

**Public Comments for September 3, 2020  
District 54 School Board Meeting**

*Received August 26, 2020*

**Comment 1**

The School Board meeting is fast approaching and I thought I would reach out yet again, to make sure every member was well aware of my thoughts/comments/questions regarding the 2020/21 school year.

1. What is being done by our schools/SD54/community to mitigate risks and to ensure that the IDPH guidelines provide a workable framework and guidance that allows and encourages in person instruction? What tangible changes are being made since the last board meeting? What type of advocating for in person learning is being done on the school district - state agencies level?
2. Since we are so concerned for our kids' wellbeing, what is being done to ensure that the environment that they are now learning in is one conducive to optimal education? Is the district monitoring students' living conditions and checking if they are acceptable? Air conditioning during this hot August is a must! What opportunities are offered to those whose home temperatures are in the 90s?
3. Is SD54 following recent numbers on kids' suicide attempts, instances of abuse at home, accidental poisonings and other accidents as closely as the "increasing Covid-19 statistics"? What is expected of the district employees and teachers in terms of mitigating those (since they are apparently responsible to mitigate Covid-19 risks)? If the district is so concerned about stopping the spread and protecting our vulnerable populations what is their stance on the fact that now many parents are leaving their kids with elderly grandparents or other strangers to provide childcare (and during that time to get exposed to Covid-19) and to supervise their education while the parents are at work? What is being done about kids left home alone?
4. Has there been any reportable research to show if/how using the platforms we currently have at our disposal impacts learning and growth?
5. What are the expectations the district has for our students' growth? Do we expect them to gain knowledge at the same rate as with in person instruction? If not, that to me is unacceptable.
6. Are park district's "Study Hall" programs subject to different guidelines? How come they can open and schools are choosing not to? Do they care about kids' health or their employees' safety less?
7. How is the school district planning on restoring trust among the parents/kids/teachers/administrators? Judging by my many conversations with other parents the "us vs. them" mentality is rampant!
8. I will not insult the board members with providing links to AAP, CDC, and other countries' statistics – those are readily available for those interested (though I would be happy to oblige if necessary). I have been following the numbers, though. I have always loved math (thank you my elementary school math teachers!) and have been doing some calculating myself. At this point, it seems that regardless of restrictions imposed, the mortality rate from Covid-19 oscillates between 3-4% of those infected, worldwide. That translates to about 0.005% to 0.06% of the entire population, depending on the country. If we consider SD54 serves 15K children, and employs 2K, statistically 10 of those people would not survive this pandemic. And if we are following the numbers and science, and not emotionally charged manipulation, I don't understand why that would be considered "the greater good." I strongly believe that we are harming a whole generation in the long run, by keeping them out of school and normalcy. Covid-19 is terrible, but it is not going away. We need to learn to live with it and to be safe around it. What better forum to teach our youth about appropriate behaviors than to bring them into schools, teach them, and model the expectations?

9. I want to be clear that I am not advocating for MANDATORY in person schooling. I simply want the ability to choose what is best for my children returned to me. I hope to partake in a civilized and constructive discussion. I want to understand why decisions are being made with what seems to be irrational fear, not science, backing them up. I want to know what I can do to encourage schools to open their doors. What else can I, as a parent, do to encourage the teachers and the school district to advocate on behalf of our kids more?
10. In closing, I would just like to say that as good a job as our school and the district has done with the remote learning in the spring AND now, I am unfortunately observing worrisome signs in my kids. My 8<sup>th</sup> grader is very discouraged by the idea this is going to be long term – she saw her brother's 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation this past spring and does not want the same. She wants to be able to learn with her friends. She wants to be active in all the clubs, sports and extracurricular activities that have been offered in the past – she wants to be ready for high school! My 5<sup>th</sup> grader just gets sad. That is not right and I will fight for what is best for them as long as it takes.

