

Public Comment/Questions
September 24, 2020

Good evening.

I would like to take a moment to publicly thank the amazing teachers who have been working so hard to make our first few weeks of virtual learning go as smoothly as possible. They have truly gone above and beyond. I have been lucky enough to observe my daughter's teachers and how they manage their classes and I am in awe of how they manage to make things work, despite many issues with technology. We are truly blessed to have such dedicated professionals serving our students.

I would like to take a moment to inquire about a few things:

1. What Plans are being made to keep students safe when we eventually return to some form of in person education? I recognize that this may be more than a month or two away, but I hope we are being proactive about this.
2. I noticed that we have an item on the agenda to bring in Velez Educational Associates to audit and possibly address issues with our Technology infrastructure. This is an important activity given the many challenges that we are facing with connectivity and poorly maintained devices. I am happy to see this, though I wish this activity had been considered in June. There is a reference to a blanket purchase order in the specifications. Is there going to be an evaluation and approval process where Velez estimates the effort for remediation of what they find in the audit and then take action? Who will review and sign off on this? What oversight will be in place for this audit and consulting activity? Also, I see that they required system administration access to all sites and servers to conduct their work. Have they prepared a data privacy agreement and an NDA re: the data that they will access? This is critical.
3. You have been using the announcement feature heavily on the Hillsidek12 website. Yet this feature is not optimized for mobile devices. It is very difficult to see or locate these important announcements when accessing the site from a phone instead of a laptop. Since this is how many people access the site, important information can be missed. Can we either make an effort to optimize for mobile devices OR use the announcement feature less and instead post all critical info on the main page
4. The website directory is still missing many email addresses and other contact info (eg Board office lists only phone numbers and no email

addresses). This is critical in a remote learning environment. Can we please address?

5. I see that we have re-assigned our IT Director and are hiring again. Is the rate for the Technician typically in the 80-90K range? What is our process for vetting our technical resources to assure that they bring the necessary skills and knowledge?

Thank you for your time and attention this evening.

Kimberly Iungerman

Responses (KI)

1. *We have ordered temperature checking hardware and software for multiple entrances to all buildings, we have ordered air scrubbing machines for locations without sufficient air flow, and we have ordered disinfectant sprayers with the proper solution. A major disinfecting of all locations will take place from an outside vendor prior to reopening.*
2. *The consultants will be working with our entire tech staff and new manager and all major decisions regarding the network operation will be brought to the Superintendent and myself.*
3. *We are currently working with a consultant to update our website. We will take this into consideration moving forward. Thank you.*
4. *We will take this into consideration when updating our website. Thank you*
5. *We have interviewed a number of candidates for the technology manager both times that the position was available and chose the best candidate each time.*

Congratulations on passing the QSAC. As a school board member for 8 years I understand the magnitude of your achievement and how hard it is to achieve.

You should all be proud and hold your heads high. You did good.

Councilman George Cook.

Response (GC):

Thank you Councilman Cook for your unwavering support, guidance, and leadership.

Marisa West

Good evening, first of all I want to send a HUGE thank you to all the administrators and teachers. You are Rock stars! The amount of patience and support you have shown is remarkable.

A few concerns noted during these weeks:

1- we’ve had a significant amount of parents that have connectivity issues on school issued Chromebooks. Unfortunately a lot of our Chromebooks are outdated and do not have sufficient processing power to handle Google Meets videos. How is the district handling this issue?

2- When a student is having an issue during class, they are prompted to call the school. Who at the school is providing IT support? Instead of the school shouldn’t parents be directed to a IT technician or department that could handle the concerns as to not overwhelm the amount of calls placed to the school?

Agenda Items:

District wide Parental Involvement policy:

1- We are a title 1 district which means all students are considered Title 1 students. Is that correct? Further, With regards to the parent committees listed are students further divided into “Part A”? Could you explain the various committees listed?

2- What is your view on the PTA’s role with parental involvement as it relates to the district wide parental involvement policy?

Thank you.

Responses (MW):

- 1. We distributed well over 1400 chrome books that were updated prior to distribution this fall. Families may be experiencing connectivity issues with WIFI as more district’s have shifted to remote instruction causing*

a strain on networks. Its very similar to electricity during a heatwave, the more people use it, the more strain on the system. We will continue to work with families to resolve technical issues they may experience with our devices and have over 700 additional devices we are expecting to arrive at some point in November. Please keep in mind, we placed our order for technology in May but due to an increase in demand, our devices are on backorder until November. We will continue to distribute, repair, and replace devices based on our needs.

