

## EAST RAMAPO AMBASSADORS YOUTH LOBBY DAY SPEECH

The students of the East Ramapo Central School District take pride in their diverse community. That is why it is so disappointing that the administration and school board ultimately disregard their concerns and place no priority in educating the students of the district. The school district has continually pulled funding and cut resources, refused to improve school facilities, and have not prioritized the safety of their students. On behalf of the ERCS D students that could not make it today, we want to voice their concerns and uplift these experiences.

ERCS D buildings are deteriorating — unable to contain the surging number of students enrolled each year. Ramapo High School is a prime example of an overpopulated learning environment failing to provide the space essential to grow, much less learn. The lack of space and orderliness have made COVID precautions useless, as students cramp into hallways and classrooms. This overcrowding is also paired with a staff shortage.

With a severe lack of substitute teachers, large numbers of students are kept in the auditorium for their class time. The severity of overcrowding is a genuine safety concern. Additionally, fights throughout the building contribute to a sense of fear and unease shared by both staff and students alike. Students get into fights due to a lack of supervision and intervention, and just two weeks ago, on the 19th of April, Spring Valley High School had a fight that resulted in students being injured with a knife. We need to focus on building a supportive school climate, including more guidance counselors and social workers in our schools to stop fights from even happening in the first place. We need more staff like this to support our school.

Students of Ramapo and Spring Valley High School deserve better. They deserve an updated curriculum and one that has representation where they can see themselves in the curriculum. A Spring Valley Student claims that his textbook from 2014 fails to provide up-to-date information. In what is given as literature and provided in health curriculums, students don't see themselves. Their concerns fail to be acknowledged in their classrooms.

There are also issues with some staff in these schools. Students often face homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and racism, amongst other prejudices from these trusted adults. Security Guards have made statements about how "easy" a student looks in an attempt to dress code them, and they overstep the boundaries between adults and children. Even some teachers refer to students in sexualizing manners. These adults often invalidate students by not acknowledging their white privilege, and using outdated and ignorant language to label or identify students, including using incorrect pronouns and names. Ramapo students say that they don't want to make political statements, they just want their teachers to be educated; held accountable for what they say and do, and what examples they are setting for

students. Students deserve a safe learning environment, and that starts with how they are treated in their classrooms.

Ramapo and Spring Valley students believe that they are being set up for failure. Much of that has to do with underfunding. The district does not supply schools with proper instruments, which demonstrates a failure in promoting the arts. It can be observed that elementary schools rely on broken instruments that are shared among students. They aren't given the proper tools to learn, and the lack of support for their arts programs is severely detrimental to students, leaving them unable to compete with other districts who have that support.

The same can be said for academics. Students who can take care of their own education and college planning may be set, but the overwhelming majority of the student body is underprepared. Guidance counselors are difficult to reach and resources are underutilized in college prep. Transportation is but yet another tool that fails students. The lack of activity buses ensures only those students with a ride set up can stay after school for extracurriculars. This disproportionately affects students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and who rely on bussing to attend such activities. This further hinders the district's ability to compete with other schools and fails to help students apply themselves outside of academics.

The failures of ERCSD have left students with this to conclude:

"Our needs are important, and our words should not only be heard and acknowledged, but responded to by ERCSD. We need funding now, not once we're drained of our remaining resources. We, as students, deserve the support our district promises, and that means the action of our administration. ERCSD claims to promote a 'healthy, safe, supportive, engaging and challenging learning environment' and we can't wait for that to become more than a vision.

Signed,

The Students of Ramapo and Spring Valley High School"