

MEETING: Regular Board Meeting 5/4/2021 6:00 PM

MEETING: Organizational Board Meeting 5/4/2021 7:00 PM

MEETING: Special Board Meeting 5/4/2021 7:30 PM

Subject: Public Comments

Board of Education members and Richard Evonitz,

I am writing this letter in gratitude to Rich Evonitz for his service to this board and the D219 community.

Rich, you have been an amazing board member. You always show up prepared and well educated on the topics for discussion. Your input has been valuable, meaningful, and enlightened with background and historical perspective. You hold yourself to high standards and in turn, have tried to hold this board to the same high standards.

Serving on the D219 Board of Education has certainly had its challenges, and with grace and dignity, you gave us your best.

One hundred thank yous for your hard work and dedication to this community. You will be missed.

Please stay engaged, you are a community gem!

With Gratitude,

Elline and Dani Eliasoff

Subject: 5/4 D219 Board Comment

Dear District 219 Board Members,

We, the undersigned, are writing to express our deep appreciation for Niles West High School's 270+ teachers and staff during the 2020-2021 school year.

In this extraordinarily challenging year for everyone, our Niles West High School teachers and staff have met challenges—rapidly changing schedules, remote learning, block schedules, new technologies and systems, Zoom-bombing, remote parent-teacher conferences, and more—with professionalism and grace. As parents, guardians, and students of Niles West, we want to commend and recognize the amazing job our teachers and staff members have done and express our deepest thanks to them for their continued diligence and service to our Niles West students and community.

We'd like to recognize teachers and staff for their helpful approach to teaching, supporting, and incorporating feedback from students, families, and members of the Niles Township community during the 2020-2021 school year. We look forward to the day when we can thank them in person.

Thank you Niles West teachers and staff, you make our school great and we appreciate everything you do for our students and community!

Warmly,

Niles West Parent Advisory Council (NWPAC) Executive Board

Caroline Bilicki Gia Schultz Connie and Alan Schroeder Cicely Lopez Fernando and Annie Duplito
Bari and Kent Westphal David and Lisa Spector Kerry and Scott Galson Devon Wright Mathew Varghese Jennifer
Angelilli Ginny and Rob Johnson Dounis Family Amanda Knighten Elizabeth Lea-Hosfield Sheila Finley Fran and
Scott Meyer Kelly Vrajitoru Jackie Gnant Aireen and Noel Casaquite Julia and Dennis Clarke Julie and Greg
Weinberg Cindy Szwiec Jo-chih Huang Zade Tagani Sabina Omercajic Mirza Omercajic Diana Alvira and
Pablo Solano Lenore Ortiz Mary Checke Tom and Alice Pappas Jeff Bilicki Sanabil Kareem Jasmine
Sebaggala Kathleen Weiss Boyle Felicia Holtz Renata Gawin Georgette Kendrick Angélica Jacobs Kathie
Brandfellner Kristine Pedersen Ziad Al refaai Maria Cruz Denise Allen Taibat Banire-Rufai Sashana Cajuste
Dave and Lani Pruess Susan and Tom Werth Lucy Oh Eric Parker Abiodun Toriola Kloe Zhang Latting Thalia
Tarsinos Baozhen Zhao Zaine Munshi Regina Magsino Jennifer Rousseau Rene and Andrea Padron Syeda
Badarunnisa Hemant Patel Taibat Banire-Rufai Hemant Patel Hayet Moussaoui Arif Hussain Illeana Crisanto
Julianne and Jamie Arvizo Paula Espindola Carlton Lit Sabria Khosho Cesar and Claire Guerrero Shaukat Ali
Stacey and Keith Heger

Subject: Public comment for May 4 D219 meeting

Dear board:

Thank you to Mr. Michael Graham and Ms. Heather Ingraham for presenting the need for detracking. These are dedicated, experienced teachers who see daily what our students are capable of. Thank you for listening to the professionals. This will not dumb down our offerings, but lift up more students to excel.

Tom Pappas

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT for Regular Board Meeting 5/4/21

Hello Teachers and Support Staff,

This week marks the beginning of our Educator's Appreciation Week and we can't tell you enough how grateful we are for all of you!

We wish there was more we could do to show you how much you've meant to our families this year. But the truth is there is no way we can repay you for the work you've done to make sure our kids were learning, happy, and surviving. This pandemic was not a choice, remote learning was not a choice, but continuing to go above and beyond for our community was. You chose to show up even as our kids shut their cameras off. Thanks for ignoring the background noise of parents and siblings so that no one would feel ashamed when they were accidentally caught unmuted. Many teachers put in the extra time to learn an entirely new way of teaching so you could still be connected to our children. Most importantly you chose our kids' educational, mental, emotional, and physical safety, sometimes even to the detriment of your own well being. We see you teachers and support staff and we appreciate you.

Many of you modeled perseverance for our children at a time when many parents were struggling to do the same. We can't think of a more challenging profession, and we can't think of a more challenging time to be doing it. While our thank yous may not be enough we hope knowing that your major role in our childrens' lives is very important. Thanks for motivating our students and helping build their self-esteem, especially during their most impressionable years. Thanks for providing our children with a support system and encouraging them to set and work toward goals.

We look forward to the culturally responsive shifts in instruction, grading, and discipline that are being discussed at the board level.

We know that educators want the best for all of the children they serve. Thanks for centering the needs of the children as you continue to grow and adapt to the needs of our children.

We will leave you with a quote from Malala Yousafzai

One child, one teacher, one pen can change the world.

Have a great week!!!

Thank You,
Abolition Coalition

Subject: Public Comment for D219 Meeting May 4th

Hello,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a public comment. First, congratulations to Naema, Joe and Elana on your election wins. I hope you will keep the success of all students in D219 centered in your thoughts as you serve the community in your capacity as a member of the board of education. The most important aspect of any elected official is to do what is in the best interest of the whole community and to give voice to those whose voices have been marginalized and silenced. Godspeed to you all.

