

Good afternoon.

I am writing this email to express my deepest disappointment in light of the news that came out yesterday, 9/22, from the News Gazette, titled Unit 4 inaction frustrates some on city council. I and many other staff at BTW were shocked and alarmed at the district's response to gun violence at the front of our school on 9/14. As a concerned member of the staff, a parent, and an advocate for the safety of our children, I feel compelled to share my, and other staff members' thoughts and concerns regarding this matter.

First and foremost, I need to say that I am proud to work at BTW. The relationships that I have made with our students and community have been fostered by an amazing administration team that has continually encouraged all staff to put our students first. It is something that my colleagues and I do on a daily basis with our students in an effort to have the whole student present and able to learn. I feel that over the last few years, staff has been able to develop relationships with those in our community to have them look positively on BTW due to the hard work we have put in to build these relationships and let families know that we are there for their students.

I want to acknowledge the gravity of the situation and the challenges you face in ensuring the safety of our schools and students. I understand that addressing gun violence is a delicate issue, and no single solution can guarantee complete prevention. However, the response to such incidents plays a pivotal role in reassuring parents, students, and the community that their safety is a top priority.

The response to the recent gun violence incident last Thursday was, in my and many others' opinions, inadequate. As staff members, we continue to feel hurt, disappointed, and forgotten by our district. I was outside with a small group of eight 5th graders when we watched a young man pull out and discharge a firearm. I managed to get my students into a safe place inside, but I will never forget the terror on their faces. I will never forget how they questioned why we didn't have bulletproof glass. I will never forget how they scoffed at another teacher telling another student, "We are safe."

I shared some of my frustrations with Mr. Roundtree after the incident. Mr. Canales being the only district staff to show up on the day of a shooting was unacceptable. I then felt like I was given many different excuses as to why the response was what it was. Many other staff also expressed to me that the response was unacceptable, and that they felt as if Unit 4 was simply passing the blame or making excuses as to why nothing could have been done and that this was a community issue.

Thursday morning, on 9/21, Mr. Canales, Mr. Thomas, and 2 other representatives from CPD met with some of our staff before school started. Many of my colleagues have come to me and expressed that they felt that all they were told was more excuses.

I understand that addressing all of the concerns from BTW may require time, effort, and resources, but the safety and well-being of our children must always be the top priority. According to the News Gazette article though, our district has had access to \$526,620 for over a year as a part of the Community Gun Violence Reduction Blueprint to carry out various programs aimed at addressing the root causes of gun violence and supporting impacted families of victims, and has not spent any of it.

The article quotes Dr. Boozer as saying in response to not utilizing the funds, "...we made the difficult decision to prioritize the work at the heart of our district's mission — educating the children in our community."

We cannot educate the children in our community when they are continually rocked by gun violence and fear going to school. This response is unacceptable. I urge you to take immediate action to rectify this, utilize the funds at hand, and to provide the community with a clear plan for improving safety measures in our schools.

Our community relies on its leaders to protect its most vulnerable members, and I hope that you will take this responsibility seriously and work diligently to regain our trust. Our staff would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this matter further with you and hear about the steps you plan to take to address these concerns. I would also like to ask for BTW to have a seat at this table. We can work together on this to educate the children in our community and enable them to feel safe at our schools. Our staff and building administration have been working with our families. I am going to encourage our members to come to the Board Meeting on Tuesday as well so that we can be heard.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. I look forward to a swift and effective response.

