

Parsippany-Troy Hills Township Schools

September 24, 2015

Many questions were asked at our 9/10 meeting. We continue to work on compiling the answers and readying them for posting on our website. The Board would like to use this opportunity to answer what we can at this time.

The safety and wellbeing of our students and staff is the Board's highest priority, and we will address those questions first.

- Did the Parsippany-Troy Hills Board of Education send our children into an unsafe situation? **No, the teachers had rosters of all students in their classrooms. The students were handed printed schedules and we had many extra administrators present to help students who needed directions.**

- In the event of an emergency, would our children know where to go? **The students were given a schedule every day that they were following. Fire Drills/Emergency drills were conducted during the beginning of the school year that required them to leave the building as they do every year.**

- Who's going to tell me when I call in an emergency where my kid is in the building?
Administrators, in any school with any schedule, are responsible for the whereabouts of their students during the school day.

- (School Security) Do you have a memorandum of agreement? That should be looked into and there's some legal issues and legalities of hiring law enforcement officers. **Yes, we do. It is signed every year between the Parsippany-Troy Hills Police Department and the school district.**

Now on to the questions on Middle School scheduling:

- Will the Board of Education and Dr. Gigante meet with all middle school students to take a moment to explain responsibility and solution to middle school issue? **Yes, when the new schedules are in place the Dr. Gigante and Mrs. Orthwein (and any other Board members that would like to attend?) will visit the students at school.**

- Will teachers be guaranteed to remain in their schools? **We cannot guarantee that teachers will remain in their schools. The District has to be administered as effectively and efficiently as possible and teachers may have to be reassigned to meet the needs of all students in the District. However, Administration and the Board are both aware that this has been a difficult experience for both students and teachers and are working to ensure that any future transitions will be as smooth as possible for all involved.**
- This odyssey began last fall with the Board rushing to approve a middle school redesign that clearly was not even remotely close to a sensible approach. Why did you let that happen? **The Board is prohibited from administering the schools; it must rely on the recommendations and expertise of its administration. The decision to move forward on the Middle School redesign was based on the recommendations of our administrators, including middle school principals, supervisors and senior administrators.**
- Didn't enough of you have skin in the game with children at the middle school level which you decidedly gambled with their academic experience? **The intent was to enhance the educational experience of our middle school students. It remains a fact that our Middle School students are not demonstrating the same level of proficiency and don't have the same level of choice that we see at other levels and in other schools. These are and should be issues that are addressed to ensure that Parsippany remains as competitive as other schools in the county.**
- I would like to know how is administration and the Board of Education going to operate differently than it has in the past couple of years? **The Board is not allowed to administer the schools – we are not permitted to make the day-to-day decisions on how the schools are run. That said, Board members will ask harder questions of its administrators about the implementation and impact of various decisions. However, decisions should still be guided by the principle of “What is in the best interest of our students?” And we may agree and we may disagree with what the best interest of our student's means.**
- We need to hear how you all are going to grow from this? **We all acknowledge the lessons learned from this experience and will carry that knowledge with us when making future decisions**
- How much has this failed design cost us? **This is still being determined**
- Has our district been served with the lawsuits from Genesis yet? **No**
- How many violations of children's IEP's are we facing? **None**

