

TO: Green Lake School Board and Green Lake Community
FM: Mary Cyrier
DR: March 15, 2023
RE: Response to Investigation

I am responding to the investigation report of allegations against me as a Board member. My response is long as there are many issues that need to be addressed.

Overall, I have been honored to be part of the Green Lake School District. Service in the community is extremely important to me and I have a passion for K-12 education and children. Also, since my husband grew up in the area, we are committed to the community and its success. My parents taught me the importance of service to the community and I have tried to serve in as many areas as possible.

I am confused and surprised by these allegations. I have always attempted to do any job to the best of my ability. I try to do what is right, be prepared for meetings by making sure I have educated myself and ask questions to assure I understand issues. This has been my approach and goal as a Green Lake School Board member.

I want to do the work that focuses on students and creates the best environment for their success. We have such an important role in their development and I believe that everything we do on the Board has the potential for impacting their ability to make the most out of their future. This District has had great success in the past and I have tried to be part of advancing that success into the future.

I asked for the full report after the February 15th meeting since it was stated to be complete that night and ready for a Board vote. I received the 136-page report on March 2nd. Also, there is a resolution for tonight already presented that finds me guilty on all allegations before my response has even been heard or considered.

There are three topics that have been stated as allegations.

Topic #1 Misuse of Email and Violations of Open Meeting Laws

Exhibits provided are requests for information or processes associated with various issues. These requests for information do not constitute a violation of open meetings law or a misuse of email.

Policy 167.5 allows for requests in email that are not for "deliberating or rendering decisions".

Policy 143.2 does not apply due to the fact that the requests were not asking for "lengthy research or investigation".

These requests were only my attempt to fully understand the issues, prepare myself for meetings and to make sure that I had correct materials for meetings in order to make an informed vote. They were for me to be sure I was fully prepared to do the work of the School Board.

Policy 167.5 Use of Electronic Email

"If a Board member does utilize electronic mail, it may be used only for the purpose of communicating:

A. Messages between Board members or between a Board member and employee(s) which do not involve deliberating or rendering a decision on matters pending before the Board.

And

D. Times, dates and place of regular or special Board meetings."

Policy 143.2 Board Member Information Requests

This policy states requests "when a board member would like the administration to compile information which will require lengthy research and investigation, the request should be submitted to the District Administrator".

Exhibit 1

I asked Donna, Board Secretary, for the correct statute referenced in the board materials since the one stated was incorrect. I copied all Board members so they could have it as well.

Exhibit 2

Incorrect minutes were sent out and Donna put the corrections in email. I asked if we needed to approve these at a board meeting. I suggested that the timing of materials was perhaps a discussion item for a future board meeting.

Exhibit 3

I asked for a summary of the insurance renewal for the upcoming insurance committee meeting and copied all board members so they would have it as well.

Exhibit 6

I asked for a copy of Gina's goals and the performance review form so that I could gather appropriate feedback throughout the performance period. I copied all board members so they would have it as well.

Exhibit 8

I asked Andy for the superintendent review process and form as well as timing. I stated it was so that I could provide specific feedback and specific examples. I also asked for the consultant's role in the review process.

Exhibit 11

I asked for a copy of the high school classes since, at the upcoming board meeting, we were reviewing Wisconsin Standards for all grade levels. I copied all Board members so they could have it as well.

Exhibit 12

I asked for the process for the superintendent evaluation to be on the agenda for October or November since I had questions on the process that were not appropriate for email. I copied all board members for their information.

Exhibit 25

I requested a closed session after the review was delivered to Gina in order to finalize goals for 2023. I asked if Gina does a self-evaluation as part of the process. I offered to research the review process and forms and present options to the full Board. Tim also offered to help.

Andy stated that he preferred to wait until new board members were installed in April 2023.

Tim replied that while Andy would prefer to wait, he would prefer to do it now. Tim goes on to state that he is "not discussing the substance of Gina's review. I am simply asking for an additional closed session. Please do not be so dismissive now that you have two board members asking for this to at least be considered. Frankly, last night's meeting was rushed because you said you were anxious to get home to supper. Let's take our time and do this right."

I replied with my concerns that in waiting for the new board members we would be 33-40% through the performance year with no clear process or goals for Gina. I offered to volunteer the time to complete this research.

I also stated that Andy said the attorney suggested we all destroy all copies we have of the review with the concern that it would be accessed. I reminded the Board that a superintendent review is subject to an open records request.

Tim replied that he would be happy to help with the support of the full board.

I agreed and asked for this topic to be placed on the February agenda.

