

Subject: Closing ITDC
Date: Tue, 21 Jul 2020 14:36:07 -0400
From: Nicole Redfern <nredfern@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>
To: Sheila Brogan <sbrogan@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Cristopher Kaufman <ckaufman@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Hyunju Kwak <hkwak@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Saurabh Dani <sdani@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Michael Lembo <mlembo@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>
Cc: Daniel Fishbein <dfishbein@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Antoinette Kelly <akelly@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Ojetta Townes <otownes@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Lisa Kontos <lkontos@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Sean Redfern <[REDACTED]>
Message-ID: <CADH7UmEjauryx1KGPUCQuEcDKq4BFj4yFY_FPM4NvcGUrsU3ng@mail.gmail.com>
MD5: 722b0fd2431df7d989e19ba02efc7ce4

Dear Board of Education Members,

My name is Nicole Redfern. I have been a teacher in Ridgewood for 15 years. I have one child who has been at ITDC for three years and another who will begin in September. I am writing to you today to express my concern, and frankly disgust, at the conversation about closing the Infant Toddler Development program from your July 10th meeting.

Mr. Dani and Ms. Kwak have clearly had it on their agenda to go after the ITDC program long before being elected to the board. A quick search of the It Takes a Ridgewood Village Facebook page shows them jumping on that bandwagon over a year ago. The fact that you are using the circumstances of a global pandemic to threaten the jobs of the staff and teachers at ITDC is reprehensible. During the meeting Dr. Fishbein and Ms. Kelly stated several times that the financial deficit this year was a direct result of the early school closing due to Covid-19. Dr. Fishbein even stated that in years past, the program has made money for the district and funded projects in other buildings. He also stated that the Red and Reach programs would not need the space used by ITDC. His comments were ignored while you both repeated yourselves over and over again, clearly having no other points to bring up, but hoping you would exhaust your colleagues into agreeing to postpone the tuition vote. Thank you to Ms. Brogan, Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Lembo for your level headedness and persistence to get that vote passed.

As I stated, I am a teacher in the district, but I do not currently live in Ridgewood. I grew up there and I am a graduate of the Ridgewood schools. My parents and in-laws paid Ridgewood taxes for many years. I pay taxes in Ramsey that are on par with Ridgewood. I understand and fully support a board that will look carefully at financial decisions and make sure that spending is focused on the best interest of the community. However, a school district is not a corporation and should never be treated as such. As board members you must think with your heads but speak and lead with your hearts. You are talking about children and families. We are not line items that can be crossed off in your budgets. To even think about closing a program 5 weeks before it is set to restart is heartless. These are not just rooms that house a program. They are homes for our children for 6-8 hours a day. Homes for them so that many of us can go serve the Ridgewood community in other schools. My son loves his school, his teachers, his friends. We talk about Ms. Bobbi, Ms. Katrina and Ms. Marion like they are part of our family. How could you even think about telling him that he can't go back? Where do you think we are

going to go with five weeks notice? These are our babies. We will not just put them anywhere.

Ms. Kwak, you said in that meeting that you want to make sure that the money is being spent on "our real kids". I had to pick my jaw up off the floor and wipe a tear from my eye to hear a board member and a mother speak about any child that way. I assure you that the children of ITDC are very real. The 57 families that are counting on a safe place to leave their children on September 1st are very real. We will not let our school and our teachers be pushed aside so you can use a global health crisis to push your political agenda. You are an example of the worst of what is happening in our society right now. Thankfully after 15 years in this district, I know that Dr. Fishbein, Ms. Brogan and the other long standing members of the administration are examples of the best. I have hope that Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Lembo will prove to be as well.

I, like the rest of the Ridgewood community are looking forward to hearing the plans for reopening at the 7/27 meeting. I know that the administration and my colleagues have been working so hard on this matter. There are no easy answers right now and it is really a shame that anyone's time and attention has to be taken up by the issue of ITDC at this critical time. I thank you for reading this and hope that you will leave ITDC to function as the exceptional child care facility that it has been for over 30 years in this community.

