

**From:** [Porfilio, Christine](#)  
**To:** [Board of Representatives](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Letter Regarding Proposed cuts to Stamford's Education budget  
**Date:** Monday, May 18, 2020 12:37:08 PM

---

Dear Mr. Quinones,

Thank you for all that **you** do to support educators in the Stamford community. I am writing as a Stamford **resident, taxpayer and a reading teacher** at K.T. Murphy Elementary school for the **past 5 years**, urging you to please reconsider the proposed cuts to education. Education, as you are aware, is powerful and important to the success and future of the city of Stamford. As a reading specialist, my role is of utmost importance to the future of Stamford's most vulnerable population, those children that are struggling in reading and receive daily reading intervention.

During this time of distance learning, myself and all of the reading specialists within the district, have worked tirelessly and “harder-than ever,” to ensure that **all** students in our schools, **especially those receiving Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) and are not proficient in reading**, are continuously engaged and receiving daily live instruction in reading and phonics. We have worked relentlessly, for the past 2 months of distance learning, sometimes till midnight to create google slides, activities, games and to prepare lessons for our students. We have differentiated instruction and have coached and co-taught with our classroom teachers to ensure that students are getting **exceptional instruction** at home and would undoubtedly continue to **make progress** and **not regress** during their time at home. Moreover, we have spent countless hours reaching out to our students and their parents to “check-in” and help them navigate the incredibly complicated technology utilized. We have **unselfishly done** all of this **because we love our jobs and our students!!** Nevertheless, we have been overjoyed by their unbounding support and have found that our students and their families are extremely appreciative of the hard work that teachers are doing during this most difficult of times.

Please realize that these **unnecessary cuts** would be devastating to them as well as all members of the Stamford community. I beg you to reconsider and to use the \$14 million surplus from last year and money

from federal funding and/or the CARES act to fund the operating budget so that teachers, students and their families, are not penalized for Covid-19. Instead, let's allow our teachers to continue to be the “**heroes**” in our community and praise them for all of their diligence and hard work during this difficult time for our community.

Respectfully,  
Christine Porfilio  
Instructional Support Teacher (K-5) at K.T. Murphy

**From:** [Grant, Jennifer](#)  
**To:** [Board of Representatives](#)  
**Subject:** Letter to the Board  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 19, 2020 11:27:26 PM

---

Dear Members of the Board of Representatives,

I am writing to you as a teacher, parent, and lifelong Stamford resident. I attended Stark, Dolan, and Stamford High School. I graduated number one in my high school and college graduating classes. I chose to attend the University of Connecticut because it has one of the best schools of education in the country. Friends and family members would always ask me, "Why don't you go to an Ivy League college and become a doctor or a lawyer? Why do you want to become a teacher?" Knowing that I wanted to raise my family in Stamford, I became a teacher so that I could ensure that the Stamford my children would grow up in would have the same educational opportunities that I had.

I'm not writing about my Stamford upbringing to brag about my accomplishments or even to rave about the excellent K-12 education I received from the Stamford Public Schools (SPS), but rather to say that now, almost 20 years later, I'm finding myself saying similar sentiments defending SPS. Today, as a mom of two young boys that will be entering Stamford Public Schools, I'm faced with friends and family members that say, "Why don't you move to Trumbull or Easton? The schools there are so much better." It pains me to think that I would have to leave my beloved hometown because millions of dollars of funding could be cut from the education budget. It sickens me to think that my children will not have some of the same programs that made my K-12 school career so wonderful. It is getting harder and harder to convince my husband that we should stay in Stamford. I'm sure many other taxpayers are thinking the same thing.

My youngest son was born with congenital nystagmus, a rare eye disorder. As a visually impaired child with delays in milestones, I was hopeful knowing that our outstanding SRBI (Scientific Research Based Intervention) teacher at my school would help to address his particular needs in speech, PT and OT, and accommodations for his specific learning needs. However, her position is one of many on the proposed cut list. Since he was a baby, my son has had a love for music. I was hopeful that he would learn to play an instrument with our amazing instrumental music teacher and be a member of the school band, but yet again, music programs, as well as art and physical education are on the cut list. So as you can see, it's getting harder and harder to convince my friends and family, and myself, to stay in Stamford.

In the words of Board of Education member Mrs. Jackie Heftman at the May 19 BOE meeting, "We need to all work together. This is a year like no other year." Indeed we do. Our generation has never had to endure a pandemic. Nor have our teachers ever had to engage in distance learning with little to no training with very little notice while simultaneously taking care of their own children. Even though our jobs have become increasingly complex and difficult, we are not asking for additional increases. We are merely asking for the opportunity to continue serving our students and community stake-holders by providing the support that our children need. We are asking to keep teaching positions and programs that will continue to address the mind, body, and heart of all of Stamford's students.

