March 4, 2019 GISD school board meeting: public comments -

 Superintendent response to 2/15 email of concerns

Following my comments to the school board at the February 11 meeting, I emailed a letter of detailed concerns about a number of GISD expenses to each member of the GISD school board. I also introduced the issue of poor classroom discipline affecting learning and test scores. Both of these topics affect district morale.

The day before yesterday I received a certified letter from the superintendent in reply. Respectfully, the majority was legal speak, a repeat of policies, a ‘we wanted efficiency’, maybe next time, and ‘teachers will be able to complete a survey’.

The heart of my concerns was totally missed. I still question some expenses. The information explaining the Reading Plus program itself, stated that the program was not successful with most adolescents. The very expensive purchase of Kamico workbooks would have been avoided if someone had compared the workbooks to the rigor of the STAAR test. I completed a TEK by TEK, question by question comparison and presented it to my administration who passed the binder along to central office. That afternoon the word came that Kamico would no longer be used. There was no other statement made. Could not someone responsible for ordering materials have reviewed in the same way before the purchases?

The letter comment was that maybe in the future teachers could be asked about needed supplemental materials. When did that change? Teachers always have made these requests, with justification, to campus administration, until recently.

Efficiency was prime, making choices such as farming out scheduling and the creation of six weeks tests that have had an effect on teacher morale. Although neither have proved efficient. There was no recognition of the lack of support for classroom discipline. No recognition of the fact that poor classroom behavior results in poor test scores. Recognition for a new reading program being implemented in the lower grades, but no recognition for the challenge for higher grade, all subject teachers, dealing with students reading 2-4 years below level now.

According to TEA data, for a district with our student population, the GISD superintendent is the second highest paid in the state at $190,000. This is reported as one salary amount. It does not read as base pay with a bonus. The superintendent stated that her salary was one amount and partially based on years of experience. On June 21, 2018, the Gonzales Inquirer printed an article written by Dr. Strozier. She stated her salary was $166.000 with a supplemental amount of $24,000. Her 32% salary increase was to insure continuity for the district. As a side note, the people most consistent in student lives is probably the teacher aide who works with our at-risk pops. They haven’t received a raise in years and don’t meet the $1500 state average for aides. And before you look at numbers and tell me again that we are over-staffed at aides, come visit classrooms. Until recently, aides were expected to work with both special ed and LEP students during the same class period. Special ed teachers are so few that each has to check on three different students in three different classrooms during the same class period. Numbers on paper do not reflect real classrooms and the student demographics in them.

The concerns voiced are not mine alone. They are not baseless, pulled out of a hat. As I speak, please hear the voices of teachers and community. My primary reason for addressing these issues is my personal concern for teachers and staff. Micromanagement of teachers, excessive paperwork, with no time to complete it during a daily conference period and bell-to-bell teaching means a minimum of a 55 hour work week, often more if you are meeting the needs of individual students. I am aware of health issues and frustrations.

Where else can you have your things stolen or destroyed? Where else can you be talked back to, ignored, walked out on, literally barked at, cursed at, challenged, and have someone “in your face” eight hours a day?

I see the toll that the constant stress and the denial of teachers as professionals by central office, parents, and students alike is taking on my friends. I am quite aware of the personal and family sacrifices they are making due to the current pressures. I am deeply concerned. I would ask you to return the classroom to teachers. They are experienced professionals who truly care about “their kids”, or they wouldn’t be here. They do not require micromanagement. I am not the enemy. I am telling you about real problems that need to be taken care of. I’m retired, although I do sub. I have nothing to gain here, except the, “Thank you for being brave enough to talk about this,” from teachers and staff. No one wants the reprisals.

Money, and what it is spent on, is a community concern. If the water building is to be refurbished as an area to teach the mechanics and auto body of tractor trailers, what is the time table? How is the sale of land coming? Which employees will be receiving raises? People want real conversations, not a general category with money lumped together that no one can figure out what goes to whom or what.

Budgets are set and contracts are being issued. As a board, you are already aware if there is a need to cut positions. In the name of transparency, this information should be laid out to the public. Specifically, how will it affect already short-handed campuses literally?. The number of aides and the number of true special education teachers at each grade level is of particular interest. Parents need time to consider all educational options for their children. Employees respectfully need to search out other positions. July and August are too late in the educational timeline for application.

As a school board, you are responsible to answer to the citizens, to the taxpayers, who fund the school district. They should know how their tax dollars are being spent. With the overall GISD “F” rating – earned by 17 districts out of the 1032 districts in Texas, the 1.6% position, the amount spent on people working directly with our students compared to non-direct staff is a legitimate question.

Thank you.

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