

PUBLIC COMMENTS

2022

January 18, 2022

Stephnie Thomas

I am, again, requesting publication of this letter on the CCPS website. My first draft was responded to privately by Mr Kiler, but it has been more than a week since I submitted my previous letter and I have yet to see it published, despite clearly stating that it was for public submission. In the meantime, I have seen other letters published from others who submitted comments dated after mine. In this draft I will address some of the points that Mr Kiler made in his email to me last week. As a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor who lives and works in the community, and specializes in dealing with clients who suffer from anxiety and OCD, I have had the privilege of working with many CC students and teachers over the 12+ years that I have been in practice in the Westminster area. I am reporting to the Board the concerns parents and children are sharing with me over and over and over again in therapy sessions. To dismiss these concerns arbitrarily, as evidenced by the response I received from the Board President, Mr Kiler, is of great concern to me, as it indicates that several members of the Board do not wish to hear from members of the public who hold viewpoints that differ from their own. In all my years of practice, I have never before had so many desperate parents reaching out seeking services for their children, who are struggling with unprecedented levels of anxiety and depression. On average I am turning away 3 – 4 local Carroll County people per week, as my practice has been bursting at the seams since March of 2020. Unfortunately, all of my colleagues are in the same boat — the need is far greater than the supply of LCPC's, LSW's, psychologists, school counselors, and psychiatrists available to meet the need. The consistent themes that I, and other mental health professionals who work with our youth and families are hearing? Parents are tired of trying to figure out the latest BOE mandates. They want a consistent policy that is driven by science. They want their kids back in school, but they also want them to be in a safe environment, and if that involves their kids wearing a mask in school and getting vaccinated, so be it. Parents tell me and other mental health providers they want the BOE to listen to advice from the Health Department. Students are tired of virtual learning, but they tell me and other mental health providers that many of them are afraid to be in a classroom with other unvaccinated students who refuse to observe basic safety measures such as properly wearing a mask. Teachers want to be in the classroom, and they want to teach — but only if they feel safe and supported by the administration, which they categorically do not. Teachers are exhausted, and I have had a large majority tell me that, for the first time in their careers, they are seriously considering finding alternate careers. Not a single one WANTS to quit — but the current administration's lack of support is forcing them to examine whether or not it is worth it — and many are saying it is not. Mr Kiler's response stating how dare I say such things after teachers had just had 10+ days off school for the winter break when he didn't get similar time off from his place of work demonstrates just how little he and others on the Board understand the stresses that our teaching staff are currently working under. As he pointed out, the numbers of teachers actually retiring does not seem to support my assertion that teachers are considering quitting. That does not negate the facts, as told to me and other mental health providers by teachers who are actually actively in public school classrooms doing their jobs, that teachers are looking at alternatives. The fact that so many teachers are choosing to stay is a testament to their dedication to the students that they serve. To be fair to the CC BOE. These sentiments expressed by teachers are not just those of teachers who are teaching in Carroll County. They are sentiments expressed by public school teachers from all over the State of Maryland. But I have had many friends in the public school system here in Carroll County express privately to me how burned out and stressed they are from trying to meet the demands of their jobs. One former CC teacher expressed just this week just how amazing a difference it had been for her to transition from the Carroll County public school system to teaching in a private school. She no longer felt undervalued, her teaching schedule meant that she was no longer working 12+ hours a day and only getting paid for 8, and she felt that for once in her career she was able to meet the needs of the students she was serving. Her salary is now less, but the reduction in stress meant it was completely worth it to her. Her comments are an indictment on how our public school systems demand so much from teachers, who are in the profession because they care about education. A personal friend who is a school counselor at a CC high school told me that she was spending her weekend attending one of three weekend trainings for her profession. It had to be done on the weekend because she was "too busy putting out "fires"" during the school day to attend any trainings during a typical school week. She was expected to be back at school along with everyone else on Monday at 7:30am. While weekend seminars are a norm in our profession as mental health providers, most of us in the field are given (or take)

commensurate time off to avoid burnout. And before someone says “well, she gets the summers off”; the answer is no — high school counselors are full time positions in CC — and if you are at one of the schools where a counselor is only there certain days of the week, the rest of the week they are at other schools. I challenge each Board member to spend a week doing all that a typical teacher is expected to do in a typical CC classroom. Tara Battaglia’s comment at the last Board meeting that “board members showing up in schools would just be a distraction” was an oblique reference to this challenge, and one which, in my opinion, shows that members of the Board are only interested in their own agendas and not at all interested in the actual welfare of teachers, support staff and students. It is my opinion that if any one of us spent a week in the shoes of any teacher in any public school in Carroll County trying to do all that they are expected to do in a typical week, all of us would be much more open to hearing from teachers who are asking for additional time to plan so that they can meet the needs of students who miss school because of sickness, or so they can figure out creative ways to bring students who are lagging academically up to par with their peers. Getting an extra planning day in a school calendar that is already tightly packed would indeed be a challenge, as Mr Kiler pointed out, but one that might mean the difference between improving the education our students receive or continuing to fail them in CC’s admirable and lofty aim of helping our students become global citizens of the future. And yes, we have one of the best school systems in the state. But it can be better. Again, I am merely reiterating what parents, children, teachers, and support staff are telling me. Other mental health providers in the county are hearing the same. Our students and teachers are at a crisis point, and they need a BOE who puts aside partisan politics to actually do the job they were elected to do: serve the needs of both students and teachers.

January 13, 2022

Jaimie Cohen

I have just read the updated quarantine protocol and once again the board is deciding to make their own rules. The updated CDC protocol regarding quarantine states that if someone has been fully vaccinated and boosted that they do not need to quarantine unless symptomatic but do recommend getting a test on day 5. If someone is not vaccinated, if it has been over 6 months since Pfizer or Moderna and not boosted or if J&J has been over 2 months ago and not boosted you should stay home for 5 days and test on day 5 if exposed to a positive contact. So, are you going to ask for students vaccination status?????? The cases are surging and the amount of students and staff positive or quarantined in this county continues to dramatically increase every week. Is the idea so that the numbers look low on the COVID dashboard??? I am not sure why the school continues to update the dashboard because the numbers mean nothing to you all. If you were watching the trends of cases you would actually do something about it to try and protect the students and staff. The BOE continues to put our students, staff and our community at risk and its appalling. I think you all should visit Carroll hospital and get a glimpse of reality and what are healthcare workers deal with on a daily basis and maybe you all would stop adding to the problem and become part of the solution. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, so why not offer a virtual option and in-person option so the families that don't feel safe sending their children to school don't have to. The health and safety of the students and staff should be top priority not politics!

