

To: The Board of Finance, Board of Representatives, Board of Education, Dr. Lucero and Mayor Simmons:

My name is Brook Manewal. My husband and I are proud parents of four Stamford Public School students. Our older two daughters attended Davenport and are now in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Scofield. My oldest is excited to head to Stamford High's IB program in the fall. We have another daughter who was lucky enough to attend Davenport's preschool before the program was terminated and is now in fourth grade, and a son who is currently in the first grade. My husband is a proud Black Knight, class of 1996, and even had the same fifth grade teacher as my oldest daughter. I have been treasurer of Davenport's PTO since 2015. We are a Stamford family through and through.

We are strong supporters of the public school system. My husband received a top-notch education which allowed him to advance to Yale University and then UCLA law school. I graduated my own public high school in Massachusetts and went on to attend NYU. My children are currently thriving in this school district, from both an education and a social/emotional perspective. We believe in what Stamford Public Schools have to offer. Yet, unfortunately, as is the case with many public school districts, the necessary funds to continue growth and forward momentum are difficult to maintain. A school district the size of Stamford is basically a small city in and of itself and the necessary budget to maintain that small city is significant. Which is why I am compelled to send this letter.

Our Superintendent, Dr. Lucero, has presented a budget reflecting Stamford Public Schools overall needs. When COVID hit, no one knew what to expect. When something of that magnitude happens, you band together as a community to support one another. We were proud that our schools did their part. That said, what was sacrificed in our schools was by no means unnecessary. Rather, the cuts were made in order to help our community navigate the uncharted waters of a global pandemic. Some necessities were subsidized by the temporary relief of funds and were able to be added back in. However, those funds are expiring. Other cuts have yet to be reinstated. Funds within our city need to be reallocated in order for our schools to be made whole again.

Dr. Lucero and SPS are trying to make sure our students, teachers and staff are getting what is necessary for our students to thrive in their learning environment. Anything less than what has been requested leaves us further behind. I believe our public schools are a reason families choose to move to Stamford. The school system was certainly an important reason for why we chose to raise our family in this city. However, continuous budget cuts and asking families to fight for every penny our schools receive year in and year out is going to inevitably drive families away and discourage new families from moving here.

Dr. Lucero's current budget request is not a suggestion in need of your further revision or a top line estimate with room for reductions. Dr. Lucero and her team have done the extremely difficult work of parsing out necessities and make sure every dollar allocated to our school budget is money well spent. While the number may be high, it is by no means wasteful.

SPS is not alone, as we see many neighboring communities facing critical shortfalls in their budgets if budget requests are not passed. Danbury asked for a 20% increase, Bridgeport asked for a 22% increase. Norwalk was able to pare their ask down to 8.2%. Dr. Lucero's request is modest in comparison to these neighboring communities, asking only for a 6.43% increase. Dr. Lucero is being fiscally responsible in asking for only what is absolutely necessary to keep SPS moving forward and not falling behind.

Please do your part. We know this may mean raising the taxes of the residents of Stamford. However, even a \$1,000 annual increase in taxes breaks down to less than \$3/day. Aren't our kids worth \$3 a day? Its time to stop making our children shoulder the burden of our community. I believe maintaining and growing the type of diverse learning environment that has enriched the lives of so many kids thus far, including mine, is worth every penny!

Sincerely,  
Brook & Matt Manewal