

**What follows is The News & Advance transcript of the statement from LCS Superintendent Scott Brabrand after the announcement of the resignation of Dunbar Middle School teacher Jason Tyree.**

Dear Lynchburg City Schools students, parents, and members of the Lynchburg community,

I want to address the public about a recent incident and an assembly at Dunbar Middle School on February 26. This program has created a lot of discussion and comment, some of which has been based on faulty information. I would like to take the opportunity to set the record straight as much as I can within the constraints of privacy laws.

The assembly that was held at Dunbar was part of a school celebration of Black History Month that featured Keith Lee's dancers; Colonel Graham, a Dunbar employee, spoke about his life experiences; and a performance of gospel songs by the LU Praise group. This was in all respects a celebration of African-American culture and progress without any other motivations or agendas.

During the assembly, an employee interrupted the program by going to the microphone on the stage during the singing performance to express his offense with this portion of the program. He then offered the students an opportunity to leave the auditorium with him. This incident upset and confused a great many people.

Many have expressed concern that the interruption was racially motivated, while others felt the employee's actions were due to his objection to the religious aspect of the assembly. This has been a passionate debate that is continuing to take place and has received widespread attention in the traditional media and in social media.

The Lynchburg City Schools administration investigated this incident immediately, and while privacy laws prohibit school officials from commenting on specific personnel matters, in light of the concerns expressed and the fact that much of this already is in the public domain, I do feel some comment is appropriate.

Based on the investigation, I am confident the employee's actions were not racially motivated, but were related to his concerns about the religious content of the assembly. However, that is not to deny or minimize the way those in attendance felt about or perceived the interruption, or to express approval for the way in which that interruption occurred.

Moreover, this incident has highlighted a long-standing concern about racial sensitivity, and our need to be more tolerant, understanding and inclusive of all people that must not be ignored.

In addition to the racial concerns raised by this incident, there are religious ones. As part of our investigation, we consulted an attorney with expertise in educational constitutional law regarding the religious content of the assembly in light of our constitutional obligation to remain neutral in matters of religion. We were advised that the inclusion of some gospel music as a minor component of a secular program did not violate that obligation, because in context it was presented to reflect the importance of that musical genre to the African-American community as it struggled for equal rights, and as such had a secular educational purpose in the context of a larger program that was not intended to advance any religious agenda.

In spite of the legality of the overall program, however, it's clear that even the very limited religious content sparked strong feelings, both in favor of and against the manner in which the religious content was presented. And as a result, we feel it's important to review and clarify the manner in which religious content may be both appropriately and sensitively incorporated into the curriculum in a manner that both respects our constitutional obligations and the feelings of belief of a community that has a wide diversity of views about matters of religion.

This event has raised a lot of strong emotions and frustration, and to help our community move forward, we are scheduling a listening tour at different city locations over the next month, including: March 21 at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church; April 4 at the Jubilee Center; and April 12 at the Miller Center. All of that information is available on our website at [lcsedu.net](http://lcsedu.net).

We hope in these listening tours to gain a better understanding of all of the concerns expressed as a result of this incident, and other concerns that citizens in our community may have for our schools. If you can't attend, you can go to the website as well where you can share your comments and concerns with us.

I know, as superintendent, that we need to do more than listen if we are going to move forward from this incident. I am recommending to the school board that the input we receive from these listening tours be shared with our LCS Equity Task Force, which can provide recommendations to the board around school system policies, procedures and protocols, as well as training. The Equity Task Force was created by the school board to enhance the communication between school board and the community around such issues of equity and fairness.

Our goal in this entire process must be to ensure that we uphold our core values of integrity, respect, teamwork and learning, as well as provide the racial and religious understanding, sensitivity and inclusiveness consistent with our values as a public school system, and consistent with our mission of every child by name and by need to graduation.

Through responding in a positive and respectful way to adversity we can emerge stronger as we confront our challenges, listen to our community, and commit to grow as an educational system.

I hope to see you at the forums. I am confident that we can work together and create the solutions necessary to move our system forward. I ask for and thank you for your support now and into the future for the betterment of our students and of the Lynchburg City School system.