

TO: WLA Stakeholders
DA: January 23, 2020
FR: Board of Directors and Executive Director
RE: Listening Session Comments/Questions/Answers



Ms. Folks, WLA Board Chair opened the Listening Session by introducing herself and welcomed everyone to the meeting. She thanked everyone for attending and being engaged parents that really care about the school. Ms. Folks clarified that the meeting was called in response to the text message threat incident, that the Board feels safety is a primary concern, wants the best for the school, and wants to respond to parents' concerns moving forward in a positive manner. Furthermore, that this session is for the purpose of listening and gathering information. Finally, that there will be a follow up response to parents. Ms. Folks then introduced Mr. Shawn Sorrell, facilitator for the meeting.

Mr. Sorrell introduced himself as a parent at WLA of a former Middle School student and a current Kindergarten student. He reiterated that the goal of the meeting was to ensure that parents and students understand that they are safe at WLA, that they understand the policies and procedures that are in place and being implemented to prevent future occurrences of this type of incident, and to hear the concerns of the parents. Mr. Sorrell then described the listed documents, all which were made available to attendees and that are available on the website:

- Policy 206 Public Participation in Board of Directors Meetings/Complaints about Persons at Board of Directors Meetings and Data Privacy Considerations
- Policy 414 Bullying Prohibition Policy
- Policy 501 School Weapons Policy
- Policy 506 Student Discipline
- Policy 525 Violence Prevention Policy
- Crisis Management Plan
- Feedback form to submit concerns, suggestions or questions

Dr. Mortensen, WLA Executive Director, shared that she has spent much time reflecting on the incident, how it was handled, and the numerous parent conversations that have occurred since. She noted that she sees two main themes to parents' concerns, that of school safety and that of adequate communication. She described the role of the Governance Committee in developing policies, ensured policies are being followed, and described ongoing staff training in the area of safety. She acknowledged that WLA families expressed concerns over hearing about the incident over social media and the desire for increased and timely communication from Administration. Moving forward Ms. Mortensen stated that families will be informed any time police are called for a weapons or drugs search at WLA. She then invited parents to contact her directly with concerns.

Overview: Mr. Sorrell then facilitated the Listening Session that was held on January 13, 2020 at WLA. He opened the session by explaining that some details of the incident cannot be shared

due to data privacy concerns. He then provided an overview of the incident which occurred on December 24, during winter break. The incident was reported by parents to Administration on the morning of the first day back to school, on January 6th. He shared actions taken by Administration that day in response to the report, explained that disciplinary action has been issued, and that the investigation is ongoing with possible further disciplinary action.

General Responses/Clarifications Regarding Parent Questions: Text messages were sent on December 24th, and reported to the school on Dec 6th. There is no indication that parents of any of the students attempted to notify the school or police prior to January 6th. The student did not bring a gun to school, and social media posts stating that there was a gun brought to school, and that the school did not care about the incident was not true. The parents of the students involved were notified except for one father, and in that case the mother stated she would let the father know. School personnel conducted the search. Disciplinary action was taken. Lock downs are a judgement call, highly dependent on containing any threat. There are some staff members on-site during breaks such as Winter Break, Spring Break, and Summer Break. Hours and days are posted for Summer Break, and will be posted for Winter and Spring Breaks as we move forward. Teachers that were directly involved with the student(s) were notified on Monday afternoon, and all staff members were notified Tuesday evening. The school is not able to disclose the consequences for the student(s) involved. Policies are regularly followed although consequences are known only to the family of the student who was held responsible. The school cannot prohibit students from entering WLA but must follow the enrollment process as outlined in State statute.

It is Acknowledged That Parents Felt a Variety of Emotions Around This Incident

Including: Hurt feelings that parents were not informed in a timely manner, anger, concern, fear, frustration, stress, distrust, relief, anger with social media, anxiety, and appreciation for the school's response

It is Acknowledged That Parents Have Criticisms Including: there is a perception that this is not the first time there has been a lack of communication from the school, there is a perception of lack of transparency with the school

It is Acknowledged That Parents Need Re-Assurance That the School is Safe and Secure.

Various parents suggested a ban on guns on the premise, provision of metal detectors, enforcement of zero tolerance with bullying, hiring a school counselor, providing a directory so that parents can contact each other especially when there are social media concerns with how their children are interacting, potential restorative justice procedures, setting-up a hotline, more control around locker area and bathrooms, separation of older and younger students. Some parents pointed out that things seem to happen around school session breaks, and that WLA staff should de-escalate before breaks and re-unite after breaks

It is Acknowledged That the Following Things Went Well: The school followed the procedures in place, kids were safe, nothing happened, no one got hurt, there were no guns on premises, that the incident brought everyone together at the meeting to get more information and accurate information, proud of staff and that they are holding forum tonight to show they care,

proud of how situation was handled, tonight's forum shows that the board and administration care, and that there will be improvements in communications coming from the incident

It is Acknowledged That Families Play a Role as Exemplified in the Following Comments:

“What is the responsibility of parents?” “Parents need to take responsibility. If parents allow young children to have technology, they should know who kids are texting, how to contact those parents, and monitor those conversations.” “Too much was put on the school. The parent should have played the parent card and took control of the texting situation.” “Technology tools are available for parents to monitor children's texts.” One parent stated that he considers this to be a criminal act and police (professionals) should be investigating and not the school. “Parents need to be more responsible about their Facebook posts.”

Action Steps for Moving Forward Include: Addressing the use of social media with our students will be covered in Media Studies class prior to Spring Break, an opportunity for parents to learn more about social media and how to monitor their children's use will be offered prior to Spring Break, staff training on how to assist students to manage social media will occur on January 31st, staff training on student Mental Health issues is scheduled for February 14th, continuing safety training is scheduled for February 7, 28th, March 20th, April 24th, and May 8th. Ensure students understand their responsibility around texting. Forums like this are helpful to get to hear the facts, and share different perspectives. Some parents mentioned that they would welcome more opportunities to engage with school administration, and that we should hold a check in meeting before end of year with update on progress made to address these issues. One parent stated that the fact that so many people attended the forum shows the level of care for our learning community. All WLA stakeholders (staff members and families) should show restraint from making assumptions, and only speak from known truths. Continue to educate our students on anti-bullying. All WLA stakeholders need to move forward with compassion. Keep loving our kiddos, stay open to change and working together for same goal.