January 12, 2022

Stephanie Brown

Carroll County’s outdated policies are failing our students. We are not living in the 1950s, we are living in 2021. You claim to promote an inclusive and diverse culture in our schools, yet here you sit, pushing divisive and political agendas. I get it, 2 of you are running for Commissioner, 1 of you is willing to abandon the seat on this board that you so very recently won, to further your own political goals. You both got that wonderful little feather in your cap that allows you to say you were President of the Carroll County Board of Education. Yet what you have truly accomplished in that role? An ever increasing covid positivity rate amongst our students teachers and staff? Overworked, underpaid, and undersupported teachers, bus drivers and staff? Promotion of a political agenda, in an attempt to further your political careers? How about an all out attack on our teachers, that you have supported, and encouraged, and now plan to vote on in this new “political neutrality” policy that is being voted on tonight? Oh I know....your constant sweeping under the carpet of any racial or hate issue in our schools! That’s it!! That is your crowning achievement!! I hope that you took the time to go through some of the links that I sent you earlier, including the document from Maryland Dept of Education

from 2015. My child stood here and spoke to you all just a few months ago, about the hate that they have experienced in our schools, because their gender identity is not what is considered “normal” for Carroll County, you know, because we are “different”. You actually stopped the public comments to speak directly to Ash. You all gave the appearance of wanting to do something, to make change...Mr. Kiler even stated that he believes that every teacher should be allowed to display the pride flag in their classrooms, so that the students would know the teacher would be a safe person to come speak to!!! Mr. Kiler said this!! Thank you Mr. Kiler. Because of you, and Mrs. McCabe’s words, my child was allowed to bring in 50 pride flags to Northwest Middle School, to donate to the teachers that wanted them. The flags were left in the office, and teachers were allowed to come take one, for their classrooms! I got daily reports from both of my children about how amazing it was to see all these pride flags in their classes, and that their friends saw them in this or that teacher’s classroom!! Then, the very next board meeting a discussion on political neutrality happened, that included Tara saying that they need a reporting system, that would also allow parents to report teachers for asking a student’s preferred name and pronouns. Do you believe that names and pronouns are political? Really? Do you realize that you use names and pronouns all the time? Even nicknames? I know several people in this room have stated that they don’t use pronouns and that their kids don’t use pronouns. Sorry to inform you all, but there are over 100 pronouns that are used in every day speech including: you, I, she, he they, them, us, me, all, each, several, nobody, someone, and the list goes on. There is more harm in NOT asking a student their pronouns, than there is in asking a student that uses what is considered in this county to be “normal” pronouns. I sent you all several resources, including documents from MSDE, DOE, advocacy groups, and other school systems, this afternoon, for you to look over. I have been in contact with central office, and passed these same resources on to the CCPS lawyers. The ball is in your court BOE, to give you a reference you might understand. Are you truly looking to make our schools an inclusive environment?? Or was that all talk because a child was sitting here before you telling you the hate that they have experienced in the school system under YOUR watch??? Institute a policy, that allows our teachers, even encourages our teachers, to ask our students their pronouns and preferred names. Many of these students are uncomfortable approaching this subject with administration and teachers, for fear of being ignored, or having issues because of it. Make it NORMAL for a teacher to ask their students their pronouns and preferred name. Help build inclusivity in our schools, not add policies that attack it!!

Lisa Wilt

I urge the Board of Education to take a step back before voting on any policy relating to political neutrality. This policy is being encouraged by a small group of parents who oppose any thinking other than their own, and has no purpose other than to further divide our already hurting community. To endorse this policy is to perpetuate the systemic issues that have caused and continue to cause division and hurt in our county. All of us have views, thoughts, and feelings that are valid, and the teachers in Carroll County are well equipped to assist students in navigating complex and often difficult conversations. This policy also diminishes the capacity of our young adult students who are more than capable of critical thinking, listening, and learning from one another. Simply not agreeing with something doesn't mean you are being indoctrinated. Please focus your efforts on keeping students, teachers, and staff during the current pandemic. Assist teachers in managing the mental and physical challenges of teaching in a pandemic. Put your own political bias aside and focus on what truly matters. Allow teachers to teach, allow students to think critically, and encourage parents to engage their students in difficult conversations that may challenge their beliefs.

Jessica Bronson

I am a parent of two CCPS students. I am also immunocompromised, meaning that I am especially vulnerable to COVID-19. Considering the surging case numbers within CCPS and the overwhelmed medical system, I implore the Board to move to remote learning temporarily. Virtual learning is far from ideal for my family and me but it is needed to protect our students, staff, and community. Additionally, the Board should require (and provide) high quality N-95 or KN-95 masks for all students and staff, since these are the most effective at preventing the spread of COVID-19. I understand the concern that some parents have expressed about the mental health of students. I agree that we should do everything we can to protect our children's mental health. We should provide more counselors, case managers, and meal services, for example. However, when we think of mental health, we should not ignore the consequences of letting the pandemic run rampant through our schools. How is it affecting our children's mental wellbeing when they see so many of their classmates and teachers out sick? When they fear getting ill themselves or bringing it home to vulnerable

family members? How will it impact them if the people they care about end up hospitalized or dead? I hope we can take this opportunity to show our children what it means to look out for our community. Thank you.

Marianne Barno

A small but vocal minority of Carroll County parents keep pushing for a policy of "political neutrality" among teachers, wanting a reporting system for teachers who they fear are "indoctrinating" their children. Political neutrality is their false flag. The truth is, the vast majority of our teachers teach the required curriculum, which must adhere to state curriculum standards. The curricula, which I have only ever witnessed being taught in wonderful ways by the CCPS teachers my children have had, is written and vetted by experts who understand that the role of public education is to educate people for the GOOD OF THE PUBLIC. A misinformed public or a citizenry that does not get the full scope of truth would put our previously highly respected Carroll County schools and our youth at a disadvantage. The irony is I have only ever heard any evidence of bias when it was about teachers sharing their opinions echoing conservative political pundits and with their students. Why are concerned parents worried about their children understanding historical events, such as slavery and the holocaust were stains on the human race, or that facts support the truth that our climate is changing, leading to more extreme weather that puts everyone at risk? Why are some parents afraid of exposing their children to literature that gives voice to experiences and perspectives that they may not have had? The truth is, some facts do not support everyone's biases. However, if an opinion is not supported by fact, that doesn't make the fact untrue. For example, we have seen many of these concerned parents falsely claim that masking hurts students or that vaccines don't do any good because people still get sick. They are not basing their claims on even our Carroll County health department, EMS, and hospital but on discredited conspiracies. I'm afraid even some board members believe the false claims instead of the actual experts in their fields. Again, public education in and beyond Carroll County is for the good of the public, not the whims of parents afraid of truth. What's ironic is I have only ever heard people in the past complain that some CCPS teachers were showing their bias with opinions that were aligned with racist ideologies, like denying that the South seceded was to maintain slavery. If a teacher is sharing facts and teaching the state curriculum as it is currently written, not a curriculum watered down to leave out sensitive material, they are not indoctrinating students. They are teaching students to comprehend, question, infer, and take active roles in society. Teachers are giving all the verifiable and diverse information and experiences which allow students to learn to think, reason, and judge on their own. Are some parents so concerned that their children will learn to think freely and then not have the same opinions as they do? Are they afraid to be "outed" but their children who discover that it is their parents who have been lying to them? Reading perspectives of people's different lived experiences allows all students to be represented, and facts show that representation matters. If we want to lift up all of our CCPS students, we have to not marginalize them. We have seen that students in Carroll County are still discriminated and harassed based on race, ethnicity, and gender identity. We must insist on better, not "neutral." Our teachers need and deserve our support. Every teacher I know of personally has gone above and beyond, learning new curricula, adapting to different teaching methods and health guidelines. Many are stressed because of the inconsistent mandates that go against the experts. Further stress is caused by all the additional training and professional development that is necessary for teachers to stay up to date with research based content and methods. To add fear-mongering into the mix and make our excellent teachers fear that they will be reported by some parent with a grudge will further drive our best educators away. We want what's best for our CCPS students AND teachers. This means the best curriculum, the best facilities, and the best guidelines, and the best compensation for their time and effort. This political neutrality guideline is one of the worst things that could possibly happen.

