

Subject: Concerns Raised During Our Last Meeting

Dear Board Colleagues,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to share some important information relevant to evaluation of our employee that recent conversations have revealed may not be widely known across the board. Two important concerns that have surfaced are: a pattern of unprofessional conduct and the denial of timely access to critical information. To foster transparency and strengthen our relationships, it is essential that we address these issues. My goal of keeping everyone informed is to work together more effectively to support our shared goals and ensure the success of our school district.

The catalyst of this letter is to address issues that arose during our recent evaluation of the superintendent, specifically concerning comments directed towards me about the course of our professional relationship. During the evaluation of our employee, I felt unexpectedly placed in a challenging position and now feel it necessary to clarify that I have frequently communicated incidents, issues, and concerns to Board Leadership. As a newer board member, I believed this to be the appropriate protocol for raising such matters. I did not previously formally request an Executive Session, but I trusted that my concerns were being communicated to the rest of the board through the established channels and that feedback would be provided to our employee for improvements. When these issues were brought up during the superintendent's evaluation and many of you said you had not been informed, I realized it must be my responsibility to take a more active role, which is why I am now writing this letter and requesting an executive session to discuss the contents of this letter as a board.

This document aims to thoroughly respond to the comments directed to me. Given the nature of the conversation, I feel obligated to provide this clarification to you, my colleagues. My intention is not to cause problems but to address misconceptions. Throughout the incidents that I have described in this letter, you will see that I have been trying to gain the attention of you, my board colleagues, and not the media, as I believe unnecessary drama can be a barrier to meaningful progress. This letter should remain within the board, as it pertains to our employee evaluation. I am hopeful that we can use this information to work together to improve our district.

One misconception that I would like to rectify is a perception that was offered that I have been overly involved, micromanaging, or even potentially unethically inserting myself into administrative and operational tasks. On the contrary, I would like to clarify that I have actually been concerned about my limited opportunities to communicate with administration and lack of access to authentic information. This has been paired with unprofessional conduct from our employee that have eroded relationships and morale. The following paragraphs provide further details for your review.

During the interview process, I was enthusiastic about hiring Dr. Robinson. Our first official one-on-one meeting was scheduled for October 20. However, when I arrived, the superintendent

was not in the building and it became evident that he was not expecting to attend our appointment, even though it was scheduled by his office and had been on the calendar.

Once the superintendent arrived, I was optimistic and friendly with a few questions, but the Superintendent quickly informed me that we only had a few minutes because he had another meeting. One of my questions was about an issue I had recently heard about involving the van drivers, so he called someone from Business Affairs to his office so she could talk to me while he logged in to his other meeting. This was not only disappointing at that moment, but is particularly relevant as the situation with the van drivers has been an escalating topic that continues to be a prominent issue in meetings and with our local news.

After talking to Business Affairs, I noticed a book on the superintendent's shelf and requested to borrow it, hoping to use it as a relationship building conversation starter for our next meeting in his office because the book was about the board-superintendent relationship. I kept the book in my car to be ready to mention and return at any moment. The book is still in the same place in my car today, because unfortunately, we never had another in-person 1:1 meeting.

Our November one-on-one was canceled, and our December meeting was replaced with a board debrief with the transitioning board members. These changes seemed reasonable at the time, but by January, I was becoming uncomfortable with the fact that I had zero information or interaction with administration outside of the public, so I requested a one-on-one, which was scheduled as a virtual meeting.

I came to the meeting with a list of questions about the agenda and general district updates (It was our first official meeting!), and I was not expecting the superintendent to be able to provide answers to all of my questions immediately. However, I was surprised that by our February virtual 1:1 there had been no acknowledgement or updates on any of the information. At this point, the school year was over ½ over, but the only district information or APS contact I had with anyone in administration was during board meetings. The only emails I sent were a few forwards from community members.

By our March virtual 1:1 meeting, the tone had shifted significantly, prompting me to immediately contact the board leadership with my concerns. I felt we were quickly heading in a dangerous direction and believed it was essential for the board to provide feedback to our employee about expectations and behaviors with board members that should not be repeated. When this issue was raised in an executive session, the superintendent was present and shared his feelings with the board. I felt accused of improper behavior without even having my own opportunity to share details about the interaction that I believe needed to be addressed by the board. It is crucial that we inform our employee about behaviors the board does not condone; otherwise, we risk conveying that such behaviors are acceptable. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to provide a detailed account of the interaction in March that made me so very uncomfortable.