Margaret Jablonski

*Received September 1, 2020*

### **Comment 2**

I understand teachers are working hard, possibly harder than ever. That being said, the quality of the education they are getting now is subpar. Particularly, my first grader is unable to focus and doesn't know what she is supposed to be doing most of the time. One of my kids has an IEP, and we were told he would be able to go in person sooner. So far there has been no response regarding this. I have 3 kids in this district, and they are all hating this and want to go back. Please open back up our schools immediately! Give us back our choice for in person!

Nesrun Hamidof

### **Comment 3**

Thank you for keeping our children safe and a huge shout out to Muir teachers/staff for a fantastic start to the school year! Your commitment to our children is outstanding.

Kim Searle (Grgat)

### **Comment 4**

We highly push for Nerge Elementary to move into both in person learning and remote learning. This would allow in person learning for healthy children and remote learning for children who are considered high risk (Or just not comfortable with returning to in person yet). 72% of school districts within Illinois are offering in person or blended learning.

Within those 72% are neighboring school districts. Please use our neighbors and these 72% of school districts as the example. Please use them as an opportunity to successfully implement in person learning for our children at Nerge.

Know that we as parents of a 5th, 2nd and 1st grader at Nerge Elementary are in favor of returning to in person learning as soon as possible. We are in favor of everything in person teaching promotes for our children.

Our children are not learning at their full potential with remote learning. These are years of teaching that many essentials needed in life are learned. Kids without the ability to read, write and assemble numbers properly put their futures at risk. Kindergartners and 1st graders are especially in need of proper

instruction from an educated professional in person. Learning to read and write are difficult enough, adding additional variables will only slow the learning process down

Also important is the need of a classroom with controlled learning environment and developing social skills. Building blocks of growing personalities away from home is a must. Watching our children grow and learn as individuals is so important to us. Remote learning is stunting these advancements and denying them access to these social growths

When we last spoke over the phone, there was talks of not meeting IDPH and CDC guidelines to resume in person learning in our area. This simply can't be true because our neighboring school districts to the North, East, South and West of us have resumed in person learning. Please start taking necessary steps to resume in person learning for families at Nerge Elementary as soon as possible while continuing remote learning for families in need

Rick and Lizzie Simantz

**Comment 5**

Please open the schools! VL can't continue forever. This is not good for our kids well being. Let's try a hybrid model at least to give our kids a bit of normality... if private schools can't do it and other districts can as well!!!

Sylvia Lidecki

**Comment 6**

For young children, under grade 6, the hours in front of the screen seem much too long. Would you consider less time using devices and more/alternative opportunities for independent work?

Corinne Martinez

**Comment 7**

When are you planning to open up schools in SD54 for in person learning? Per CDC reports, the numbers of COVID are going down, deaths have decreased substantially. Zoom learning doesn't do justice for kids and it just burns them out mentally and physically. I see no justified reasons why schools should be closed.

Lukasz Rosa

**Comment 8**

I feel that District 54 and all the staff at Blackwell Elementary are doing an AMAZING job adapting to v-learning and the situation we all currently find our world in. My only complaint is that these children are glued to a screen way too long. I understand the difference between educational screen time vs nonproductive screen time. Still, if you add in the 5-6 hours my children spend online at school to the 1-2 hours of homework and studying on their chrome books it's WAY too much! Something has to give...either lighten the day or lessen the homework because all I'm noticing from my straight A daughter is there's no time for anything else BESIDES sitting on her computer. And my son has given up, he'll "go to school" but won't put ANY more time into that computer after 3 pm so only about 1/2 of the homework is actually being completed. And honestly, I'm not gonna come down on him for that. Because I don't blame him! Please reconsider how much time these kids are spending on a computer and how that is affecting them, emotionally and socially.

Kristen Fosses

*Received September 2, 2020*

**Comment 9**

I have to give all the praise and admiration to all the District 54 teachers and staff, especially my son's teacher Mr. Derrick Sun, 4th grade teacher at Armstrong School. He is doing a magnificent job organizing and engaging my son who has ADHD. He brings him into conversation with what interests him and relates it to the subject matter. It's difficult with Zoom but he has been very successful. Amazing talent, the entire faculty and staff!

