

Spotlight on the Board
Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings
November 11th, 2009
Citizens Address the Board
Virginia Lake Elementary School Recess

Advance notice was given to the Board of Education in order for this topic to be added to the meeting agenda and a response could be received that evening.

Citizens Address the Board
Virginia Lake Elementary School Recess

Stephanie McVeigh – Virginia Lake parent

Stated that she attended Virginia Lake, Sundling and Palatine High School and by the time her youngest child is finished at VL, she will have spent 22 years walking through the doors of that school. Her family has a long standing invested interest in VL and this school district. Relayed some information to the Board regarding childhood obesity - It affects 1 in 4 children in this nation with a disproportion number falling into the low-income category and 43% of children at VL fall into this category. McVeigh also named a number of physical and mental concerns related to childhood obesity. She further stated that while the rest of the nation is campaigning to bring awareness to childhood obesity, our leadership at Virginia Lake has chosen to contribute to it with a policy that has cut the children's recess time in half. These lost 20 minutes are not being spent under the guiding presence of a teacher but are overseen by program assistants that face the impossible challenge of being in two places at one time – and from time to time, have left our children unsupervised. Add to this our district's PE exemption waiver; our children receive PE only twice a week for 30 minutes. Our research has concluded that VL is missing out on 100 minutes per week of physical activity compared to other schools in our district. McVeigh relayed information on how physical activity stimulates a child's brain and helps with social skills. She continued to quote research regarding English Language Learners. McVeigh stated that VL parents have been told by the principal that VL's failing AYP status has nothing to do with this policy. In actuality had VL's status been considered, countless studies indicate that an adequate amount of physical activity lowers stress and raises concentration levels and translates into higher test scores. Her group of parents is asking the Board to consider physical activity consistency through the district to give the children a healthy foundation that they all rightly deserve.

Gina Kowalski – VL parent

Has been a Palatine resident for 36 years, her husband and she are both products of D15/D211 education and she is also a member of the VL PTA. She is proud of the education that she received and stated that in fact some of the Board's spouses have been her teachers. They taught her to think outside the box, to question policy and to stand up for what I believe to be right. Kowalski stated that after speaking with the VL principal, she stated that one reason for this recess change was to provide a transition time for kids to wash hands, to use the restroom and settle into class before instruction begins. Question – how does this transition address the students that have lunch or outside recess immediately prior to their afternoon instructional time? She stated that they were also told that this silent time (20 minutes instead of outside recess) will eliminate playground disturbances. Question – If playground disturbances were such a concern, why wasn't there any communication from the school on this issue? If there are a few children creating disturbances on the playground, she again questions – Why punish all children and prevent them from receiving the healthy benefits of physical activity and socialization? During our research, we reached out to our district's schools and surrounding suburban districts. If this policy (at VL) is allowed to continue, our kids miss out on over 3500 minutes this year alone. This is 58 hours of lost physical activity and socialization time. How can this be allowed from a community consolidated school district? Our children are entitled to the same physical activity minutes that the majority of our other schools now receive. The epidemic of childhood obesity is now being addressed in the Fit Kids Act Bill – fitness integrated with teaching. Legislators on both sides of the

party lines realize the oversight of No Child Left Behind. The pressure of schools and administrations to achieve higher test scores has caused many principals to cut recess. This Bill will amend No Child Left Behind to hold schools accountable for quantity and quality of physical activity. With over 118 sponsors/co-sponsors, it is just a matter of time before this comes to pass and becomes policy. Wouldn't it be great if our district can lead by example and be proactive? She is aware that exemption waivers to avoid the IL State requirement of daily PE. Our district has until January 18th to re-file for this exemption waiver. Perhaps not filing for this waiver would be another proactive action taken by our district to support our children in achieving their recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity. While she appreciates the need for site-based decision making, (it should not) be at the sacrifice of developing the whole child. She stated that the BOE was given packets that contained all of the research that has been done on this topic plus a petition with the signatures of 100s of VL parents.

Robin Serafino – Virginia Lake, Sundling and Palatine HS parent

Her 4th grader at VL has participated in the Reading Intervention program without much success for three years. She is raising her children bilingually with her Argentine husband and as such is very familiar with the obstacles of being foreign-born and trying to acclimate to our country. Serafino is a Spanish teacher with a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction and an ELL certification. She has taught in Spain, Zion, New Tier, Harper College, Buffalo Grove, and Palatine and now in Lake Forest. The data that has been presented is clear and commonsense. This has never been a debate about personalities or whether people are well-intentioned. This is a debate on issues surrounding the need for physical activity. It is a plea to look at the whole child instead of recycling old methods that are shown to be ineffective. We need transparency, a true sense of vision and direction in our leadership. At VL, the lack of it was made obvious through numerous conversations in a variety of circumstances. Likewise, real opportunities were not given to advocate for our children when decisions were made. Not one month into the school year after their implementation. Having worked in schools of varied reputations, Serafino knows that when it comes to children's education, it is not merely about money. What works is a mindset and common values held by all parties involved in children's education. How these parties related to each other can either create or dismantle a sense of community within and outside the school walls. It is the district leaders that set this tone. She will conclude with four questions for the Board to consider. 1 – Can the question "What is best for the whole child be the first measure to guide any decision thinking throughout the district?" 2 – Will physical education be given the real magnitude it has on the development of children that the research and common sense indicates? 3 – Will the district continue to adhere to the philosophies of Richard Allen and the like that blame academic failure on the student rather than questioning the methods of instruction? 4 – Can our district become more transparent and open throughout its decision making process?