Sincerely,  
Jennifer Jimenez Grant

*Jennifer J. Grant*  
*Title I Reading Teacher*  
*Stillmeadow School*

(203) 977-4788

[jgrant@StamfordCT.gov](mailto:jgrant@StamfordCT.gov)

**From:** [Pingelski, Lauren](#)  
**To:** [Board of Representatives](#)  
**Cc:** [Phanos, Diane](#)  
**Subject:** Letter regarding proposed cuts to Stamford's budget  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 19, 2020 9:25:09 PM

---

Dear Members of the Board of Finance, Board of Education and Board of Representatives,

I am the Board of Education Reading Teacher at K.T. Murphy Elementary School here in Stamford. I have taught in Stamford for 14 of the past 16 years. The two years I was not in Stamford, I was teaching in Georgia while my husband was serving in the United States Army. When looking for places to live and start a family, I chose to return to Stamford because I **believed in the school system** that I attended myself. When I reflect back on my time as a student in Stamford, I fondly remember teachers and administrators that I have enjoyed lasting relationships with and some that I still keep in touch with to this day.

As the Board of Education Reading Teacher, I not only serve the needs of the many struggling readers in my building, but I also collaborate and coach teachers on a daily basis on how to best meet the academic and social emotional needs of our students. Moreover, I push-in to classrooms to support students and teachers as well as pull students out who benefit from a quieter small-group setting. I, like all reading teachers in the district, spend countless hours analyzing data and creating lessons that meet the individual needs of my students. I am constantly trying to catch the students that are most at risk. These students are put in small groups and many, with my extra support, never have to enter the Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) process. Nonetheless, the majority of the students that do enter into the SRBI process, make significant gains and are then exited after time. Without this process, the classroom teacher would never be able to support the many needs of the students in his/her classroom. The fallout will end up being more money put into special education because more students will fall further and further behind.

When COVID-19 happened, Stamford teachers **embraced** digital learning and have worked tirelessly to not only maintain student's knowledge, but to also teach new skills. We learned technology at the same time we were converting our lesson plans digitally. We have worked countless hours beyond our contractual hours to stay connected to families and students while offering supports well beyond the classroom. **With fewer or no reading teachers at all, children will fall further below-grade level** as well as not get targeted, differentiated small-group phonics and reading instruction that they so

desperately need.

I hope you take into consideration how detrimental this cut will be for students and parents. Isn't that, in fact, the reason behind there being a desk placed in the middle of the Board Room? The Board is supposed to make all of its decisions with the students in mind. Is this cut what's best for the student that sits at that desk? This year more than ever reading teachers will be needed to fill the gaps when we return to school in the Fall, whether that be to a physical building or digitally. I was one of almost 800 people that attended the Board of Finance meeting on Monday evening and frankly it is very disheartening to hear the Mayor speak of parades being cancelled and leaf clean- up rather than what we can do to help alleviate this 15 million dollar deficit. Why are we not using the federal money from the **CARES Act and allocating the 14 million in surplus funds** to the operating budget to solve our problem? I say "**our problem**" because this is **all of Stamford's problem**. Stamford **educators** are not alone here nor should they be asked by members of the Board to come up with different ways to eliminate the deficit. **We all must do better. We must come up with another solution.** Educators and students should not have to bear the brunt because we are on the frontlines. Let's all be a part of the solution to the budget that does not involve cuts that will negatively impact children. Our students are the **future** of Stamford. Let's continue to give them a bright future; let's not only be the city that works, but the city that works together to make this happen.

Sincerely,

Lauren Pingelski  
BOE Reading Teacher  
K.T. Murphy Elementary School

From: [Wood, Stacey](#)  
To: [George, Andy](#)  
Cc: [Simon, Courtney](#); [Santasiero, Sarah](#)  
Subject: To our fellow Stamford Public Employees-Proposed BOE cuts  
Date: Tuesday, May 19, 2020 10:24:52 PM