Allison Lindrum

**Comment 10**

We wanted to thank the district and our sons teachers at MacArthur and Eisenhower for a great start to school. Of course, we all wish our students were back in the classroom in person. However, this is the best alternative we have right now to keep our students, teachers and staff safe and healthy. Not knowing what to expect, I think many parents were nervous with e-learning starting last week. However, we have been so pleased with how well school has gone so far. Teachers are creative, engaging and organized. Our boys are enjoying school and having fun. They've already mentioned favorite lessons and moments with their teachers. We greatly appreciate the organization, thought and training that has clearly gone into e-learning this fall. Thank you to our teachers, administrators, and staff for your hard work over the summer and into the fall. We know you are working even harder to provide our students with a quality remote education and we appreciate you!!

Jessica Augsburger

**Comment 11**

We the parents would like an idea of when there is a possibility of going back to in school learning. Maybe the district should be looking at a hybrid schedule at the very least. If other districts can do it why can't we? Our kids need normalcy and socialization.

Justine Kaye

**Comment 12**

We cannot thank the teachers and staff at Enders-Salk School as well as throughout the district for all of their hard work! The time that has been dedicated to Chromebook and technology lessons has really paid off. My first and third grader have become far more independent than I ever imagined. My children are engaged all day, and I know that they are receiving great instruction through the entire day. Even though they are at home, I know that their day is much like it is when they are in school. Whether below, on, or above benchmark, it is wonderful to see that my children will be provided instruction at their level while in small groups during reading or math acceleration. Thank you to District 54 for continually providing my children a quality education.

Stacy Costa

**Comment 13**

I would like to commend District 54 and the staff and faculty of Dooley. While there have been the expected mishaps with Zoom, I have been extremely impressed with the quality of instruction with VLearning. My children are engaged and are able to do their schoolwork independently, with minimal help from me with my first grader. While it isn't how we thought the school year would look like, I feel confident that my children are getting the same quality education (in terms of academics) they would have

received in the classroom. I urge the district to continue with VLearning until it is truly safe to return to school.

Erin Moeller

#### **Comment 14**

With regards to vlearning - we need to make reopening the schools a priority. Not all children are excelling in this vlearning environment. Placing the burden of vlearning on families is damaging for the children, the parents, and the families. At a minimum, we should return to the model that was originally presented to us - the ability to choose between vlearning or sending our children to school. For guardians/parents that are unwilling to send their children to school in person, they can opt for vlearning at home. For parents that are willing to assume the risk of exposure to COVID-19 (much like we assume the risk for the flu, the common cold, and norovirus - all of which I've caught via my child and their school), we can send them to school.

Furthermore, if we're going to continue in this format, the district needs to eliminate YouTube from its platforms. YouTube contains some great educational material, but it is overshadowed by the mindless drivel that children actually want to watch. Specifically, I refer to gaming videos where the YouTubers yell profanities at their screens, or videos where the YouTubers treat life like a game where they can say and do the most ridiculous things.

We have been wanting to block the usage of YouTube from our home network, but we are unable to do so because of the fact that the district is using the platform in its vlearning. I have caught my child multiple times, watching non-educational YouTube videos during vlearning. I've attempted to correct this bad habit, but I am also a working parent struggling to work from home. Vlearning, despite the promises of "You shouldn't need to become too involved, and the children can work independently...", is not something that a child between the ages of 5 and 13 can do independently. It is not even reasonable to make such promises to parents.

We are expecting children to stare at a screen for six hours each day for "educational purposes," and it is just as dangerous as allowing a kid to stare at a screen for recreational purposes for six hours a day. Children are also not taking this seriously, as actual education, despite repeated assertions from their parents this IS REAL and that they are being held to the same expectations via vlearning as they are during in person school. But, really, how can we hold them to that? Children don't treat their parents or home the same way that they treat their school and teachers. They don't treat the talking screen on their Chromebooks the same way that they treat their teachers when they're actually in the same room.

