



Good evening. My name is Carol Kennedy and I live at 19 Stephanie Lane. I have both a 1st and 5th grader at Ox Ridge. Along with Robin Nelson, I am the Budget Co-Chair of the Council of Darien School Parents and would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening on the Superintendent's Proposed 2020-21 School Budget.

First, thank you to Dr. Addley and team for presenting what we believe to be a fiscally responsible budget that carefully balances our student's interests with a rising cost environment. The CDSP supports the Superintendent's Proposed 2020-21 School Budget. We believe everything included is critical to allow Darien schools to continue to operate at their current level of excellence.

We also want to highlight Dr. Addley's prioritization of quality of services for our students, and we strongly support the need for these investments. Specifically, we want to thank the administration for the 4.9% increase in Curriculum RC 19, which includes additional funding for new textbooks, Curriculum Development, Professional Development, and ELL resources. In particular, we support the rollout of the new Math in Focus program for 5th grade and grades 6-8.

With that being said, while we are thankful for a budget that protects the necessary "baseline" budget items, we would like to request that the Board of Ed and District continue to emphasize the need for ongoing investment to enrich the education of our students, even in the face of budget headwinds. In 2017-18 Operating dollars accounted for 17.4% of total expenses, but in the 2020-21 budget they have fallen to only 15.9%.¹ Operating dollars represent the "students' budget" and it is discomfoting to see this percentage decrease. This percentage decrease is directly correlated to rising healthcare and personnel costs absorbing a bigger piece of the pie. We would argue that fixed costs are likely to remain static or may even increase further in the future. **As a community we cannot be afraid to build budgets that take into account increased fixed costs and move beyond fulfilling just our students' baseline needs.** We encourage the Administration and Board to strongly advocate adding back to the budget where they feel there is a true need. For example, we join Mrs. Stein in support of funding the "Project Lead the Way " equipment and materials at the middle school, rather than deferring this budget item until the 2021-22 school year. This initiative is an important part of our STEM program and needs to be supported.

¹ Based on the RC Summary Expenses, presented on 1/4/20, in the Darien Board of Education Superintendent's Proposed Budget 2020-2021.

In closing, we would like to thank Dr. Addley, the Administration, and the Board of Ed for your time and for your dedication on behalf of our students. We are hopeful that the new strategic planning effort will create a roadmap for implementation of future initiatives to ensure that we keep Darien's schools at the forefront of our DRG. Sustaining excellence requires strategic vision and ongoing expenditure in curriculum, professional development, and programming. Even when we are faced with rising healthcare and pension costs, or decreased excess cost reimbursements, we must continue to invest in both our existing assets and new initiatives.

Thank you.