September 30, 2024

Marlboro Township Public Schools
Marlboro Township Board of Education
1980 Township Drive
Marlboro, NJ 07746

Sent via Email:

Dear Members of the Marlboro Township Board of Education, Superintendent Ballone, and Board Secretary Caravello;

We are writing to express our serious concerns regarding the integrity of the Request for Proposal (RFP) process surrounding the selection of The YMCA of Greater Monmouth County for before and after care services in the district. Information recently brought to light raises critical questions about the fairness and transparency of the process, and the trustworthiness of the Board's actions.

In our view, the process was marred by significant irregularities as well as a troubling disregard for the best interests of Marlboro families. The dramatic increase in costs associated with the new provider, the YMCA, compared to the long-standing provider, Champions, was not appropriately communicated to the public, nor were the pricing comparisons accurately represented. The Board overlooked the significant financial impact of the YMCA's monthly billing model, which requires families to pay for before- and after-care during school closures. In contrast, the weekly model used by Champions allows for more flexibility, minimizing unnecessary charges for families.

BEFORE AND AFTER CARE

2024/2025 RFP RATES

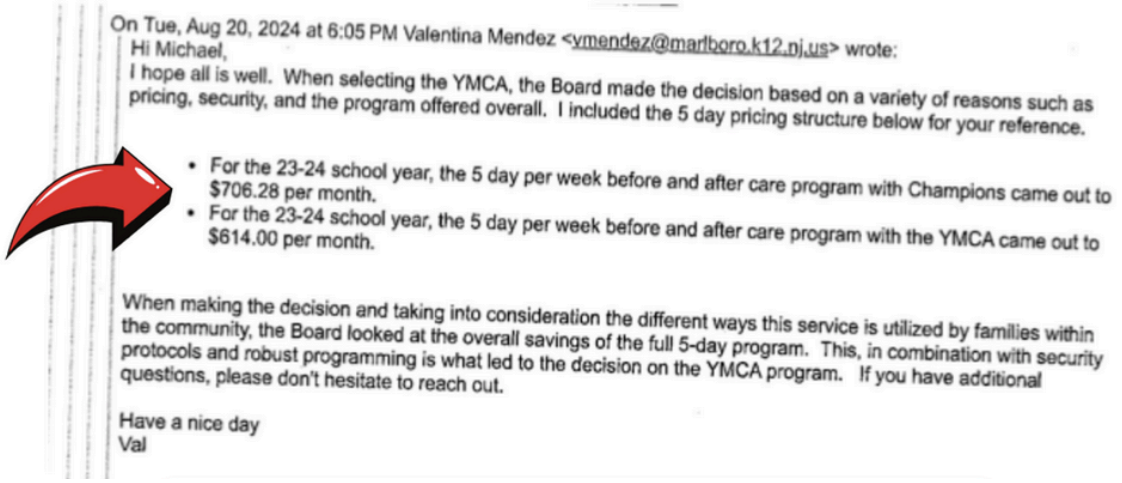
VENDOR	5 DAYS/WK NO SECURITY BEFORE & AFTER	5 DAYS/WK WITH SECURITY BEFORE & AFTER	5 DAYS/WK AFTER CARE & SECURITY	DAILY DROP-IN RATE
CHAMPIONS	$506.25	$506.52*	$365.80	$22
YMCA	$614	$830	$530	$25**
RIGHT AT SCHOOL	$575	$745	$575	$40

FIRST THREE COLUMNS ARE MONTHLY RATES.

*NO CHANGE IN RATE - SECURITY INCLUDED BOTH PRICES

**RATE LATER REDUCED TO $20/DAY

Moreover, the deliberate omission of relevant cost details during public meetings and the misleading nature of email communications to the community and among the board itself, several of whom appear to have been omitted from certain of those emails, undermines the ethical standards that should govern this Board at all times. It appears that certain board members and administrators actively worked to conceal the true cost implications of the decision, comparing outdated figures in an effort to justify the selection of the YMCA over Champions. This kind of disingenuous obfuscation is a significant breach of trust.



On Tue, Aug 20, 2024 at 6:05 PM Valentina Mendez <vmendez@marlboro.k12.nj.us> wrote:

