

Public Comments/Questions  
Board of Education Meeting of the Whole  
September 1, 2020

**Questions/Comments**

I have been a Palos community member for 16 years. A parent of children in the district for 8 years and I will continue to have children in Palos 118 schools for 7 more years. I am addressing the board as a concerned parent. My concerns lie solely with the 118-school board, how decisions are made and the lack of communication to our community.

Recent Palos 118 school board decisions that impact families and children along with a lack of clear and consistent communication have left me concerned. Plans have been presented and voted upon with little to no community input or public discussion. School board members have not opened up tough topics for debate and conversation. Decisions have been made for families and not WITH them. Timely, clear and transparent communication from our school board is lacking. We can do better. We must do better.

As parents we look to our school board for leadership and guidance. We expect that our board is making decisions representative of ALL members of the Palos community. This past year has been nothing shy of challenging for all however we are now at a turning point. A pivotal moment for the leaders of District 118 to be collaborative and inclusive in their plans and future decisions for our children and schools.

I ask you, the Palos 118 Board of Education to be more forthcoming, honest and transparent in your communications. I urge you to reach out and ask your constituents both parents and staff for their thoughts. Make that personal connection with those you represent. Offer this opportunity to openly collaborate on important decisions that impact the future of our children. Give all of your 118 community a chance to offer creative and innovative solutions to some of our greatest challenges.

**Answer:**

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and concerns with the Board of Education.

**Questions/Comments**

Hello Everyone,

I am here as a representative of the teachers and the Palos Education Association.

I wanted to express to the community, the School Board and Staff how the teachers feel about the events of the Spring, the Summer and upcoming Fall school Year.

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the school year was unexpectedly disrupted. None of us as educators believed that the disruption would end the school year.

Last March all our planning had to be adjusted and modified. I am asking the community not to judge the quality of education that students received because of the guidelines that we were mandated to follow, by the Governor and the State Superintendent. Palos 118 offers an excellent and rigorous academic program.

In fact, the teachers of Palos 118 went into overdrive to develop a manageable curriculum with zero prior professional development. There was no preparation for a pandemic, no preparation to completely change our mode of instruction. Even Zoom, at the time, was new to many. Teachers began to research and learn new educational platforms, new programs, scan textbooks, and prepare in a matter of days what normally took months of preparation.

The state of Illinois did not make that easy! The state of Illinois very publicly indicated that teaching should consist of reviewing of concepts, manageable expectations, and focus on maintaining connections with our students. Most importantly the directive specified that student's grades could not be negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Despite these statements our teachers continued to provide meaningful work and feedback. Our elementary teachers spent hundreds of dollars to deliver work to their students or to drive it to their homes, our teachers provided virtual opportunities to maintain connections, our teachers continued with their curriculum with adjustments. Our adorable middle schoolers did not hesitate to provide us copies of the governor's new directives!!

All clarifying questions were answered and support for students and parents, was provided. Our teachers worked all hours of the day, many answering emails and making phone calls into the late evening. It was not a break to be away from the classroom, it was heartbreak. Teachers continued to hope for a student return until the last day.

Our teachers want to be back in the classroom with our students!! Our teachers want to return to the buildings with our students. I am not saying it is without fear because we are all fearful.

This summer consisted of the Association, teachers and administration preparing for a return. Together with our Administration we began in June to prepare for a school opening. The Teacher's Association's stance was and is that "If it is safe to return to school the kids belong in school."

Along with the Administration this was the guideline that we followed. Dr. Scarsella and my team met weekly to discuss reopening plans and exchanged daily emails.

Our staff was surveyed in June and early August on their fears, solution, ideas, and insights to manage new state guidelines, and curriculum concerns. Our teachers provided over 18 pages of comments regarding concerns and suggestions on how to open safely. We were confident that we had a plan that ensured students return to school in a way that kept everyone safe. As a Union, safety for all was priority number one!!

Dr. Scarsella and I often had to make adjustments based on new guidelines put out by ISBE. Each of our school buildings developed a safety committee that worked out the logistics of reentering. It was a summer full of planning to return, but also of planning for a possible return to remote. Despite our hopes, The Illinois department of Health guidelines made reopening impossible.

Teachers fully understand that teaching beginning September 8th is a return to rigorous and meaningful education. Teachers want to provide a curriculum that ensures student growth and advancement. Teachers understand that we need to provide a schedule that provides students the best opportunity for this to happen. In our collaborative planning this summer we reviewed research on how students obtain optimum growth through our PLC guidelines. We took into consideration that students learn best in the morning and need an opportunity for feedback and follow up questions once they can process new information. We took into consideration attention spans and the possibility of virtual fatigue. The plan that was put together was developed throughout the summer in a collaborative, respectful environment in which student achievement was the focus.

Our school community should be assured that our focus is on excellence. Our teachers judge their own success by the success of our students. We teach in a district in which excellence is the normal. One only needs to look at our accomplishments for evidence. We find excellence in every classroom from early childhood to our eighth grade, every sports team, every band performance, and our effective special education department.

We are ready and excited to begin this school year!!!

**Answer**

Thank you for your partnership and support as we work together to reopen our schools.