Between the February and March meeting, I started to become concerned that information was being withheld from the board. I used the administration's google form to submit questions and

prepare for the 2/26 board meeting, but the link in the 2/23 Friday notes that was supposed to provide answers was to a file that was password protected, so I did not have access to them. By the time I received access (after asking Ruth and Zach and after the 2/26 board meeting when we voted on the items I had questions about), the file was empty with no answers.

As a board member, my primary duty is to fulfill our fiduciary responsibility to the school district. To uphold this duty effectively, it is essential that we have comprehensive information on the items we are voting on. I submitted questions because approving items without understanding their costs would constitute a significant breach of trust with the community members who elected me.

At the February 26 board meeting, I brought up that I had unanswered questions about the cost of the MTSS coordinator. I was very upset about the position that was approved that evening instead of waiting for the administration to provide information to the board about the MTSS program, or in the very least, the cost of the position that was approved. This continues to bother me because three months after approving a position without knowing the cost we had a reduction in force due to financial necessity. Additionally, on May 28 we had a special meeting and unanimously approved the resolution for a levy. Although I have continued to ask, I still have no salary or other information about this position or program.

The most recent communication I received was on June 21 that said "No, the Board will not receive a plan at this time. However, we will provide an overview of MTSS and how it will function for the District. The team is currently working on the overview and it will be presented to the Board when completed." However, I see on the July 8 agenda, we are being asked to approve another new position without knowing the cost and with MTSS duties in the list of essential functions. To put it simply, we are still being asked to approve positions without knowing the cost after authorizing a \$12 mil reduction in force and while asking the community to support us for a 7.60 mills operating levy.

Before our March 1:1 the board also had our March 2 executive session, where I was falsely accused of many things, including blaming the superintendent for editing the 1/9/24 YouTube video and where I remembered the Superintendent calling me a "backstabber". To be clear: I have never accused anyone of editing any recording.

In the virtual 1:1 on March 8, I addressed the March 2 executive session starting with positivity and reminding the superintendent how much support that I have shown of him at meetings and publicly celebrating his work, like the blueprint. I explained this was something I had also mentioned to other board members, but the praise possibly had not reached him, so I wanted to use this 1:1 opportunity to make sure he heard those positive remarks from me. I also tried to open up and shared that I pride myself as being a simple person who uses transparency to reduce drama and then tried to start a discussion to try to collaborate towards what he thought improved communication processes could be. His response was that this was an issue of the whole board and he said "can't make this to be my issue because I'm doing what I'm supposed to do".

At about 10 minutes into what had been a conversation until redistricting was brought up, he started a rant that lasted for 15 minutes until I interjected to try to bring the conversation back to focus. I reminded him that I am a simple person looking for simple answers with no knowledge of the conspiracies or situations he was going on about. I said that "I am asking for clear information to be given to me because at the end of that day I need to be able to justify the decisions I'm voting on for the community" he said "What a board member needs is what I provide." and "You seem to be the only board member that has a problem".

I reiterated that all along all I have been asking for is clear information. He responded that he didn't know what information I wanted because I never explained what I was asking for. He said, "I did teach English, but I'm not a mind reader".

Rather than focusing on the information previously omitted from items recently voted on, I clearly outlined the information I needed to fulfill my fiduciary duty on upcoming items. The upcoming resolution on the redistricting plan had been a source of consternation in prior meetings. My questions were: 1. What changes have been made to the redistricting resolution in the agenda? 2. Why were these changes made? 3. What is the cost of these changes?"

He said that nothing changed, so I asked why the words in the resolution within the agenda were different since the previous reading and I asked why it had been removed from the earlier agenda. He said that since I was the one saying the words have changed, then maybe I should tell him what has changed because he didn't know what changed.

