

Garvey School Board Meeting – Apr 19, 2012
Nancy Eng comments

I am a parent of a fourth grader at Bitely and consider myself to be an informed and involved parent.

I left the last School Board meeting without making the comments that I planned because I was really bothered by the misinformation, political spins, and unnecessary personal attacks by some speakers in the audience. I was sad children in the audience had to witness them as well. The approach of some speakers only served to further create barriers to collaborative dialogue that many of the speakers were insisting should not be happening. If the goal is to provide quality education to all children in Garvey and to save jobs of good educators, what I witnessed was counterproductive. This forum should not be for stakeholders to pit one against another, individually or collectively. It needs to be really about our children in Garvey. It needs to be about good solutions to provide quality education to and serve each and every child in Garvey to ensure their future success in learning and in life.

I was on the committee to gather input in the search for a superintendent to replace Ginny Peterson, who retired. This Board voted unanimously (5-0) (8/4/2010 mtg) to hire Dr. Johnson as Superintendent based on community input from parents, teachers, staff and community members that someone with commitment to public education and experiences outside of Garvey were needed to address many challenges to improve the quality of education in the District, such as the number of schools in Program Improvement, uninviting/dirty school grounds, lack of accountability, no constructive solutions to parent complaints at school sites, ineffective communication with stakeholders, etc. Given the mandate to move the District forward, Dr. Johnson has had to make hard and unpopular decisions. I believe the decisions were made with the educational needs and interests of students in mind. Continuing to do things the usual “Garvey” way has not been meeting our children’s educational needs. My

child and all Garvey children cannot afford to wait another 10-15 years for the District to catch up with what other forward looking school districts are already doing. Dr. Johnson has been at Garvey for less than two years and is tasked with numerous gigantic challenges.

It is not surprising that there is resistance to change. Changes should not be made for the sake of change, but they need to be made because they are necessary, constructive, and will improve the quality of education to better serve our students, teachers and staff. The current dire state of education funding throughout California and US makes it a lot more challenging to implement good changes that are desperately needed in Garvey.

One sign of the quality of a school district is when its own teachers or employees want their own children educated there. When my son started here, three teachers had their children enrolled in the school. Two of the teachers have since transferred their children out of the district. There are district employees who reside in the district but their own children or children of their family members attend schools outside of Garvey. If Garvey's own teachers and employees do not have confidence that the District is meeting the educational needs of their children, what does that say about the quality of education we are providing at Garvey? It would be fantastic if the District can provide the quality of education that Garvey teachers and employees would want for their own children.

I hear complaints from frustrated teachers who say they have to cut into their grade level curriculum in order to "re-teach" children material that should have been taught from the grade before and that these kids are coming up unprepared from the same certain teachers year after year. I also just met a teacher who recently retired from Mark Keppel High and she shared with me that she often felt bad for students from Garvey because some were so unprepared. Why would any family want to send their children to school and for them not to learn?

There are many good teachers and employees in Garvey that are creative,

dedicated and work hard carrying out their responsibilities effectively on a daily basis. I am grateful my son has the opportunity to be taught and inspired by some of these good teachers. Sadly, some students are not as fortunate and their families, and sometimes the teachers themselves, do not feel that they can speak up, know to speak up, or when they do speak up, nothing constructive is done.

As a parent and a taxpayer, I am frustrated by a system that seems to protect the few bad apples who are not responsible/will not be held accountable at the expense of our children and the many hard working professionals who do their jobs effectively. There are many parents in the district who share this sentiment, and are fed up with those in this district who are unresponsive to our kids' needs. We are fed up by the bickering and finger pointing. Our kids are on the losing end of everyone's low morale, mistrust and ill will. Our main desire is for our children to be educated in a safe environment by qualified and skilled administrators, teachers and staff who believe and take pride in their jobs and most importantly, believe in our children. We need to be assured that when our kids leave the district they are fully prepared academically for their next level of learning, and can ably compete with students from high performing school districts.

It is budget and contract negotiation time. Understandably, this is an anxious time for employees in the district. The current economic challenges facing many families and CA's budget mess only add to that anxiety. My sister is a teacher and my husband is an administrator in the public school system for many years. I support everyone working in public education, at every level, to have fair compensation with benefits within budget availability in return for their talent and dedication. How is it possible that Garvey is spending 94% of its Unrestricted General Fund on employee compensation¹ and still provides employee benefits that are the most generous compared to other school districts in the area?² How can

¹ GSD Initial Proposal to GEA March 12, 2012, Pg. 2

² Certificated Market Data re District Benefit Contribution on GSD website 3/12/12 Mtg Info, Pg. 5

this be financially sustainable? This does not seem like prudent business practice, even when we're not in a budget crisis situation. Is this why we can't afford to have library aides in our school libraries, there are outdated and nonfunctional computers in school libraries, broken lunch tables have to be held together by duct tape, and yard duty aids who have the lowest hourly pay with no benefits have their minutes cut? These are not practical solutions to deal with the District's budgetary challenges — getting our schools out of Program Improvement will help tremendously. The cost to the District for having schools in Program Improvement is over half a million dollars (\$500,000) a year.

So please remember as you engage in the budget process that the delivery of quality education to our children and their successful learning must be the main focus. I urge everyone involved to dialogue in good faith, be objective and problem-solve with transparency. With families leaving the district year after year, and no trend reversal is in sight, ADA will continue to shrink. Everyone will need to share in making hard economic decisions for Garvey to continue to improve and to again become a school district where families want their children to be educated in and where innovative educators want to work. Why not aim to become a District of Choice for families where every Garvey school is a Distinguished School?