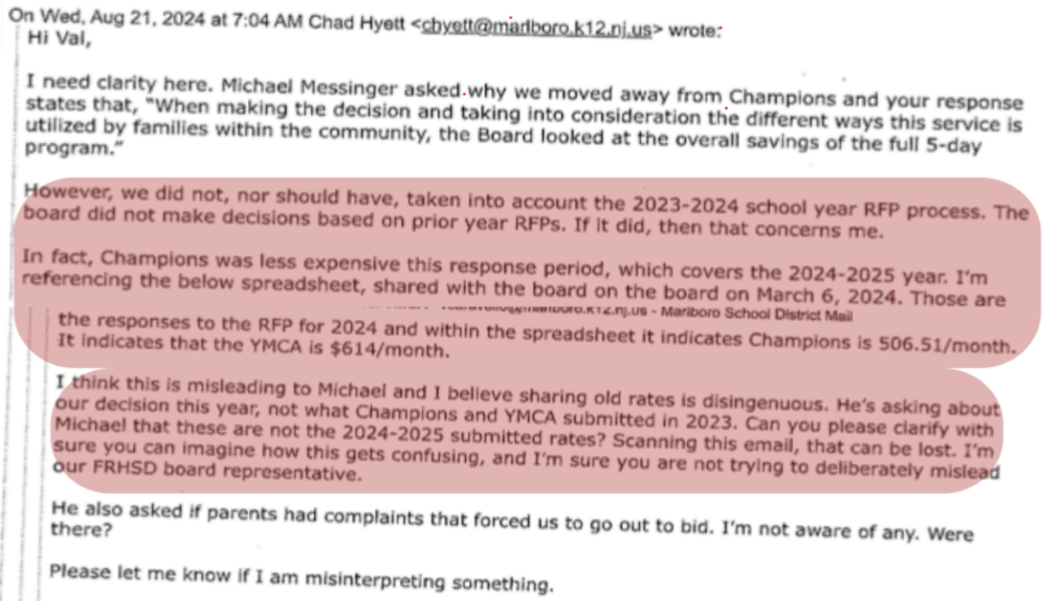
Hi Michael,

I hope all is well. When selecting the YMCA, the Board made the decision based on a variety of reasons such as pricing, security, and the program offered overall. I included the 5 day pricing structure below for your reference.

- For the 23-24 school year, the 5 day per week before and after care program with Champions came out to $706.28 per month.
- For the 23-24 school year, the 5 day per week before and after care program with the YMCA came out to $614.00 per month.

When making the decision and taking into consideration the different ways this service is utilized by families within the community, the Board looked at the overall savings of the full 5-day program. This, in combination with security protocols and robust programming is what led to the decision on the YMCA program. If you have additional questions, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Have a nice day
Val



On Wed, Aug 21, 2024 at 7:04 AM Chad Hyett <chyett@marlboro.k12.nj.us> wrote:

Hi Val,

I need clarity here. Michael Messinger asked why we moved away from Champions and your response states that, "When making the decision and taking into consideration the different ways this service is utilized by families within the community, the Board looked at the overall savings of the full 5-day program."

However, we did not, nor should have, taken into account the 2023-2024 school year RFP process. The board did not make decisions based on prior year RFPs. If it did, then that concerns me.

In fact, Champions was less expensive this response period, which covers the 2024-2025 year. I'm referencing the below spreadsheet, shared with the board on the board on March 6, 2024. Those are

[redacted] - Marlboro School District Mail

the responses to the RFP for 2024 and within the spreadsheet it indicates Champions is 506.51/month. It indicates that the YMCA is $614/month.

I think this is misleading to Michael and I believe sharing old rates is disingenuous. He's asking about our decision this year, not what Champions and YMCA submitted in 2023. Can you please clarify with Michael that these are not the 2024-2025 submitted rates? Scanning this email, that can be lost. I'm sure you can imagine how this gets confusing, and I'm sure you are not trying to deliberately mislead our FRHSD board representative.

He also asked if parents had complaints that forced us to go out to bid. I'm not aware of any. Were there?

Please let me know if I am misinterpreting something.

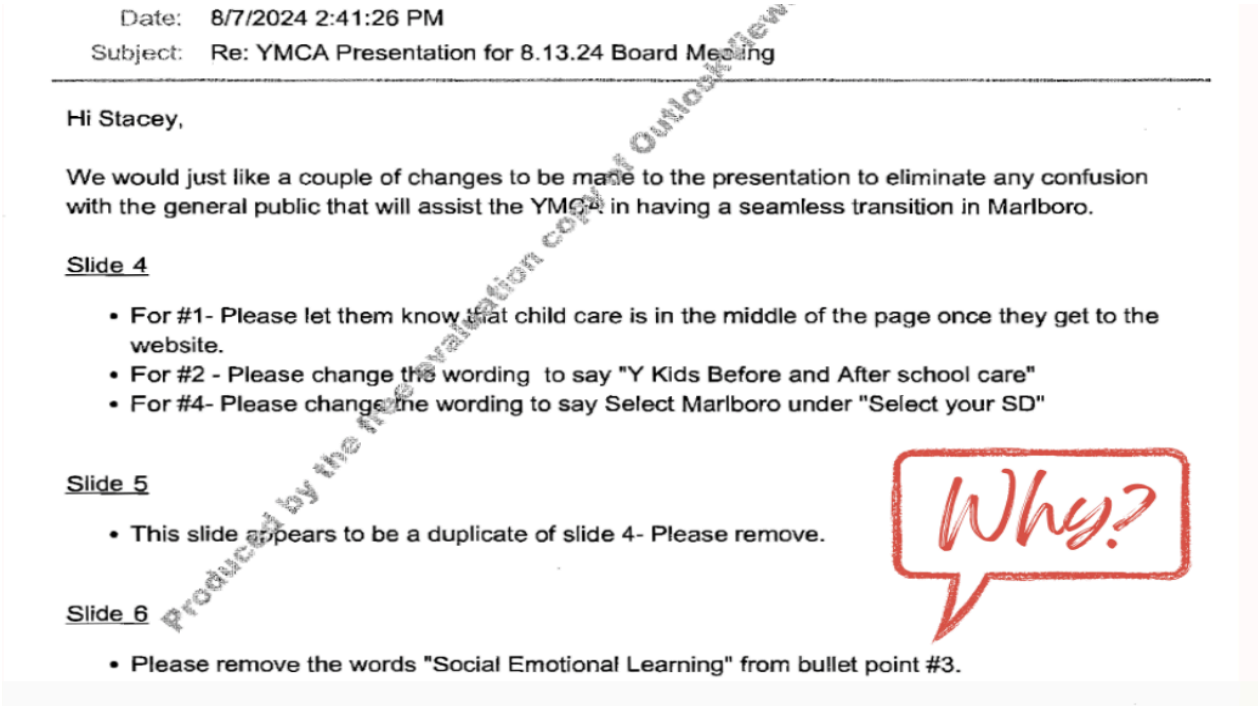
By prioritizing certain interests over the needs of the community, the Board has placed additional financial strain on many families, all while failing to adequately justify the move to a more expensive and less flexible provider.