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I was off enjoying my son's wedding this weekend when I checked my work email. Not a smart thing on my part because this email about ruined me celebrating with my family something beautiful and positive. Something my family has needed for a long while. Why because we too are victims and yet traumatized due the senseless acts of gun violence. We lost two teenage Black boys tragically to gun violence. One 16 years old shot in his head and he wasn't the intended target. The other shot point blank in his face a day before his 17th birthday. So celebrating my BLACK 29 year son, that has been pulled over by not one but four police cars at one time for "mistaken identity" was more than just celebrating his wedding. It was celebrating a milestone! We all know how that potentially could have turned out especially when the officers

kept telling him (after they made him get out of his car) how big he was. Yes, he's 6'5 240 pounds of muscle. I still cry thinking about how it could have turned out if my BLACK husband and I had not taught our kids how to be compliant while driving or just being Black. That's trauma you will never experience or understand as a parent. I know trauma. I live it everyday even in my role. I'm a Superintendent by choice, and trauma is still at my front door.

My family has had more trauma than many can comprehend. We NEVER looked to the schools to fight gun violence. I say this to say because I'm tired of the nasty, disrespectful and downright hateful emails from you and your colleagues. Until you walk in my daily reality please do not email me nor my Board anymore disrespectful messages regarding anything. I personally came to BTW and spoke to you and your colleagues the next morning. If you had something to say you had an opportunity at that point. You personally looked me in my face and said thank you for being here. I was outside chasing off the extra foot traffic in the park. If something had popped off I too was in the line of fire. As far as Mr. Canales, he did exactly as our plan calls for when the RAVE button is pushed (the program I made sure we have in place). I sent over CPD, our head of security and Mr. Thomas Thursday morning to hear the staff's concerns because I could not personally be there. I was told thank you.

When I arrived here to Champaign Unit 4 3 years ago. I walked into a community plagued with gun violence. My school busses were hit by bullets while dropping students off. I visited schools that had Black Lives Matter posters everywhere. I delved into the data and saw horrific scores. All I could do was say, "Do Black Lives Really Matter or is this the new buzz term. Do these folks really mean it?" I'm waiting for the community outrage of the lack of performance from our Black students. Instead, being unable and unwilling to stretch my already worn out staff any further and honestly acknowledging we cannot use all those funds made available to us and suggesting that other organizations should have access makes the news. Admittedly I'm so confused by all of it.

As far as the Blue print goes it involved trying to get Saturday school going and after other school programming. We did not have the manpower (teachers, bus drivers, admin etc) to make it happen. The City did not give us funds. We had access to funds for reimbursement if we could get the programs going. We could not. We did however do the intramural basketball program that was a part of the proposal. We told the City our plight. At face value they understood. We said we wanted to scale back and we have other options we wanted to go with.

We have other initiatives we put in place to do our part. I will be discussing this at the next Board meeting. I'm a Superintendent trying to change the trajectory of many students lives. I'm not equipped to stop gun violence. No school district is. Our best weapon is education not perpetuating stereotypes, casting blame or fault finding. Our job is to teach our students to read, comprehend, problem solve and become amazing citizens. It takes a village to do all of this. I am a strong believer in controlling what I can control and if I cannot control them I determine how might I influence it. I accept that I cannot control gun violence (if I could my two cousins would still be here). I figured out how we could influence psychological, emotional and physical safety in Unit 4.

We brought in weapons detectors, a security team, Care Solace, more General Education Social Workers, SSA's, hall monitors, additional admin team members, secure entrances at

every school building and I'm sure other measures over the past two years. We heard a few more things your team had asked for that we are looking into providing.

I understand first hand how trauma affects people. I acknowledge you experienced trauma the other week. I With all of that you do not get the right to come at me or anyone else. We have to work together to problem solve. If you feel the need to share any other opinions or thoughts please call me or better yet, follow the proper chain of command. Talk to your building leadership. They can and should be able to explain to you the proper response and protocols were followed. Please ask and get an understanding before you call something you do not understand as inadequate.

In all gun incidents the local police department takes over not the school district personnel. In fact, we did not learn it was gun violence near or on BTW property until late Thursday evening well after we received the all clear. We met with both your admin team and CPD to discuss that piece.

The Board of Education's role is policy and its implementation not the day to day operations.

Yours in Service,

Dr. Shelia E. Boozer

Superintendent Champaign Unit 4

Sent from my iPhone