



Parents and students of the NKSD Options Program packed the district office Feb. 27.

Parents voice concerns over plans to move NK Options program

By Ken Park

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Parents and students of the North Kitsap School District's Options program flooded the district's main office for its Feb. 27 board of directors meeting. Those in attendance called upon the board and superintendent to reconsider plans to move the Options program from Richard Gordon Elementary School to David Wolfle Elementary School next school year.

In late January, NKSD leadership announced that it would be moving its signature Options program from Gordon Elementary to Wolfle Elementary in order to balance out school enrollment. Parents allege that this announcement was made without any input from the stakeholders of the program, including the parent group that has been worked with the district since the program's inception 30 years ago.

NKSD Superintendent Laurynn Evans defended the decision not to seek input from stakeholders by saying it would have been "disingenuous" because the outcome would have remained the same.

“I wanted to not engage families in a disingenuous conversation, I learned a lot from listening to folks who talk about the decisions when we re-boundaried a few years ago and the closure of Breidablick,” Evans said. “Families who were involved in those discussions felt like they were led down a path where a decision had already been made. I had to wonder whether or not we engaged folks in this process, had we landed in this place where we would be, I think we would be upset regardless.”

Evans also noted that since the transition process was announced, she has reached out to teachers and parents of students in the Options program to ask about their needs to make accommodations for them, so far she has only heard from the teachers.

Many of the people that packed into the district office were not only parents of students currently enrolled in the Options program, but students themselves.

Morgan Chandler, a recent graduate of Kingston High School and an Options alum, spoke to the importance of the program and how it provides a transition period from middle school to high school.

“There is no middle school intermittent period of a six-period day at the high school, that is incorporated in Options. One of the benefits of Options being so closely attached to the High School is that this immense gap systematically is a little narrower,” Chandler said.

Chandler spoke to his experience in the options program, which he said has led to his success at attending college on an academic scholarship. He also spoke about a peer who, through Options, was able to not only succeed academically but socially, describing the program as a family environment and home a for a lot of kids and their families. He also described the relationship between Options and KHS as being unique in that it provides a connection and a place of familiarity to the kids, long after they graduate.

“Options is a home. Not only to all of these kids that you see before you but to alumni like myself. Unlike KMS, there is a link between Options and the high school that isn’t just a one-way tunnel, but it’s a two-way bridge,” Chandler said.

One of the biggest concerns for parents surrounding the relocation of the program is student safety, both during drop off and pick up times and while at school.

Wofle sits at a busy intersection along Highway 104 and Highland Road. One Options parent, Mary Eisenhardt, noted that there aren’t any school zone signs to slow traffic either.

“My first question is why are there no school zone signs at Wofle? The speed limit on Highland Road is 30 miles per hour, on Highway 104 it’s 45 miles per hour, all of the schools, of which I am aware, are 20 miles per hour. I would like to know why that excludes Wofle?”

NKSD Board member and liaison to the City of Poulsbo, Rick Eckert addressed this issue specifically during board comments, noting that one of the roads belongs to the county, while the other belongs to the state, and that it is difficult to get either to care about making changes on roads without any considerable momentum.

“I think 104 is a terrible road too, but ... this is a state highway, the road next to the school is a county road ... I go to the city council and I talk to them about things inside the city of Poulsbo, about roads next to our schools in Poulsbo, and they listen ... the county and the state, I’m gonna say are maybe not as receptive. But we have to engage them and that takes the whole community,” Eckert said.

Mark Miller, another Options parent had contacted the principal at Wolfle, Courtney Allison to set up a time for Options parents to visit the school in early February. Miller said the principal initially agreed, but called back a day later, and informed him that Evans had instructed her to cancel the visit.

“The tour was going to happen on the 10th of February ... it’s the 27th. Now I can come up with all kinds of conspiracy theories why we would not be allowed to look at the facility, but I’m not gonna really go there. The district has said that there is an urgency to move and we need to be planning and helping to do this, we’ve already delayed 17 days, we could have done exactly what the superintendent was talking about on the 10th of February and we still don’t have anything set up and we still haven’t seen the facilities,” Miller said.

Dr. Evans again defended her decisions to cancel the tour during the board comments period.

“The principal of Wolfle is delighted to have the program come, she is also busy trying to run her school and it is very difficult for her to stop what she is doing to accommodate parents dropping in to ask questions about the program and make visits to the school. When this question came up, I asked the parent group and the faculty if we might find a way to coordinate a visit that would work for Courtney to be there as well as for me as well as maintenance personnel so that we can address questions that might come up during the visit, the answer was ‘sure,’” Evans said. “It has been characterized that we are preventing people from visiting the campus, when in fact what we’re trying to do is set up a time to have the right people present to address questions and make sure we can get information for you.”

Evans concluded her remarks noting that this was a difficult decision to make and that she understood the frustration of the parents.

“I think what’s most important and what we need to really focus on is this decision was made and it is difficult, this is not a short term decision, it was not the easy decision, it’s the long term decision. When I applied for this job as candidate, one of the things that I committed to is that I would

look to the long term future for the whole school district and part of that means looking to the best way to have this program be vibrant and viable in the long haul, even if that means that it might be painful in the short term,” the superintendent said.

“At the heart of it, I value this program, I think the board values this program, they want to see the long term success of this program and we feel that this pathway is the best way to do those things for the program.”



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