

From: **Donna Schuster** <[donnark@hotmail.com](mailto:donnark@hotmail.com)>

Date: Tue, Jun 20, 2023 at 3:59 PM

Subject: [External Email] Field Day Decision and Policy Request

To: [lpiascyk@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:lpiascyk@woodbridgeps.org) <[lpiascyk@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:lpiascyk@woodbridgeps.org)>, [mmadonick@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:mmadonick@woodbridgeps.org) <[mmadonick@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:mmadonick@woodbridgeps.org)>, [sdelprete@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:sdelprete@woodbridgeps.org) <[sdelprete@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:sdelprete@woodbridgeps.org)>, [jdahya@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:jdahya@woodbridgeps.org) <[jdahya@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:jdahya@woodbridgeps.org)>, [bhopkins@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:bhopkins@woodbridgeps.org) <[bhopkins@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:bhopkins@woodbridgeps.org)>, [jhughes@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:jhughes@woodbridgeps.org) <[jhughes@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:jhughes@woodbridgeps.org)>, [slawrence@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:slawrence@woodbridgeps.org) <[slawrence@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:slawrence@woodbridgeps.org)>, [mstrambler@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:mstrambler@woodbridgeps.org) <[mstrambler@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:mstrambler@woodbridgeps.org)>, [ewilliamson@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:ewilliamson@woodbridgeps.org) <[ewilliamson@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:ewilliamson@woodbridgeps.org)>

Dear Woodbridge Board of Education Members,

My name is Donna Schuster and I am parent of a 5<sup>th</sup> grader who, along with many other parents expressed concern about outdoor recess and the decision to proceed with outdoor Field Day on June 7<sup>th</sup> given the air quality concerns.

As you know the air quality was unhealthy beginning Tuesday, June 6<sup>th</sup> through the early afternoon on Friday, June 9<sup>th</sup> due to the Canadian wildfires. Not only were air quality alerts being issued from CT DEEP but the air quality situation was covered by all news outlets. You could smell the smoke in the air and see the orange sun. The recommendations were to avoid going outdoors for children and pets along with those who have health conditions and wear an N95 to decrease inhaling the particulate matter. UCONN Health was even distributing air filters to the community.

Due to the unhealthy air quality many school districts postponed Field Days and moved recess indoors until the air quality improved.

These were public health decisions and common sense. However, the Woodbridge School District superintendent still decided to proceed with Field Day outside even with air quality alerts along with the multiple phone calls from parents concerned with outdoor recess on Tuesday due to the health and safety concerns.

After not receiving the awaited email on Tuesday evening to postpone field day I sent an email to Analisa and Jimmy at 7:02am on Wednesday respectfully requesting the postponement of Field Day with the [airquality.gov](https://www.airquality.gov) link noting that the air quality was dangerous or children.

As I reassured my child as I drove her to school on Wednesday that the school administration would make the right decision to postpone Field Day since you could smell the smoke and see the orange sun.

After not receiving a response, I began calling the school office at 8:30am and was told that they were still waiting for a decision.

We all received an email at 8:52am stating that Field Day was going to proceed, shortened with some indoor options, but no path for parents to request the indoor option for their child/ren. This of course prompted me

to call the north office. After several more calls to locate my child in addition to requesting a call back from Vonda I drove to the school to pick up my child passing other parents on my way in leaving with their children.

I received a return call from Vonda around 1:30pm to discuss the decision-making process. We had a long conversation, I will spare you the details, but she first refused to tell me which experts she and her administrative team consulted only that they were monitoring the situation closely stating that she didn't need to tell me. She referred to the email that identified the school nurse and her administrative team were responsible for the decision which is when I reminded her that has the superintendent this is her decision and one that risked the health of our children.

Vonda had many public health resources to consult and not only did she ignore these experts prior to proceeding with Field Day outdoors she then left the children and staff outdoors until 12 noon, at least an hour and a half after receiving an explicit alert from CT DEEP that Yale pushed out to their employees at 10:40am, see below. Ignoring DEEPs air quality alert which is unacceptable.

I also pointed out to Vonda that she offered no path for parents to opt their children out of the outdoor activities before they started the All-School Walk at 8:50am before she sent out the email. She conceded that this was an area that she and her staff could have done better and thanked me for bringing this to her attention, noting that they just didn't think about this.

Not sure how this could be true since the school was receiving calls on Tuesday about the outdoor recess concerns. Each time, not once not twice but at least four times, Vonda defended her decision that she made the right decision as the superintendent.

I understand making decisions based on limited information can be difficult but this was not one of those situations. I also cannot understand her digging her heels in defending her decision repeatedly, lacking the ability to learn from this mistake. Hindsight is 20/20.

Given that health and safety is critical for school districts and after careful consideration I request that the Woodbridge Board of Education develop and Outdoor and Indoor Air Quality Policy under Health and Safety clearly outlining when children and staff should avoid going outside for recess and other activities to protecting children, staff and teachers. Keeping our children, teachers and staff safe should be the number one priority of the school district.

I did contact one of your board members with my experience and concerns who suggested that I write this letter and speak at public comment today so that each of you could hear about my conversation and concerns. A policy will provide clear guidance as to how to proceed when this situation arises again.

Thank your for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,  
Donna Schuster