I am writing tonight to join the growing number of people who are asking for the end of Police officers being stationed in our schools. Police do not belong in schools. Police in schools do not provide resources as they are not resource officers, they are Police. They are there to keep students in line through fear and intimidation. Let me be clear on this, the officers themselves do not have to actively engage in intimidation to intimidate, they do not have to overtly instill fear to make students fearful. Fear and intimidation are foundational to the institution of policing which is why I slow down and make sure to use my turn signal and that I am buckled in when I see a Police on the street as I suspect many of you do also.

To anyone who pays attention, we can see that parents of color, who have children of color are fearful for the health and wellbeing of their children in the presence of Police. You may not understand that, but that does not make it untrue. I cannot imagine what it feels like to worry about your child in the presence of those who are supposed to protect them. I ask all of you this, do you need to feel that fear for your own children in order to empathize with our friends and neighbors of color? If you feel strongly that our children need to be policed while in school for protection, who do they need to be protected from? I am a white person with a white child, I have the immense luxury and privilege of not being fearful of my child interacting with police but I can also say that I do not feel that my son is safer in a school with Police than one without. I suspect that is true for many white parents, unless they themselves are afraid of the very children who are disproportionately targeted, disciplined and made to feel unsafe by a system of policing that at its core, sees them, people of color, as the enemy.

I implore you, live into the promise of your elected positions and give voice to our friends and neighbors whose voices are marginalized and silenced. Work with your whole community to find solutions that work for everyone. I hope that regardless of where we sit on the political spectrum that we can see that we all want our children to safe and brave and if we work together, we can achieve that goal.

Ross Sawyers

Subject: Public Comment for D219 Board Special Meeting, May 4, 2021

Tonight, protestors greeted board members to show their support for keeping police in our schools. Their vicious behavior toward certain board members who have questioned the presence of police showed their true colors. Tonight you will hear facts and evidence presented in a reasoned manner by the SRO task force that should guide your decision making. Moving forward, I hope the board recognizes that while protest and contrary viewpoints are welcome, citizens and other board members targeting members of the board who are people of color who happen to support certain viewpoints is unacceptable and unprofessional - and subverts true, meaningful dialogue that can bring our district in line with the principles of supporting equity and diversity.

Sincerely,
Louis Mercer
Skokie, IL

Subject: For public comment for D219 special board meeting 5/4

Dear Superintendent, Administration, and Board of District 219,

Thank you for your implementation of racial and economic equity measures in your schools, and I'm looking forward to more.

Thank you to the Board for the discussion on meeting the needs of families who face home and food insecurities. I look forward to further policies and programs that support families.

Thank you to the students who shared their views on the removal of SROs. Listen to our children who center the experiences of Black students and remove SROs now.

Thank you to Dr. Wells for creating and supporting racial equity norms, spaces, and measures across school systems.

Thank you to Dr. Arreguin for supporting teachers and the district through the encouragement of classroom practices and curriculum that is anti-racist, culturally inclusive and responsive, and multi-perspectived.

According to the Illinois Report Card, it is clear that student achievement is stratified across economic and racial groups in D219. Taking away the systemic barriers within the district for all student achievement must be paramount.

Thank you for the detracking English courses and for revising grading policies to be about growth and achievement rather than deficits. Also, thank you to the four teachers who have shared about their curriculum that de-centers whiteness, that includes multiple perspectives and cultures of the American experience in order to better prepare our students for active participation in our world.

Please continue to center the experiences of your Black, Brown, BIPOC students and families and implement a restorative and healing model in the D219 schools rather than one of policing.

- Remove SROs. Not one more of our Village's tax dollars should be paid to this dehumanizing practice in schools and instead be invested in wellness, anti-racist and implicit bias classroom practices, and restorative practices. D219 has court referrals for overwhelmingly Black/Brown/BIPOC children. Daily policing of our children is violent, traumatizing, and alienating from academic, college, and career success.
- Instead, hire in-house, well-paid, full-time safety officers who receive benefits and are employees of the District 219 community with mandatory training in restorative justice practices and anti-racist and implicit-bias training.
- Create and publish a clear vision and policy of the practices of restorative justice at D219 schools based on anti-racist and implicit-bias ideology that are to be adhered to by all those who work with our children, from classroom teachers, to deans, to school administrators.
- Retain, support, and hire Black, Brown, BIPOC leadership and educators. Our children need to see themselves in their school leaders.

History proves that racial equity policies must be implemented actively. I urge you to create and fund the policies and positions that will ensure racial equity in practice and student success now. Please continue to stay focused on those most marginalized from educational opportunities in District 219.

Thank you for your time,
Angela Sangha-Gadsden
D72 parent

Subject: Public Comment for D219 Special Board Meeting May 4, 2021

To the D219 Board and Administration,

At last week's Equity Committee Meeting of the whole, D219 teachers gave a phenomenal presentation on equitable grading practices. During this presentation, Jacob Noll delivered a powerful message to our community, based on irrefutable data from our district -- we have an anti-blackness crisis in District 219. I thank Mr. Noll for speaking truth to power and I think it's vital to center this message going forward. I also deeply appreciate Dr. Wells and Dr. Arreguin for facilitating this conversation and thank the board for making the space to hear this message.

Also last week we heard the presentation on de-tracking freshman English in D219, something I'd like to voice strong support for not only because it will benefit all kids, but also because it will interrupt the inequitable predictability that our Black and Brown students face in D219 and beyond, which, as Dr. Arreguin pointed out, mimics the school to prison pipeline, beginning already in fourth grade. Despite Mr. Nowik's objections, the proposed plan will not take anything away from those who have tested into honors English but will rather open up the opportunity to ALL students to opt in to honors.