Process or information requests do not violate open meeting laws or constitute a misuse of email. Policy 167.5 allows for these communications. Policy 143.2 does not apply due to the type of requests in the emails.

Topic #2 Mistreatment of District Employees

The report states my requests for information were "nonsensical and irrelevant to the duties of a board member". As you can see from the Exhibits below, my requests were quite simple and asked for meeting agendas, items and other materials that would be helpful for me to learn as a new board member.

The Exhibits provided as support include 20 instances of email topics between May 27, 2022 and January 12, 2023. This is a rate of 3 email topics per month. I would agree these are not all emails I sent during this time, but I am simply responding to the evidence provided to support the allegations. This is clearly not "burdensome" and the requests, as you will see, were quite simple.

In addition, Donna is the Board Secretary. This means that she is directly responsible for Board meetings, minutes, reports, attachments, policies, etc. My requests were often directed to her as this was her role.

Exhibit 4

I asked Donna for the wording on a specific motion from the May 2022 Board meeting.

Exhibit 5

6/13/2022 I asked Donna when the agenda and attachments would be posted for the Wednesday meeting.

6/13/2022 I asked if the finance meeting scheduled for that day was still scheduled since I did not see it on the calendar.

6/13/2022 I asked for a copy of the employee handbook and benefits.

6/8 and 6/14 I requested a summary of who requested to be on what board committee.

Exhibit 7

6/14/2022 When signing into the District Gmail, it impacted my personal and business google accounts. I asked for help from Donna. 1 hour later I emailed her that I had resolved it with IT.

Exhibit 9

This Exhibit is irrelevant to the topic of District Employees. It was communication between me and a District vendor. However, that communication included 4 emails to the vendor asking for a phone conversation so I could fully understand their role and the District contract. Again, this was for me to make sure I had educated myself on contract language. There is no policy that states a board member cannot discuss a District contract with the vendor.

Exhibit 10

The report states that I “made requests for information about board meeting dates and the District’s website suggesting that *Administration was not keeping it updated or efficient*” (*italics added*)

My email is as follows. “Good morning. Where does the public find the list of board meeting dates that we approved in May? When I looked on the website, I could not find them. Maybe I am looking in the wrong place?” I also asked if we could place the calendar in a couple places on the website for community access.

My email does not suggest in any way that the Administration was not “keeping it updated or efficient”.

Exhibit 11

I asked for a copy of the high school classes since at the upcoming board meeting, we were reviewing Wisconsin Standards for all grade levels. I copied all Board members so they could have it as well.

Exhibit 13

I asked for the District zoom account in order to hold a Strategic Planning Meeting.

Exhibit 14

I asked for a printed set of the 148 pages of policy that were to be reviewed at the board meeting. I was unable to get the pages to print in a way it could be reviewed. Donna printed it and provided it.

Exhibit 16

The report states I was attending a meeting of which "I was not a member". I was asked to attend the meeting by Sue Sorensen, Tim Lyke and Gina Baxter. I did attend the policy committee meeting at the approval and legal verification from Gina.

In an email on 11/30/22 I asked about attending the Policy meeting as requested above. I had asked Gina to confirm "that the attorney has confirmed that a non-committee member can attend a committee meeting and speak. Please affirm". We were all very careful since we had just heard the legal presentation from the attorney where he made it quite clear that I could not send edits (via email) or speak at a Committee meeting where I was not a member but that edits were to only be done in public at a full board meeting. I added "I want to be sure to follow the interpretation of the rules for this District". I later stated that I would not attend since I had not heard back it was allowed.

Gina's response to the Committee on 11/30/22 was:

"Since an explanation needed to accompany Mary's proposed changes, the legal loophole to allow a board member who is not on a committee time to speak or explain a thought/idea is that they are put on the agenda. Once they are one (sic) the agenda, they can present during their allotted time and answer any questions the committee members may have about the content being presented. My thinking on this option has been verified so we are ready to move forward".

Gina confirms in Exhibit 16 in the 12/16/22 email as to why I am attending and that it is allowed.

Exhibit 17

The report states this Exhibit references policies "to be considered at the December board meeting" and that I had "requested certain September Finance Committee minutes and changes to committee assignments made in June 21".

Exhibit 17 is an email from 12/9/22 where I asked what policies were going to be reviewed at the 12/20/22 board meeting.

The Exhibit does not reference finance committee minutes nor committee assignments.

Exhibit 18

I asked for the date of the future board retreat.

Exhibit 19 – several emails attached

I identified that meeting minutes for the following meetings had not been posted or approved. I asked where these minutes could be found.

