

Dear Anne-Louise, Colleen, and SEPAC,

Through many conversations that I have had with community members and educators, I understand the challenge of navigating the educational waters when you have a child with special needs. The challenges are amplified ten-fold with remote learning, yet our children need direct and specialized instruction that is consistent and intensive. I believe, legally and ethically, it is essential for students with special needs to continue to receive services even if learning from home.

As I've said many times in my public statements, I prioritize transparency and collaboration between parents, School Committee, teachers, and administrators. It is the job of every school system to meet the needs of ALL students. SEPAC is a valuable organization, because we know that when parents advocate for their children, it is proven that the result is better schools for all children.

Over the past few months, I have had conversations with about 100 parents. A common theme that has emerged is concern about special education in Wayland, particularly with regards to how the needs of students with dyslexia are met. Our town must invest in training special education teachers to be able to assess and provide structured, code-based instruction, and authentic literacy instruction that is transferable to the classroom for our readers who struggle, as reading is an essential life-skill.

Improving special education is ultimately better for all kids, even those without IEPs. Since all students benefit, the argument that some make, that money spent for few students (those with special needs), does not hold water. When we, as a school system, become more adept at meeting the needs of all students, and have more tools in our tool belts, many students benefit from learning through specialized programs and techniques.

As a parent of a child who has had difficulty learning to read within the parameters of our standard, whole-class literacy curricula, your frustration is felt, and the need to build capacity is now. Meeting the needs of Special Education students is not negotiable. It is legally and ethically necessary. IDEA mandates that schools provide the accommodations, modifications, and instruction for all students to learn.

Though there will always be students who require outplacement, if we can, as a district, build increasingly robust and diversified capacity to meet the needs of our students on IEPs, less children will need to be outplaced, which is a huge cost to the district and more resources and

professional development can occur within our district. The more inclusion that we can provide, the better. For the 10 year period from Fiscal Year 2008 through 2017, Wayland's outplacement tuition costs increased 126% and the associated transportation costs increased 58%. The costs for fiscal year 2019 is approximately \$2,600,000 for outplaced tuition and \$500,000 for associated transportation. This should be our rallying cry to invest in training and developing resources for special education within Wayland schools.

While special education costs can be high, it is important to look at research and understand how our money is being spent. What are our out-of-district costs? Can we develop programs and hire specifically trained special educators that are certified in structured reading programs like Orton-Gillingham or Wilson and behavioral therapists like BCBA's, so that we can keep more children in their home district, while providing them with the quality education they need and deserve? This, in the long run, would save money by providing solutions in-house. It is in the best interest of all of our children.

Most importantly, as I've said throughout this campaign, the voices of parents and educators must be heard. It is of paramount importance that our district hears and values the parents of students with special needs. Though there are surely supportive educators in Wayland, I understand how it feels to be your child's only advocate. I too have felt sad, helpless, and frustrated. In my vision for our schools, the School Committee and entire school district should partner in the educational advocacy of all of our children. Every child in Wayland is our child. No child in Wayland should fall between the cracks. I believe that if all constituencies work together in creating a shared vision for our schools, we can be an even stronger school district.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or to discuss these matters further.

All my best,

Chris Ryan

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