I urge you not to make the mistake of thinking that taking steps to address anti-blackness will somehow threaten other students -- this is a narrative that seems to flare up every time we get anywhere close to addressing anti-blackness in our district. This narrative is false and harmful because it tries to pit groups against each other and this is a classic tool of white supremacy. I also want to highlight something that Dr. Wells pointed out, which is that Black and Brown students themselves, when asked, say that they would like access to honors classes. She also pointed out that students of color will not lower standards, and I would add that suggesting otherwise is deeply problematic and rooted in white supremacy.

I'd also like to once again state my strong support for the removal of the SROs in D219 and the termination of the district's IGA with the Skokie Police Department. I urge you to hear the evidence-based recommendations from the task force this evening and to remember the clear message that you've received from the Black and Brown community and many allies on this issue. Our schools can be kept safe through in-house security without threatening the safety of our Black, Brown, and LGBTQ+ students and students with disabilities through the negative impacts of police in schools. Once again, our district has an anti-blackness crisis. It's in the data on grades. It's in the data on discipline. It's in the data on the hiring and retention of staff of color. You can take clear steps right now -- today -- through your votes on de-tracking and SROs. Please make the right choice.

Sincerely,

Maggie Vandermeer

Subject: Public comments/Detracking Freshman English

I am writing in support of the proposal to combine levels of Freshmen English at Niles North and Niles West.

Students come in with vast differences in their academic and personal experiences that creates a challenge for providing a curriculum that consistently builds on their skills. The development of a thirteen year old, eighth grader, is not complete. Children continue to grow, learn, and evolve. Unfortunately, one thing we have observed is that the track that a student enters their high school career in often remains the same, even as they may not.

English classes offer space for students to connect to their own background knowledge and experiences. In this way, academic skills and life skills overlap and serve to enhance each other. Tracking often creates bubbles of students limiting their access to connect with students who have different experiences. Heterogeneous classes benefit the growth of all students by increasing their exposure to view points and learning styles that more accurately reflect the makeup of their communities. This exposure enhances the experience of all learners.

English is a unique course because it combines many modes of communication; students are asked to read, write, speak, and think critically. While some students may excel in one area, they may not in another. Not all of these skills are easy to test on standardized tests and yet are vital to the development and future success of students. By detracking the freshman curriculum, we have an opportunity to collaborate district-wide to develop a curriculum that is stronger, more scaffolded, and provides a more consistent scope and sequence of learning, allowing each student the opportunity to advance. The goal is to create a learning environment where each student has access to content and curriculum that both meets their needs and provides appropriate challenges.

In the proposed system, **all** students will have awareness and access to the honors level work and the honors level track that guides their access to course work in the future. Frequently, teachers meet students in the regular leveled classroom that we feel should be placed in honors and often have students who request to be moved to honors. However, not all students are able to be moved into honors even if that is the best fit. How many open seats are available in honors classes and changes to students' schedules often limit level changes. Additionally, sometimes students are hesitant to make a change because they are intimidated by the risk of a level change, having a new teacher, or being with a new group of students. Placement is also impacted by our own implicit biases. The proposed course change allows for students to remain with teachers that are already familiar with their abilities and provide the freedom and flexibility to ensure each deserving student has the opportunity to receive honors credit without the obstacles presented by course changes. Also, this empowers students to take on challenges that are not directed or determined by their teacher. Giving every student autonomy in their own advancement often inspires and motivates academic growth.

Change is not easy and it is often not comfortable. That does not mean it should be avoided.

Detracking freshman English is not a blanket solution to all of the challenges that face D219. It alone also does not solve systemic racism. However, it is one step towards providing an equitable learning environment for all students.

Thank you,

Kerry Daley

English and Reading Teacher

Subject: Public comment for board meeting

I am writing in support of the proposal to de-track freshman English. I have taught in the Niles North English department for over twenty years. During that time, I have taught all "levels" -- from what we unfortunately used to call "basic English" through senior AP Literature (which I currently teach). Throughout the years, I have seen first-hand the often arbitrary nature of how students are placed in various tracks. I have had students in AP English who struggle skill-wise and who lack interest/motivation. I have had incredibly driven and "gifted" students in regular level classes, who never even thought to sign up for honors or AP, mainly because they didn't see themselves as "honors" students, not because of any discernible difference in skill, interest, or ability. I currently teach the combined regular/honors senior College Prep classes, where we try in one semester to undo some of the harm of years of tracking. Despite being in different tracks on paper, these students are finally in the same room, discussing the same books and topics, and learning with and from each other in important ways. If we started with this model when they were freshmen, we could get even further in helping students think beyond these labels and expand their ideas about themselves and about each other.

Ultimately, both the research and my twenty-plus years of anecdotal experience illustrate how labeling students impacts their ability to have a growth mindset. For lower tracks, rather than giving students the skills they need to move up, the vast majority of the time, what they learn is what their place is in our school and in our society. Many years ago, I was teaching the "basic" track of junior English (a class that no longer exists). We had read Frederick Douglass's autobiography, and inspired by his story of how he became a reader, they were writing personal narratives of their own literacy journeys. We were brainstorming in class, and in reminiscing about elementary school reading experiences, one student brought up "reading groups." He looked around the room, and he said, "You were in my reading group. And so were you. And so were you." My stomach dropped. If tracking works to lift up those who struggle, then why were the tracks the same in first grade as they were in eleventh grade? This is a highly flawed system that segregates students and places labels that lack consistent meaning. We owe it to our students to re-think and re-frame this structure. The research backs this up, as do the experiences of our students and of veteran teachers like myself. Thank you.

Barbara Hoff
English Teacher

Subject: Comments for the Board Re: Freshman English Proposal

Greetings,

I am writing in support of the proposal to combine levels of Freshmen English at Niles North and Niles West.

Students come in with vast differences in their academic and personal experiences that create challenges for providing a curriculum that consistently builds on their skills. The development of a thirteen-year-old, eighth-grader, is not complete. Children continue to grow, learn, and evolve. Unfortunately, one thing we have observed is that the track that a student enters their high school career in often remains the same, even as they may not.