---

## **An unforeseen pandemic, its potential impact on students and a set of SPS reading teachers behind them:**

It is March 12, 2020; for all intents and purposes, a day in a normal school year. Reading intervention is going as planned. There are data collections on a daily basis, Literacy How is inserting the most up to date reading research practices which are evident throughout the school. Both ELL and non-ELL students alike are receiving one form of Tier 1, Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention across grades K-5 from our B.O.E reading teacher, IST K-2, and IST 3-5 reading interventionists. Each interventionist is fitting 6-8 groups into a school day. Every student identified as in need of intervention by the Literacy Team, classroom teacher and SRBI coordinator receive a personalized focus of instruction used by each intervention teacher to target their specific, small group instruction. In this particular school, the Literacy Team serves two roles. One is to evaluate student strengths and weaknesses, identify the student's focus of instruction, then to plan and execute this instruction while tracking progress through on-going data collection. The other role is to serve as the SRBI coordinator for the school and each identified student. Every 6-8 weeks they meet with classroom teachers and/or parents to discuss each student's progress and to develop and track a plan of action. Are they on a trajectory to exit out of SRBI so

that intervention is no longer needed? THIS is our goal. These are the supports provided by our IST K-2, IST 3-5 and B.O.E reading teachers who are simultaneously serving as SRBI coordinators. How can we lay this work on our classroom teacher's shoulders? By eliminating these positions, we are losing the structure that we have created to support students *before* the special education process begins, often preventing the need for a child to enter special education. This is the foundation of the Response To Intervention process we have thoroughly infused into our education system in the past 15 years.

Fast Forward.....

It is September 2020; for six months, students have been without the secure structure of a formal school day. They are reentering this world with so vastly different home experiences and educational gains and losses and have experienced individual and collected trauma. Teachers are motivated to take on their students *however* they arrive, they've been waiting for this day, but they can't do it alone. Returning will be its own unprecedented event, but this time, classroom teachers and students must do it all without the expertise of the interventionists who they have relied on. There is no doubt that there will be gaps in development that cannot be closed by one classroom teacher alone. When they have questions about their students, who will they consult with? When they need to submit paperwork for a student who is substantially deficient, to whom will they turn? When a student's *need* is above and beyond a teacher's daily small group work



and data collection is proving the next tier is essential (in a classroom of 25 students), how will the student receive the extra tiered instruction? How will the teacher close the gap without an expert in that area that is needed to further them towards their academic goals in these critical elementary school years? As Joseph Torgesen explains in the article [Avoiding the Devastating Downward Spiral](#), the skill deficit between average and below-average readers can be largely erased with appropriate early intervention. Research proves our intervention is absolutely essential. A classroom teacher cannot do this alone. Without it, students fail because we fail them. The gaps which were already hard to fill, grow wider with less support.

Our students deserve better. It is their right to be provided with the support they need. To give less in a time where we *all* need so much more will come with permanent consequences. We must give our teachers and students what they require as we navigate our school world once again.

Respectfully,  
Sarah Santasiero *IST K-2 Reading Teacher*  
Courtney Simon *B.O.E Reading Teacher*  
Stacey Wood *IST 3-5 Reading Teacher*  
[Julia A. Stark Elementary School](#)

*Julia A. Stark Elementary*

**From:** [Lisa Butler](#)  
**To:** [Freedman, Richard](#); [marylourinaldi@stamfordct.gov](mailto:marylourinaldi@stamfordct.gov); [Cerasoli, Frank](#); [Alswanger, Geoff](#); [Mannis, David](#); [Ryan, Kieran](#)  
**Cc:** [Lucero, Tamu](#); [BOE - Elected Officials](#); [Rosenson, Valerie](#); [Winterle, Cynthia](#); [Martin, David](#); [Lutz, Diane](#); [Cottrell, Megan](#); [Michelson, Bradley](#); [David Watkins](#)  
**Subject:** Don't eliminate these positions at Stamford High School  
**Date:** Wednesday, May 20, 2020 9:08:50 AM

---

How do we cut money from the school budget when the schools have been in need for several years?

During these times when budget cuts are being looked at, I felt it was important to contact all of you who will be voting on and cutting budgets that directly impact education. I have two children in Stamford High School and over the last five years the school has built its reputation due to the leadership of Principal Ray Manka. Parents are now sending their kids to Stamford High School. They are **“Choosing Stamford”!**

**This is not the time to cut from the education budget.** Enrollment is expected to increase with the closing of Trinity Catholic High School, the closing of Stamford Academy, students that move into the district that are fleeing New York City [New Yorkers flocking to CT, Realtors say](#) and/or parents who can no longer afford private school. We need a strong public school system in Stamford. We need to maintain the same growth in our school buildings that we are experiencing in our growing city.