- The 9 periods 40 minute schedule was working so well for us. Why did we have to change it? Test scores for the last few years have shown that we are not meeting State set benchmarks in Math and Language Arts at both middle schools and that is something that has to be addressed in some fashion.
- If we get yelled at for not doing our homework, why is it ok for the Board not to do theirs? The Board is comprised of unpaid volunteers and must rely on the District's professional educators to guide them in the decision-making process. Again, the Board members have learned to ask harder and more practical questions when being presented with options that are endorsed by its administration.
- I want specifically to know how you are going to break up these trimesters? When the new schedule begins the total number of days that make up the new schedule will be divided into three parts, as we have always done when dividing the 180 days of a school year into four parts.
- Have you considered the impact and the necessary remedies for special education students and their IEP's? –Yes. All students have their required Core subjects and programs. If there are specific concerns they should be referred first to the building principal and then Mr. Giordano.
- When does the district anticipate being in compliance with IEP's? The District is in compliance with students' IEP's.
- Will the schedules be ready in October? Our best estimate is early October.
- My son has a couple of study halls and a class that's listed as Spanish with a teacher to be determined. Who will be responsible to know his whereabouts until we do move back to that schedule? Every class has a roster and an assigned certificated staff member taking attendance.
- What about the communication with the parents? Will be on-going communication.
- Do you expect to put timelines out when deliverables might be done? Yes, see timelines on website.
- How often are we going to be updated? As often as practicable.
- What are we going to do losing a month? Students are learning in their core academic classes and student work will be shared with the new teacher if a student's schedule requires him to change teachers.
- I'm also curious about the cost of the scheduling fiasco in terms of legal fees? To be determined.
- There were also some general and Board related questions that we can answer:

- Re Rosh Hashanah and only on day off - PHS school pictures are scheduled for Tuesday, September 15. I am hoping that at the very least that can be rescheduled. **The pictures were re-scheduled for a different date. Activities, tests, and quizzes were not scheduled for September 15 & 16.**
- Case manager not in place at Brooklawn – could Mr. Giordano elaborate on that? **Brooklawn has a School Psychologist, Social Worker, and LDTC. The LDTC is a consultant who is acting as case manager until the permanent LDTC arrives from their current district on 10/13/15.**
- Have you gone into the lavatories in the elementary school? They are disgusting. The tiles are patched in different colors. They don't even put the right colors in to match. I know that sounds silly but if you go in and you're looking at this stuff and you say: What kind of school system is this? **The Business Administrator will look into this facility issue and bring it to the Buildings and Grounds committee of the Board.**
- Is there any consideration to help the paras along with some kind of instrument (computer) so we can get on to GCN, at least be able to access it? **Yes, there are Chromebooks and iMacs available at the schools.**
- Why no iPads on the first day of school? **iPads were handed out on August 24th and 25th first – 68% were handed out. The principals determined the dates that they would be handed out in the schools according to their own schedules. It was determined they would be handed out on September 9th during lunch.**
- Re: noontime aids -- Now you also have teachers covering some of those lunches, as well. I'd like to know if teachers are still going to be available to run things like their clubs that I know many teachers enjoy doing during the winter months? **Yes.**
- Will they be available to do forensics? **Yes**
- The other thing, and probably more importantly, where do they get the time to collaborate? **During their prep periods.**
- But you put in this beautiful field which I'm sure is going to make everybody happy. But how could you do that without having a contract for the teachers? **Negotiations are ongoing with the teachers.**
- What is the cost of the Attorney, Mr. Murray that is fighting our teacher's contract? **His hourly rate is \$160.00, hourly rate for travel is \$80.00; amount spent as of June 2015 = was \$33,136.00**
- Has the Board of Education been rubber stamping policies? **No.**

- At the same time scores of additional administrative overhead positions were proposed. The new cabinet was presented by our Superintendent using an extremely compact flowchart. It was difficult to decipher, at best, even more difficult to understand was how to pay for it. The Board approved these positions time and again with little discourse or debate. Most of these positions were paid using borrowed time and money. They were funded through the district's receipt of extraordinary aid received from the State of New Jersey because a myriad of paperwork was completed documenting special education population. Extraordinary aid is a one-year grant and that can vary greatly. Previous Superintendents considered this gift money and were careful to use it only on expenses in the district that they knew were not reoccurring. How are we going to pay for those salaries this year? **The additional administrative positions were funded through the general fund portion of the district's budget. Extraordinary aid are unrestricted funds that the district receives from the Department of Education that the district uses as a part of the general fund budget, so to suggest that these positions were funded exclusively by this aid in not a correct assumption. Parsippany has for years been below the administrative cost limit particularly when compared to districts of comparable size.**