

On 27 Jul 2020, Frank and Kjersti Powers attended a scheduled in-person meeting with Lance Johnson, Peaster ISD Superintendent. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the upcoming reopening of Peaster schools and our concerns with his lack of health and safety standards during the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. The following are the takeaways from the aforementioned meeting:

As we entered Peaster ISD's administration building we noticed that none of the staff were wearing masks. We also observed multiple mask-less individuals in a conference room (we were informed by the administrative staff that Mr. Johnson was conducting a meeting with the school principals). We had given Mr. Johnson prior notice we would be wearing face masks to this meeting and would appreciate it if he wore one as well. However, Mr. Johnson greeted us in the lobby of the administrative building not wearing a mask and asked us to join him in his personal office. Upon entering his office, he introduced us to his assistant (who was also mask-less) and invited us to be seated. We requested Mr. Johnson wear a mask during our meeting and he replied he would not because he wasn't sick and didn't believe masks were effective against the spread of the virus. Considering Mr. Johnson's refusal to wear a mask, we requested to hold the meeting outdoors so that we could maintain social distancing and be in compliance with Gov. Abbott's Executive Order GA-29. Mr. Johnson balked going outdoors and told us we could maintain our social distance within his office and that Gov. Abbott's order allowed people to hold meeting indoors without wearing a mask as long as you could social distance. We disagreed and explained to Mr. Johnson we had personally read Executive Order GA-29 and it specifies masks are required to be worn indoors in all public spaces, and it was outdoor gatherings that could be conducted without a mask when social distancing was feasible. Mr. Johnson continued to disagree with us; therefore, we politely recommended he seek a legal review of the executive order.

Upon our second request to meet outdoors, Mr. Johnson complied. He and his assistant escorted us outside the administrative building where Mr. Johnson inquired if we were sick and was that why we were wearing masks. We explained we were not sick, but felt compelled to follow state guidelines and do our part to slow the spread of the virus. He again stated he wasn't sick, explaining he and his daughter had already contracted and recovered from Covid-19 in March of 2020 and the virus was unproblematic for them both. We questioned how he knew he was not currently sick and how he knew the attendees in his principal's meeting were not sick – we specifically inquired if everyone was recently tested for the virus or did they have their temperatures checked upon entry to his facility. Mr. Johnson replied no to both and said they implement a self-screening policy at Peaster ISD where people screen themselves at home and if they feel sick they stay home.

We questioned Mr. Johnson further about his reluctance to enforce a mask mandate at his school even after Gov. Abbott issued an executive order requiring them be worn. He replied that there was a federal program called Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) [*please see note below] that exempted him from following any State order; therefore, he would not comply with the mask directive. Mr. Johnson proceeded to list numbers regarding Covid-19 testing, recovery,

and death rates, proclaiming they were extremely low. He explained that in his opinion everyone in Peaster and Parker County had already been exposed to Covid-19. Mr. Johnson boasted about the number of events that members of the Peaster ISD community (including him) had recently attended without wearing masks and without social distancing, to include the Parker Country rodeo, various sports camps, and school awards ceremonies. He proclaimed if Covid-19 was really as bad as the government and media proclaimed why hadn't case numbers in Parker County (Peaster specifically) spiked. Mr. Johnson further asserted that because the cases in Parker County are actually going down, even after all these events without masks and social distancing, Peaster would prove to be "ground-zero" showing others that Covid-19 is not a serious threat.

Mr. Johnson continued to offer numbers regarding the 2018 flu infection and death rates, commenting on how Covid-19 paled in comparison. Mr. Johnson questioned why the government has not mandated a face mask be worn during flu season when the flu kills more people than Covid-19. Mr. Johnson added that if a mask mandate actually kept people safe, why wasn't there a mandate to force Jews to wear masks with swastika symbols to keep them safe. Completely dumbfounded with Mr. Johnson's assertion, we refused to answer this question. Mr. Johnson continued to compare and contrast the flu with Covid-19. He inquired if we really believed masks protected us from getting sick did we wear masks last year when some 11,000 Texans died from the flu. We explained that although we did not meet with him to discuss the flu, masks were not recommended by health officials during last year's flu season and we had received our flu vaccinations. This prompted several more minutes of him providing factoids he thought supported the ineffectiveness of the flu vaccine. We explained to him that each year our medical experts make their best educated guess when developing an effective vaccine to fight the numerous strains of the flu virus. Mr. Johnson interjected stating it was likely the Covid-19 vaccine would only be 20 percent effective, just like the flu vaccine. Once again dumbfounded with Mr. Johnson's statements, we provided no response.

