

Outgoing Board President Emma Petrie Barcelona's Comments – January 4, 2021

Dear Lakewood City Schools Administration, Board of Education colleagues, and the entire Lakewood City Schools community,

What a year 2020 turned out to be; so much more challenging, confusing, and troubling than we could have imagined when the year began. And yet, with that worry, we kept working together, listening, learning, re-focusing, and in the best possible ways, looking out for the students and employees of the Lakewood City Schools.

Back in March, we thought we might have a few weeks of disruption, but that we would get back to some normalcy, maybe even before the end of the last school year. Not only did that not come to pass, but our kids have not been in school, and we have not been together, since then.

That said, what we have accomplished since March is nothing short of amazing.

The Lakewood City Schools are investing in hiring more teachers and having additional staff available for our students and families. This has allowed the Lakewood City Schools to offer three different age-appropriate models for education for our children and families this year. While one model will not be starting until this week, being able to offer choices to our families during this most challenging time in order for everyone to determine what is best for them and their individual needs and situations, has been a goal since this pandemic became our new way of life. These models all have children as the focus while working with our incredible teachers in new, different, and safe ways. Our educators have worked tirelessly to work with each of our students and provide them with the educational foundation they need to prepare them for the future.

Another big shift has been in access to resources while in the remote environment. Technology resources have been deployed across all of the age groups and maintained by our employees to help ensure that kids are able to connect and engage with their classes, where ever they are located. Meals have been provided at all our buildings to help meet our community's basic needs. All school employees have been hard at work supporting our kids and community.

We were able to do this, in part, due to the support from the community in passing the levy and bond issue back in the spring after a changed election date. Lakewood's support of its schools, employees, and facilities allowed the district to avoid negative changes being experienced in other districts, offer many choices, and support our employees through investments in technology, safety, and continuing education.

As a member of the Board of Education, I have kept my focus on how we can and should continue to provide public education for all of our students, supporting what is working and evaluating how things can be modified for improvement. This is thoughtful, paced work, sometimes moving slower than some would like and likewise moving faster than others would like. Navigating the unique experiences of our entire school community, our students, employees, and families, has been near impossible as the differing needs and goals were in conflict more this year than ever, and yet, we all kept working together and toward the future.

As a parent, it is hard not to think about what has been lost as our country has failed to keep education and our children as a priority during this pandemic. The lack of a federal response and limited support from the State of Ohio – namely in testing capacity and now with vaccine deployment – will result in our navigating this new normal for some time to come. I am definitely sad for the experiences that our children have missed out on, and yet know they are learning some major life lessons in navigating pandemic-life which will help them throughout their lives.

Among the disappointments I will carry include the fact that because this pandemic has not resulted in shared challenges and experiences, it resulted in our collective inability to understand each other and each other's unique needs. There is so much complexity of life experienced by each household and some of the needs that resulted during the pandemic. Challenges are typically not due to the lack of will or support of families and caregivers who have worked so hard during this time, but rather the realities of the lack of support for families and workers in federal and state policy, especially for children with special or profound needs is something I think we'll need to grapple with for some time to come. Our collective ability to empathize with others has been strained during this time as we lost experiences to commune with each other, and yet we keep working together and for the future.

This disparate impact is even more nuanced when we layer on the need to reconcile the realities of systemic racism and experiences for communities of color. We in the Lakewood City Schools recognize the challenges and will seek to continue to work for equality. 2020 reminded all of us that we still have work to do.

But here we are now in 2021. We will need to say goodbye to our beloved Superintendent Dr. Barnes and welcome a new leader to Lakewood. Dr. Barnes has been wonderful to work with, even during this horrible year, and his steady and thoughtful leadership is what we needed during this challenging time. I was so lucky to be part of the team that hired him to come to Lakewood three years ago; and though I wish his time with us would be longer, I am so glad he was able to share his enthusiasm, intelligence, and focus on what is best for children here in Lakewood. We are a better district for having him with us and I am so glad we will be able to finish this school year together.

I have a lot of hopes for this year. I have shared before that while I have been able to work a mix of at-home and in the office for the non-profit I work for, my husband has gone to work every day since March (with a few days off here and there) as part of patient care teams in the ICU as a pharmacist at University Hospital. I am so proud of him and all of the people in our community who are on the front lines in providing health care for people in hospitals and care facilities, as well as first responders. In the past few weeks, he has been helping to administer the vaccine to health care workers at the hospital; the vaccine that will soon be available in Ohio to people involved in education in recognition of their priority role in our state as instrumental in shaping lives of others. I have seen how this virus has impacted people I work with and their families along with my own family directly. This is why it is important that we must continue to be careful in how we interact and engage at this time and throughout the year, and yet brighter days are ahead.

As I conclude this year, I would like to thank my family for their support. While I know this year has been challenging for many people for many different reasons, this year was more taxing

on our family than I could have expected. However, even when things were at their darkest, I, and we the Board of Education, kept working on behalf of our community, not letting the fear, sadness, or frustration stop the work that needed to be done. Our collective Vision of a Lakewood Graduate attributes are part of our entire district and it is exciting how it is part of so much of our work; all characteristics that are just as important during a pandemic as in other times. We will keep moving forward, together, and I have hope for the future.

Thank you Board members for your presence and perseverance and good luck Mrs. Shaughnessy in your term as president. Thank you Dr. Barnes and Mr. Zeman for your steady and thoughtful leadership. Thank you school administrators, educators, teachers, and employees for your skill, expertise, and focus on children. Thank you families and caregivers for navigating these changes and supporting your students. And thank you students for giving us millions of reasons to hope for the future and inspiration to be better adults. Thank you, Lakewood.

Emma Petrie Barcelona
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