Maria Warburton

. If the BOE is truly concerned about the well-being and mental health of students and in hiring and retaining the best teachers, then it will choose not to move forward/approve the proposed political neutrality policy that allows for, among other things, the reporting of teachers for any perceived deviation from the proposed policy. With regard to a student's mental health, one of the simplest, yet most meaningful, ways to affirm a student and protect their well-being/mental health is to address a student by their preferred pronouns. Yet this simple act, which harms no one and serves only to help the student, will likely be prohibited under the proposed neutrality policy. What will the curriculum and classroom look like under this proposed policy? Will teaching about Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech be acceptable, but teaching about his formation of The Poor People's Campaign shortly before his assassination be

unacceptable? Implementing some sort of "Newspeak", under the watchful eye of "Big Brother" may at first feel comforting to some who are afraid of their children being exposed to more than one point of view or to accurate history lessons, but will only result in a lesser education for all. Let us not be afraid of providing our children with a broad, comprehensive education. Let us develop young adults who are critical thinkers, interested in the world around them as well as beyond them; and who do not look back on their years in Carroll County public schools as some sort of aberration but a school system where they will feel confident sending their own children when the time comes to decide where to live and raise a family.

Stephanie Brown

I will be speaking this evening at the board of education meeting, but I wanted to give all of you a chance to look over some information before I speak. I will be speaking about how you, as the board of education, can take a small step to making our schools a more inclusive environment for our LGBTQIA+ students. You may remember when my child, Ash Tough, came to speak about their experiences in our schools, a few months back. You may remember how you stopped public comments to actually comment on the issues they brought up, what they were dealing with. You may remember professing to want to do something about it. Well here is your opportunity. Take some time to go through these websites and pages: <https://genderspectrum.org/articles/easy-steps-to-a-gender-inclusive-classroom> is a great resource that explains why something like a questionnaire is a great way to introduce a gender inclusive classroom: "Provide an opportunity for every student to privately share with you their name and pronouns, and tell students why you are doing so. At the beginning of the year or new semester, at back-to-school night, or following a break, privately invite students and parents to share how the student would like to be referred to at school. You might do this by asking them to write the information on a card, or via an online tool to collect the information. Seek out and use the name and pronouns a student uses, regardless of what is written on their birth certificate. Invite ALL students to share the name and/or pronoun they use (especially early in the year)." <https://www.gse.upenn.edu/news/educators-playbook/erin-cross-pronouns-gender-identity> <https://www.weareteachers.com/teaching-pronouns-myths/> <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/lets-get-it-right-using-correct-pronouns-and-names> <https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/TT-LGBTQ-Best-Practices-Guide.pdf> pages 13-15 have some great information about dress codes as well (that is another topic that is important to deal with soon as well) this whole PDF is a great resource. Page 22 suggests a student survey at the beginning of the year as well. <https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/Schools-In-Transition.pdf> <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/osh/osh/emergingpractices.pdf> Madison Metropolitan School District in Madison WI, that is the 2nd largest district in their state (<https://www.madison.k12.wi.us/>) has in their guidance to support LGBTQIA+ booklet on page 24, that can be found at: <https://www.madison.k12.wi.us/student-staff-support/lgbtq/guidance-policies-to-support-transgender-non-binary-and-gender-expansive-students>: "Ask all students to share their affirmed names and pronouns, either in writing or aloud." These are resources that I have submitted to Central Office, and through them, to your legal team to look at. It has come to my attention, that you, the board of education, has the power to make a small change that will help our students and our staff. This policy of not allowing the teachers to request this information, in a "quiet and private" way, is adding to the stigma that creates a non-inclusive environment. These questionnaires, if done correctly by teachers, do not have to be shared with the class by the student, they aren't being called to stand up and state their preferred name or pronouns, they are actually being asked to put them down either in a google doc, or on paper, and hand it to the teacher, so the teacher can be inclusive and call them by their preferred name/pronouns. This creates the inclusivity we are looking for. I am asking you all, tonight, to vote on a policy that will allow your teachers to survey their students, and in those surveys ask their students their preferred names and pronouns. Help our teachers reach out to the students that need them, and help our students feel more welcome and included in our schools!

A more local resource:

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DSFSS/SSSP/ProvidingSafeSpacesTransgendergenderNonConformingYouth012016.pdf> On page 10 Equal education in a non-discriminatory environment may be supported by the following guidelines:

- Address every student by a name and pronoun that corresponds to the student's gender identity.
- Privately ask students how they want to be addressed in class and whether this will be different when in correspondence to the home or at conferences with the student's parents or guardians.
- Train all teachers, staff, and school administrators to use the student's preferred name, pronouns and gender.
- Use the student's preferred name

for classroom rosters, identification badges, announcements, certificates, newspapers, newsletters, yearbooks and any other record where the use of the legal name is not specifically required by law.