- 2. At each school IT support is provided by a school-based technology assistance. We wanted to ensure parents and students were provided timely responses to potential technical issues that could be addressed at the school level. When an issue can not be corrected at the school, our IT department is notified and intervenes thereafter.*

District wide Parental Involvement policy (Responses MW):

- 1. We currently have one Title I school: AP Morris/ECC. We have submitted school wide plans for each school to become a Title I district as we are eligible based on our percentage of students who receive free and reduced lunch. All school wide Title I annual school plans were submitted and certified by the Chief School Administrator today (September 24, 2020). We had a deadline of September 30, 2020. We will find out our status upon approval of our plans from the state. I'm not familiar with the committees referred to in this question but we will provide the community an update on our status. Becoming a Title I school district will provide us additional funding for all schools.*
- 2. We view parents as partners and see our PTAs as vehicles to support district/board goals and initiatives, more importantly our schools. As stated in Policy 9210, Parent Organizations, "...Representatives of recognized parent organizations shall be treated by district employees as interested friends of the schools and as supporters of public education in the school district."..."The board relies upon parent organizations to operate in a manner consistent with public expectations for the schools..." We want to ensure we continue to have viable PTAs and parent organizations at our schools*

Judite Soares

Good Evening everyone, my question is a general question on the hiring process? I see in the agenda, that the recently hired technology manager position is back up for rehire and the individual is being reassigned to a lessor

position. Are there appropriate processes in place to vet candidates to ensure the most qualified are being interviewed and appointed for positions? As a former hiring manager, I am all too familiar with the costs (both in time and financial) of not matching up the right candidates to open positions. I'm not asking about specifics about the particular candidate originally hired I know that information can't be released in a general public meeting. Thanks.

Response(JS)

DE: We have interviewed a number of candidates for the technology manager both times that the position was available and chose the best candidate each time.

Sarah Allen

133 silver avenue

My question is in regard to chromebooks. We are having daily multiple incidences where my 8th grader is kicked off the google meeting for connection issues. We have switched out her chromebook for replacement only to have more issues. It is not our House connection as others in the house have no issues. Are there any plans to upgrade the chromebooks or replacement for newer ones with less connectivity issues? I can't afford to have my 8th grader fall behind in her class work constantly being kicked off the session.

Thank you for your time

Response (SA): *We will continue to work with families to resolve technical issues they may experience with our devices and have over 700 additional devices we are expecting to arrive at some point in November. We will ensure parents can continue to replace devices they may be experiencing technical issues with. New devices we ordered in May are on backorder until November.*

Name- Angella Alexander

Question-

1. will the children who received old Chromebooks get new updated ones? Virtual learning has become difficult due to the old laptops not being able to handle the wifi connection.
2. Why was back to school night not done live? If the children can have virtual class the parents can and should have had live virtual back to school.

3. The electronic signs outside the schools are extremely too bright at night. My house is directly across the street from Deanna Taylor Academy and it feels like a spaceship is landing in my living room and bedroom. The brightness was turned down a few months ago but at the end of August it was turned back up. The complaints are not just for this school but for all the schools that have homes across the street from them. There needs to be a timer as well as the brightness needs to be turned down. To pay over \$15,000 for each of them, there has to be a way to monitor it.

Thank you,

Responses (AA):

- 1. We will continue to work with families to resolve technical issues they may experience with our devices and have over 700 additional devices we are expecting to arrive in November. We will ensure parents can continue to replace devices they may be experiencing technical issues with. New devices we ordered in May are on backorder until November.*
 - 2. This question was addressed in the Superintendent's Report. We wanted to ensure all families had an opportunity to receive pertinent information provided by the principal and their child's teacher beyond Back to School Night on September 23rd thus have made virtual back to school night presentations available until September 30, 2020.*
 - 3. Our board president and I ensured the vendor came to dim the lights on all of our electronic display boards. This occurred on Wednesday September 22, 2020. The displays also goes off each night.*
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Good Evening. Hope you are doing well.

First of all thank you Mr. Gregory for always responding to questions so quickly. I also want to also thank all of the school administrators, teachers and support staff in the schools for all of their efforts the last few weeks. Their patience & willingness to get answers to parents quickly is much appreciated.

Just a few questions:

1 - There have been many parents stating that their child's class was being hacked during google meets by someone using a Hillside email account. I was doing some research on Canvas. I'm just wondering if there is a reason we are using Google meets rather than [Canvas Big Blue Button](#)

[Feature](#) ? Just wondering why we are not able to use canvas in its full functionality since it has more strict security measures. Is this a cost factor? Additionally, if we go back to school in November, will we continue to use this platform throughout the year?

2 - Regarding Labor: This is not a specific question regarding personnel - more about tech support. I see that the recently hired Technology manager has been transferred to another position in the district and someone else is on the agenda to be hired to fill that spot. Was this hire done to increase the staffing to address all of the issues parents and teachers are having with chromebooks/connections to canvas/google meets and offer more support?

I know this can't be predicted/planned in advance but how are teacher resignations being handled? Will substitutes be fully trained on canvas? And if so, is there a way to keep a consistent sub? It is something we have had issues with for years now. Students being without a teacher is hard enough for in class learning, Will the replacements for teacher leaves be treated more swiftly?

3 - This was recently asked in a parent group by a parent who homeschools. I know there are no legal obligations on behalf of the board but what are the district policies about homeschool students participation in Hillside activities? Are they able to sign up for extra curricular activities inclusive of clubs/sports? If so, are there limitations? If not, is this something that can be considered?