English classes offer space for students to connect to their own background knowledge and experiences. In this way, academic skills and life skills overlap and serve to enhance each other. Tracking often creates bubbles of students limiting their access to connect with students who have different experiences. Heterogeneous classes benefit the growth of all students by increasing their exposure to viewpoints and learning styles that more accurately reflect the makeup of their communities. This exposure enhances the experience of all learners.

English is a unique course because it combines many modes of communication; students are asked to read, write, speak, and think critically. While some students may excel in one area, they may not in another. Not all of these skills are easy to test on standardized tests and yet are vital to the development and future success of students. By detracking the freshman curriculum, we have an opportunity to collaborate district-wide to develop a curriculum that is stronger, more scaffolded, and provides a more consistent scope and sequence of learning, allowing each student the opportunity to advance. The goal is to create a learning environment where each student has access to content and curriculum that both meets their needs and provides appropriate challenges.

In the proposed system, **all** students will have awareness and access to the honors level work and the honors level track that guides their access to course work in the future. Frequently, teachers meet students in the regular leveled classroom that we feel should be placed in honors and often have students who request to be moved to honors. However, not all students are able to be moved into honors even if that is the best fit. How many open seats are available in honors classes and changes to students' schedules often limit level changes. Additionally, sometimes students are hesitant to make a change because they are intimidated by the risk of a level change, having a new teacher, or being with a new group of students. Placement is also impacted by our own implicit biases. The proposed course change allows for students to remain with teachers that are already familiar with their abilities and provides the freedom and flexibility to ensure each deserving student has the opportunity to receive honors credit without the obstacles presented by course changes. Also, this empowers students to take on challenges that are not directed or determined by their teacher. Giving every student autonomy in their own advancement often inspires and motivates academic growth.

Change is not easy and it is often not comfortable. That does not mean it should be avoided. Detracking freshman English is not a blanket solution to all of the challenges that face D219. It alone also does not solve systemic racism. However, it is one step towards providing an equitable learning environment for all students.

Sincerely,

Christine Mbah

Freshman English teacher

Subject: Comments for 5/4/21 Board Meeting

Good evening,

I wanted to write to the board about some troubling things I have read in the past weeks. The first thing is the possibility of removing tracking and honors classes. My son had the unique opportunity of participating in high school classes from 7th grade. It was a fantastic experience for him and one of the reasons we live in the district. The quality of education that district 219 provided was a key factor in moving to Skokie. Removing these kinds of honors classes for students is a disservice to all students. By removing this opportunity from D219, how many other students who can not afford private school (like our family) will be negatively impacted by not being able to be exposed to advanced classes?

This de-tracking platform that is being pushed by D219 dovetails with my second concern that EVERY SINGLE DECISION made by the board and administration is looked at and judged through the prism of race. It is appalling that the Niles West administration would be promoting as a "community event" a rally that took place on April 24th that focused on abolishing the police, and rooting out the systems of white supremacy that are supposedly prevalent in our community. It must be such a comfort to all of the non BIPOC students attending D219 schools that their teachers and administrators think they are all white supremacist racists.

Not sure if you are voting on the SRO decision tonight but I'm sure that is just a formality as it seems the district administration has made up its mind on how that vote will go.

Sincerely

Jennifer Kraljević

District 219 parent

District 72 parent

Subject: Public Comments: In Support of Embedded Fresh Honors Proposal

Serving as the Building Reading Specialists at North and West (respectively) as well as English teachers, we would like to convey our advocacy and support for the proposal to embed honors within a shared English classroom at the freshman level. Both research and experience informs this advocacy and support. Having taught all levels of freshman English at D219 and the experience of teaching College Prep Senior English with an embedded honors option, we have seen the positive research on detracking and differentiation in action. We have only seen more students flourish under this model -- not regress. We have witnessed increased student engagement, regardless of credit selection, and more authentic learning leading to better growth outcomes for all.

If we continue our current model, we risk: diminished student engagement, increased student growth skill deficits, and predictable skill stagnancy at all levels. We risk further widening a human and system created achievement gap.

We are incredibly excited to see this work happen at the freshmen level -- this proposal is coming from teachers, because we know and see the good it can and will accomplish. We are ready to support all of our students through a rigorous literacy education that very much begins with this model.

As classrooms are often our children's first communities, this is one more space where we must model appropriate and responsible support for all to ensure post high school success.

With Dedication,

Katherine A.N. Gillies
Building Reading Specialist
English Teacher
Niles North High School, D219

Stephanie lafrate
Building Reading Specialist
English Teacher
Niles West High School, D219

Subject: Public Comment for Special Board Meeting

Dear 219 Administration and Board,

I understand that you are facing some big decisions, and I am writing to urge you to remove SROs from schools and de-track English classes for freshmen. I am a university educator, and I assure you that conversations about the role of police in schools and equitable educational practices are happening at all levels. We are in the era of a necessary educational revolution, and I cannot encourage this board enough to take action as early as possible.

I trust that the SRO task force has worked diligently to provide you with the needed information to proceed forward and make an educated decision that will guarantee the safety of *everyone* in the community.

From personal experience, I have some students who are now pursuing medical school and bio-engineering degrees that were tracked into lower level classes when they began their educational careers. Fortunately, there were adults in their lives who believed in them and challenged them to try their best and countered messages of inferiority projected by society. Because they were immigrants, or struggling with family crises at very young ages, their circumstances were equated with a lack of capacity. This was not the case. Let's make sure we are that community of adults motivating and supporting each and every student in this district to strive for scholarly success.

Sincerely,

Molly Greening

PhD Candidate, Integrative Studies in Ethics and Theology

Loyola University Chicago

Subject: Letter to the board

I am writing in support of the proposal to combine levels of Freshmen English at Niles North and Niles West.