Metta Lash

I write in regards to the proposed Politically Neutral Stance policy, which arguably having been written decades ago probably needs some updating. That said, the current policy mostly seems to be in search of a problem. Educators are already required to remain neutral in terms of religious and political leanings, so why the sudden furor over creating this policy? The irony is not lost on members of the community that the proposed policy itself is a political act intended by the board to virtue signal that they have been captured by the current anti-intellectualism, anti-teacher viewpoint currently popular in right leaning politics. A longstanding principle of education is that public school teachers, as representatives of the state, must not attempt to influence their students' political beliefs. I think trying to argue to the contrary would be difficult. Moreover, that assertion will find overwhelming majority support in Carroll County amongst educators, parents, students, and community members. As a librarian I embrace this principle in my work every day. I frequently work with students doing research who I disagree with politically but still support their academic work, finding them the best information to support their arguments. This is the same ethical behavior I see in every teacher my children have had at CCPS. While academic neutrality as a basic stance is relatively uncontroversial, over the last few years, this idea seems to have mutated into a belief that teachers should be wholly apolitical and refrain from sharing their personal views with students and that punitive policies are required to prevent this myth of "indoctrination." If teachers had the ability to indoctrinate students on anything it would be to turn in their work on time and stop tik-toking in the bathroom. From what I have seen of the discussions occurring during recent meetings, the BOE ignores the fact that the choices we make about education are themselves political. Who chooses the textbooks? What is included in the curriculum? Who funds schools and how? Which pronouns students are allowed to use. Your choice to allow this discussion to be framed in such a way that some parents feel empowered to scapegoat teachers is disturbing to me as a parent. And not just scapegoat but to be empowered as "watch dogs" for any perceived indications of "bias." Social Science research has consistently shown that students don't care where their teachers stand politically as long as they feel like they aren't being pressured to think a certain way. Do you have data showing the need for this policy? Do you have data assessing how this policy will improve student outcomes? Because that is your only job. Maybe focus on that job and support teachers as much as possible given the level stress and pressure they are under. Voting yes on this new policy is a political statement. You get that, right?

Liz Warren

I am writing to encourage you to consider a virtual option for our students until the numbers get back to a safe level. They are reporting around 30% positivity rate and that is not even accurate as most people cannot even get an available test while they are ill. I have an immune system that is comprised as well as my son who has special needs and pulmonary issues. My daughter should not be forced to attend school in a state of emergency until they get things under control. The bus driver (when they come) states they do not have to wear a mask b/c they are vaccinated, and the students are being sent to school sick and parents feel they dont have other options. They eat elbow to elbow unmasked and dont stay in the same classroom to lessen transmission like it was when covid started. I dont understand why we are not using the virtual option to not only protect our students and their family's but more importantly our teachers and our hospitals that are at capacity. Please consider keeping our community safe and offering the virtual option to families that are in need.

Carla Lawson

I am writing to you today to plead with you to please support our teachers and staff in Carroll County public schools. The last two years has been extremely stressful for everyone. We all have very different views on how best to navigate these challenging times. However, one thing we can all agree on is that our teachers and staff members are essential to the stability and quality of our educational system. Our teachers and staff members are professionals, many with advanced degrees. Yet we seem to treat them like Ping-Pong balls in debates about COVID safety protocols and national culture wars. As a parent I watched the last BOE meeting in disbelief as the board members spent an hour discussing adding a reporting and tracking element to the updated Political Neutrality Policy. I found this particularly disheartening because

at the same meeting a representative for the teachers asked for support and relief due to teacher burnout, staff shortages and COVID related issues. Our teachers have been accused of so many terrible things in the last 2 years. Every month at BOE meetings, we get to hear how teachers are the problem. We hear about CRT, DEI, political indoctrination, and equity vs equality from the same group of 10- 15 people. Some of whom don't even have students in the public schools. As a CCPS parent, I would much rather the board discuss how they could support teachers and give them some relief. As you know from my previous letters, our son has missed almost 25 days of school this year due to COVID related quarantines. Could the board address the quarantine coaches and the resources available to students in quarantine? How about the resources available to teachers who have students in quarantine? Other stakeholders have expressed concerned during BOE meetings and public comments. These concerns have included bullying, discrimination, and the needs of the bus drivers and support staff, and masking accommodations for student with auditory and sensory issues. All of these are important areas that are not being discussed as much as this policy/tracking system. Instead of focusing on a redundant, potentially costly process, that communicates mistrust to our central office staff, principles, vice principles and teachers could we please address these issues? Resources are limited and our school system is struggling to retain staff. It seems shortsighted and unnecessary to alienate your workforce. Our teachers and staff members can easily drive down the road and obtain better paying jobs, where they aren't accused of being unprofessional and require a tracking system to monitor their behavior. Without quality teachers and staff our schools and children will suffer. I ask you to put the teachers and staff members first, so they can put our kids first. I trust the teachers to teach in a professional manner and I trust our school administrators to supervise their staff if an incident occurs.

David Warburton

My name is David Warburton. I was born and raised in Carroll County, went to Loyola University in Baltimore, and since then have spent the last three years living abroad: one year in Australia, and what will be two years in South Korea. I spent about five months as a permanent substitute at Taneytown Elementary School back in 2018, and am currently teaching ESL in South Korea. I am also currently enrolled in an online teaching program to obtain my license, and am hoping to have a successful career in education, perhaps back in my hometown someday. In light of some recent events regarding education in Carroll County, I wanted to weigh in with my perspective in hopes that it can add something a bit different. Living abroad has given me a new perspective of what it means to be an American, and a better look at what the United States actually is. People are talking about the fear they have for political indoctrination, and how terrified they are that public schools might force certain political narratives into the children's minds. When I hear these things, I can't help but laugh at the irony here. People are nervous of the government brainwashing our children, yet the sad reality is that they already are, and they have been for decades, ever since public schooling was established, and most prominently since the 1980's. Before I speak directly on education, however, I think it is important to go back to the beginning of the story. I mentioned how living abroad allowed me to view 'America' as it really is. So, what is it? It is, in a factual, objective way, a settler colonial nation inspired by white supremacy, built on the back of slave labor, on the land of stolen native peoples, continually propped up by the work of immigrants and poor people throughout the world. It is owned by a few massively wealthy individuals and corporations, who essentially, through their advertising budgets and lobbying efforts, control the political and media life of the nation. It has used, is using, and will continue to use its military force as a means to protect the interests of those individuals and corporations; a force that includes over 800 military bases worldwide, and an annual budget of over 700 billion dollars. It has used, is using, and will continue to use this force, as well as covert forces, to fund foreign militia groups, orchestrate coups, assassinate political officials and public activists, and engage in war all in an attempt to continue to protect these interests. 'America' has been incredibly successful in all of this, which is what has made it so powerful, and was why Hitler envied it so much. In his famous book, Mein Kampf, when talking about his plans for Germany, and what he wished it to become, Hitler explicitly writes about how impressed he was with the Westward Expansion program in the United States, and how he sees Germany following that model throughout Europe. This means that the United States is essentially what Hitler wanted to accomplish. The only reason we gawk at Hitler and the Holocaust, but not at the United States and all it has done in the last few centuries is because Hitler was in Europe conquering white people, while the United States terrorized people of color, whether they be Native Americans, African Americans, Latin Americans, Africans, Carribeans, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, Middle Easterners, and Asians. If this truly is the case, then why hasn't 'America' ever been held accountable? Well, it has done an extremely good job at using its media and educational institutions to frame all of this in a different light, so as to not seriously address any of the problems, conflicts, hypocrisies, and contradictions that arise through this history. It simply papers over these instances with slogans, vague concepts, and personal anecdotal stories. An example of all