**This is not the time to cut the school budget.** The proposed cuts that would have a huge impact on the SHS community and students would be loss of our Athletic Director who has gone above and beyond what his job description entails. During the pandemic, Chris Passamano's role switched to making sure all SHS students had technology to be able to distant learn and food as 46% of our high school community are dis-advantaged. Chris goes above and beyond his everyday role in making sure the neediest students have their needs met, whether that be by enrolling them in the after school Athlife program or being a mentor to someone that needs that extra support. How could we even possibly feel that one AD, Dick Cerrone from Westhill could manage two schools. This would also be a dis-advantage to Westhill High School as well. The list of AD's responsibilities include: securing transportation to games, coach eligibility, working with the security team to ensure security measures are in place, assist with standardized testing, player eligibility, press/social media, Knight life which is a program that offers student athletes tutoring assistance to keep them eligible. So ask yourself, how would a school environment be vibrant with someone splitting these tasks among two schools?

The other incredible loss would be the Dean Of Students, Mr. Tom Agosto. Communication among the school community has increased tremendously with the newly launched monthly newsletter that Mr. Agosto sends. In addition, he was also an intricate part on revamping the

successful “Shadow a Knight” program where 8<sup>th</sup> grade students would shadow a current 9<sup>th</sup> grade student to see if SHS was the right place for them. We can’t lose the momentum on these initiatives put in place. In addition, Mr. Agosto’s job would go beyond the normal hours to make sure that kids in need were mentored and had their needs met. Mr. Agosto also is also responsible for attendance and appeals, school honor ceremonies and honor roll, securing the school lunch grant to allow students to have meals after school, DOMUS knights, ensuring clubs and organizations in the school are implemented, 9<sup>th</sup> grade orientation and acts as the middle school liason.

This is not the time to cut the Athletic Director and Dean of Students from Stamford High School. We need to build on the momentum that was started when Principal Manka took over. We can’t afford to go backwards! We need the community to rally behind these potential cuts and we need the Mayor, Board of Finance, Board of Representatives, and Board of Education to support the growth of Stamford Public Schools. We need **STRONG SCHOOLS!**

We want Stamford families to stay in Stamford. We want them to be active community members in our public schools. We want people to **“Choose Stamford”** because we offer so much. We can’t go backwards, it will take years to get to where we are at now.

Lisa Butler (203) 253-1044

[lmbutler@optonline.net](mailto:lmbutler@optonline.net)

[Lbutler@butlerassociates.com](mailto:Lbutler@butlerassociates.com)

**From:** [Eydelman, Michelle](#)  
**To:** [Board of Representatives](#)  
**Cc:** [Phanos, Diane](#)  
**Subject:** Letter Regarding Cuts  
**Date:** Wednesday, May 20, 2020 3:44:06 PM

---

Dear Board of Representatives,

Thank you for allowing educators to speak out and voice their concerns regarding the proposed cuts to the Board of Education's budget. I was born and raised in Stamford, CT and always knew I wanted to be a teacher in STAMFORD. From a young age, I would sit my dolls in front of my chalk board and teach them. I would take my sister's *already* corrected school work and re-correct it. I even brought home my first grade word study skills and taught my grandparents English when they moved to America. I modeled after some of my favorite teachers that taught me as a student in the Stamford Public Schools system. I loved going to school and I am so proud to be a teacher right here in my hometown!

I am disheartened by the possible cuts to education to make up for the \$15 million deficit to the cities' budget. It is beyond belief that during this unprecedented time when teachers are the "heroes" in our community, that we are the ones being forced to make an unfair decision – to deal with possible position and program cuts, or endure salary cuts and/or salary freezes for the next two years.

As a classroom teacher, I am extremely worried about my students. I work among a number of professionals who have been on the *front lines* during this pandemic and I cannot imagine any of us losing our jobs. I currently hold a Masters in Elementary Education and I am almost done with completing a second Masters (sixth year) in Remedial Reading. My dream is to become a reading specialist. By cutting literacy specialists/SRBI/support positions, you are stripping me of an opportunity I have worked so hard for. Think of the sacrifices I have made to ensure my students are achieving and will achieve their highest potential, while worried for my own future.

Over the past nine weeks, we **ALL** have worked tirelessly to ensure that our students are getting the education they deserve. I have stayed up until 11:30 PM just so I can call a parent because I know that she finishes working the night shift at 11:00 PM. Additionally, although my school day may end at 3:45 PM, it actually does not. I have baked with students through Google Meet, played virtual math games, and most importantly made sure to keep them smiling through their distance learning experience. I have also worked above and beyond to create materials to differentiate instruction and continue being a positive role model to students during such tough times. This has been unsettling and challenging. **PLEASE** understand that the cuts you plan on making in Stamford will not make it any easier for the children.