Patricia Boyles – Virginia Lake parent

She herself attended Virginia Lake, Sundling and Palatine HS and has 3 children, two currently at VL. She and her family have made many sacrifices so her children can also attend VL. Many people here tonight can afford to have their children in extra-curricular activities. Unfortunately that is not the case for all VL students. Many children that are struggling to meet reading standards are bussed to and from school, work hard all day in school, attend supplemental education classes after school plus need to complete their nightly homework. This gives them little time, if any to run around and play. These children are actually putting in more work hours than most adults. Boyles knows that many will argue that the kids are now adjusted to this policy. The kids will adjust to all kinds of situations but just because they have adjusted, it does not mean that it is in their best interests. A daily 20 minutes of silent time is not instructional and if safety is a concern, certainly unattended children in a classroom poses some liability. According to the CDC, the US Department of Health and Human Services and the American Academy of Pediatrics – it is recommended that kids be physically active for a minimum of 60 minutes daily. She continued to relay details of the research that she and other VL parents have done on the issue of physical activity on children's learning. Boyles stated that VL parents have offered to have a playground equipment drive to help foster a positive playground environment. Our kids have 3 basketballs, a broken basketball hoop; there are a few oversized footballs and no soccer balls. Kids are actually bringing their own from home. Come spring, it is a race to the jump ropes to see who will end up with one. We have suggested a compromise consisting of a 30 minute recess with a 10 minute

transition. This will provide a means of addressing some of our concerns without interfering with time and space issues in the building itself. We have offered to establish a parent/mentor assistance program which a parent would sit in – similar to Marion Jordan School. The group of parents hopes that tonight's meeting will ignite discussion to achieve parity for their children.

Kristin Fortunato - Speaking on behalf of a group of Virginia Lake parents

We would like to extend our support to the administration and staff at Virginia Lake. We understand and support the decisions of the administration. We are confident these decisions are made in the best interest of our children's education, safety and well-being.

Patty Clark – Virginia Lake Kindergarten teacher

As a representative of the teaching staff of VL, she is here to acknowledge our support of the noon hour decision made for all of our students at Virginia Lake School.

Sandy Hartz – Virginia Lake parent

She wanted to read a few highlights from a USA Today article published October 30, 2007

"Exercise builds strong brains, too"

www.usatoday.com/news/health/2007-10-29-exercise-brains_N.htm

Michael Klein – Palatine resident

Klein said that he moved here 33 years ago because of the school district and its fine standing. He stated that sadly, he has watched it decline and erode in District 15 particularly in recent year and particularly on the East side. Unfortunately, we are rapidly approaching a two-tier system in D15. It is never a good time to undermine the physical and well being of our children – there is certainly a worst and that time is now. There is an obesity crisis and its long-term consequences are universally acknowledged and the further devaluation of our home values. Obviously we can ill afford a school policy that inadvertently exasperates both of these situations. Klein wants to commend the parents that have brought this issue to the Board rather than accelerate the socio-economic flight that has been going on from the East to the West side and even out of the district completely. He said that it took courage and a strong commitment to their children to do what they have done. It is easy for people in leadership to "circle the wagons" and paint the centers with labels of "uninformed malcontents." Nevertheless, this is about coming together as a community to find commonsense solutions to complex issues without demonizing those who hold different points of view. Sometimes a leader needs to abandon or modify a policy for the good of others in this case our children and property owners. Klein said that to be an effective leader one must recognize the point of compromise is for the greater good. He would like to acknowledge Dr. Chapman as an example of that kind of leadership. He has witnessed first hand his willingness to apply commonsense solutions to remedy complex issues that arose from D211 policies. Klein respectfully urges this Board to address the true educational needs of Virginia Lake and other East side elementary schools so they can once again celebrate their rightful top tier achievement levels. It would be a win-win proposition for all of us.

District 15 Superintendent's Response

Daniel Lukich, D15 Superintendent – Wanted to make a few comments concerning the VL lunch hour. Said he is not nearly as prepared as the speakers. Both sides of this issue present a good case. There is no easy answer. He has worked with Principal Rivera, been in her building and partaken in her lunch hour – food is good and kids are extremely well behaved. He also spent time at recess a couple of weeks ago and he wants to ease this – Lukich thinks it is time to give the principal and her staff the opportunity to do what they think is best for the entire building. He supports and always supported that initiative during the course of this year. For that reason, Lukich said that we need to give her some room, let this take its course, continue to study it. The information presented tonight is extremely valuable. This is not a new thing; this is a debate that goes back many years.

This district does face the issue of the PE waivers situation. It was just discussed Monday at the cabinet level. We wish we didn't have to apply, we wish we had the space to be able to do much more along with staff and everyone else. Last year, the Board in its architectural study looked at core capacity space issues in virtually every building in the district. The core space issue has to do with

interior areas, PE areas, etc. and how many kids we can accommodate. There are buildings at capacity and some over capacity.

Lukich thinks it is time we support the principal and her staff. The staff supports her and they know that they have his support. From that standpoint, we need to be cognizant of the information given here tonight. He will encourage Rivera and her staff to continue to review, reflect and use it in their decision making for the *next* school year, not this year.

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