three might look something like: "Tom is a self-made man who worked hard and picked himself up by his bootstraps." It also picks certain lines from prominent activists, like MLK, that fit the narrative, while at the same time surveilling, imprisoning, exiling, and sometimes executing them if they start to talk about anything too serious that might jeopardize the collective mythological story that it has gotten its people to believe. This is why many 'Americans' have a very mythological understanding of the history of the United States, which usually boils down to a few dates and quotes they were forced to remember. There's never any serious discussion or a serious attempt to understand why and how these specific events happened. When I share this perspective with people, they respond in different ways. Some experience a mix of disbelief and guilt. Some respond with anger and frustration. And then there are some that either respond with denial, or they respond by defending the mythological story they were taught. If the person responds with one of the last two, the reasons are fairly clear why. It is the same for any empire at any time throughout history. They benefit from the status quo, and don't want to give up anything they have as a result of that status quo. When you look at the people who are coming forward to reject critical race theory being taught in schools, however you officially define that term, or when they show extreme support for political neutrality, it is because they know, sometimes very blatantly or deep down, that the story that they and their ancestors have helped build over the previous few generations, and all the status, wealth, and power that comes with it, is being threatened. This threat could be very real depending on your class, but for most it isn't anything real which would jeopardize their actual material well-being. They simply feel the story with which they identify is being threatened and therefore their personal identity is also being threatened, which can sometimes be an even more powerful threat than material well-being. The United States, and its people in every town and school district across the country have a choice to make. One choice is to continue telling the same story we've been telling, despite the overwhelming evidence proving it to be a myth. If we continue this path, there will continue to be confusion on who we are, there will continue to be hyper-polarization in our media attempting to persuade who they should align with, and there will be continued protests and conflicts in the schools, streets, and government halls. There will then be a reaction to this. What will this reaction look like? Well, when people yell out in the bars or TV studios that, "America will never be a socialist country", they're right. The reaction would be America's own form of facism, militarism, and nationalism, probably wrapped in a flag and carrying a cross. 'America' will follow Hitler 9 times before it follows Marx once. Following this path would inevitably lead to continued global conflict. From this conflict, there could potentially be a global nuclear war killing off most of humanity, or due to our extreme divides, the US Empire will crumble and 'balkanize' similar to how the Soviet Union did after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in which the Eastern European countries and Central Asian countries once under the Soviet Union broke away, creating their own states, borders, and conflicts. The second main path that we could take as a country is to start uncovering, admitting, and truly reckoning with all that 'America' is and how it was created. This means starting to tell a different story, or at the very least acknowledging that there are other stories that exist, and this means devoting time to seriously analyzing those stories from above, absent of any national pride within the analysis. This process needs to happen at full scale throughout all major institutions, but one that is set up perfectly for helping us do that is our public education system. We have no problem admitting, accepting, analyzing, and debating some of these stories at universities within our nation, so why don't we do this within our public school classrooms, as well. Why is it that the kid who is fortunate enough to go to college is exposed to all sorts of stories and ways of thinking, but the student that isn't able to go to college, for whatever reason, is fed only one story through their entire educational life, and needs to do their own research and investigation to simply uncover that other stories even exist, let alone what they mean and how they work. People say this will change 'America' and that we will become a different country. Well, yes, that's exactly the goal. Think about yourself as a person. If you never change throughout your life and are the same person at 50 that you were at 20, then you're very likely not a good person. Improvements, open feedback, change, and innovation are embraced wholeheartedly within most of our society, but not when it comes to education and the identity of our nation? If we, as humans, are supposed to admit fault, learn from the past, and improve ourselves, why can't a nation? The power and influence that 'America' currently holds is incomprehensible, and extends farther than most of us know or think. The two major threats to humanity in the 21st century are climate change and nuclear war. Given the history of the United States on both of these issues, it being a playground for climate deniers on the former, and being the only country on Earth to drop an atomic bomb on the latter, it has shown that it is incapable of effectively leading humanity through them, and instead will likely do whatever it takes to continue to protect its mythological story and the interests that story protects, regardless of the social, political, environmental, economic, and culture consequences that it will produce, including the self-destruction of the human race. If you doubt this line of thinking, just look at how the United States has responded to and dealt with recent issues like Covid-19 and Afghanistan. There is confusion, finger-pointing, and a whole lot of suffering. 'Americans', the world, and all of humanity desperately need 'America' to seriously address

the story it tells itself and the story it portrays to the world because the consequences range far greater than simply making my child feel weird. I was once one of those children sitting in a Carroll County classroom. I was told many things about the United States from my textbooks and most of my teachers. People are calling for political neutrality now, but really what they're doing is rejecting political opposition, or to put it another way, they are rejecting political choice. Americans always claim to love the choices that their free society grants them, yet when it comes to our political education, we are only given one option. Those things my textbooks and teachers told me in school were all essentially in line with this mythological story that 'America' has created in order to survive all of the terrible things it has done throughout history. I was given no choice. Yet, each and every thing that I was told was naturally extremely political, meant to create a specific type of citizen with a specific type of political ideology. This happened everywhere from the events we chose to and chose not to teach in our history classes; from the fictional novels we chose to read in our English classes, and the themes we encouraged students to embrace as a result of reading those novels; from the way we explained our institutions in government classes; from the assemblies we chose to hold as a school; from the entire educational culture we've chosen to build. There is a political element to all of it, and is in place so that once you graduate, you already have a foundation for a specific political ideology, which can literally be as simple as, "I believe in America", making each and every one of us up for grabs for any of the news channels, social media accounts, or politicians, so that once serious situations happen in our country or around the world, we are unable to think clearly on them or with any historical context, outside of random dates and quotes we memorized from our textbooks and teachers, causing continual confusion and conflict. I am proud to be a teacher. I plan to return to the United States soon, in order to see my friends and family. It is never easy leaving your hometown, let alone your home country, so I can also see myself living and teaching in the United States again at some point, perhaps in Carroll County. The thought of the school board not only being completely unaware of the current level of indoctrination that is happening, and that has happened for decades, but actually going further in that direction to ban any other kinds of thoughts that might be in opposition to the same line of thinking that has led us to where we are today is numbing. I hope you read this letter with an open mind, and seriously consider everything I have mentioned. You have control over the education of students in the most powerful country in the world at a moment when the stakes couldn't be much higher. Please make the right decision, and allow our students to be exposed to, think about, and question the world freely.

