMONG STUDENTS, SECURITY SHOULD BE INCREASED AND NOT CUT IN ANY WAY! ALSO, THE NUMBER OF IRATE PARENT SITUATIONS THAT I HAVE EXPERIENCED THIS YEAR TOWARDS STAFF IS GETTING OUT OF HAND. SAFETY WORKERS ARE NEEDED!**

- Parent facilitators (often the first point of contact for families when they have questions)

**Our parent facilitator is vital for our large number of Spanish speaking families at our school. She is an integral part of our school community and if she was no longer available as the first line of contact for that community there would be a lapse in communication which could impact SEVERAL students and families on varying levels. This role is necessary as well!**

I implore you to approve the BOE's proposed operating budget AS SUBMITTED. As an out-of-district parent of Stamford Public Schools students, I believe that failing to fully fund the BOE's proposed budget will be detrimental to our students. Please show your constituents that you support the students, staff, and families in our public schools.

**Brande Phillips-Quarshie**  
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