

Plainfield H.S. students stage walk-out over budget

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Hundreds of students from Plainfield High School walked out of class and marched to City Hall in protest of proposed budget reductions to the school district.

(Photo: ~Courtesy of Councilwoman Bridget Rivers)

when a child leaves the district to go to a charter school, the funding follows them. In many cases, (when) charter (students) returns to the public schools because the parent doesn't like it, the money doesn't follow them."

Wyatt was one of three board members who met with the students at City Hall after they marched there from Plainfield High School.

"It was very impressive," he said. "I told them that I was proud of them for organizing that and to make the walk over here without incident to make sure their voices were heard."

He said that he does not agree with the proposed budget reductions, adding that he plans to not vote in favor of it and will wait until another proposal comes along that "makes more sense."

Plainfield is one of the state's 31 Abbott districts, which receive higher funding than other public school districts. The total operating budget for the Plainfield school district this year was \$162 million, according to the city Board of Education's website.

In addition to the budget deficit, the students also raised concerns about violence in the city, challenges facing English-language-learning students and charter schools. Wyatt said that Mayor Adrian Mapp was not at the meeting at City Hall but his chief of staff was.

"A number of students at Plainfield High School walked out of class briefly this morning, to allegedly protest proposed reductions for the 2018-2019 school budget. The rally which ended up on the steps of City Hall, lasted a few minutes, with the students returning to class in a safe and orderly manner," Acting Superintendent of Plainfield Public Schools Debra J. Sheard said late Thursday in an emailed statement.

"The Plainfield High School students returned to school escorted by Plainfield Public School security officers and members of the Plainfield Police Division, who personally walked back with the students to assure their safety.

"At Plainfield High School, the Student Council and Class Presidents met with the High School Principal, School Administrators and the Acting Superintendent of Schools, for approximately 1 and ½ hours to discuss their issues and concerns. It was agreed that the parties will meet during scheduled meetings, on a bi-weekly basis, to provide continuous communication with the students.

"We believe that by working collaboratively, all students will feel empowered to express their concerns."

*Student representatives met with city officials and board members at Plainfield City Hall on Thursday.
(Photo: ~Courtesy of Councilwoman Bridget Rivers)*



"I used to serve on the Board of Education, so I understand what the board members are going through right now," Rivers said. "This was just a preliminary budget. I stand with the students of Plainfield for taking a stand."

She said she believes that the Board of Education will do the right thing "and I believe in my heart that the voices of the children were heard."

The proposed budget reduction is included in the preliminary budget, which will be voted on March 21. If it is passed, the Board of Education has until April to adopt the budget.

"It's up to the board," Wyatt said.

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