

Mistretta, Susan

From: Larry Pilla <larrypilla@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, June 24, 2020 10:12 AM
To: City Council - All; Harbron, William; Driscoll, Peter; Lyndes, Kim
Subject: School Year 20-21

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I'm writing both to thank you all for your thoughtful concerns for our students and city, and to provide my personal thoughts about the coming school year.

I have children at both DMS and DHS, one of whom has an IEP. In addition, we have had a couple of extra high school students staying with us for much of the recent quarantine period - five kids in all.

While I commend school staff for their efforts this past year, overall my kids did not thrive in the remote learning environment. Although they started out strong, by the second month they had difficulty focusing and were either not turning in work or, as one admitted to me, cheating as much as possible to get through. Only one of the kids, already a high honors student, did well with remote learning as it was being practiced. It probably also didn't help that they understood there would be great leniency this year and they could slip by with a minimum of work.

Moreover, it is difficult to do justice both to my fulltime job and to my kids' education when they need help at home. One or both tends to suffer. And I'm fortunate enough to have a job I can do from home.

All that said, I am also greatly concerned about returning to anything resembling a normal school day. COVID19 cases continue to rise around the country, despite being relatively low in NH. As a single parent to these kids, I am greatly concerned about my own health. Being somewhat older and with asthma and type A blood, my personal risk is probably quite high. I cannot afford to be cavalier about the potential for catastrophic consequences.

That leaves me and many other parents with a Hobbesian choice: risk my health or risk my children's education and development. In the end, I have to be cautious. I won't send the kids into a risky environment. I need to be reasonably certain we aren't just throwing them into a petri dish and hoping for the best. If I needed to keep them home and hire my own tutors, I would do that. I hope it's not necessary.

But we also cannot continue to teach them the way we did this spring. Remote teaching methods and technology need to improve greatly if our children aren't to fall far behind. I especially fear for my son with an IEP. I don't want to be critical but even as a non-educator it was clear to me that there was much we can do to improve learning in this environment. More regular remote class time, even for an hour a day, might help with focus and accountability. Better use of technology would also help.

Until we have better treatment or a vaccine, I'm hoping we can come up with a modified plan where kids go to school in small numbers on certain days of the week. They definitely need face time and accountability but we cannot send them all back into one building together just yet.

Thank you for listening.

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