



Why I Have Shifted My Stance on Community Classroom Supply Lists

July 26, 2021 by Educator Barnes

Two years ago, I wrote the article, "[Parents, Stop Complaining about Community Classroom Supplies.](#)" In this article, I explained the strain on teachers to ensure all students are prepared for instruction without teachers spending their own money to support students who come without supplies. I still believe as a community member that I should help others if it is within

my ability to do so. At some point, parents need to push back. Although I understand the need from the educator perspective, I am also a parent. From the parent perspective, I have concerns.

This year, my twin sons are entering 5th grade, the last grade at the elementary school they have attended since kindergarten. My husband and I elected to keep our sons at home as virtual students for all of 4th grade. The supply list was of low concern. We did get the items their remote teacher requested, and they did not even use those supplies all up.

For 5th grade, our sons will attend school in person. Of course, we knew we had to buy classroom supplies, but we were surprised that this was still a community supply list, especially during a pandemic, and concerned about the quantity requested for some items. The first item on the supply list is "1 ream BULK copy paper, 8.5"x11', 500/Pk. White." Also included on this list was "60 yellow wooden #2 pencils." According to the school's website, the average classroom size is 25 students. If a class had 25 students and every student brought in pencils, the teacher would have a total of 1,500 pencils. I have taught middle and high school English where I had way more students than an elementary classroom teacher, and I have never needed 1,500 pencils.

What are parents to do when they have concerns? I sent an email to school administration on behalf of my husband and me specifically inquiring about the pencils and copy paper. The response I received was, "It is a new team, so not sure. Send in what you feel is reasonable." My husband and I found this response frustrating because this did not address our concerns of why the supply list is asking us to provide way more materials than my children would use.

Although I was in full parent mode, it is impossible to completely disengage from my experience as an educator. My experience has allowed me to work in both the elementary setting and the secondary setting in more than one school district. The school administration or department chair in those settings vetted and approved the supply list. When I was an administrator, I also had this task. I found it completely unacceptable for the school administration to be unaware as to why behind the items on the supply list especially when these supplies are due on the first day of school.

Unless I missed something, I have not heard the pandemic be declared over. Schools still have COVID-19 guidelines in place. Frankly, I want my children sharing as little items as possible. The supply list even says not to label supplies. I made it clear that this response was not acceptable. I asked for a supply list of supplies my children actually need versus the bulk

supplies that the 5th grade teachers are clearly trying to accumulate. We made it clear we are labeling those supplies so our sons we use their own supplies especially during this pandemic. Administration told us we will have information about the supplies our sons actually need on the first day back for teachers which is two days before school starts.

As an educator, I am not clueless to the funding issues, and I do not want teachers to have to fund their own classrooms. My husband and I have supported number Donors Choose projects for several teachers at their school, and have donated supplies mid-year when their teachers reached out for help. However, community school supply lists are glazing over the actual problem. Teachers need more financial support for their classrooms, and parents who cannot afford supplies need connections to more resources to get what they need. At some point, we need to stop putting band aid over situations in education and fix the actual issue.

To administrators, if you do not know what is on your supply lists and why for classrooms in your building, find out. Make sure the list is reasonable. If you are going to have a community supply list, have the essential supply list already created to be shared with parents. Actually, it can be on the supply list. A note at the top asking parents to send in certain items if they can to help the teacher and then a list of items students need for their individual use makes the supply list clear and allows parents to plan accordingly.

Parents, if you have concerns about your children's supply list, do not hesitate to ask questions. If teachers want students to be prepared, they should be prepared to justify what they are asking for especially if the ask accumulates to 1,500 pencils.