Stay well,

--

Nicole Redfern
Orchard Elementary School
First Grade Teacher

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Subject: Support of ITDC
Date: Wed, 10 Feb 2021 14:58:49 -0500
From: Nicole Redfern <nredfern@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>
To: Michael Lembo <mlembo@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Hyunju Kwak <hkwak@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Sheila Brogan <sbrogan@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Saurabh Dani <sdani@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Cristopher Kaufman <ckaufman@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>
Cc: Thomas Gorman <tgorman@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Sean Redfern <[REDACTED]>
Message-ID: <CADH7UmHVcn5ai2CzJBuF3k0f+QJNCd6RDt9cuRvUNW7WvApXJw@mail.gmail.com>
MD5: 1beaccab14fde62eca4aa91495f9a254

Good Afternoon- I am writing to you all today in support of the ITDC program and in disappointment that this is coming up yet again. I waited to write this email until after the board meeting on Monday night instead of before because I was hopeful that the issues surrounding ITDC might finally be put to rest during your meeting, but unfortunately that was not the case. It seems like the program is in danger now more than ever.

I have two children at ITDC. My daughter is in the infant room under the amazing care of Ms. Bobbie and Ms. Melody and my son is in the 3's classroom with the incredible Ms. Marion and Ms. Cheryl. I am not a Ridgewood resident, but have been a teacher in the district for 15 years. Last summer I wrote the board and Dr. Fishbein a lengthy email in support of the program and the teachers at ITDC. I don't feel like you need to hear all the reasons again why it is such a valuable part of the Ridgewood community. I want to thank Mr. Kauffman specifically for reminding everyone of that at Monday's meeting. There is so much support for this program throughout the community and it is sad to see that the very vocal minority has been controlling the direction of this conversation for so long.

I have just a couple of new points to make based on your conversation on Monday night. First, the issue of mismanagement of funds and the program operating at a loss seems to be the main point of why this program has come into question in the last year. I am still unclear, even after listening to many board conversions, exactly when and how much money ITDC has cost the district in its 30 years of existence. Some on the board make it seem like it has run at a loss for years, while others make it sound like this has only been the case a few times. I would love to see a simple breakdown of the numbers over the last 30 years. How many years did it lose money and how much? How many years did it break even or make money? I get the impression that while it had some tough years, the overall performance of the program has not cost the district much money in its lifetime. Can anyone provide that information to the public in a simple spreadsheet so we can really understand what the numbers look like? It seems like you really can't, which causes me to question how numbers can be thrown around to make it look like such a losing enterprise when you yourselves are admitting that you don't really have all the facts without a full audit.

Second, the idea of expanding the REACH program and taking over the classrooms from ITDC was also discussed this time around. As an educator in the district, I am very much in favor of expanding early childhood education for our students. High quality preschool education is always beneficial to both special education and regular education students. As a first grade teacher, I would directly benefit from having those well prepared students walk through my door in 2-3 years! That being said, that is a very expensive proposition. Adding another Transitional Kindergarten, another REACH 4's class and/or

expanding the program to include some 3's classes would require hiring certified special education teachers for all of those classes. The salaries and benefit packages for those teachers would cost the district far more than the salaries of the daycare teachers and aides. Not to mention the furniture and supplies that would need to be purchased to get those classes running from scratch and to keep them running year after year. If you are talking about shutting down ITDC because it is too expensive to float its occasional revenue loss, then I don't understand how replacing it with a very expensive program expansion is the counterargument for that space. If given that choice, I really wonder which one the taxpayers would choose?