This was a resolution that was on the agenda to be presented to the board for approval 3 days after this conversation. I couldn't figure out how to support something that could not be explained to me. His response was that if I don't want to vote for something, then don't vote for it. I never said I didn't want to vote for it; I said I wanted clarity on what I was voting for. What we now know is that at the March 20 special board meeting when this resolution was brought to emergency passage, there was still confusion for many board members over the language in the resolution.

Later in the March 8 conversation Robinson said the cost information I was asking for was not going to be in the presentation, but he believed it would be in the delivery of their presentation. I told him that I didn't understand what that meant. At that point he said that he had to go to another meeting and he instructed me that from that point forward I was to submit my questions to the board president because he would not continue to have meetings with me.

I tried to appeal to the superintendent on a personal level. I tried to explain that I believed he had a different perception of me based upon his interactions with other people and that if he knew me, he might perceive my quest for information differently. I said that I was not a "backstabber" as he claimed on March 2. To that, he denied calling me a backstabber and made the correction that "I said what I don't appreciate is my own bosses backstabbing me. And I think I used the plural form of the word. Bosses is multiple. So, if you're guilty, then you accept your guilt."

He also called me a "headache" and said that when any other board member has a question they tell him and he gets it done, and that he felt sorry for me because the AEA was using me. (I'm not sure where that comment even came from because I have never brought up the AEA in any conversation with the superintendent) He also said "you think that I'm stupid and you're trying to play me and that's not going to happen...and if you think that I'm that dumb then I feel sorry for you because you can sit there and play games all you want to, but I can tell you this much, if you come for me, I'm not going to take it lying down." He also threatened filing a grievance against me. He said that if I did anything that created a problem for him he would file an ethics violation and a lawsuit against me.

As I already stated, I immediately called the board president after this conversation. It was then confirmed that the superintendent and I would no longer meet, and that I would submit up to 10 questions before each board meeting via a Google form, which I did for the April and May meetings. During that call I even received text messages from other employees asking if I was ok because they heard the superintendent yelling at me through the walls at 10 N. Main.

I contacted board leadership because I thought it was important to discuss this matter with all of my board colleagues. It is essential that we address our employee's behaviors that the board finds unacceptable, as failing to do so may imply tacit approval. To the best of my knowledge, no other board member has yet communicated to the superintendent disapproval related to that interaction or the need for improvement in his professional communication, particularly in terms of clarity and tone, especially when interacting with board members. I believe that this has empowered our employee to disregard me completely.

On May 3, I had a phone conversation with the board president about my distress over the superintendent ostracizing me at a celebration at [REDACTED] but also prevented me from fully participating in the event. During that call, she informed me that she heard that the Legal Committee needed to change because it was costing the district too much money. I asked to hear this directly from whoever told her- or at least someone that could explain what fees we were being charged so I would have a better understanding of how to restructure.

As the chair of the committee, I very intentionally laid out a transparent agenda. As part of that process, the agenda for every meeting is cocreated by participants within and announced at the end of the previous meeting. To my surprise, on May 6, a completely different agenda for the May 13 Legal Committee was posted with several changes from what the committee laid out, including the addition of an entire section of policies. This forced me to make an announcement during the May 6 board meeting that the agenda that had been posted was incorrect.

I do not want to waste time speculating why the administration would want to change the board's legal and policy agenda, one that had been publicly announced April 15 on a livestream that had over 100 views, without approval from the chair or cochair. I do however believe that it was intentional and inappropriate. I am also unaware if any admonitory feedback was given to the administration related to this.

Instead of exacerbating these situations when asked for details from reporters after each meeting, I dedicated significant effort to try to resolve them by working towards a constructive and supportive communication framework. I diligently followed instructions to submit my questions via Google doc and awaited the Friday notes. However, despite my adherence, I still did not receive the clear information that I needed to be an informed voter.

On May 14, I emailed 19 unanswered questions, many of which I considered to be critical to the proposed reductions in force on May 20. On May 16, I reframed these questions in an email reply (In the 5/15 email response, many items had comments, but not information/answers). For example, I asked what our current student teacher ratio was. The answer I expected was a number or a list of numbers. The response I received was "This varies..." so my follow-up question asked when the board would be able to know what our student teacher ratio is. The answer I expected was a date, or at least a timeframe. I submitted the follow up questions both for my own learning and understanding before a critical vote, and as a courtesy to prepare administration before the meeting. The response I received on May 17 was "Unfortunately, we did not have time to respond to these questions."

