



SEWICKLEY PARENTS

A not-for-profit organization

Members,

We all are a bit overwhelmed by the volume of information being discussed in the community, the media, and online. It's easy to feel confused and frustrated. We all are engaging in conversations and hearing wildly false or purposefully sensationalized stories about Sewickley Parents and what's going on at Sewickley Academy. There are those who seek to shape our specific circumstances to fit a broader narrative – replacing our community's real story with a faux narrative promoting a different, more sinister and patently untrue tale.

While some members of this group have been here since the beginning, many have joined more recently. As such, we thought that some quick reflection - and some current thoughts - are in order to bring everyone up to speed on why we formed, where we are, and, most importantly, where we are going.

How this all started

We began this journey in late 2020. We came together after a number of parents began sharing worrisome stories regarding some of the challenges our children were facing at the Academy. While these challenges took many forms, the common thread – and common frustration for the group – was that the Academy was not effectively engaging or addressing the concerns.

We made a collective decision to form a group and started speaking with other parents about our observations and experiences. It became apparent that many people had similar experiences and concerns, but were unsure how to address them.

Some members reflected on the events of 2016 and the attempt by many within the community to realize a change in the then-current Administration. They felt demoralized, and had little faith that a change in direction could be achieved. As a result, some departed from the Academy. Yet many stayed out of their love for the Academy and this unique, close-knit community.

We began to dig more deeply, and learned a troubling set of facts; namely, that the Academy had been suffering from a gradual decline in enrollment since 2006 (approximately 27%) [1], with families quietly voting with their feet and leaving the Academy community. We also learned, through conversations with then-current Academy families who have since left the school, that the trend was continuing. We love the school, want to see it succeed, and wanted to have a hand in building its future.

Our first action

Based on our collective concerns, we reached out to the Board of Trustees in February of 2021. It's important to note that this was long before the release of the DEISJ plan.

Board leadership responded to our message stating that the Administration had already addressed our concerns. While we respected their message and responsiveness, it became evident that there was a difference between the Board's intentions and the direction of the Administration.

We fully support Diversity and Inclusion

It's hard to understand the statements and vitriol in the media challenging our commitment to diversity and inclusion. That has never been the case.

Since the formation of the group, we have issued numerous private and public communications. Without fail, we have reinforced our unequivocal support for diversity and inclusion and affirmed its importance at the Academy. It is a genuine priority for our group, and something that is critical to the well-being of our children. Let there be no mistake, we support, celebrate, and promote diversity and inclusion.

Sewickley Academy has a tremendous track record in this regard. The school's published data indicates diverse students make up 31% of the student body (double the rate of the neighboring public school system).

The school's diversity has long been a key strength communicated to all prospective parents who tour the school. It's a major reason why many of us chose to place our children here.

Months after our group's formation, we learned that the Academy was implementing a DEISJ plan that promoted a "radical change" in curriculum. This foundational premise had never been communicated in the original framework of EnVision SA 2024, and wasn't how the plan had been explained to parents.

To us, the commonsense question became, "What is so broken at Sewickley Academy that requires radical change?" This would be a natural question for any area of the curriculum, whether it be math, science, or any other discipline. If a "radical" new mathematics curriculum was proposed for a school that already had a terrific track record in mathematics, parents would, understandably, have questions.

Why are we engaging with the Board?

We believe that all parents should have a voice, as well as a clear and transparent understanding of the Board's current priorities and objectives, the member selection process, and progress towards those priorities and objectives.

We believe this is extremely helpful to the Academy community. It allows us to better understand what is happening and enables us to better support Leadership's efforts.

Why don't we share our members' names?

We have strong support from a wide range of parents within the Academy community. Our membership has consistently increased over the last several months. We currently number over 200 within our active, engaged group. We have also processed a large number of detailed surveys to gauge the opinions of many of these parents.

Naturally, parents advocating for change within any school might worry that their opinions or criticisms could have negative repercussions on their children or other dimensions of their lives. While some parents in our ranks have voluntarily raised their hands as part of the effort, we continue to take seriously our commitment to protect the privacy of those who have chosen to join us.

Why academic excellence?

Families choose a school like Sewickley Academy – and make a significant financial commitment - intending that their children will receive a world-class education. We want our children to be challenged on fundamentals, taught to think critically, and to communicate clearly. This sets the foundation for the next stages of their academic and, ultimately, professional lives. Parents and Alumni who responded to our survey unanimously supported this position.

Parents are drawn to a school that teaches children how to think. Not what to think. A school should be a place of diverse thought and robust dialogue among students of all backgrounds, cultures, and opinions. Students need and deserve space to shape their own viewpoints while learning from each other. Introducing ideology and indoctrination into the classroom is counter-productive to this important work.

To conclude...

We hope that this quick history offers you some helpful background. You can help by reaching out to your friends and neighbors to share the truth. Together, as a unified community, we can help the Academy achieve new heights in preparing many more generations of learners and leaders. There's so much more that unifies us than should ever divide us – a shared commitment to our children, a passion for academic excellence, and a deeply-held interest in raising happy, well-rounded children. We truly believe that the Academy's best days are ahead of it and rally behind Dr. Birtwell and her vision for a tremendous future.

Sewickley Parents Advisory Committee
Members of SewickleyParents.org

[1].Source

<https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/Enrollment/Pages/PrivateNPEnrRpts.aspx>

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Our mailing address is:
Sewickley Parents Org
PO 299
Sewickley, PA 15143