



Editor
Jodi Weinberger



TAPinto
Nearby
North Salem
Your Neighborhood News Online



EDUCATION

Teachers' Union Criticizes District's Cleaning Practices

By ABBY LUBY

September 30, 2020 at 10:55 AM



NORTH SALEM, N.Y. - In a charged statement at last week's North Salem School Board meeting Wednesday, Sept. 23, James Savarese, president of the North Salem Teachers Association, criticized what he said was the district's mishandling of sanitizing and cleaning many high-touch surfaces in the schools, thereby neglecting to maintain student safety.

"Very troubling is the apparent disregard for consistency to enforce proper safety and cleanliness and protocols and practices during this deadly pandemic," he said. "We were welcomed back to school with promises of rooms being properly sanitized and cleaned to safeguard students. What we've seen instead is the same inattention to surface cleanliness casting doubt that we are more protected from particles in the environment."

Savarese read his statement at the very beginning of the meeting. At that time there was no response from the board.

"That students and staff were invited back into school with under-sanitized working conditions is reprehensible," Savarese said. He also requested documented evidence of the cleaning protocols and related actions taken by the cleaning staff, which Savarese said the district had promised to keep track of. "To date, no response has been supplied to verify the cleaning practices."

According to Savarese, teachers were aware for years that the custodial department was understaffed and he urged the district to hire additional staff.

In an email, NCSCD, Board of Education Board President Deb D'Agostino said the board had approved the appointment of two custodians but neglected to say when they would be hired. In total, according to D'Agostino, there are more than three custodians, but some are part time and some are combination bus driver/custodians.

Although Savarese acknowledged the newly hired custodians, he urged the board to share a model of current cleaning practices, "because the current basic cleaning practice is unsustainable." Teachers are particularly concerned with the efficacy of cleaning practices will be in place during the colder weather when more students move inside. "We request the district produce to the community and to our staff, all accounts of efforts being made to clean high touch surfaces and the disinfecting desks," Savarese said.

Savarese initially thanked the staff development team for the support and training teachers had received, but claimed more help was needed. "The teachers' appeals for more time for guidance and training to use the various platforms and resources that are being developed have mostly been passed aside. We have asked for a full-time director of technology to work with teachers." He asked that the district facilities committee reconvene to continue communications between the CSEA and NSTA.

After the meeting, D'Agostino responded to Savares's statement in an email to the North Salem News.

"We appreciate the faculty's concerns, and look forward to working with NSTA leadership to resolve outstanding issues," she wrote.

Superintendent Kenneth Freeston did not respond to an email with follow up questions by press time. In the district's "Reopening Overview" issued in July, 2020, the Health & Safety Overview references cleaning in two separate bullet points; "high touch areas will be cleaned throughout the day including door handles, bathrooms, etc. and that common areas require cleaning and disinfection in between lunch periods."

EDUCATION