

MEETING: BOE Meeting 9/14/2021

Comments are listed in the order submitted via the electronic form.

Name: Maggie Vandermeer

I am writing about the decision you made at the August 17 board meeting to switch board meetings to Thursdays. At this time when women's rights in this country are egregiously under attack, to witness a decision being pushed by male board members who did not even have the facts straight in order to steamroll over a female board member's access to time with her kids was unbelievable in its non-sensical cruelty. The message you are sending to girls, women, and especially mothers in this district is that their school leaders will prioritize the concerns of men over those of women and mothers and that if, as a woman, you want to work or volunteer in your community, if you want to have a voice at the table, you will have to sacrifice that which is most dear to you.

And now for the facts. Your decision to move to meetings on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays does NOT in fact eliminate conflict with feeder district board meeting dates. Both Districts 67 and 68 meet on the 3rd Thursdays of the month, and District 74 meets on the 1st Thursday of the month. This is counter to your claim that Lincolnwood meets on Tuesdays. In fact, your decision now, ironically, means that Dr. Farzaneh will NOT be able to attend board meetings in HIS feeder district. So while Mr. Nowik got his way and can go to District 72 board meetings, other board members cannot. I would also point out that District 72 only recently changed their board meetings to Wednesdays. In other words, any district at any time may change their meeting dates -- you cannot prevent overlap now or in the future.

Furthermore, the argument that meetings can't happen on Mondays has not, it turns out, prevented both Districts 73 and 70 from meeting on Mondays. And in fact, their meetings, when they both fall on the 3rd Monday of the month, conflict with each other. Other districts also have meeting dates that conflict with each other. Districts 69 and 71 both have meetings that fall on the 3rd Tuesday of the month. And, as already stated, Districts 67 and 68 both hold meetings on the 3rd Thursday. The point being that it is already impossible for anyone to go to any and all of the feeder district meetings. So the idea that you are clearing the way for future board members to attend any feeder district meetings is untrue and actually not possible.

As it turns out, the least used day of the week for board meetings in feeder districts, besides Friday, is Wednesday, which is the day Board Member Manrique requested. Even though it also means less time with her children. It was a compromise she was willing to make to accommodate Dr. Farzaneh's work schedule.

It was horrible to watch all but two board members vote for a poorly-researched and inhumane proposal. and I've heard from many women who felt the same. I am especially blown away that this cruel decision was made without anyone actually looking at the meeting dates of other districts.

In conclusion, please fix this error of logic and ethics. It's simple. Mr. Nowik can still go to the D72 board meetings on the 3rd Wednesdays of the month and D219 board meetings can occur on the 1st, 2nd, and/or 4th Wednesday of the month. This creates NO conflict with feeder district meetings (while, again, your current schedule has created more). It also accommodates Dr. Farzaneh's work schedule and Ms. Manrique's parenting schedule. It's a win win and quite frankly, if you choose not to, despite the above information, you will be solidifying a choice that is sexist and non-sensical.

Sincerely,

Maggie Vandermeer

Name: MurphyMaeve Holleran

Hello my name is MurphyMaeve Holleran, I am a representative of the Niles West Senior Class via Senior Cabinet. I am here today to talk to you about the homecoming dance, or lack thereof. When I first found out that we were not going to have a homecoming dance and every other school in our conference was, I immediately went to talk to Ms. Laux, she told me that it was because of the skokie health department guidelines. I then called the skokie health department to better understand the guidelines that were restricting us from having a homecoming dance. They were not giving me much information on the guidelines, they just kept saying there is a high transmission rate the past four weeks. But if there is a high transmission rate right now with vaccinations and everything else available to stop the spread of covid-19, why was there a prom allowed last May, when the conditions were worse? The representative from the skokie health department said to me "The Skokie Health Department does not make rules about certain events, that is your school board's decision." So my question to the school board is this, why were we allowed to have stands full of fans at football games and soccer games with no social distancing in the seats, but we are not allowed to have a dance where people attending would be separated around 3ft dancing? Why are we allowed to be in the classroom working in groups less than three-feet apart? Why is every other school in our conference allowed to have a homecoming dance outdoors, but we are not? There is a petition circling around the school in hopes to change the board's mind about this dance, it has over 340 signatures of students in all grades. Not having a homecoming dance is taking away a major part of our senior year and everyone else's highschool experience. The "Homecoming Festival " which is being used as a replacement for the dance is not a fair event for the school, it is being held at the same time as the football game therefore students have to choose between the festival or the game. The varsity football team has 58 team members that will not be able to participate in the festival, now there are the cheerleaders, poms team, student athletic trailers, color guard, and marching band. All of these students will not be able to attend the homecoming festival, because of their other duties. Board members, please think back to your normal highschool years, the big homecoming football game, the pictures, and the dance. This is something we missed out on last year, don't make us miss out on it another year while we sit and watch everyone around us be able to attend their schools homecoming dances.