Elizabeth Calderon

#### **Comment 15**

I wanted to reach out and just say how amazing School District 54 as a whole is. Last March was rough. It all happened so fast and I was so pleased to see how fast the school district came together and kept things going the best that they could. In one day these kids' world just got flipped upside down.

Summer came and went and I was filled with anxiety, wonder, and worry. Deep down watching the news and numbers not moving down, my gut told me there is no way school will start back up. I was right. But boy was I scared. It's a brand new school year. How will this work? My son is getting a Chromebook for the very first time, we at home are all apple electronics. How will he learn? Then I would spend sleepless nights worrying about my daughter. She is going into 7th grade. Will both of my kids keep up? Will they be engaged and most importantly would they learn and grow with this remote learning?

Back to school night is when it all changed for me, I didn't worry. I finally knew that the teachers are going even further than before. Again last year the kids were used to their schedule and we worked though it like champs. The start of a new school year online is what scared me. That night I could finally breathe.

First day of school was simply amazing and as the weeks have gone on I have only seen things getting better and better and my kids are truly learning and not missing out on friends. They give them time to chat and just seeing faces everyday helps. I have seen with both schools the amount of hard work and effort all teachers put in is so amazing the parent communication is amazing and even to many teachers answering emails from my kids who sometimes would send an email for help at 5:00 pm and to see that the teacher answers the email within minutes when their day is over and they should be home having family time. I love this district and love the concern is safety and health first.

I appreciate your hard work and dedication. You guys made a tough situation that cannot be controlled by anyone and made it so rewarding. This pandemic is scary and I appreciate the care all around and also making sure our children don't fail.

Both my kids get up every day ready to learn, I hear giggles, I hear conversations and I just hear learning and it makes me so happy. Keep up the amazing work D54 there are many parents in your corner ☐

Jessica Gilford

#### **Comment 16**

Parents are being left in the dark regarding the re-opening of our schools. I have 3 children in the district and I am clueless regarding re-evaluation dates or details about the re-evaluation process. I don't know what criteria must be met in order for schools to re-open. We are not getting answers. As a result, parents are turning to social media seeking answers which can lead to rumors and inaccuracies. We expect better. Parents are having important discussions and District 54 is not even part of the conversation. Where are you?

Metin Hamidof

#### **Comment 17**

My kindergartener is on Zoom 5 1/2 hours a day. This is way too long for his age. The original district email stated 2 1/2 hours for early childhood. This zoom day needs to be shortened and should end at lunchtime. The specials are really not working out for kindergarten. There's not much structure and everyone is talking (unmuting) at the same time. The live time needs to be shortened for kindergarten.

Becky Little

#### **Comment 18**

District 54 has been doing a fantastic job. Thank you to all teachers and administrators - our 1st and 4th graders are getting the attention and education they deserve! They really have taken on unprecedented tasks so well and so quickly. I overhear very engaging and excited teachers, have received responses from teachers within hours after I email them, and love seeing everything on seesaw that my 1st grader does. Thank you for everything, I hope you hear many positive responses as well - there are a lot of parents very happy with this experience!

Victoria Miller

**Comment 19**

Please explain why is it okay for you to keep the camps open with dozens of kids placed in one area but it's not okay for you to open schools even for a few days?

Gabriela Slowik

**Comment 20**

Can you please explain why some schools are open and some are not? Are SD 54 kids more likely to get exposed to Covid? Parents completed the survey , and it has been voted for opening schools and not e-learning. Despite the vote, schools got closed. What about park district? How come they are ok to be open and house so many kids at the same time? What about all the funding that schools received from the federal government? Where did that money go? Hope the district understands how this is hurting our children! Kids need to be in school...period.