Students come in with vast differences in their academic and personal experiences that create challenges for providing a curriculum that consistently builds on their skills. The development of a thirteen year old, eighth grader, is not complete. Children continue to grow, learn, and evolve. Unfortunately, one thing we have observed is that the track that a student enters their high school career in often remains the same, even as they may not.

English classes offer space for students to connect to their own background knowledge and experiences. In this way, academic skills and life skills overlap and serve to enhance each other. Tracking often creates bubbles of students limiting their access to connect with students who have different experiences. Heterogeneous classes benefit the growth of all students by increasing their exposure to view points and learning styles that more accurately reflect the makeup of their communities. This exposure enhances the experience of all learners.

English is a unique course because it combines many modes of communication; students are asked to read, write, speak, and think critically. While some students may excel in one area, they may not in another. Not all of these skills are easy to test on standardized tests and yet are vital to the development and future success of students. By detracking the freshman curriculum, we have an opportunity to collaborate district-wide to develop a curriculum that is stronger, more scaffolded, and provides a more consistent scope and sequence of learning, allowing each student the opportunity to advance. The goal is to create a learning environment where each student has access to content and curriculum that both meets their needs and provides appropriate challenges.

In the proposed system, **all** students will have awareness and access to the honors level work and the honors level track that guides their access to course work in the future. Frequently, teachers meet students in the regular leveled classroom that we feel should be placed in honors and often have students who request to be moved to honors. However, not all students are able to be moved into honors even if that is the best fit. How many open seats are available in honors classes and changes to students' schedules often limit level changes. Additionally, sometimes students are hesitant to make a change because they are intimidated by the risk of a level change, having a new teacher, or being with a new group of students. Placement is also impacted by our own implicit biases. The proposed course change allows for students to remain with teachers that are already familiar with their abilities and provides the freedom and flexibility to ensure each deserving student has the opportunity to receive honors credit without the obstacles presented by course changes. Also, this empowers students to take on challenges that are not directed or determined by their teacher. Giving every student autonomy in their own advancement often inspires and motivates academic growth.

Change is not easy and it is often not comfortable. That does not mean it should be avoided.

Detracking freshman English is not a blanket solution to all of the challenges that face D219. It alone also does not solve systemic racism. However, it is one step towards providing an equitable learning environment for all students.

Jean Ordonez

Subject: Letter in Support of the Freshman English Proposal

Good evening!

I have been genuinely impressed with the ability of the Embedded Honors model to interrupt the pernicious system of racial apartheid upheld by traditional academic tracking practices. This *de facto* racial segregation was painfully apparent every time the bell would ring and my regular students filed in as my AP students filed out. That kind of segregation should not exist -- not ever, and especially not in 2021.

In contrast, the "embedded honors" model in College Prep English has offered a meaningful alternative, one in which students representing the full diversity of D219 learn from and with one another in a supportive and challenging environment. Not only are these students academically prepared for life beyond Niles North, but they are stronger for having learned how to have conversations with people from extremely varied life experiences.

The embedded honors model builds on a student-centered and value-added mindset. Those who suggest -- no matter how cloaked their wording -- that letting "those kids" into an honors program would somehow bring down the quality of learning are engaging in a white supremacist mindset that assumes that Black and Brown kids are somehow "less than." They are NOT "less than," and these students prove it every single day in the College Prep classroom.

So, why NOT expand this racially, culturally, and intellectually diverse learning opportunity into the freshman year?

Or — is D219's "diversity" something we enjoy boasting about in theory, but which we don't want happening in our own child's classroom?

What I love best about embedded honors is that students don't know who is in honors and who is not. They read the same books, participate in the same discussions, and wrestle with the same eternal yet contemporary questions. And if students wish to change levels, the Embedded Honors classroom means they can do so without having to rearrange their entire academic schedule.

The freshmen deserve this chance to experience high school for themselves before committing to a particular academic track. And the success of the senior detracking has paved the way -- slowly, over several years, and through a long process of due diligence -- for this powerful and necessary proposal.

Our Black and Brown parents have been clear -- as has the exodus of Black and Brown staff members -- that racial disparities persist even in our own, well-resourced district. This proposal takes a big step toward addressing some of the classroom disparities that hit our students the hardest.

I urge the Board to approve the embedded honors Freshman English proposal without delay.

Sincerely,

Heather Ingraham (English Teacher at North)

Subject: Public Comment for BOE meeting 5/4/21

As per the petition circulated on [change.org](https://www.change.org) which was signed by 311 people, d219 has many questions that need to be addressed regarding Detracking Freshman English. I strongly encourage the BOE to postpone this vote so as to address the many questions posited in the petition and to allow proper communication of this proposal to families of incoming freshman students.

I do not understand how removing the honors option for one semester will not negatively impact the transcripts of higher performing children, thus providing them a competitive disadvantage during the college application process. D219 students will be compared to many students across the country who are not subjected to a detracked model of education and therefore will have more honors level work on their transcripts. Moreover, I do not think that the education provided in detracked classes is the same for higher performing learners. Whereas I can recognize that the lower and average performing students may have an opportunity in a detracked model, I do not think the same is true for higher performing students. The studies that were provided by Dr. Kucera also shows inconclusive empirical evidence regarding the effects of a detracked model on the education of all students including the higher performing students. It seems almost reckless to gamble or experiment with the education of these higher performing learners without knowing for certain that this will not negatively affect their education.

Furthermore, these higher performing children were already placed into Honors level English. D219 is moving forward with this proposal without first informing families of this switch. I am certain that if all parents of incoming Freshman students were contacted regarding this change to curriculum, that d219 would be receiving significantly more emails and phone calls from other concerned parents. Proposing this change without first informing families that a change is imminent seems secretive and deceitful. The emotional impact of taking away an Honors level class that these children have already been told that they earned is not conducive to supporting their mental health either. These children worked hard and diligently throughout grades K-8 to differentiate themselves and strive for a higher level of learning. Many of these students probably have pride in their accomplishment of achieving an honors level class. This decision to take away their hard earned placement can be very damaging to the psyche in that it firmly places the locus of control outside of themselves. This then teaches these children that despite their best efforts, prizes can be taken away on a whim. And lastly, being informed of this switch in curriculum at this time of the year makes it very difficult to apply to private schools in the area.