Name: Ankur Joshi

Good Evening,

I want to give a report about some major concerns NTFTSS has had since the start of the school year.

Since the end of last school year, we made numerous requests for meetings with upper administration to assure the reopening plans for the 2021-22 school year addressed the issues that we anticipated. They agreed to only two meetings in the summer, which left us frustrated and with very little information. Since the start of this school year, we have met with administration numerous times to address issues that we feel should have been addressed prior to the start of the school year. We are left with some serious safety concerns about lack of testing and issues with building security.

Testing is one of the most important layers of mitigation in the fight against Covid-19 and we can all agree that our goal for the year is to keep students, staff, and extended families safe and to be able to continue in-person learning.

Many school districts around us have been proactive in finding solutions to anticipated problems. The NTFTSS is dissatisfied with the lack of testing availability in the buildings as many of the surrounding high schools established robust testing programs for students and staff prior to the start of the school year. Additionally, they require unvaccinated athletes and students who participate in certain activities to be tested weekly. Surrounding schools already have the SHIELD testing system in place but we still do not. We understand there is a tentative launch date for the district the week of October 4. We strongly encourage the district to partner with SHIELD to meet this launch date. We request the following SHIELD testing be offered:

Test unvaccinated students in high risk activities weekly in order to participate.

Strongly encourage unvaccinated students to be tested weekly.

Test unvaccinated staff weekly.

Provide availability and accessibility for vaccinated staff to be tested upon request.

Another concern is that our buildings have been experiencing shortages of security guards because of problems with recruiting and retaining outsourced safety staff. These shortages have led to building admin, deans, directors, and recently teachers having to fulfil the role of security personnel. This is unsustainable and creates potentially dangerous situations for students. Teachers have had to give up collaboration time with one another and time to meet with students in order to supervise study halls. We believe this is bad for teaching and learning.

The security issue is systemic and will not be solved by pulling teachers and administrators away from students and curriculum work. Part of the security guard issue is actually a study hall issue, for example. We think our students should be taking classes instead of sitting in study halls, sometimes for multiple periods a day. Another aspect of the security guard issue is that they are outsourced, which is very challenging for recruiting and retaining personnel. The position of the union is that processes should be in place that have students taking elective classes instead of multiple study halls, and that the district can and should hire security/safety personnel as district staff in order to prevent the high turnover rates that these positions face. Many surrounding districts hire their own security/safety personnel instead of contracting with an outside company.

The burden this shortage has put on the building based administration and teachers is reaching a tipping point. This shortage is creating far more challenges to providing a safe environment for everyone in the building, especially since we are still managing and navigating through a pandemic.

I implore you to invite us to have a genuine conversation about these critical matters.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Ankur Joshi
President of Teachers NTFTSS

Name: Helen Levinson

Dear Board of Education Members of District 219,

I would like to welcome Dr. Farzaneh, joining the D219 board - elf Mabrouk! I would also like to welcome Dr. Lopez to the board. I wish you both well and great success in what appears to be very challenging roles within District 219.

Many parents, including myself, have filed several complaints about Ms. Manrique's inappropriate behavior on social media for a year. In addition, District 219 community members have witnessed a series of disturbing online activities by individuals on your school board and within your administration and faculty.

Amid the current atmosphere of uncertainty, people are leaning more towards social media for information, and some are using it as an outlet to express political views. Board members sharing their personal political opinions on their social media pages and discussing other topics that are perceived to be inappropriate reflects poorly on the entire school board members. Especially when a board member is posting volatile statements linked back to the organization on whose board they sit.

Ms. Manrique's Twitter posts on September 2, 2021 states that she has "aided & abetted many abortions." This should be enough of a concern that her posts are becoming a poor reflection on the entire D219 board. The Niles North Girls Track & Field official Twitter account liked the post. To have students witness and view Ms. Manrique's inappropriate tweets should be a concern to all of you who work hard to be good role models in the community.

Social media can be a positive tool for fostering community engagement with the school district. It needs to operate within appropriate guidelines for board members whether they are communicating online about school district business or their personal views. In light of the many complaints regarding Ms. Manrique's volatile Twitter posts, I ask that you consider adding to the next board agenda reviewing and amending your board ethics policy to include a social media policy for proper etiquette and conduct.

Thank you,
Helen Levinson