Equally concerning are the apparent breaches of confidentiality during the RFP process and the potential negotiations with vendors outside of permitted legal parameters. In any RFP, it is critical that all vendors are on equal footing and no favoritism is shown, yet the actions here call that into question, raising concerns over whether the Board met its ethical obligations under New Jersey law.

We are also concerned that the Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG) was involved in the RFP process before the selection of a vendor. The inclusion of SEPAG, without similar input from other parent organizations, and without necessary confidentiality and conflict of interest statements, undermines the integrity of the RFP process. SEPAG holds no official role in evaluating vendor proposals, and its involvement was seemingly concealed from vendors. These actions compromise trust and accountability, both of which are critical to maintaining a fair procurement process.

We have repeatedly heard that the board emphasizes security as a key component to their decision. Yet from our reading of the proposals, the only difference between them appears to be the option of hiring a separate security guard—which is cost-prohibitive and not chosen by the board—or employing or using a dedicated staff member (unarmed and minimally trained) to sit at a desk. We encourage parents who rely on these services to express their opinions on whether this truly represents enhanced security or is simply a justification for the board's decision to choose a particular provider, regardless of cost. Furthermore, we want to understand who made security such a huge concern. A survey conducted by the District prior to the RFP asked “Do you believe that Champions currently provides a safe and secure environment for your child?” Of the respondents, 314 parents said “YES,” they did believe that it was secure, while only 22 parents answered “NO.” This implies that the District or certain Board members were imposing their views on the process while misrepresenting the views of the families that relied on the before and after care services provided.

Finally, we cannot help but point out an email in which the District instructed the Y to remove a reference to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) from Slide 6 of the YMCA presentation, but not from it’s actual curriculum. This demand reeks of censorship and pandering to specific viewpoints, notably those of Mr. Patruno, who openly raised concerns about SEL during an earlier YMCA presentation. This appears to have been a deliberate effort to hide the Y’s actual curriculum to appease him and those with misguided personal agendas, without regard for the welfare and development of students.



Date: 8/7/2024 2:41:26 PM
Subject: Re: YMCA Presentation for 8.13.24 Board Meeting

Hi Stacey,

We would just like a couple of changes to be made to the presentation to eliminate any confusion with the general public that will assist the YMCA in having a seamless transition in Marlboro.

Slide 4

- For #1- Please let them know that child care is in the middle of the page once they get to the website.
- For #2 - Please change the wording to say "Y Kids Before and After school care"
- For #4- Please change the wording to say Select Marlboro under "Select your SD"

Slide 5

- This slide appears to be a duplicate of slide 4- Please remove.

Why?

Slide 6

- Please remove the words "Social Emotional Learning" from bullet point #3.

The decision to switch providers will have long-lasting implications for the families who rely on these services, and the manner in which this was accomplished was, simply put, deeply flawed. We urge the Board of Education to rectify these concerns by immediately authorizing the issuance of a new RFP for before and after care services. This new process must include input from stakeholders, most importantly the parents who rely on these services, and a fair and even handed evaluation process. Anything less would be construed as just another attempt to cover up the flaws in the original process.

As residents of Marlboro and community members deeply invested in the integrity of our education system, we urge you to take these recommendations seriously. The Board must take responsibility for the decisions made and correct its lapses and mistakes. The public needs to feel confident that the Board they elected is acting in their best interests, free from conflicts of interest and undue influence. Accountability and transparency are vital components of this process.

We hope that steps will be taken to address these concerns in an open and honest manner.

Sincerely,

Brian Cohen, Jenna Corraro, and Nirav Kadakia