No matter how detracked education is explained, the fact remains that an opportunity is being taken away from higher performing learners who earned their honors classes. That is not equity.

Rupal Mandal

Subject: Public comment

I am writing in support of the proposal to combine levels of Freshmen English at Niles North and Niles West.

Students come in with vast differences in their academic and personal experiences that creates a challenge for providing a curriculum that consistently builds on their skills. The development of a thirteen year old, eighth grader, is not complete. Children continue to grow, learn, and evolve. Unfortunately, one thing we have observed is that the track that a student enters their high school career in often remains the same, even as they may not.

English classes offer space for students to connect to their own background knowledge and experiences. In this way, academic skills and life skills overlap and serve to enhance each other. Tracking often creates bubbles of students limiting their access to connect with students who have different experiences. Heterogeneous classes benefit the growth of all students by increasing their exposure to view points and learning styles that more accurately reflect the makeup of their communities. This exposure enhances the experience of all learners.

English is a unique course because it combines many modes of communication; students are asked to read, write, speak, and think critically. While some students may excel in one area, they may not in another. Not all of these skills are easy to test on standardized tests and yet are vital to the development and future success of students. By detracking the freshman curriculum, we have an opportunity to collaborate district-wide to develop a curriculum that is stronger, more scaffolded, and provides a more consistent scope and sequence of learning, allowing each student the opportunity to advance. The goal is to create a learning environment where each student has access to content and curriculum that both meets their needs and provides appropriate challenges.

In the proposed system, **all** students will have awareness and access to the honors level work and the honors level track that guides their access to course work in the future. Frequently, teachers meet students in the regular leveled classroom that we feel should be placed in honors and often have students who request to be moved to honors. However, not all students are able to be moved into honors even if that is the best fit. How many open seats are available in honors classes and changes to students' schedules often limit level changes. Additionally, sometimes students are hesitant to make a change because they are intimidated by the risk of a level change, having a new teacher, or being with a new group of students. Placement is also impacted by our own implicit biases. The proposed course change allows for students to remain with teachers that are already familiar with their abilities and provide the freedom and flexibility to ensure each deserving student has the opportunity to receive honors credit without the obstacles presented by course changes. Also, this empowers students to take on challenges that are not directed or determined by their teacher. Giving every student autonomy in their own advancement often inspires and motivates academic growth.

Change is not easy and it is often not comfortable. That does not mean it should be avoided.

Detracking freshman English is not a blanket solution to all of the challenges that face D219. It alone also does not solve systemic racism. However, it is one step towards providing an equitable learning environment for all students.

Stephanie Salem

Niles North English Teacher

Niles West class of '04

Subject: D219 public comment for tonight

Dear D219 Board and Administration,

I am writing to encourage you to please center Jacob Noll's message from last week's Equity Committee Meeting. I urge you to please take to heart his direction to care for and protect Black and Brown students as our own children and to find the will to address anti-Blackness now. Please center the needs of Black and Brown students and social justice in all decisions.

To that end, I support de-tracking as a step in the process of dismantling systems of segregation. Allowing students to opt into honors English will specifically benefit students who are currently locked out of educational opportunities and will also benefit all students. When the creativity, talents, ideas, and narratives of Black and Brown students are locked out of honors classes, everyone loses.

Similarly, I strongly support the removal of the SROs in D219 and the termination of the district's IGA with the Skokie Police Department. As a social worker with experience in schools, I have witnessed personally the trauma inflicted on students, particularly students of color, by the presence of police in schools. Teens need to be in environments that do not criminalize normal adolescent behavior and development. Our schools should be places that allow our children to make and learn from mistakes and that foster true safety and wellness, not fear, punishment, and incarceration. We cannot expect our children to develop a growth mindset if we traumatize them rather than allowing them to learn and grow from mistakes. Again, if we think of all of our students, especially our Black and Brown students, as our own children, we can respond in ways that nurture wellness, safety, and accountability that have nothing to do with policing, just as we do in our own families.

Please keep in mind that intent is not greater than impact. Please avoid the trap of thinking that, if your or others' intentions in previously supporting tracking or police in schools appear to you to be free of racist intent, then somehow those systems are not racist. The data that show that these systems harm Black and Brown students are overwhelming. Any attempt to explain away the data is only an excuse. There is no excuse and no time to wait to root out white supremacy everywhere. You have the opportunity today to make real, positive change for our students. Please vote to de-track and remove SROs.

Thank you,

Carrie Bradean, LCSW, MA, CCTP

Subject: Please remove SROs from District 219

Dear D219 Board:

I am a D219 resident and parent of two future Niles West students who are currently attending Lincoln Junior High in D69. As you may know, D69 and D68 recently decided to remove the SROs from their Junior highs, which is a decision I agree with. I hope you will follow their lead.

If the goal of D219 is to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for all students, data shows that SRO programs are not the most effective or efficient way to do that. We also know that these programs disproportionately target students of color, especially Black students, for behavior violations that are not equally enforced with white students. SRO programs offer an inequitable solution to a presumed safety problem, and may even be exacerbating fear and anxiety of some of our community's children.

I would encourage the D219 board to listen to the recommendations of the SRO Task Force to develop more effective strategies for ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment for all students in our diverse community.

Thank you,
Erin Fenner

Subject: Public Comment - Special Meeting May 4th 7:30

D219 Board and Administration,

I want to thank the teachers and admin last week who presented on Grading for Equity and Detracking. It was amazing! I thought everyone did a great job and I'm hoping that the board is really thinking through all the positive changes that are possible going forward for our district. There is definitely an anti-blackness crisis in D219, that was very clear in those presentations. Let's work to change that for the future of our school and our students.

