

April 2, 2024

Dear Chairman Freedman, Vice Chairman Rinaldi, Mr. Alswanger, Ms. Burwick, Mr. Mahoney, and Mr. McMullen:

My name is Kathryn Gentle and I am a Science Teacher at Westhill HS. I am a Stamford resident for the past 21 years and I have worked for Stamford Public Schools 5 years. My children have been attending SPS for the past 12 years. I am writing today to request that the Board of Finance approve the Board of Education's FY25 proposed operating budget as submitted.

As a Stamford Public Schools teacher and parent, I know firsthand how crucial this funding is to the future of our district. Consider the following:

- Stamford has a larger percentage of high needs students (65%) than our neighbors in Greenwich, New Canaan, or Darien. High needs students require significantly more support to reach their academic potential; support that is only possible through adequate funding. Despite this, our average spending per-pupil lags behind Greenwich, New Canaan, and Darien and many other communities with a lower percentage of high-needs students.
- Without adequate funding, many of the programs that challenge our most academically motivated high school students will be in jeopardy. Stamford Public Schools currently offers more Advanced Placement courses than any other district in the state, and specialized programs such as the Academy of Finance, Early College Studies, the High School of Business, International Baccalaureate, and Regional Agriscience offer opportunities for our students to distinguish themselves academically. We should be investing to grow these programs, not worrying about whether they will be funded from year to year.
- Like districts around the country, Stamford's instrumental music program was decimated during COVID. Over the last two years, our dedicated music teachers have worked hard to start rebuilding the K-12 instrumental music program. Reducing the budget would put this progress at risk, despite research showing that playing a musical instrument supports academic achievement. For many of our students, their only opportunity to learn a musical instrument is through the school music program.
- Our non-certified staff are integral to the successful operation of our schools. Teachers rely heavily on parent facilitators to help us connect with families in their native language, and to help families navigate the complexities of a large urban school system. Security staff not only monitor for external threats, they help manage student behavior. Losing these and other critical positions would put an added burden on teachers at a time when we are still trying to help students recover from COVID-era learning loss and a rise in mental health challenges.

- The BOE's proposed budget already reflects a net loss of 52 full-time equivalent positions, including 35 teaching positions. Absorbing additional cuts beyond these would be detrimental to students.

I understand that you have to balance many competing priorities. However, ensuring that we have the funding to provide every child with a quality public education must be a priority for our elected officials and our entire community.

I hope you will take the above into consideration when you vote on the BOE's FY25 proposed budget.

Respectfully,

Kathy Gentle

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Science Department  
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*"We have an infinite amount to learn both from nature and from each other."  
John Glenn*