Maria Smith

The aim of political neutrality in the classroom is avoiding indoctrination. What it overlooks is that exposure is not indoctrination. Indoctrination is presenting one set of claims to the exclusion of others. Exposure is seeing competing ideas and discussing them. Parents send their children to Catholic schools, even though they aren't Catholic. Those children are being exposed to a Christ-centered education each day. They are not indoctrinated into becoming Catholics. I grew up in a home with two parents who were strong Democrats. Being exposed to their more liberal views did not stop me from becoming a registered Republican. Many heterosexuals support LGBTQ+ groups, attend marches and events. Being exposed to the LGBTQ+ community does not mean you will become gay. Exposure is not indoctrination. Some could argue indoctrination is sterilizing the curriculum of societal topics such as inequality, climate change, religious differences and racism. Students need to learn how to make and respond to reasoned arguments. That skill is not innate, it is taught. Who better to teach it than professional educators. I will close with what I found to be an enlightened policy at McDonogh School in Owings Mills, MD. Taken from their website describing the "Freedom of Expression and Civil Discourse" policy: "... teaches students how to think and not what to think. As LifeReady, our academic vision, promises, McDonogh graduates "self-reliant, critical thinkers who can form, test, and revise their ideas—for themselves, and in the service of others." To develop these abilities and to be truly inclusive and respectful, teachers and students must invite and analyze all debatable ideas and points of view. Critical reasoning remains a core competency for college and career, but just as importantly, the ability to understand, evaluate, and act on ideas responsibly prepares students for healthy democratic participation for life."

Wendy Novak

Last week the Maryland State legislature's Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, & Legislative Review voted to keep the mask mandate with addition of offramps if certain metrics are met. I wanted to address some of the misconceptions around this action and masking in general. One piece of misinformation presented at the hearing was regarding the lack of negative impact of COVID on our children. I have heard it stated that we don't need a mask

mandate in Carroll because no Carroll child has died. Do we really want to wait until a child dies? Enough have died in other counties. One speaker even claimed no children have died from COVID. A 10-year-old died in Anne Arundel county last week. (1) As reported by WBALTV last week, "According to the Maryland Department of Health, there have been four COVID-19 deaths in children ages 0 to 9, and nine deaths in children aged 10 to 19 since the pandemic started. Over the past month, COVID-19 cases in children 0 to 9 increased by 40% with 17,379 cases in that period, and cases of children 10 to 19 increased by 38% with 25,102 cases in that period." Now there are 10 deaths in the 10-19 age range, the Maryland Coronavirus dashboard reported another child between 10-19 died this week. (2) Another negative impact on our students is the loss of family and loved ones to COVID. (3) One in 500 children have lost a parent or grandparent caregiver to COVID. Our teachers are also at risk, 25% are at higher risk of serious consequences of COVID (4) . Removal of a mask mandate without benchmarks will make schools unsafe for the teachers and staff. There are better paying jobs for teachers that ARE providing a safe place. There is already a teacher shortage in our county, this will make it worse. We cannot have an entire industry that is essential to life in this county feel unsafe to go to work. Students are missing school due to COVID. Students from families that have COVID or are exposed can miss up to a month of needed services and regress as they wait for COVID to work its way through the family. When case rates go up, hospitalizations do too. The 8 percent of the population who has not been vaccinated accounts for 75% of the hospitalizations. (5) This is resulting in our hospitals being overcrowded, despite their increased capacity since 2020. Our hospitals are full and in crisis mode. "Most hospitals in the state are at or near 100% capacity. Nine of the 44 general acute care hospitals are now operating under crisis standards of care. This means that any patient who is not in need of immediate, urgent, emergency care, may have to wait until there is staffing and/or a bed available to treat them." (6) My family knows this firsthand. My father-in-law had to wait days to get into the hospital, because his vitals were fine, he was just incredibly weak. He is in the hospital now. The hospital is at 112% occupancy. They have 25% more beds than they did in July 2020. The hospital is in crisis mode. The doctors and nurses do not have time to provide the appropriate standard of care. I am not faulting the medical team; I know they are in a tough situation. Here are some examples from my father in laws medical record. He was given a CTA and the radiologist was unable to get through to the ER where my FIL was staying while waiting for a bed in the hospital. Each time the radiologist called he was put on hold without the opportunity to tell them he was attempting to communicate a stroke protocol. Twice now, the hospital has been too busy to place a PEG, there is no one available. The overcrowding of the hospitals has decreased my FIL's quality of life and shorten his life expectancy. A mask is a small inconvenience compared to losing a family member because they can't receive the care they need because the hospital is swamped with people that didn't trust their advice to get vaccinated but will still use their services. Doctors are choosing who to care for and how much resources can be used. I want there to be enough resources to treat my FIL properly. My daughter has no problem masking to save other people. I imagine the 140,000 children that lost a parent or caregiver would agree. Children are resilient, they rely on their parents to help them understand. Part of living in a community means public responsibilities. There are laws against drinking and driving. It is my choice to drink, until there is someone else that can be harmed. Same thing with smoking. Our founding fathers listed one reason for establishing the constitution was to promote the general welfare. Masking during a pandemic is general welfare. During the War of 1812, the town of St. Michaels moved their lanterns above the city to fool the British about the location of the city. During World War 2, the Pacific coast was willing to endure blackouts to hide the locations of cities. Imagine if someone said their freedoms were being stolen, that the government was overreaching. It is our constitutional duty to protect each other. It is your duty as board members to protect our children and our community, to rely on what the experts in the field are telling you including ones from Carroll County Hospital. Masking is an important part of a multi layered strategy to lessen the spread, decrease the impact on our medical systems. Sources 1. [Online] <https://www.wbaltv.com/article/stephen-wagner-10-years-old-dies-from-covid-19/38658242>. 2. [Online] <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/>. 3. [Online] <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/p1007-covid-19-orphaned-children.html>. 4. [Online] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html. 5. [Online] <https://thehill.com/changing-america/well-being/prevention-cures/588038-gop-governor-says-unvaccinated-are-overwhelming>. 6. [Online] <https://foxbaltimore.com/news/local/covid-hospitalizations-top-3000-most-md-hospitals-at-capacity-some-in-crisis-mode>. 7. Handbook. Carroll County Board of Education. [Online] <https://www.carrollk12.org/boe/Documents/handbook.pdf>. 8. [Online] <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/p0924-school-masking.html>. 9. Carroll County Board of Education Meeting 11 10 2021. YouTube. [Online] <https://youtu.be/zH4ALxL-8aQ?t=4246>.