Kjersti specifically questioned Mr. Johnson about his response plan in the event of a Covid-19 outbreak at his school. Mr. Johnson exclaimed we should trust him that extensive plans had been established. Kjersti retorted that it was difficult to merely "trust" an effective Covid-19 outbreak plan had been devised considering his defiance to the Governor's mask mandate. Mr. Johnson asked why, if we were so concerned, we didn't volunteer to help develop the plans. We intimated we were unaware of a call for volunteers or we would have gladly provided our assistance. Mr. Johnson declared he felt insulted we would question his leadership abilities and proclaimed we were bad parents for keeping our kids out of the classroom (even though we had not wholly decided whether or not to send our children back to an in-person classroom setting, hence the purpose of the meeting to begin with). We inquired why he would say such a thing to which he replied that since he had been insulted, he wanted to insult us. We questioned if he would advise other parents contemplating the virtual classroom route that they too were poor parents. Mr. Johnson specified he would if they insulted him.

Once tensions eased, we asked Mr. Johnson if he was prepared to take personal responsibility for any serious illnesses or death caused by his decision to make masks voluntary at his school. He stated he would absolutely stand by his decision and had already had to take responsibility for a student's death in the past. He specified he and his family attended the "Islamic Muslim" funeral service for this student where a "Black Panther" priest carried an "upside-down Jesus" while preaching hate-speech. Mr. Johnson added that although he is a Christian, he did not shut the funeral service down because the deceased's mother chose to have that type of funeral service. He said he allowed his family to leave and decided to remain with the grieving mother. Again, totally dumbfounded by his comments, we did not respond.

Mr. Johnson intimated it was his belief everyone has the choice to make decisions about their own personal safety and their children's safety, and cannot be forced to do otherwise. Trying to make sense of Mr. Johnson's standpoint, we posed the question if he felt that as a parent he has the option to buckle his child in a seatbelt. He argued it was his choice whether or not to buckle the seatbelt for his young daughter, and if ticketed by police, he would argue the ticket in court because he has the freedom to make that choice. He equated the choice to wear a face mask to the choice to smoke cigarettes or wear a motorcycle helmet. We attempted to debunk his analogy, explaining how wearing a mask protects those around you not the wearer personally. He disagreed and emphatically asserted masks are a personal choice and if people think they somehow protect them go ahead and wear one; however, he was not going to comply with the government's unethical infringement on personal freedoms. Mr. Johnson questioned why people were not as concerned with the thousands of abortions being performed in Texas. Unable to follow his thought process or the reasoning behind his rant, we once again tried to persuade him to focus on the topics which brought us to this meeting.

We reiterated our health concerns based on his policy making masks optional for students, staff and visitors on Peaster ISD grounds. We requested he consider the scientific facts that are driving our health experts to recommend everyone wear masks, but he stated he had done so already and concluded masks do not protect against the virus. Mr. Johnson added he even looked at labeling on his box of masks and it clearly stated it would not protect against the virus. Once again, we agreed this was true and explained how masks actually limit the number of aerosols and droplets (how Covid-19 is transmitted) expelled from the wearer's mouth and nose, and that wearing a mask is only effective if it is a two-way street where everyone wears one. Mr. Johnson disagreed, asserting that because Covid-19 is not airborne masks are ineffective and masks actually pose a health risk, causing you to rebreathe carbon dioxide. Mr. Johnson became agitated as he reiterated more numbers, percentages, and rates of infection. We explained our intentions were not to insult or argue with him, but we felt an obligation to stand up for what is right and for the safety of our children. This led Mr. Johnson to make several statements regarding Martin Luther King Jr. taking a stand against Jim Crow laws requiring separate water fountains for whites and blacks. Mr. Johnson added that similarly, he as the leader of Peaster ISD needed to take a stance regarding face masks. He asserted the government is overstepping its

bounds mandating masks, just like they did when they prohibited churches from holding services during the initial virus outbreak. Mr. Johnson further defended his decision to NOT make masks mandatory at his school, saying he also based his decision on the results of his recent survey sent to parents. Seeing that the majority who took the survey stated masks should be optional, Mr. Johnson said he decided to side with the majority. We questioned his logic by maintaining Martin Luther King Jr. was the minority taking a stand against a majority mindset – and thankfully people listened to the minority. Contradicting his earlier statement that he was the majority, Mr. Johnson replied, “I am the minority”. With that, we decided to conclude the meeting because we were obviously at an impasse with no resolution in sight.

Based on the results of this meeting and Mr. Johnson’s flagrant disregard for the health and safety of his students, staff, and community members, we unfortunately cannot send our children to his classrooms.

*Note: Upon further review of the FAPE program Mr. Johnson mentioned during this meeting, we discovered it is in fact the *Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for Students with Disabilities: Requirements Under Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973*. It protects the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal funding.

Disclaimer: Frank and Kjersti Powers are retired Special Agents from the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. We have written this memorandum for record in the manner we are accustomed -- providing an unbiased, detailed description free of our personal opinion.