These massive cuts would be **devastating** to the students as well as all members of the Stamford community. What we should be doing is allowing our children to continue getting an excellent education and let educators remain as the "heroes" in our community, praising them for all of their persistence and hard work during this extremely vulnerable time!

Respectfully,  
Michelle Eydelman  
Grade 3 Teacher (KT Murphy)

**Miss Michelle Eydelman**  
Grade 3 Teacher  
K.T. Murphy Elementary School

**From:** [Toni Fox](#)  
**To:** [Board of Representatives](#)  
**Subject:** Budget  
**Date:** Wednesday, May 20, 2020 8:37:45 AM

---

Good Morning,

My name is Toni Fox, and I have lived in Stamford all of my life. I have been a teacher for SPS for the past 20 years. Needless to say, I am not thrilled to hear about what is happening with the BOE budget, especially at a time when teachers are working harder than ever. However, that is not the topic of my letter. My question is this, why is Mayor Martin worried about the 4th of July, and other activities that draw large crowds? We are in a pandemic. Cancel the fireworks, Live at 5, and parades indefinitely. The city needs the money that funds some of these activities more than people need to be standing less than 6 feet away. I live on the East side, and see the crowds that walk into the beaches to watch the fireworks. Many of those people are drinking, and we know that they will not be socially responsible. Use the money somewhere else. I understand that these activities are made to lift people's spirits, but during this time, I feel that safety, and our budget, should be the number one concern.

Thank you for your time,

Toni Fox  
10 Willowbrook Place  
Stamford, CT 06902

**From:** [Sundararajan, Raj](#)  
**To:** [Board of Representatives](#); [Dauplaise, Daniel](#); [George, Andy](#); [Burke, Jennienne](#); [Tarzia, Nicola](#); [Altamura, Michael](#); [BHamman@stamfordct.gov](#); [Heftman, Jackie](#); [Pioli, Jackie](#); [Lucero, Tamu](#); [Mayor's Office](#); [Winterle, Cynthia](#)  
**Subject:** Budget Cuts and Teaching Jobs  
**Date:** Wednesday, May 20, 2020 9:11:31 AM

---

Respected Mayor Martin, Members of the Board of Finance, Board of Representatives, Superintendent Lucero and the Board of Education:

Our district philosophy of providing an education that cultivates productive habits of mind, body and heart in every student is currently being challenged with the suggested serious cuts. Due to the suggested cuts students will lose:

- A sense of support when their struggles in reading are met by small-group instruction from a qualified and experienced teacher.
- Self-esteem, risk-taking efforts, and a sense of success which are possible in small group instruction under the watchful eyes of their reading teacher.
- The benefit of Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) programs administered by certified reading teachers who can monitor their reading skills and adjust instruction if the students are not progressing.
- The vital support of reading intervention which they will need in the Fall more than ever. Despite effective distance learning it is not a substitute for the routine of direct instruction. We can anticipate students' regression and we need to be there more than ever in the Fall .

We are now asked, if the Boards can't cut teaching positions, where else can the cuts come from?

Can they come from-

- The reallocation of the surplus of \$14 million from last year to the operating budget to offset the cuts and job losses.
- The reallocation of the \$3 million that is ear-marked for the demolition of the old police station, which is not a high priority, and have the city continue to maintain it as is.
- The Thanksgiving parade budget which results in generating overtime for other city



workers.

- Big spending items like Literacy How, and consultants for professional developments.

Additional funding sources through

- Increasing the mill rate of property taxes by 1% or 2 % since we are expecting an influx of population from New York where the taxes are much higher than Stamford.
- All the union jobs in the city who could be asked to take a pay freeze too.
- Funding from the CARES Act from which the State of Connecticut received \$1382 billion
- New grants written and the existing alliance grant money (which funds some of the Instructional Support Teacher positions)
- More economic stimulus money passed recently at the Congress

With all the above options available, it is premature to think of cutting reading jobs. Teachers do not deserve to go through the “job cuts”, “pay freezes”, and “salary reductions” every year. Teachers are to be respected by the community for working with children, caring for their learning, and shaping them to cultivate productive habits of mind, body and heart. I urge the Board of Finance, Board of Representatives, Superintendent and the Board of Education to not cut teaching jobs or freeze teacher pay. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Sincerely,

Raji

Sundararajan

Instructional

Support Teacher (3-5)

Hart Magnet

School

Raji Sundararajan  
IST 3-5  
Hart Magnet Elementary  
Stamford Public Schools