

School board meeting in Webster gets heated

Parents yell, police officers summoned

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Thursday night’s Board of Education meeting was heated in the Webster Central School District.

Parents yelled at board members. Police officers were summoned. Some questions were answered.

In what was scheduled as a budget hearing, parents repeatedly yelled their frustrations over the board members and the board ultimately opted to allow time for residents to speak after the public hearing on the district’s 2021-22 school budget.

“My children deserve better,” one woman yelled over the crowd gathered at the district office at Spry Middle School in Webster.

Here’s what folks at the meeting said they are frustrated about:

When will students return to school?

With secondary students in several other area districts returning to in-person instruction this month, why hasn’t the Webster district outlined a plan for all students to return to school for fulltime, in-person instruction, asked Webster parent Sarah Dolle.

Dolle is running for a seat on the district’s school board.

Interim District Superintendent Brian Neenan said that it has been discussed, but while the transmission rate remains in the “red zone,” returning to school full time is not an option.

“For next year, we are going to do everything, we’re going to get creative, we’re going to do the creative pieces that we need to do,” he said.

don’t feel that the board is transparent, then the only place that people have a way to voice their frustrations is on the budget,” she said.

Another parent said that he understands the district is in a “tough spot” but that he and others are concerned that part of the budget will fund Gumina’s retirement.

Gumina retired last week, days after a former teacher who was exonerated of child sex abuse charges sued the district in federal court and accused Gumina of steering the investigation because both men were sleeping with the same district faculty member.

“I’m not paying for whatever he did that was wrong, and neither should anybody else here,” a father told the board Thursday night. But “we should all know about it. If there was some agreement to make him go away, we should all know what it was.”

Brian Neenan takes helm

Neenan came to the district 12 years ago, in 2009, as the principal of Willink Middle School.

He was principal for four years before he moved to the district office in 2013 as the assistant superintendent for instruction. He also became the district’s deputy superintendent in 2015 and served a dual administrative role for the past six years.

Neenan started his career in 1996 as a math and computer science teacher in Fairport Central School District. He left Fairport in 2005 for Victor Central School District in Ontario County, where he was the assistant principal at Victor’s junior high school for four years.

He took on the role of interim superintendent on April 30, stepping in for Gumina after Gumina announced his departure last week.

“Webster is my heart, it is my family and I know our family is hurting right now,” he said at the end of the board meeting. “That’s real and we need to come together.”

“We’re going to go back to teaming to make sure we do everything possible for everyone in our district to be here full time next year.”

“This is a pandemic we never wanted to be part of. None of us, and neither did our kids,” Neenan told another parent who asked the board about the district’s educational plan to address how students will recover from their unconventional schooling since March 2020.

He said addressing such a gap is a priority for Webster educators, after establishing a plan to return to full-time instruction.

Mask-wearing

Several parents complained to the district asking why students are required to wear a face mask while at school, except when eating. One mother called the requirement “abuse” and “a sign of submission.”

“Let my kid be a kid,” she said moments before she jumped up from her seat while screaming at board members. “If you guys don’t like it, get out. Because you want to know what, there’s enough people here who will take your jobs. Quit abusing our kids.”

Neenan noted that state Department of Health regulations require masking within schools, which eliminated previously allowed mask breaks for students.

Several parents also asked why children are required to wear masks during physical education classes and athletics and Neenan suggested each parent contact their school principal directly to talk about each child’s specific situation and concerns.

Transparency with taxpayers

Another parent, also a teacher in another school district, said she was concerned that if school board members and district officials are not transparent with taxpayers, that the community could vote down the district’s budget.

“Combined with the fact that so many people now feel that the board wasn’t transparent,” that district Superintendent Carmen Gumina, who abruptly announced his retirement last week, was not transparent and

He urged parents, educators and others to all set their differences aside and speak about the issues to better benefit Webster students.

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Webster parents share concerns about transparency, when students will be able to return to school full time and other issues during a meeting of Webster Central School District's Board of Education on Thursday. PROVIDED



Webster Central School District Superintendent Carmen Gumina talks about the initial response to allegations of rape by a teacher and coach that have since been dismissed. TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

the realities of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, “I really fear that our budget is going to end up going down.”

“People when they are frustrated, when people don’t feel that they are listened to, when they

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