Karolina Mitura

**Comment 21**

For the past week my 8<sup>th</sup> grader has appeared to take many breaks throughout the day. Yesterday I decided to see what her e-learning experience is like. Her morning meeting lasted 13 minutes then a 17 minute break, not a great start. Humanities was the full time with a mix of the teacher talking and independent work with a short break. I thought the teacher did a great job. I'm feeling optimistic. Unfortunately, the rest of the day was a big disappointment. Science consisted of 12 minutes of live instruction and an 18 minute break, math was approximately 10 minutes of live instruction which was a review of previous day's HW, no new material. Students were told to complete the day's slides independently and watch the district video if they had questions. There was a 1hr 30 min break for lunch which occurs on Wednesdays and Fridays. In total, my 8<sup>th</sup> grade student received less than 1.5hrs of live instruction. The district committed to 2.5 hrs of DAILY live instruction. What measures are you taking to insure students are actually receiving 2.5hrs of live instruction? I requested the zoom participation report for my daughter from 8/26 thru today so I could determine if this was an anomaly or a chronic problem. Mr. DuRoss replied my daughter was marked present yesterday and said if I had any further questions regarding attendance I should contact the principal. I do not have questions regarding attendance, I have questions regarding LIVE instruction. I would like to know what measures the district is taking to insure ALL students are receiving 2.5 hours of live instruction daily.

The district administrators said this fall would be better than the spring. I was told all schools would follow the same pacing. Were the following decisions made by the district administration, building administrator or teachers?

1. Gym class is 20 minutes four times a week. Two days are zoom and two days are independent. Does the district approve of the lesson being go outside and enjoy the day, go for a walk or something for students who may be home alone and are under the legal age of 14 to be home alone? The e-learning programs are limited to k-6 so working junior high parents have no choice but to leave their child home alone. Does the district think it is safe for a 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grader to go on a walk outside alone without parental approval?
2. The entire school has an hour and a half break on Wednesdays and Fridays for lunch?
3. The district has offered zoom cross country and zoom girls basketball. Is this safe for 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students? What about students who don't have a basketball or access to a basketball hoop? Is it safe to tell students to run alone outside for 1.5 miles unsupervised? Is EVERY school offering virtual sports and paying a stipend to the coaches? Many students do not live in supportive families and do not have

adults available to supervise them in order to participate in an extracurricular activity. Are you increasing or decreasing the equity gap with this program?

Since there are many students (especially 11-13 yr olds) who will be home alone, I would like to request teachers leave their cameras on when allowing students to work independently. My daughter's math teacher did this today and I was very grateful she did. I expect it will be comforting for those who are home alone to know that there is an adult who is "there" even if it is only on a screen.

The latest communication from the district says students may return mid-October. Local teachers, district employees, teachers union representatives, and community e-learning centers are saying students will not be going back this academic year. What do these people know that parents do not? Is there a chance students will NOT return to in person learning this academic year? If so, when do you intend to tell parents?

Will you be taking steps to reduce staff and facilities utilization? Obviously, it makes sense to have teachers in district buildings for logistic and operational reasons, but do all buildings need to remain open? I expect there are ways for the administration to better utilize buildings and save some money on operating expenses. It's nice for staff to work in the same building, but it clearly isn't required. Is the district planning to reorganize classes to the maximum contracted size of 28 in an effort to be fiscally responsible to taxpayers?

Zoom has participation reports which show when an attendee logged in, logged out and the duration of their participation. This information would be helpful for parents when trying to troubleshoot why their student is struggling. Who should a parent contact to obtain this report? The district or the teacher?

Stacy Gale

**Note:**

Board President Bob Kaplan also announced that District 54 received three anonymous comments. District 54 Board Policy 2:230 requires individuals to state their name as part of public comments at board meetings. When individuals submit anonymous comments, we share those comments with the School Board but we do not read them into the public record.

Administration will contact individuals who submitted public comments with questions and concerns this evening.