

To: Members of the Guilford Board of Education, Tom Forcella, Superintendent

From: Kari Henley, 530 White Birch Drive

RE: Feedback on School Facility Issue:

Thank you in advance for reading this letter. I have not had the opportunity to meet most of you in person, and want to begin by saying I am grateful for your service on behalf of our children in your role as BOE member. Secondly, I want to chime in that I don't envy any of you one bit for serving this term! I recognize there is a very big task before you, and one with myriad complexities and ramifications for this town - to a scale we have not seen in decades.

I have enjoyed living in Guilford for eight years. I have four children, one entering Adams Junior High and 3 others attending Guilford Lakes Elementary this Fall. We have been thrilled so far with their educational experience at the elementary level. However, I, like so many other residents, had no idea the scale and breadth of problems our upper level schools held, until I was able to tour the schools, attend a task force presentation, and engage in extensive conversations with community members who are very active in this issue.

I shared shock, dismay and frustration, along with many fellow residents, upon hearing the scope of issues before us. Quite frankly, I immediately began pursuing other options for my eldest son to attend a private school or magnet school. In the end, we are "sticking it out" with Guilford public schools, for now, and I am highly motivated to get involved and make a change. Those in my generation of parents with children at the elementary and middle school levels, it is very sad to know that our children will at BEST be attending school through some sort of repair, renovation or new construction project, and at worst, attending schools that so badly need repairs that health concerns are now a factor, test scores are falling rapidly, school pride is nil and alcohol and drug problems are on the rise.

I won't presume to expand on the statistical data of the task force, as I am not as fully aware of the details as you are. I do know it is not an easy answer. I also know that as a citizen of a town I take great pride in, I will not settle for anything less than a solution that is truly progressive, comprehensive and forward thinking to take us deep into the future.

The option that makes the most sense to me is to opt to build two new schools, beginning with the High School and immediately following with Adams. If I were to be considering purchasing a very old house- one that does not meet codes, has a lot of problems of which I can only estimate at first look, and has very little appeal structurally- I would probably opt for taking it down and rebuilding from scratch in order to have full control of design, energy efficiencies and predictable stages of construction.

I also know passing something of this magnitude is overwhelming with the fairly limited matching funds that come from the state, as well as the difficulties in encouraging citizens to pass anything that requires an increase in taxes, even though it will not come into effect until 2012, and the increases are a deductible expense.

When I moved to this state after living in the very progressive states of Colorado and California, I was very surprised to see how individually each town in Connecticut defines itself, and the reputation each town holds. I had no idea what it meant to live in "East Haven" versus "Madison" and the ramifications of each- but now I do.

Guilford still holds a very distinct and coveted reputation as being a highly desirable place to live. People hand pick to live here when they have the means and flexibility to choose many other places. When asked why people choose to move here, many will state the obvious such as the Green, the friendly people - and often say they move here because of the quality of the education. Can we afford to jeopardize this reputation and lose these potential tax payers to Madison, Hamden, Woodbridge or other surrounding towns who boast newer and better schools?

I believe this argument is imperative to the entire town's future, and not just the parents of the nearly 4,000 children who are attending our schools. We cannot afford to hedge, ignore or placate this issue any longer. Many residents I have spoken to are looking for leadership right now. They want to know what to do. They want to get behind a strong solution and are organizing efforts to do just that.

I had the great pleasure in participating in the TEAM Guilford events, and felt incredibly proud to be a part of a town that invests so much in itself to rewrite a town covenant, create town conversations about our strengths and challenges, and then take action from the grass roots to make a difference.

Perhaps we can ride on the coattails of this extraordinary experience of the town coming together, and leverage this very important issue to the good sense of our citizens. It is time to support moving Guilford into the forefront of the shoreline communities with state of the art facilities for our children, and a reputation that will attract a tight knit community for many years to come.

Thank you.
Kari Henley