

To: The Guilford Board Of Education
From: Dr. Julian Henley

After attending several recent meeting, I was made aware of the structural, health, and design issues affecting Adams and Guilford HS. I am not the most knowledgeable of all the specific facts pertinent to the upcoming decisions facing Guilford in regards to its schools, nevertheless, I wanted to take this opportunity to voice my opinion and preference.

I have been in Guilford close to 15 years, and came here because of what it had to offer as an environment for raising kids. There is no question in my mind that we should offer our kids the most inviting environment and facilities to further their education. If we as a community do not care enough about optimizing their learning environment, why should they, or future citizens, care about education or our community?

If I had to send my kids to school in temporary structures, water leaks, poor ventilation and other problems well documented by the task force, I would probably opt for Choate or Hopkins. If I have to absorb the tuition costs, it makes no sense to stay in Guilford if the kids cannot get good education in a suitable learning environment. If the situation continues to deteriorate, I would even consider moving to Madison, simply to benefit from their improved schools and test score results.

I recently heard at the energy meeting that 90% of CT schools are more than 30 year-old construction. If our economy and standing on the world market is sliding, it is because of our lack of investment in the skill and education of our work force. If we fail to invest in our education system and environment conducive to learning, I believe we are for a long and unrelenting economic slide. With aging structures, ignored environmental energy considerations, and dysfunctional ergonomics that may have been adequate 30-40 years ago, we risk of failing to prepare our Guilford raised children to compete in the world that has entered the 21st century of information, nanotechnology and biotechnology. I would not like to see Guilford ranked with third world countries as a measure of its educational opportunities.

How long do you think you will retain good teachers if our learning facility becomes a dump of stains, leaks, and molds? How much tax money will the town have put in to keep up with repairs and lack of energy efficiency? I would not like to put band-aids on bleeding wounds.

We have a new rec center, we have a new library, we have a new police station; but when you want to attract new home buyers to Guilford it is the state of the schools that makes the cut. With the internet, many people will have greater choices of location for their jobs. They can do their work online, but not their daily living and educating of their kids. Towns will need to invest in their infrastructure to attract taxpayers to want to live in their town. We who live here want to have the community infrastructure which people find desirable.

I reviewed some online comparative data about Guilford schools. In the lower grades Guilford ranked in the top 13th percentile as compared to other CT schools at same level. What was concerning is that at the higher grades Guilford slid by double digit in its comparative rank. Did the above average kids go someplace else or is the teaching environment below average? If the same profile of kids moves through our Guilford school system why do they slide back on their testing scores as compared to other CT communities? I am not writing this to discuss theories of learning, I am sure you are better versed at such than I am. I am writing this to support and embolden you to make the right decision for our town and community given the specific problems identified by the task force.

If the schools are a problem with aging structures, than I am for building new ones. The future tax cost is less than future tuitions in other towns, and less than the cost of moving houses. The cost of not addressing the issue today is even greater for Guilford in the years to come. Some of the costs will be tangible and measurable, whereas the greater cost to our community will be in the intangibles, if we allow our inactivity to constraint our future and that of our children.

I do understand that it is a daunting and expensive task to seriously upgrade both schools even if we stagger by a few years. This task comes before us now, after years of deferral and procrastination. The architectural and structural experts have made it clear that a serious and costly problem is facing us with the current state of our schools. If some medical experts found that you have a “little cancer” that is likely to grow, spread, and overwhelm you, would you wait till it gave you pain and symptoms or would you bite the bullet and act now. We now recognize that there may be a little cancer growing in our school structures. Do we act decisively now and address the issue or do we wait till things get worse and more expensive to correct.

There is no doubt in my mind that taking a bold and decisive stand on behalf of our Guilford schools will yield dividends for our town in the future. “Yes We Can” change our apathy toward our future. We can raise the money, we can allocate a significant portion of the school build budget and direct it back to the Guilford work force and subcontractors. We can build an energy and ergonomic “showcase” school. I hear there is money and regional fame behind such a “showcase” endeavor.

There is no Prozac for our collective apathy, only a shared vision can bring us together and vanquish inactivity. I invite you to open your minds to the choice of investing now in our future and that of our children. You are citizens of Guilford, you are our Board of Education, do not waffle, take stand that invests in our collective future.

I do not expect the members of the Board of Education or the Board of Finance to make the rebuilding of our schools happen. That will lie in the collective conscience of Guilford citizens. What I do hope for, nevertheless, is that the most informed and wired members of our community and town leadership can form a unanimous recommendation and stand behind what is the right thing for our town, irrespective of whether it is politically expedient.

This is not about partisan politics, those who tax and fund, and those who cut taxes and cut services. This is about our town, our kids, and our future. In the world of education where “no child is left behind” I do not wish to live in the “town that was left way behind”.

Thank you.
Julian Henley