

June 15, 2020

Dear Members of the Woodbridge Board of Education (WBOE),

I am writing you today regarding the proposed 2020-2021 school budget and potential cuts to the school social worker position at Beecher Road School.

Over the past several months, I have attended numerous meetings and conversations regarding the potential decision to eliminate the part-time school social work position and replace it with a full-time school psychologist position. My understanding is that part of the argument for this decision is that a school psychologist can do what a school social worker can do but a school social worker cannot do what a school psychologist can do, specifically special education testing.

The assessment that a school psychologist can do everything a school social worker can do is belittling, uninformed, and neglects to recognize the two years of specific graduate education and subsequent licensing social workers require to do their job. In fact, licensed psychologists cannot fill positions that require licensed social workers for this exact reason. I would like to highlight the fact that no social worker has agreed with this assessment, nor does the National Association of School Psychologists' (NASP) Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services which recommends:

- 1 school psychologist for every 500-700 students; and
- 1 school social worker for every 400 students

According to the NASP each school psychologist should be able to carry a caseload of 65-91 students.

Despite the fact that Beecher's two school psychologists already exceeds the NASP's own recommendations for psychologist to student ratios, the focus continues to be on increasing this resource yet further. It has been acknowledged that the school psychologists currently provide services and supports that can be provided by the school social worker. If that is truly the case, the school should consider increasing the social worker position to full-time so that the school psychologists can concentrate on the activities that cannot be done by others in the school.

NASP and our own school psychologists acknowledge that while both social workers and school psychologists can work with general population and special education children, school social workers specialize in working with the general population and school psychologists specialize in working with special needs children. With the discussion of an increase of yet further psychologist hours, there has been an implication that school psychologists could and would meet the needs of the general population; however, in each of these meetings the conversation has quickly turned towards the needs of special education students and away from the needs of the general population. In fact, there has been virtually no discussion regarding the needs of the general population. This highlights the concern that the focus of this position will be special education, and that the needs of students in the general population would be an afterthought.

Finally, both national data and the experiences of other local school districts who have made this decision, such as Avon, argue against the decision to eliminate the social worker position and replace it with a school psychologist. The ONLY data that has been referred to regarding this need is historical data within our own school district. The proposed structure would result in psychologist to student ratios that significantly exceed those recommended by the NASP, and thus suggests that our current structure and systems are not working efficiently. At the very least the inefficiencies of our current structure and systems should be assessed before we take resources and support away from the general population in order to meet the needs of our special education population.

In closing, I respect and recognize the important and difficult decisions that the WBOE will need to make to ensure the fiscal stability of Beecher during the 2020-2021 school year. It is my hope, however, that as you move forth in the process, your decisions will be based on as much research and evidence as possible.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erin Williamson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Erin Williamson

Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Mother of a rising Third Grader