

October 28, 2024

Board Chair Wright,

Per Board policy KL, please find below a complaint I am filing regarding Board Director Michael Williams. Details surrounding my concern with Director Williams are below.

**Main Event: October 15, 2024**

Michael arranged to meet with me in my office at 9:00. Board member Suzanne Messer was also present.

We talked about...

- Harvest season for cannabis and the dueling nature of CBC and THC
- Suzanne asked Michael not to wear his tool belt, which includes a knife and shears hanging and visible, to Board meetings. Michael said they were his tools, and he didn't understand why it was a problem. I said that we wouldn't allow them at school, and it's good for adults to model those standards. Michael was dismissive.
- Michael asked me if Board member Jeff Kinsella had a conversation with the Board's attorney, Thad Pauck, about the complaint recently filed against Jeff. I said that I knew they talked, but did not know the content of the conversation. Michael pressed for information several times, and I kept referring him to Jeff and Thad. Michael then told me he was treated differently, as Thad would not talk to him (Michael) about the complaint filed against Michael. Suzanne tried to explain the difference, but ended up noting that this was a conversation for the Board at a later time. I made sure Michael knew that Thad works for the Board, not for me.
- Michael then referenced policy KL and said I did not follow the policy for his complaint, because I didn't follow a ten-day cooling off period. I said that I felt confident I followed the process. Suzanne noted that she would read the policy.
- Michael then told me that he talked to Cynthia following the last Board meeting, and that she was not interested in "resetting." He also mentioned that Jeff was not ready to meet with him at this time, and indicated that Jeff and he had not communicated for a while.
- Michael asked me if I had a conversation on July 25 with Cynthia and Kendell about Michael being possibly censured due to his speaking to the paper. I indicated that I wasn't sure about the conversation, but that it was possible, as I was angry with him going to the newspaper and erroneously naming an MSD employee as being the sole reason SRO Doney was moved to patrol. Michael said that it was inappropriate for me to be in that conversation as, "You're the employee, and this was about evaluation. You work for us." I agreed, and reminded Michael that I work for the whole Board, not individual members. Suzanne tried to explain how Board leadership interacted regularly with the superintendent.
- The conversation turned back to the summer, and Michael informed me that if I had told him (Michael) everything about the Doney move in advance, "all this could have been avoided." I informed Michael that I told him an appropriate amount - that the decision to

move Doney was made by MPD in conjunction with MSD. I told him that, because he and Doney were friends, I wasn't interested in saying more. Michael stated, "We don't go fishing together. We're not friends...." He then shared that SRO Doney's response to a situation that involved Michael's daughter was outstanding.

- Michael stated that he is treated differently than other Board members, and that he feels like a "3/5 Board member." I asked for an example, and he shared that at a school last week, a principal would not allow him into a classroom while teaching was going on. He said, "She said exactly what you have said to me, that me coming in can be disruptive." He got animated and said that it was ridiculous to say that him coming into a classroom is disruptive. I said that the reason the principal said the same thing that I had said was that it was true. Michael challenged me on this. I reminded Michael that the Board had agreed to a 24-hour notice to visit a classroom, and part of the reason was so that principals could check with teachers to ensure they were comfortable with a Board member coming into their classroom. This took some time to finish, as Michael was emotionally elevated and kept cutting me off. Suzanne agreed with me, and shared a recent example she had personally experienced. Michael said that it sounded like she was defending me.
- Michael then shared that it felt like it was September 11 and he was standing in the second building of the World Trade Center after the first one collapsed. He said he felt like he was standing on the tenth floor saying, "We need to get out!" while everyone around him said, "It's fine. Everything's fine." I said that was quite dramatic, and I wondered if he could explain why he feels that sense of urgency. He said, "Students aren't taken care of in this district." I asked for specifics, and he repeated the line. I asked again for specifics and he said, "In terms of safety." He then referenced the tragic student deaths we have had this year. I agreed they were terrible. I asked for other examples, and Michael again brought up SRO Doney's move. He stated that Doney was teaching a class at South and that four students had notified him about weapons [which is inaccurate]. He said, "No other SRO does what Doney did," and that South wasn't safe without Doney. I replied, "OK," as it was clear there was disagreement about our outstanding existing SROs and multiple safety measures.
- Suzanne reminded Michael multiple times that I had an appointment at a school, but Michael continued talking.
- There were several times that Michael made it clear I was the Board's employee, and I made it clear that the full Board was my boss, not Michael or any other individual Board member.
- Michael said to me, "Let me be clear. I'm for the kids and their safety. If you don't react to the things I tell you, then you are complicit and I will take care of business."
- Michael then told a story about when he taught French cooking to inmates when he worked in the kitchen of a prison. His efforts to "bring light" were ended because of another cooking supervisor. He said that that's how he feels here, and that I don't answer his questions. I said that I do answer his questions, it's just that he doesn't like my answers. He disagreed and stood up, saying, "No, you don't see me. You don't hear me," in a loud voice. I stood and said, "I do see and hear you, and you don't like my answers. This is something that sometimes happens between superintendents and

Board members.” Michael said, “I want us to collaborate on something.” I said, “We are: safety and curriculum.” He scoffed.