Educators around the country are consistently reporting weariness and fatigue in regards to daily operations in schools. Carroll County teachers are no exception to this, they are pulling figurative overtime trying to educate during an ongoing pandemic and give the best quality education to their students. Amid this fatigue, the CCEA implored the Board of Education to help teachers by providing just one early dismissal day each month, not for teachers to take that time off, but instead of just get a few hours of planning time to keep them from literally having to work in their evening time at home! Sadly, this plea has not just gone unanswered, but parental groups are using it to attack the CCEA and claim that teachers don't need this type of help. Carroll County surely wants to attract and retain the best teachers, but this fatigue does not lend itself to retaining good teachers, as school systems around us are finding ways to address their teacher fatigue issues. PLEASE listen to your educators and find ways to HELP them offset this fatigue! In that light, you are once again discussing the update to the political neutral policy today. Again, this policy may need an update, being written over 25 years ago, but it has evolved from simply updating it to more modern terms and application, to now imagining some kind of widespread bias issues in our classrooms and discussing a reporting system to allow parents to accuse teachers of bias. As a parent, I once again stress: This is NOT an ongoing, widespread issue in the classrooms. Carroll County educators are, above all, professionals. Making a policy that tries to expand the definition in a broad scale is going to make their jobs more difficult, expand their fatigue, and dilute the quality of education our students will get. We are seeing this in more extreme applications across the county, with other states introducing changes that could lead to sensitive topics like the Holocaust, Jim Crow laws, and even the political unrest of January 6, 2021 being labeled as "political" and declared off-limits to teach or discuss. I again want to reiterate: Your teachers are professionals. They are aware of the boundaries that need to be maintained. Through all the complaints and calls for this, no one has provided evidence of widespread issues in any school or classroom. Creating a policy that tries to overtly define all boundaries, and a system to report on incidents, will lead to our students being woefully ill-prepared to compete with neighboring county students in regards to future jobs and college entry, and lead to more teachers abandoning this county for other counties where they are allowed to do their job without micromanaging their teaching subjects. Please consider taking a very limited approach to updating this policy, and focus on providing guidelines to your teachers to apply it, not on creating systems that could be abused to allow parents to retaliate on teachers they disagree with!

Michael Ruth

I strongly encourage the BOE to pass this policy. Unfortunately, having 2 kids in CCPS, I have had my kids come home from school to tell me stories of teachers who have wrongly expressed their own individual political views. Making matters worse, some of these teachers have done it in a way to pressure the students. Anyone who thinks that teachers today are neutral, or even worse aren't political activists in the classroom, are lying. As stated previously, that passing this somehow lacks critical thinking, just shows that's individual's lack of critical thinking. Our kids are being exposed to too much, too early. Too many of these teachers are over stepping their bounds. And it shows in the results of where America stands on the world stage in its rankings on education. Teachers should stick to core subjects and not be community organizers.

January 11, 2022

Amanda Jozkowski

As you prepare to vote to approve the "Political Neutrality" policy tomorrow evening, I hope you understand the message you send to the teachers of our county with your vote. At the last meeting, you were clearly advised that the proposed policy would lead to legal challenges. In theory, it is also redundant with existing policy, but in spirit it is much more nefarious. As a candidate for election to the Board of Education, I have been spending the past few months meeting with teachers and school staff to hear about their experiences and perspectives. Despite the MANY challenges they are currently facing, at the core CCPS teachers just want to be trusted, listened to, and treated with respect. They are professionals who have trained to prepare students to become community citizens, change-makers, and contributors to a democratic society. The political neutrality policy is an assault to their expertise and judgment, and a threat to their personal well-being, as anyone will be welcome to report teachers for violating a "politically neutral stance" in the classroom by simply encouraging the free exchange of ideas in an educational conversation that feels a bit uncomfortable or is in tension with someone's personal beliefs. Schools should not prohibit thoughtful discussion to

avoid controversy or viewpoints that may be unpopular, and teachers certainly should not be penalized for doing what they do so well – engaging students in critical thinking. We should be welcoming such conversations in the classroom! As teacher education professor Alyssa Hadley Dunn argues, strict adherence to “neutrality” - avoiding political or controversial topics - is a tactic that can actually marginalize many students. Taking a neutral stance reinforces the status quo and silences underrepresented voices and opinions. Monitoring and reporting teachers who are perceived to deviate from the official curriculum is disturbing, and is a slap in the face to teachers who are pouring their time, talent, and treasure into thankless jobs. Endorsing this policy will only serve to increase discontent and staff shortages – two issues I would hope would be of much more concern to this Board.

Victoria Nefflen

My name is Victoria and I’m a patient rights advocate and loving older sister to a Westminster High School student. What’s occurring in our school system right now is absolutely appalling, and destroying the physical and mental health of Carroll County students and staff. Given the current Omicron surge, the amount of students and teachers out in quarantine, and the overall threat keeping schools open poses to the health and safety of our entire community, there is absolutely no conscionable reason schools should be open right now. None. Time and time again I’ve heard loss of learning and students’ mental health used as justification for flagrantly poor policies adopted by this board, that cares as much about students well-being and learning as it does the coronavirus pandemic. But now, after refusing to allow any virtual accommodations for the many students and teachers in quarantine, and keeping schools fully open in spite of the many infections occurring during this wave, how can we justify the weeks of lost learning that students are experiencing due to being forced into quarantine? How can we justify the empty classrooms and under qualified substitutes that are ill prepared to teach classes as droves of educators are out sick? How can we excuse the effect this is having on student’s mental health, the fear many of them experience being trapped in rooms with unvaccinated peers, terrified of what they’re bringing home to their families? As a disabled member of the community, it’s truly terrifying trying to navigate this pandemic while this board refuses to act in good faith with the best interest of our community in mind, and I can’t imagine the toll this must take on disabled students whose wellbeing is a political pawn for board members who care little for their safety. Our hospital is full. Our schools are empty. Where is the logic in any of this? Schools should be virtual. At least until this omicron surge passes. And if not, we need masks, we need consistent covid strategies and we need accommodations for students in quarantine at the very least. This board is putting my health and the health of all other disabled people in our community at risk by refusing to adopt any science-backed, common-sense strategies. It’s putting the health of our students and teachers at risk. It’s gambling with human lives to make a political point, and there is nothing more sinister than that. How many more children have to suffer due to their inaction?

RJ Stanley

I am writing to urge you to pass the “Politically Neutral Stance” policy. Please include the establishment of a publically available data base to track Complaint Forms, which your counsel advised has no chance of withstanding its inevitable legal claims. I can’t imagine a more effective way for this BOE to display its lack of critical thinking and its willingness to expose CCPS teachers to an ongoing political witch hunt. It is important to galvanize voters in this spring’s election by making them aware of how equally inept and and dangerous this Board is. Do it, if you have the guts.

Emma Powell

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the January 12th, 2022 Board of Education meeting. I request that my email here be included in the public comment record for this meeting. I am writing to comment on the Approval of Politically Neutral Stance (Board Policy GBI- Political Activities of Carroll County Public Schools Employees). The proposed policy provided in the January 12th, 2022 agenda is antithetical to what public education should provide students. We should encourage our educators to help our children think critically and become engaged and informed citizens, not force them to shy away from sensitive topics because they are deemed too political, or because their mere mention may stoke parent outrage. The proposed policy would restrict the “...discussion of political issues, parties, and candidates unless and to the extent that such discussions and any related activities are aligned with the approved curriculum.” I worry about what we may end up defining as political in the context of this policy and thus what may end up being removed from the classroom. This policy would place an undue burden on educators and administrators and

would be a disservice to the children receiving what has been deemed a very good public education provided by Carroll County schools. Thank you for your time.