However, I was very disappointed to hear that Joe Nowik commented on twitter that there were "some excellent and some not so good ideas in the equity grading presentations at last night's equity committee meeting at Niles Township" and further questioning "How is differential instruction within a detracted class different than instruction to classes on different tracks?" After teachers and administrators worked hard to present those programs and ideas to the board, this is what one of our board members has to say, and on twitter none the less? As a teacher in the district and community member, I was shocked and bothered that these comments were made, and I was not even one of the teachers who presented. I can only imagine what those teachers and admin are thinking and feeling.

And, lastly, I don't think bringing up that your phone is blowing up in the middle of a public meeting from parents about detracking is an acceptable thing to be commenting on. That is not the reaction that a board member should be having after these kinds of presentations.

As a board member, who is supposed to be leading this community and our schools in working towards being an anti-racist district, I urge you to look at the detracking proposal that has been presented through an equity lens. Let's do the right thing here for all of our students, not just for the ones that their parents are blowing up phones!

Thank you for your time!

Nicole Reynolds

Subject: Please read this for public comment at the BOE meeting on 5/04/21

I am a mom of an incoming freshman who was planning to take honors English, and I am requesting that you delay or vote no on detracking.

A petition against detracking honors freshman English has received the support of over 300 concerned parents, students, community members and taxpayers in Niles Township, and it is clear that school district 219 is attempting to implement this new model in an expedited manner without eliciting feedback from the community beforehand. You introduced detracking at a special board of education meeting held on 4.27.21 where it was presented to the board of education and the community at 11:15pm when most working community members who would like to be engaged and informed were sleeping.

Equity within D219 should focus on providing the best possible educational experience to every level of learner. Detracking is being proposed in an attempt to address racial inequity within the D219 system. However, this approach is a conflated and misguided attempt to solve a complex societal issue and D219 has not provided any empirical proof to support the benefits of detracking for every level of learner.

Please either vote no on this reckless radical left proposal or delay the vote until you proactively engage all families of incoming freshman and glean their feedback about such an impactful curriculum change. Then please explain why you chose to introduce this proposal at a special board meeting held on a weeknight at 11:15 p.m. which is not a reasonable timeframe to conduct public business. The timing of this meeting was a barrier for attendance for most working community members. Finally, if you disagree that this is not proposal born out of a radical left political agenda, I would like to hear you publicly denounce vice chair Manrique's statement that "tracking is a modern day form of segregation." Otherwise, we are left to assume that you are in agreement and that it is a political statement, not one in the best educational interest of all learners.

Thank you,
Erin Oleniczak

Subject: Rich Evonitz

I want to extend my sincere appreciation for the dedicated and exceptional work of Board of Education Member Rich Evonitz. His integrity, honesty, and dedication to working in the best interest of students is beyond reproach. Since his days as board president for Skokie School District 73, he has been focused on fair and inclusive governance and a desire to always build consensus. His decision-making has been considerate, pragmatic, and principled. His role as board member the past four years has left Niles Township District 219 in a better place. His experience, knowledge, and contribution to our community will be missed. Thank you, Rich.

Bob Quane

Former Board President

Skokie School District 73.5

Subject: Please read in the public comment section

D219 board members

Please do not allow a few “chosen” people (SRO task force) dictate what 83 % percent of parents, 53% of students and 61% of the teachers wanted of D219. The majority of people that responded to a survey are in favor of retaining the SRO program in D219 schools. The security and safety of the students and faculty is paramount. We should not ignore the voices of the few that are in fear of a uniformed police officer in the school, but instead assist them with reducing their fears and anxiety. This can be obtained by having them interact with the SRO in none confrontational settings. The schools have a restorative justice program for students. One of the characteristics in the restorative justice program is : transformation: this can cause **fundamental** changes in people, relationships and communities. Let this be your guide to help the students in fear. Why do you want to totally eliminate a program where so many want it to remain without looking to alternatives to alleviate others anxiety? If you love all the students, you will protect them while they are in the school. Protecting them is keeping them safe. Help ALL the students feel safe. Retain the SRO program and all of the security staff.

Respectfully

Patrick Johnston

Businessman

Relative of D219 students

Shareholder

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENTS - SPECIAL BOARD MEETING - 7:30PM

Dear 219 Board Members,

I write to you tonight asking for your commitment to end the D219 SRO program. We are at a critical moment in our nation's history and D219 is not immune to oppressive practices that inform the way we police and discipline our BIPOC students. The data is clear that BIPOC students are punished more severely and treated differently by the SROs. Black and Brown students have expressed through a number of platforms that racism they have endured and the fear and trauma that consumes them by having armed law enforcement officers in their school buildings. We must center BIPOC student and family experiences.

The endless violence against Black, Brown and LGBTQIA+ people in this country at the hands of police directly affects the D219 community and we cannot discount the harm BIPOC students face each day. We have seen a number of schools in the Chicago area including D68 and D69 end their SRO programs. Let's put our focus on having a district employed security staff that is part of our school community. Let's put our focus on moving the financial support for the SRO program into more mental health services and restorative justice programs. Let's ensure we have an equitable and anti-racist safety and security program that protects all of our children.

Finally, I'd like to thank Jacob Noll and the English department for their impactful and thorough presentation on de-tracking. Members of the Board have asked for data and metrics, and Mr. Noll presented this data which clearly shows the negative impact tracking has on Black and LatinX students. We are failing our Black and LatinX students and we have an opportunity here to make some meaningful change. Let's give all of our students the opportunity to opt into honors classes and stop reinforcing racist practice of pushing Black and Brown students into lower level classes.

