

Q: What Does Watchung Need More, Better Schools or a local library? A: YES!!

Some concerned parents have raised a good question, of whether library spending could funnel money away from the school budget. **In fact, the two budgets (school and municipal) are not at all in competition for the same dollar.** And better education in Watchung is supported by improvements in the schools *coupled with* a strong local library.

The Watchung School Board and the municipal government are separate entities, with their own expense budgets, each one subject to its own two percent annual cap for operating expenses. Each also has its own capital spending budget which are not subject to that cap. A library construction bond would be municipal capital spending, and would not affect the school board budget. Capital expenses can be bonded, similar to a mortgage but at very low rates.

If we want our children to maintain excellent test scores—a common metric for defining an excellent school—then we need to invest in education beyond the 180-day 6-hour school schedule. School-related services after hours and during school breaks conducted by the professional staff from the library system—including literacy support, tutoring, ESL (English as a Second Language), for both students and parents, is an important way in which the borough can improve school scores. One need only stop by the library on a school-day afternoon to notice tutors and students working at tables. In fact there isn't currently *enough* space to accommodate the tutor/student groups that want to meet.

Watchung can well afford both good schools and a good library. And the cost of library reconstruction would come out of a capital budget the borough municipality manages, **separate from the operating and capital budgets of the Board of Ed.**

Adding \$58 per average household to the Borough's capital plan (possibly \$29 if we were to get state-matched funding) will not break the average household and would in fact add greater value in terms of services, property value, and educational benefit.

There is an increasingly strong connection between a strong library, solid test scores, highly-rated schools, and stable property values. Additionally, people are seeing that through a local library, the borough can play a critically important role in their children's success in school. Just ask our highly-achieving students in Watchung; they will likely tell you they have used the library! The school libraries alone simply are not accessible enough or broad enough to support what they need. And of course the children are only one piece of how a library increases the quality of life in a community: parents and seniors who use the library also grow in their own education, which enhances the children's chances of success, through the expanded skills of the adults.

Please question whatever you hear people saying about the library issue around town, and ask for substantiation from those spreading rumor, fear, and outlandish cost estimates and illusory promises. **Ask for the concrete facts behind the rumors.** Building cost estimates should come from professionals familiar with the industry who are willing to back up their quotes, not from some unnamed builder in a different field. Analysis of the current building was done with engineering studies, going deeper than 'it looks good,' or for that matter, '*doesn't* look good.' Search out the facts and form your own opinion about what is good for the future of Watchung!

We invite you to check our website, SaveWatchungLibrary.com for regular updates.

Coalition to Save Watchung Library

A coalition of neighbors in our borough