- I thanked Michael for coming in and we shook hands. Michael was clearly agitated, as he slammed my door against the backstop when he opened it, and stormed loudly out into the district office common area, yelling loudly enough for several people in the hall to hear, “Goddammit!”
- I saw several alarmed staff members out in the hall who had come out of their offices because of the yelling, and I said to Michael in a loud voice, “Come back in my office.” I then stood just inside my door and Michael, breathing loudly, came into my office and stood directly in front of me, nose-to-nose. A staff member later stated that when he returned to my office, he “looked like he was charging Bret.”
- One staff member looked through my office window and, fearing for my safety, opened the door. That staff member said that Michael appeared to be “vibrating with anger.” Another staff member who entered the room said, “Michael was puffed up, with his chest out.”
- I said to Michael, “That was inappropriate, and you’re standing in my face.” Michael responded, “I am, and I’m not stepping back. You step back.” I said, “OK,” and stepped back. I told Michael, “When you storm out of my office, slamming things and cursing, it makes people needlessly uncomfortable.”
- By this point, Suzanne and several staff members were saying things like, “Let’s all step back,” and, “That’s enough.” Michael again stormed out of my office cursing, forcefully exiting the building by loudly pounding on the exit doors.
- A few minutes after Michael and Suzanne left, I heard that staff members were nervous, uncomfortable and/or frightened by the events. We pulled everyone together, and I told them that Michael and I had had a disagreement in approach and philosophy, but that he was still a Board member, and we would treat him as such.

### **October 17**

After the Board meeting, I verbally reminded Michael about being accompanied by an administrator at any school, got the time he was coming to the building tomorrow (Oakdale Middle School), and informed him not to bring his knife and/or shears in the school building. (I did consult with the principal, and she was good with this plan.) He agreed to all of it.

### **October 18**

I got a report from concerned staff members that Michael wore his toolbelt, including a knife, to Ruch Outdoor Community School. After talking with the staff, who stated they were uncomfortable asking Michael to leave the knife (because he is a Board member), I called Michael and made it clear that weapons are not allowed on campus, so he needed to not bring his knife and shears to ANY school and that just because he is a Board member, he is not exempt from the law and should be a role model to students. In that call, Michael said, “Okay,” and the conversation ended.

About five minutes later, Michael called me back and asked to know what policy and/or law he was breaking by bringing a knife and shears to a school. I told him I would send it to him. The

phone call went on for a while, as Michael argued that it was OK for him to have his knife on school grounds and in classrooms, as he had seen kitchen knives in culinary classrooms at the middle school, that he knew other people had knives, and that he did not think shears could be considered weapons. He also said he should be allowed to carry the weapon into schools because he is a “working man.” He mentioned that he felt he was being “singled out,” and I informed him that that could be because he was the only Board member visibly wearing weapons into classrooms. We agreed that I would send the email. Later in the day, he requested that I send the email to his attorney, Charley Bolen. I did so. The content of the email:

*Charley,*

*Board Director Williams requested that I direct this email to you. I’m copying Michael and Thad Pauck, with whom I consulted prior to sending the message.*

*Thank you,*

*Bret*

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*Michael,*

*As we discussed earlier today, when you visit any campus for any reason, you need to not bring a knife, shears, or any other tool that could be perceived to be or potentially used as a weapon. Here are the relevant laws and policies. I did verify this information with our attorney, as well.*

*ORS*

*[https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors\\_166.370](https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_166.370)*

*Policy*

*<https://policy.osba.org/medford/G/GBJ%20D1.PDF>*

*Also, to your question on curricular issues like knives in culinary, the policy clearly exempts program and curricular needs: The superintendent may authorize persons to possess weapons for courses, programs and activities approved by the district and conducted on district property.*

*This takes effect immediately.*

*Respectfully,*

*Bret*

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## **Closing**

During this semester, Michael has engaged in a number of concerning behaviors.

- He continues to wear his tool belt with shears and a knife in schools and to Board meetings, even knowing that a principal recently requested the knife from him when he entered the building. During one Board meeting, he removed his knife and trimmed a fingernail; in another he used his knife to remove a staple from a handout.
- At a school event, Michael stated, “I left two bags of cannabis in the bed of my truck and need to go move it,” when exiting the building.

- When Michael was not allowed by the principal to interrupt a classroom, Michael stated, “You’re telling me, as a Board Director, that I cannot go into a classroom?” He was clearly trying to use his position to influence the principal’s behavior.
- In the October 15 meeting, Michael said that he would need to “take care of business” and then got in my face soon thereafter.

Following the incident in my office, numerous staff members have expressed fear. At least one parent and multiple staff members have expressed concern witnessing an adult in schools with a visible weapon. And given all the recent incidents, my immediate staff informed me that Michael’s behavior (and the ramifications that we continue to have to deal with), is negatively impacting their work performance and job satisfaction.

And for me, Michael’s behavior in the October 15 meeting, particularly the “if/then” statement about taking care of business and then coming into my office and standing literally nose-to-nose with me, is troubling. I am reminded that near the end of September this year, a principal called me after a visit with Michael. Toward the end of the visit, Michael said to the principal, “The one person I hold responsible for the problems of this district is Bret Champion.” At that point, Michael put his thumb on the table and turned it in a circle, like he was squishing a bug. Earlier this year, when Michael shared my Board-only superintendent evaluation document with MEA leadership, which was then converted into a survey and sent to all teachers in the district, I felt uncomfortable with his treatment of me. When Michael falsely called out an outstanding employee and claimed the employee acted out a personal vendetta in the newspaper, I grew more concerned. After the events of October 15, I am feeling intimidated and like I am working in a work environment that is progressively hostile.

Our most basic role as leaders is to ensure the safety of students and staff. I am unsure what action the Board can take about Board Director Williams’ behavior, but we all need to work to ensure an environment that is free from intimidation and hostility.

As always, if I can be of assistance, please let me know.

Respectfully,

Bret Champion