

EACC Remarks for The Board of Education

6/9/26

Before I start today, I would like to invite the Board of Education, Superintendent Navarro, CCPS leadership, distinguished guests in the room, and those watching online to attend one of two performances of *The Addams Family* this Saturday at McDonough.

For those who do not know, the All-County Thespian Troupe will be performing *The Addams Family* on the main stage at the International Thespian Festival in Indiana this summer. These performances will be their final in-county shows before taking the production to the festival. They are also the final fundraiser supporting the 80 students from across the county who will participate in this incredible opportunity.

Showtimes are 2:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. at McDonough. I hope you will join us in supporting these talented students.

I look at this time when I can speak to you as a privileged opportunity. I think about the concerns I hear from our members that deserve the attention of both this Board and the public, and I think about possible solutions to those concerns. Now that we have completed another school year and celebrated our high school graduations, I have reflected on what I see as some of the biggest challenges facing our district and what I hope you will consider as we prepare for next year.

Safety and workload.

Let's start with safety.

Staff and community members are genuinely concerned about the increasing number of weapons being brought into our schools. I want to be clear: the CCPS Office of Safety and Security has done an outstanding job developing protocols and programs to respond when these situations occur. These incidents are taken seriously, and I appreciate both their proactive planning and their willingness to evaluate and improve their responses after each event. I would like to expand our frame of reference beyond the schoolhouse to the student house. The most effective way to address this issue is to prevent weapons from coming to school in the first place.

When community members advocate for metal detectors, I would suggest that the first line of defense begins at home. The weapons are not coming from our schools; they are being brought into our schools. The best prevention strategy is not a metal detector, but a parental detector.

Parents need to know what is in their child's backpack before they leave for school.

Some of the most troubling incidents we have experienced over the past two years have involved elementary-aged students. We have seen knives brought into schools, firearms

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brought into schools, and even firearms discharged in classrooms. This is not simply a high school issue.

Parents, especially those with younger children, should make checking backpacks part of their daily routine. It may be a preventable situation that begins long before a student enters a school building.

We also need to discuss how weapons are stored at home. If an elementary school student can access a firearm and bring it to school, that should be a concern for everyone. Every family that owns firearms should ask a simple question: Could my child gain access to this weapon, especially my elementary-aged child?

If the answer is yes, additional safeguards are needed.

By the time a weapon is discovered at school, we are already responding to a dangerous situation. Prevention that can happen before a student walks through our doors may be able to alleviate some of the concerns that we have all already experienced.

This is something that families can do to help to make the schools safer.

In addition to school safety, I would like to address staff workload. This is how sneaky the educator workload can be.

It can begin with a statement such as, "All third graders will read on grade level," or "Students will receive additional interventions before retention is considered." Those goals sound reasonable. But they are not measured solely by a report card grade. They require documentation of interventions, communication with families, progress monitoring, meetings, reassessments, and follow-up. Every worthwhile initiative carries additional responsibilities.

The question should not simply be, "What are we adding?"

The question should also be, "What are we taking away?"

Consider another example. Increasing numbers of second- and third-grade students still require support with basic toileting needs. Prior to COVID, this was uncommon. Today, educators are expected to address academic needs, social-emotional needs, behavioral needs, and, increasingly, basic developmental needs that traditionally would have been addressed before students reached those grades.

Before adding anything else to educators' plates, I would encourage this Board and district leadership to ask three questions:

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What is the benefit to students?

What additional work will educators need to do to implement it effectively?

How will we provide educators with the time necessary to make it successful?

If those questions cannot be answered, the initiative should stay off the table.

As for solutions, I would ask you to consider two ideas.

First, revisit the dedicated work time that existed during COVID. Just this week, I heard another member ask, "Can we have those Wednesdays back?"

For those who may not remember, educators attended countywide collaborative meetings related to their content areas and then had dedicated time to complete the many administrative responsibilities that accompany teaching: grading, planning, parent communication, intervention documentation, and reassessment.

Second, consider adding a planning period for all educators.

I know the objections. There is no time. It would be expensive. The schedule cannot accommodate it.

Yet last year, collaborative planning was added, and time was found to make it work. In many middle schools and block-scheduled high schools, that time was carved from what could have been a second planning period. The reality is that when something becomes a priority, we find a way to schedule it.

There are three things educators consistently want: time, compensation, and a safe place to work.

Today I spoke about safety and time.

I'm going to give you a summer assignment. It is simple: find ways to give educators more time to accomplish everything they are already expected to do, as well as everything this building continues to add to their responsibilities.

Thank you, and I hope you all have a great summer.

I will be checking your homework in August.