Alison King

Our school system, like most in our country right now, is in crisis. Many students have struggled with the transition back to in-person learning, and we have very real academic and behavior concerns in our schools. Teachers and administrators are burnt out, and unable to sustain how much we have asked them to stretch themselves over the past two years. Most importantly, our schools aren't bubbles. Every single student and staff member in our schools is also living through a pandemic that has upended life for almost two years. Everyone is impacted by this crisis. The only way to manage a crisis is to triage and try to deal with the most important problems first. Yet, month in and month out, inordinate amounts of time at your meetings are spent discussing how to subvert state health requirements and how to develop a policy that will punish teachers for the infraction of being political in the classroom. Please stop. The community wants to see you rising to the occasion and managing this crisis. How can we know our kids are safe and receiving a quality education among unprecedented staffing shortages? As Covid case numbers rise, what additional measures are you taking to make sure our students and staff are as safe as possible? Just saying we will not shut down is not enough. We need healthy kids and teachers in schools so real learning can take place. Your rhetoric on this proposed political neutrality policy and the talk of banning books is scaring teachers at a time we need to be building them up, not tearing them down. There is already a policy in place for administrators to take action if a teacher is unprofessional in any manner. There is already a process for professional staff to select and review challenged books. Now is not the time to be dedicating precious resources to non-existent problems. That's not how to manage a crisis. During the time that board members share their activities, it would be wonderful to hear of your visits to schools, during the school day. It would be wonderful to hear of your conversations with other school systems about what they are doing to manage this crisis. It would be wonderful to hear a tone of caring and leadership at a time when the school system you were elected to oversee desperately needs both.

Nikki Rhodes

For the past almost 2 years, the educators in this county have worked tirelessly to ensure the continued learning of its students. They learned an entirely new system of teaching, planning, and grading virtually. They then adapted again after being told they needed to teach virtually and in-person at the same time. They have been stretched and stressed beyond what is humanly possible for any of us to expect. Many have left the profession altogether due to the pressure. This new "politically neutral" reporting system is not only unnecessary, it is a slap in the face to the teachers who have sacrificed everything for their school communities over the past 2 years. The teachers in this county need support and acknowledgement from the Board, not one more reason to fear going to work each day. The Board should be focusing on retaining staff and building this county back up again, not finding more ways to divide and demonize. Please put this idea to rest and focus on rebuilding a strong school system. Our teachers deserve more respect and more gratitude.

January 10, 2022

Stephnie Thomas

As a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor who lives and works in the community, and specializes in dealing with clients who suffer from anxiety and OCD, I have had the privilege of working with many CC students and teachers over the 12+ years that I have been in practice in the Westminster area. In all my years of practice, I have never before had so many desperate parents reaching out seeking services for their children, who are struggling with unprecedented levels of anxiety and depression. On average I am turning away 3 – 4 local Carroll County people per week, as my practice has been bursting at the seams since March of 2020. Unfortunately, all of my colleagues are in the same boat — the need is far greater than the supply of LCPC's, LSW's, psychologists, and psychiatrists available to meet the need. The consistent theme that I hear? Parents are tired of trying to figure out the latest BOE mandates. They want a consistent policy that is driven by science. They want students to be safe, and if that involves their kids wearing a mask in school and getting vaccinated, so be it. They want the BOE to listen to advice from the Health Department. Students are tired of virtual learning, but many are afraid to be in a classroom with other unvaccinated students who refuse to observe basic safety

measures such as properly wearing a mask. Teachers want to be in the classroom, and they want to teach — but only if they feel safe and supported by the administration, which they do not. Teachers are exhausted, and I have had a large majority tell me that, for the first time in their careers, they are seriously considering finding alternate careers. Not a single one WANTS to quit — but the current administration's lack of support is forcing them to examine whether or not it is worth it — and most are saying it is not. I challenge each Board member to spend a week doing all that a typical teacher is expected to do in a typical CC classroom. It is my opinion that if you spent a week in their shoes you would be much more open to hearing from teachers who are asking for additional time to plan so that they can meet the needs of students who miss school because of sickness, or so they can figure out creative ways to bring students who are lagging academically up to par with their peers. Our students and teachers are at a crisis point, and they need a BOE who puts aside partisan politics to actually do the job they were elected to do: serve the needs of both students and teachers.

Sarah Van Horn

Ok, so the CC infection rate is over 26% and skyrocketing. There aren't heppa filters in the cafeteria or gymnasium where kids are permitted to remove their masks. There is such a shortage of bus drivers that at least 5 buses of kids at one school didn't have a ride last week and were "compensated" with an excused absence, but no instruction. Those shortages are continuing into this coming week. Teacher shortages are exponentially worse. At the end of last week there were about 280 unfilled teacher absences in the county, almost double the amount from just before Christmas break. So who exactly is covering those 280 classrooms all day? It's other teachers and support staff during their planning periods, WITHOUT compensation. No wonder teachers are quitting/retiring left and right. You're a terrible employer that doesn't value it's staff. Central office employees have been subbing to cover classrooms full time, so who is doing their jobs? Is everyone just expected to do double and triple workloads without pay and be happy about it? Where is the contingency plan? Schools cannot remain open without staff. When you don't have "real substitutes" lessons aren't being taught/learned. You claim that virtual would be a huge disservice but by not preparing that option you have left the entire county in the leech. For those of us that actually want to slow and stop the spread because there is no room at the hospital for those that need it, we have no option but to leave CCPS and homeschool. I have offered to donate filtered box fans and volunteer to construct them. I have picked my kids up for their lunch/recess periods every day so they aren't unmasked around others (this is a 3.5 hour ordeal dragging my toddler with me BTW), all because I want to be part of the solution, not the problem. What exactly are you doing other than searching for a new superintendent because the great one we had doesn't want to work with a bunch of ostriches with their heads in the sand anymore (Mrs. Dorsey and Ms. Mistry being the exception). It's time to be open and get a backup plan together NOW, because things cannot continue in this manner. CCPS was once an honored school system and now it's becoming a joke. NOT because our teachers are subpar, our teachers are nothing short of real superheros. It's their leadership that's garbage. Please get it together. Perhaps surveying parent volunteers to be lunch monitors and move lunch outside or get them to donate filter fans, send a letter requesting parents who are available to apply to be on the sub list. At very least you need to find a way to show the teachers, school staff, and bus drivers that you actually do appreciate them breaking their backs for you.