- All 2022 Marketing Committee minutes
- 9/12/22 Finance Committee meeting
- 11/16 and 12/14 Policy Committee meetings

However, I have not pointed out before now, but the lack of minutes violates Policy 155 that states committees are to “write up minutes to present at the next board meeting”. This has not occurred.

Also Exhibit 19 included an email regarding the June 2021 Board meeting. I pointed out that the agenda and attachment had different dates. The agenda said 2021-2022 yet the attachment said 2020-2021.

Exhibit 21

The report states I had “an inference of some error by Administration.”

I asked for Donna to explain the color coding on the proposed policies. I stated “In the past red had strikethrough so the green was being proposed. Now red and green both included with no strike through so I am not sure what is being recommended”.

Donna replied that there were technology issues and “it appears we might have some bugs to work through”. She then explained the colors and added “Thank you for bringing this to our attention”.

I copied all board members so they would have this information for the upcoming meeting.

As can be seen by my email, at no time did I “inference some error by Administration”.

Exhibit 22

I asked where the minutes were for the 1/31 and 3/23 board meetings.

Exhibit 23

I asked when the meeting (that was cancelled due to weather) was going to be rescheduled. She replied with the confirmed date.

Exhibit 24

I asked if there were any non-candidacy forms submitted by the deadline.

My reason for these requests was to make sure I had done my homework in preparing for Board meetings and that I fully understood materials. These requests are neither “nonsensical” nor “irrelevant to the duties of a Board member”. They are all related to the work of the Board.

At no time in any of these emails was I disrespectful.

Topic #3 Unauthorized Representation to the Public

The report suggests that it is not clear where I “obtained the information, or whether Board Member Mary Cyrier verified that information with any District official”. The report also alleges that I “gave false and misleading formation to the Board, and public” quoting the Strategic Planning presentation.

The information and numbers provided for the Strategic Planning report came directly from public presentations by the District Business Manager including the Annual Meeting in October 2022.

They are neither “false and misleading” nor an “unauthorized representation”.

Other Allegations:

Mistreatment of Staff

It would never be my intent to embarrass someone in public. I believe in talking one on one with employees about issues. However, the work done by the School Board is in public. In my effort to be sure I have accurate information for meetings, I have pointed out things that were incorrect or inaccurate in materials and presentations and asked for correct materials prior to meetings. If Donna was responsible for generating these materials, I could see how she could be embarrassed or uncomfortable.

Direct Communication Style

I am direct yet professional in my communication. I take my role as an elected official very seriously. Also, the work we do on the School Board impacts the community, staff, teachers and children. I try to do all that I can to be sure that I have prepared myself and ask questions that help me make good decisions about issues. I will always ask questions, ask for data, challenge, debate and ask for budget impact. I am passionate about education, teachers, children and success.

An example of my passion for doing things right, on May 18, 2022 I sent a very strongly worded email in response to what I considered to be an inappropriate video card that was distributed by Gina to the entire staff. It included language that I found to be inappropriate in a K-12 setting or in any work setting. The video included song lyrics sung by two Board members in the video including “Looking for your girl, she on my jock” “half-black, half-white: domino” and “I’m runnin through these hoes like Drano”.

I take the role of a Board member to educate and prepare myself very seriously. I read every attachment, Wisconsin statute and policy. I have been frustrated and vocal about board materials not being provided prior to meetings. There have been repeated instances where materials are handed out at board meetings for a vote that night. Personally, I am unable to vote on something I have not read and reviewed prior to a meeting. I want to do a good job for the District and make informed decisions, and I can’t do that without adequate time to review the materials.

It is time to focus on the real work of the Board which is education and success of our kids. Rather than fighting among ourselves and spending hard earned taxpayer money on investigating Board members, we should be focusing on the children and their success. We have work to do. In the most recent State Report Card Green Lake 2021-2022:

75% of 6-12 students are below proficient in Math

62% of 6-12 students are below proficient in English Language Arts

49% of K-5 students are below proficient in Math

59% of K-5 students are below proficient in English Language Arts

I am not blaming anyone for these numbers. Parents, staff, teachers and students have had unprecedented challenges in the last few years. What I am saying is this should be our focus and where we spend our time and money. We spend \$6 million dollars a year of hard-earned taxpayer money. It should be directed at students, teachers and staff.

I have tried to do the job of a Board member to the best of my ability. I try to do what is right for the District and students. I do my research, ask questions, ask for correct materials in order to be sure that I am doing my job for the community and District in my role as an elected official. I am committed to this community and believe that the School District is a critical piece of community success. Kids depend on us for every decision we make.