Third, I understand that some board members want to close or at least give over the daycare classrooms to be run by an outside company because they don't feel that the board of education should be in the business of daycare and that your mandate is to educate children K-12 and provide federally mandated education for younger children through special education. It also seems to be a problem for some board members that not all of the children at ITDC live in the district, my own children and many of the other children of staff members included. It was asked if there is any teaching or curriculum going on at ITDC and I can assure you there is. ITDC is far more than a daycare center. It is a community school where from the time they are babies, the children are explicitly taught communication skills, social skills, empathy and academics. My son's class just finished an amazing unit on animals in the winter. He came home teaching my husband and I the difference between the Arctic and Antarctic. He explained landmass vs. ice, what animals live in each place and how they are being affected by global warming. Again- he is in the 3's class! My daughter is 17 months old and can't get enough of the books in her classroom. She has learned sign language to help lessen frustration as she learns to communicate and comes home with new words weekly that I know she didn't learn at home. When she was having trouble learning to walk, her teachers made sure she had one on one time daily to work on exercises to help her and now she is up and running- literally! She is building the foundational skills she will need to be able to teach us about Arctic animals all over again in a few years. I know the board of education does not *have to* educate children from birth, but wow, what an amazing idea that it does! Don't you think that builds the foundation for the tradition of excellence that Ridgewood prides itself on? And isn't it amazing that you value your teachers so much that you are willing to offer this to their children as well? Or do you??? I know at least two of you do...

Finally, the parents of the children enrolled in ITDC need a timeline. We were asked to give \$500 deposits for each of our children just a couple of weeks ago and we did so in good faith that our children would be in the program that we currently pay for. I am very concerned about the idea of a RFP and allowing this board of education in particular to choose a company or individual to run this program when the bottom line seems to be the only concern. If ITDC will not be run as it has been next year, you need to return the deposits to parents and allow us to look elsewhere before other centers are full for next year. We need an answer now, not in July like you did to us last year. It breaks my heart to think that we wouldn't return to ITDC next year, but given all the uncertainty, you owe it to us to make a decision about the future of this program now or drop the idea of making changes for the 2021-22 school year.

Thank you for your time,

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Nicole Redfern
Orchard Elementary School
First Grade Teacher

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Subject: Re: Closing ITDC
Date: Tue, 21 Jul 2020 20:48:42 -0400
From: Nicole Redfern <nredfern@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>
To: Daniel Fishbein <dfishbein@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Hyunju Kwak <hkwak@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>, Ojetta Townes <otownes@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>
Message-ID: <CADH7UmHuN+G5OTfFGnP8GVWK=noUf-t7-qJ+UMq02haj=FJ6gQ@mail.gmail.com>
MD5: 48b10983f20555bb1bc791fff981568e

Dear Ms. Kwak,

I received a very nice email from Mike Lembo informing me of the boards plans regarding ITDC so I am not looking to pursue this matter any further right now. However, I kept Dr. Fishbein and Ms. Townes on this email because I am a district employee and want to make absolutely sure that there is no confusion here about my earlier comments or where they came from.

I did not confuse you with anyone else on social media, but I did attribute your comments at the meeting on 7/10 to the opinions of your husband, Steve Kim's post on social media as they are closely aligned. In no way was my goal to represent his opinions as yours. I only meant that you and Mr. Dani were aware of the issues surrounding ITDC last year when the comments in support of Laurie Bender were made. It was unfair of me to assume you shared your husband's opinion.

I look forward to hearing more from you on ITDC during the next board meeting. Thank you for your time.

Nicole Redfern

On Tue, Jul 21, 2020 at 4:05 PM Hyunju Kwak <hkwak@ridgewood.k12.nj.us> wrote:

Dear Ms. Redfern,

I have removed most members of the Board of Education per OPMA guidelines. Thank you for sharing your heartfelt concerns.

I wanted to clarify that I did not have a Facebook account prior to early 2020. I have never posted about ITDC in any social media, period. You must have confused me with another Asian woman with the same last name.

I take my responsibilities as a Board trustee seriously. I appreciate you sharing your thoughts.

Sincerely,
HyunJu Kwak

On Tuesday, July 21, 2020, Nicole Redfern <nredfern@ridgewood.k12.nj.us> wrote:

Dear Board of Education Members,

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Nicole Redfern
Orchard Elementary School
First Grade Teacher

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