

IT'S TIME TO COME TOGETHER

Many students have had to voice their opinions in undesirable ways following a string of decisions that did not align with many of their views

On Behalf of the Editorial Board
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After a string of negative press and bad attention, it is evident that the Francis Howell School District needs to expand its efforts and look for input from the ones most affected by its decisions to understand their needs better. Student voices have been ignored for far too long, and the harmful effects of this have just begun to catch up. The FHSD Board of Education, administration and FHN Student Council need to take the initiative to seek the perspective of the student body. Students must also work to utilize available resources to voice their opinions more often.

Board of Education

It's clear that many students in the Francis Howell School District feel underrepresented. The student-led walkouts across the district following the removal and then reinstatement of the Black History and Literature classes voiced that a main problem of the decision was that students were being silenced by various members of the Board.

Students should not have to risk their attendance and valuable learning time to prove a point to the school board. Rather, the school board needs to seek the thoughts of students through methods like surveys and public roundtable discussions more often. Although all input may not be useful, it is important to allow students to feel heard.

One method that the school board uses to receive public opinion is through patron comments at the monthly board meetings. Each patron is granted three minutes to speak directly to the board members. However, there are only 30 minutes of comments, leading to as few as 10 speakers which strips the opportunity to speak to the Board away from many who did not sign up in enough time. Board of Education members need to deliberately work to be in schools as much as possible and not solely rely on board meeting comments for public thoughts.

Students can also become more involved in board meetings through the Student Representative Program. Students are granted permission to sit next to a school board member during the meeting and

are given a chance to speak momentarily. However, only one student is representing the entire district for only one night. Additionally, there is no form of application and representatives are picked based on principal recommendation solely, leaving the rest of the school population without the chance to participate. According to one school board member's opinion, the program has evolved into an honorary role without any real purpose.

Administration

Although the district hosts many parent and student involvement programs, they need to give the proper amount of attention and knowledge about them. Roundtable events, a way for citizens to work together to discuss topics regarding the district have been forgotten, with the last one being hosted over a year ago. Another program, Citizens in Our Schools, is reserved for 25 citizens and only meets on Wednesdays, an often busy day for a parent who may have a job. Additionally, the program is only open to adults. It does not allow students enrolled in a Francis Howell school to sign up, leading the district to dismiss potentially valuable information that a student may be able to add to the program. The lack of opportunities for students to be involved in these programs creates a disconnect between the administrators making decisions and the students left to follow them blindly. Additionally, students should be able to utilize Knight Time to directly speak to Administrators.

Student Council

The Student Council at North lacks to acknowledge many students' opinions. According to Student Council, the Toilet Talk printed in bathrooms is a way the members collect student opinions. However, with a string of bathroom vandalism, a piece of paper taped to the back of a stall door asking students to scan a QR code is an unreliable method of collecting input. Students also are not entering a bathroom to tell Student Council representatives their opinions on topics. Another method of communication between representatives and students is through the use of grade-level group chats. However, these chats are often exclusive to a select group of students, leaving out many

who deserve to be represented as well. Even platforms like Instagram accounts are not accessible to all as many students do not have access to social media. The Student Council also fails to require a student representative at school board meetings, as accredited by their club constitution. As a club that represents the student body, it should be an expectation that the elected members work to ensure a peer has the opportunity to inform the community of the events at school and speak if they feel necessary. It is the responsibility of the Student Council to stand up for students rather than just be known for planning dances and spirit weeks.

Student Body

While it is easy to point fingers at various outlets of the school, much of the disconnect between students and the district decision-makers sparks directly from the lack of effort put forth by the students. Even with various programs in place and ways to voice opinions, students still neglect to take advantage of them. The majority of school board meetings are filled with adults, the yearly school-wide surveys taken in English classes are simply left unsubmitted and students do not take advantage of their ability to speak to administrators at any time by walking into their office.

In the end, school administrators, district officials and student council representatives need to emphasize student voices and allow them to be heard more often, while the student body needs to work to take advantage of opportunities to voice their opinions. With a constant stream of feedback, decisions that lead to negative effects could be stopped before news articles are written and walkouts happen.