Thank you,

Matt Temkin

Subject: Public comment to be read 5/4/2021

Dear Board of Education Members, Administration, Staff, Students, and Community Members,

I am writing as a concerned parent about the recent proposal for detracking Freshman English for the 2021-2022 school year. From listening to the last board meeting, the main issue seems to be that students have not all been given the option to take honors in the current model. Instead of forming mixed classes, why can't all students be given the opportunity to opt-in for honors while maintaining different levels of classes? Differentiated classes offer the benefit of a focused opportunity to meet the needs of students at the appropriate level. My kids have had both accelerated and non-accelerated classes and I believe that the level they were placed in served them well. I do not think that my child (who was not in honors) would have been served well in the honors class. In fact, not being placed in honors, gave my child the motivation that they needed to work towards a higher level. As was explained in the previous board meeting, mixed classes benefit from having higher level thinkers in the class. However, how do higher-level thinkers benefit from mixed classes? Our experience with mixed level classes has been that higher-level thinkers are not sufficiently challenged at the appropriate level. It was not clear from the previous meeting how students will be appropriately challenged at different levels. With the new proposal, how do you ensure that students will have meaningful work at all levels? How are higher-level thinkers going to be challenged appropriately? Instead of having mixed classes, all students should be given the option to opt-in to honors so that all students are served equitably at the appropriate level.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Nilam Shah

Subject: Public comment - No to SROs!

I am an alumna of Niles West, class of '02. I am writing to express my strong opposition to SROs.

When I was a student at Niles West, one of the SROs also worked at Cook County Jail. That is not even a school to prison pipeline, that is them directly overlapping. Literal prison guards in the hallways. That is not acceptable or okay.

I also want to express my support of detracking.

Thanks for your time,

Claire Nowak-Boyd

Subject: Public comment

Thank you for supporting the detracking of students.

Please continue to center BIPOC student and family experiences and remove SRO's from 219 schools.

Hire in house custodial staff, safety staff, and cafeteria staff full time with benefits.

Lastly, please investigate any current staff members who have been reported to sexually harass and threaten other staff members yet continue to work freely with staff and students.

Thank you,

Lisa Litberg

Subject: Public Comment to be read on 5/4/21

To Whom it May Concern:

At the 4/27 Special Board Meeting, the English Department presented their proposal to detrack Freshman English. Several questions remain unanswered that I believe the school board members, students and district families need answers to before anything is executed. In the last week, I've sent emails with my questions to Dr. Kucera, Dr. Arreguin and the Board at large, to which I received no targeted responses. The fact that these answers have not been provided demonstrates the hastiness, ill-preparedness and lack of transparency of the English Department for this change they are proposing to take place in four short months. Allow me to reiterate my questions:

1. What is the data that supports this shift?
2. Specifically, what gap analysis was conducted within District 219, and what were its results that drove the need for this proposal?
3. What are the leading and lagging KPIs and measurements that will be used to evaluate this? How you will measure them throughout the year, and longitudinally starting with next year's incoming freshmen? This will help the district to determine if/how they continue detracking or not.
4. What does a detracked classroom curriculum look like?
5. Why is the district not looking closer at the role of the teacher, in partnership with the students and their family, to proactively identify a need for a student to move up or down in class levels, versus making a change that affects the entire student body?
6. What is the Change Management Plan that will be implemented to ensure success? How are you communicating this to and preparing the impacted students, their counselors and their teachers?

Without the answers to these questions, I do not understand how the board or the district can endorse this proposal. While saying that detracking better prepares students for high school, enhances teacher/student relationships and promotes equity are all positive qualitative benefits, they do not demonstrate the current state, nor do they build the case for an adjusted future state. As it stands now, this proposal appears to be suggesting we throw items at a wall and see what sticks. That is not how I expect my child's education to be developed.

Thank you,
Emily McCall

Subject: Letter to the board

I am writing in support of the proposal to combine levels of Freshmen English at Niles North and Niles West.

Students come in with vast differences in their academic and personal experiences that create challenges for providing a curriculum that consistently builds on their skills. The development of a thirteen year old, eighth grader, is not complete. Children continue to grow, learn, and evolve. Unfortunately, one thing we have observed is that the track that a student enters their high school career in often remains the same, even as they may not.

English classes offer space for students to connect to their own background knowledge and experiences. In this way, academic skills and life skills overlap and serve to enhance each other. Tracking often creates bubbles of students limiting their access to connect with students who have different experiences. Heterogeneous classes benefit the growth of all students by increasing their exposure to view points and learning styles that more accurately reflect the makeup of their communities. This exposure enhances the experience of all learners.

English is a unique course because it combines many modes of communication; students are asked to read, write, speak, and think critically. While some students may excel in one area, they may not in another. Not all of these skills are easy to test on standardized tests and yet are vital to the development and future success of students. By detracking the freshman curriculum, we have an opportunity to collaborate district-wide to develop a curriculum that is stronger, more scaffolded, and provides a more consistent scope and sequence of learning, allowing each student the opportunity to advance. The goal is to create a learning environment where each student has access to content and curriculum that both meets their needs and provides appropriate challenges.

In the proposed system, **all** students will have awareness and access to the honors level work and the honors level track that guides their access to course work in the future. Frequently, teachers meet students in the regular leveled classroom that we feel should be placed in honors and often have students who request to be moved to honors. However, not all students are able to be moved into honors even if that is the best fit. How many open seats are available in honors classes and changes to students' schedules often limit level changes. Additionally, sometimes students are hesitant to make a change because they are intimidated by the risk of a level change, having a new teacher, or being with a new group of students. Placement is also impacted by our own implicit biases. The proposed course change allows for students to remain with teachers that are already familiar with their abilities and provides the freedom and flexibility to ensure each deserving student has the opportunity to receive honors credit without the obstacles presented by course changes. Also, this empowers students to take on challenges that are not directed or determined by their teacher. Giving every student autonomy in their own advancement often inspires and motivates academic growth.

Change is not easy and it is often not comfortable. That does not mean it should be avoided.

Detracking freshman English is not a blanket solution to all of the challenges that face D219. It alone also does not solve systemic racism. However, it is one step towards providing an equitable learning environment for all students.

Sincerely,

Rachael Berrios

Niles North English Paraprofessional