4 - I want to preface my question to say that this is not related to the overall policy of students having their camera on during class. I noticed that if students are off camera, are more than 3-5 minutes late for their class, they are marked absent, does this take into account students having technical difficulties like connection issues - especially if at home without a guardian or at home with a guardian who may not be technologically savvy and can't solve the issue quickly?

The second part of my question is how absences are being handled. I know parents are to alert the school nurse in cases of absences but who alerts the teacher ? I can hear during the day where kids are "absent" because the teacher can't see whether the students have logged in while they are in class. When "switching" I hear the next teacher ask "how many students were in your last class"?

I had asked the last 2 superintendents about how the district addresses absences. The time of notifications about absences to parents was updated to the morning rather than the afternoon but nothing was done to address *how* parents notify the school. I saw in a few other districts (have

attached the guidelines from Upper Saddle River ([Upper Saddle River - Genesis](#)) that Genesis has a functionality that allows for parents to mark their child absent, Is this feature not built in or available in the Hillside portal? Also at UCVTS - parents can send an email directly to the person responsible for student attendance. Is this something that can be set up? The current way of identifying a student's absence doesn't seem very effective or efficient.

5 - Question regarding the parent involvement policy as it relates to title 1 - I see that the district mentioned developing a parent advisory committee, change communication with parents, encourage parents to (I can't read the balance) - Is this specific to Title 1 **parents (it says title 1 schools in most of the language)** or parents district wide, in our title 1 schools? Is this the same program that has been in place (where teachers/administrators meet with disadvantaged students/parents) and being revisited?

Thanks for taking time to read my questions - looking forward to your feedback

All the best

J'ne Brathwaite

Responses (JB)

Your welcome, please see responses below to your inquiries.

- 1. Regarding attempts to hack google meets while impersonating HBOE employees and/or board members, our teachers have been resilient and have prevented classrooms from being interfered with by outside agitators. I sent an email home to families and a Blackboard Connect phone message warning them that people are using HBOE fictitious emails and/or social media accounts to disseminate inaccurate information. All Hillside Board of Education members have hillsidek12.org accounts. I also notified the Hillside Police Department when one parent reported that the attempted hacker had an image that traumatized her child. The police department is aware and investigating these instances of cybercrimes. Impersonating a public or elected official is a crime and we take these matters seriously.*

Regarding questions related to Canvas, we believe in providing teachers and staff bite sized professional development that is implemented in phases. Our teachers received their first training in Canvas on September 1st and have had to adjust to a completely new virtual learning platform. They will continue to receive training to enable all features of Canvas. Our next training will be on October 5th. We will continue to leverage Canvas throughout the school year in our in person, hybrid, and full remote learning models.

- 2. We cannot publicly discuss items related to labor. As it relates to substitutes, we have hired certified building-based substitutes that will be trained in Canvas and will serve as long term subs in occasions where resignations, retirements, and leaves of absence occur. Teachers will provide asynchronous instruction when occasional absences occur (i.e. an employee is sick for 1-2 days).*
- 3. Students who are home schooled can participate in co-curricula activities and sports offered in the Hillside Public Schools. The district remains responsible for offering equitable opportunities for our families who are homeschooling their children that includes but is not limited to; access to our curriculum, curricular resources, and participation in co-curricular activities and sports.*
- 4. We are unaware of any policy that marks a child absent for being tardy. Children are marked tardy for the day when reporting to school after 8:30 AM. As it relates to how absences are being handled, we would encourage you to reach out to your building principal to see what systems they have in place to notify teachers of a child's absence for the day.*
- 5. To reiterate, we have just submitted our Title I applications so all district schools can leverage federal dollars based on our eligibility. We have not received notice from the state if our school plans have been approved but will notify the community when it occurs along with associated committees, if applicable.*

My name is Christina Richardson. My daughter is in the IEP program. I first would like to say when the schools first closed, I did not receive any assistance for my daughter. I received a packet with copied dido's that were very hard to read as if the copier ran out of ink..

I heard nothing from her Teacher or her Case Manager all summer. It was hard for me and Miracle trying to help her because I am not a teacher.

I feel she lost a whole year of school which is making it very hard to catch up. Virtual learning is not effective for my child. You have children talking sometime, their sibling yelling in the background. A student that is after care so you hear background noise from there as well.

Her teacher Ms. Alvarez is great and does her best, but something is out of her control because she cannot make the children sit and listen in the home environment.

I really wish the district would at least consider bringing the IEP student back to school. I am almost sure there is a classroom that can accommodate 8 children and have social distancing.

There is no way Miracle will reach her IEP required level in this learning environment. She will be 2 years behind instead of one. .

I have friends in union county but different districts that did not skip a beat. They went right into Virtual Learning. Some districts already brought the IEP students back to school. This is just not fair that our district is not giving our children the same benefits.

I am hoping this can be taken into consideration to bring IEP students back. They deserve to have a chance at being successful too.

Thanks you for listening to my concerns

Sincerely

Christina Richardson

Response (CR)

Thank you for expressing your concerns. We will continue to provide the community updates on Reopening plans.