Disappointingly, I later learned of a video of the superintendent answering some of these questions while presenting as our superintendent in a public setting on May 19, indicating that I could have received some of the information before the May 20 vote.

(<https://www.wkyc.com/article/news/education/education-station/akron-public-schools-superintendent-michael-robinson-defends-himself-accusations-union-busting-intimidation-name-calling/95-de4d4575-5cb6-4897-9403-4c859b49a136>) For instance, when describing the reduction in force to community members in the video on May 19, the superintendent volunteered that administrators from 10 N. Main would be taking the positions of the teachers that were being rified. He also explained that \$11 million was saved through attrition and not filling positions of people that had resigned. I would have appreciated this information that had not been shared with me.

In the video of the public meeting, the superintendent also accused our APS teachers of "using our children" by giving them "misleading information" to "send them out to protest with misguided information". He also emphasized that he only works well with 6 of our 7 unions. He also discussed Varsity Tutors while describing lies and misguided information. It is my opinion that this is reckless communication that should be permitted from no employee, especially while presenting as our school leader providing an update on the status of our district. The board should not condone the superintendent speaking negatively about any other employee, stakeholder, or issues in the midst of litigation, especially to large groups in public and especially in light of the upcoming levy.

I shared some of these frustrations with leadership through phone calls and a detailed email. I am now bringing this to the full board's attention because I believe that the specifics I have provided of threats, offensive remarks, work interference, and various excuses to withhold information from and sidestep the board are textbook examples of workplace bullying. While I was initially excited to hire Dr. Robinson, and still believe that a 5 year tenure could provide

much-needed stability to our school district, there must be clear expectations, accountability, and improved communication to achieve this goal.

In summary, my goal is to foster a positive and collaborative environment to advance our district, a goal I believe we all share. This message addresses the questions raised to me during the evaluation of the superintendent- which was the third session that I was accused by leadership of not supporting the best interests of our district. I will admit that there have been many items that I have not supported accompanied by frequent inquiries and dissenting votes. I have vocally requested more information during meetings regarding redistricting, van drivers, new positions, and the reduction in force, and hopefully this message helps to provide additional context.

Simply put, I am not the kind of person to support programs or initiatives without sufficient information, as I believe that doing so would be irresponsible. As I have emphasized, I highly value my fiduciary duty and am committed to ensuring the best outcomes for our students and community. I hope that this message clarifies why I have claimed that because my questions were not answered I did not have enough information to support all of the initiatives presented.

I also cannot ignore the fact that as a community member, I hear concerns about information being misrepresented to the board at meetings and the board not being fully informed about certain situations. Frankly, on multiple occasions community members have come to board meetings to say that board members are being lied to by the administration during meetings. Some examples include issues with our attorneys, the 2025 school calendar, transportation with van drivers, position control, and our Early Learning Program. I am happy to provide more information on these situations, if desired.

As I started this letter, two important concerns that I have are: a pattern of unprofessional conduct and a lack of transparency and lack of timely access to critical information. If a goal is for board members to be more supportive, then I believe that improving communication and providing access to more information would be the best course of action. I also believe that we can foster a more supportive climate by emphasizing that all interactions and comments from district leaders, especially with board members, stakeholders, and colleagues, are conducted with the utmost respect and professionalism. I believe that showcasing action towards a more cohesive and supportive environment is especially important in light of the upcoming levy.

Thousands of community members elected each of us to represent them responsibly, and in January, we committed to the goal of ensuring transparency. As board members, we all have a fiduciary duty to act in the best interests of our students, which requires us to be well-informed to make critical decisions. This duty cannot be fulfilled without adequate, clear, and timely information. Additionally, as role models, we must not condone or overlook any form of bullying. Unprofessional conduct aimed at intimidating us from being fully informed should not be tolerated and must not deter us from fulfilling our responsibility.

I sincerely thank my board colleagues for taking the time to read this letter and for your attention to this matter. I believe that we need to take action because without admonishing behavior, we

are sending the message we are condoning it. I am available and would be happy to discuss any further questions or concerns.