

Parents offer input at Plainfield education forum

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Photo: ~Courtesy of Plainfield Public Schools)

PLAINFIELD – Parents, students and community members came together Wednesday night at Plainfield High School to participate in an open discussion with school administrators to talk about the matters that most concern them about their children’s education.

“The Board of Education recognizes the value of our community’s input,” said Debra J. Sheard, Ed.D., acting superintendent of schools. “It’s in our interest to engage our parents and stakeholders so together we can make sure all our students succeed.”

The forum, called “Education in Plainfield: Charter, District or Private,” was sponsored by the Board of Education, the Principals and Supervisors Association (PASA) and the Plainfield Education Association (PEA).

Prefacing the meeting, Dr. Sheard said, “Tonight, this is not about judgment, it’s about listening and trying to figure out how we can all help all of us as we move forward to make sure of the success of all the children in the City of Plainfield.”

Eric Jones, president of the PEA, which represents approximately 1,000 district employees, 400 of whom reside in Plainfield and have children in the schools, said a similar dialogue took place recently, when employees spoke freely about their individual decisions of where they chose to educate their children.

“It was a pretty engaging conversation,” Jones said. “And, tonight, we are all about listening, and to get information from the public to take back to provide better services for all our district schools and the community.”

“The experience provided refreshingly honest feedback from stakeholders. It was a step in the right direction for the district,” said Dr. Anthony Jenkins, president of PASA, which represent approximately 600 Plainfield Public Schools educators.

Open microphones were accessible to all who wanted to speak.

Mothers, fathers, grandparents and community members spoke about taking their children to Plainfield district schools based on personal knowledge about the people at the helm of their schools, the rigors of the curriculum, the services or the proximity of the schools to their homes. Others spoke about the challenges they face and the perception Plainfield schools endure because of the lack of information or knowledge about the programs that are offered.

Parents such as Ananlyn Acosta, who co-hosted the event with Sheard and Ryan Sears, Plainfield School District systems analyst, said she and her husband took their three children out of the district but brought them back when they found out the services at Plainfield Schools matched the needs of their children.

“Our district does have lots of programs that other private and charter schools do not have,” Acosta said. “We realized there were resources the district has that we just did not know about. When I found out Maxson and PAAAS had STEM programs, my husband and I decided to bring our children back.”

Another important issue was community ties.

“As taxpayers, we also wanted our children to enjoy our community and to grow up with the children in our neighborhood,” Acosta said. “Our children are excelling and we are very happy with our decision.”

Sears said his two sons attended Plainfield Schools, but because of severe overcrowding in the middle schools at the time, he and his wife made the “tough decision to take them out.”

The forum lasted about two hours as speaker after speaker took the opportunity to make their opinions known.

A 15-year resident said her youngest son is at a district school, but she wanted to know how Plainfield is going to attract the students that are leaving the district.

The night was more about comments and testimonials.

Alice Horton-Mays, whose grandson is at Hubbard Middle School, said the decision to send her grandson there was hard, based on the reputation of the school. But she said she decided not to go on hearsay but to do her own research and get the facts, and meet the teachers and administrators.

“I have been enormously pleased with Hubbard. I have been pleased with the teachers, the environment, the curriculum,” Horton-Mays said. “I’m pleased with the homework assignments, I am pleased with the floors, the cleanliness and the friendliness of the school. Don’t judge a book by its cover. You have to open up the book and start reading its pages.”

A parent at Cook School said, “I am quite happy with what is happening with my son. I love Dr. Cooper (principal of the school), I love the work she is doing, but I also supplement my son’s education. You have to supplement your child’s education. The one thing I know for sure, I am not going to rely on statistics to deter me from what I can see is going on at my son’s school. For me, Cook is a great school.”

A father said he applauded the recent walk-out by students at Plainfield High School, but it should not come to that — and those responsible should work so students can study and not have be concerned about their studies.

Victor Reynolds, whose son is in third grade at Emerson School, said his approach to his son’s education is to be involved. His son used to go to a charter school, but he decided Emerson School was a better fit.

“My concern is for my son to thrive,” Reynolds said. “My son has a right to a good education.”

A Queen City Charter School mom said her decision to take her daughter to a charter school was based on the better fit for her daughter’s needs.

David Graves, PTO president at Cedarbrook, said, “We as parents need to hold the Board and administrators accountable. I see good things in this district. We have resources most schools do not have. But as parents, we need to make sure our children are getting the services they need.”

It was announced that a similar forum will take place with students in grades from middle school and high school.

For additional information, call Gloria Montealegre, community relations liaison, at 908-731-4333 or email GMontealegre@Plainfield.K12.NJ.US. Visit <http://www.plainfieldnj12.org>.

