

Plainfield security guards, social workers fight to keep jobs

Courier News/My Central Jersey

Nick Muscavage

March 22, 2017

PLAINFIELD - Security guards, social workers and teaching aides took to the microphone at Tuesday night's Board of Education meeting to let the members know that the proposed budget cuts would have drastic affects on them and their jobs.

The proposed budget includes reductions worth \$8 million that would slash hundreds of thousands of dollars going toward social workers, security officers, assistants, guidance counselors, elementary media specialists and at least one school. The \$8 million deficit the district is attempting to make up for — which sparked a school wide student walk-out at Plainfield High School — is partially due to charter schools in the city taking funds away from public schools, according to Richard Wyatt, a board of education member.

Denice Stone, who works as a districtwide social worker, said the community recognizes that "services that we provide make sure that our students are supplied with the necessary support to achieve academic success."

"We hope you take this into consideration," she said to the board. "We are an integral part of students' learning."

Kimberly Moore-Jones, a social worker who works at Dewitt D. Barlow Elementary School, said social workers and counselors play an important part with helping students who are homeless or who have troubles in their family life.

William Kevin Wright II has been working at his hometown high school for eight years.

As a security guard for Plainfield High School, he is concerned that the budget cuts would reduce his hours to part time, taking away benefits that he relies on.

"Unfortunately, it doesn't seem that school violence is going anywhere anytime soon," he said. "We all know about the violence that has occurred in this community over the last couple of years," adding that he doesn't know how anyone could sleep at night knowing that they didn't do all that they could to protect the children in the community.

He said that security officers are the first ones to respond to potentially dangerous situations in the schools.

"Making security officers part time would reduce our income, deprive us of benefits needed by our families," he said. "This does not seem fair or right."

"It would be nice if Plainfield didn't need security guards," said Skyler Frye, a sophomore at Plainfield High School. "That would mean Plainfield is nice and peachy-perfect, but it's not."

He said that there are already kids who act out with security guards present, so "What makes you think it will get any better without them?"

Eric Jones, the president of Plainfield Education Association, said that there are some duplicate positions in the district, such as acting superintendent and superintendent, and he inquired about the status of the current superintendent.

Debra Sheard, the assistant superintendent, has taken the role as acting superintendent since Anna Belin-Pyles announced she would take a leave from her post as superintendent in early February.

After his question, the next speaker swiftly took to the microphone.

"Do I not get an answer?" Jones said. "There's no answer at all?"

"Oh no, at this point in time the board is in no position to make any type of response to your remarks," said Board President Emily Morgan. "But thank you so much for sharing that data with us."

Staff Writer Nick Muscavage: 908-243-6615; ngmuscavage@gannettnj.com