

Can you walk through your district buildings?

The district can have policies about the public entry into buildings and mention it is for safety. The district buildings are public property and are open to the general public. If you need an escort, ask for one. You can go into the district buildings with an escort and without. Don't let them tell you that you need an appointment. You are a member of the community and no law says you need an escort to enter and go into a public building.

I went through with the principals. I was able to see that many classrooms were empty in a building that they were complaining was so full that they had 32 students in some classes. I then asked the principal how many classrooms he thought were empty at any given time, his response was, 30% empty. I then asked if the large classroom sizes were due to not enough teachers. This principal said, we are not short of teachers. I later figured out that very few admins ever told me the truth. This principal did tell the truth.

I left and thought through my next steps. I then asked for the public record; I asked for each teacher's weekly schedule, which would contain their daily and hourly schedule. It took 4 repeated requests and on each request I cc'd the other board members. In the subject line I wrote "second request", "third request" and "fourth request." This took 3-4 months - I was patient. Once I got the data dump that took them 4 months to compile, I was able to see a trend in one building. The trend was that all the 6th grade teachers in that building (they never told anyone) got an extra hour off each day. While the extra hour off was called a "duty period", I believe it was likely added to their schedule as a title once I asked for their schedules. I informed the other school board members that this was the reason they had to squash 32 students in two classes. We all understood that it was done so that the 6th grade building could tell everyone how overcrowded they were. That message would be spread throughout the community to prove that our district was "bursting" with students and needed the \$30 million levy that had failed 4 times. Once it was revealed that this was done on purpose, to make a point, and to spread false propaganda throughout the community, the board insisted it stop immediately. Class sizes were corrected back down to very low numbers.

You see, this was one of many ways our board was manipulated by false or at least misleading information to work over the board and the community to get at the money.

Several teachers in that 6th grade building told me how overcrowded their classrooms were and that they "could not possibly teach class sizes of 32." Note there were only two classes of 32, the rest had an average of 25. Neither of those teachers bothered to tell me that they got an extra hour off each day. Another reason I thought something was up was because these two teachers lived in my neighborhood and I saw both of them drive up to their homes during the school day and stay for at least an hour. I asked the superintendent if teachers were allowed to run errands during their planning periods, his answer was, "not really." I then took the tour through the buildings.

So here it was. They all admitted that they could not effectively teach class sizes of 32 students and that the quality of education was harmed if the class sizes got that large and I believed them. Then I found out that they were all pushing out the false narrative that the building was bursting at the seams, knowing it was due to them having an extra hour off each day. If their statements were true and they can not effectively teach that large of a class, why did they do it on purpose? Why didn't all teachers get the extra hour off? It appears that one building can keep a secret that not all teachers would have been able to do.

I was very proud of the board of education. Once the board found out the rest of the story the problem was corrected. Too bad that teaching effectiveness was so clearly not a priority and spreading false information to a community was more important.

Initially the rest of the board believed the administration and also were involved in telling the community about the overcrowding in our district buildings— never telling anyone it was isolated to two classrooms in one building. To be fair, they were told of overcrowding but they did not ask for the details, trusting the administration instead.

—Kelly Kohls, Former School Board Member in Ohio