

Mrs. Vicki Saviers:

I am writing this letter as an individual board member to provide a response to Leslie Fiskens letter to you dated January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015. This is simply my position and does not represent the position of any other board members.

First, I would like to express great sorrow that Ms. Fiskens has decided to communicate in this manner. I am sensitive to her perspective and trust that she is a well-intentioned and concerned public servant. At the same time, as I explain below, she could not be more mistaken in her concerns and assertions. The bottom line is that this board is committed to working with this superintendent to make sure every child is given the highest trained personnel and the best programs that they will need to succeed.

Ms. Fiskens argues that we have a dysfunctional relationship with the superintendent. But I would point out that we have only been together as a board for four months, and four of us have been elected since September 2013. We are still in the early stages of our relationship. I am not sure how one could argue that the relationship is dysfunctional, and it is certainly unfair to lay the blame for past troubles on the current board. Ms. Fiskens also asserts that Dr. Suggs is the man to fix all the problems of the Little Rock School District. Dr. Suggs is a capable leader for our district, but as he has said on numerous occasions, the work of one man or woman will not fix the district. Our community must work together. As the elected representatives of the people, the board has the responsibility to make sure effective personnel, programs, and policies are in place. It is our job to question the superintendent when we believe he has left the mission of our district or has stepped outside the bounds of the law or board policy. It is also our duty to support him when he is following the mission of the district and within the bounds of the law. The current board is doing both of these things very well.

Ms. Fiskens specifically claims, "Yet, his plans involving academics, athletics, technology, Special Education, English Language Learners, Gifted & Talented and more are suppressed or even eliminated because of our board." This is a broad claim that is open to verification. I can think of **no instance** when this has happened. We have not eliminated any programs that he instituted. Her assertion is hyperbole at its worst. Perhaps she is confusing our assertion that we need to

assess these programs to determine if they are working. Surely we will not hold this board at fault for ensuring that programs are effective and cost efficient.

Ms. Fisken outlined six criticisms to assert that the current board is dysfunctional.

She wrote, "First, board member(s) are consistently rude, inconsiderate, patronizing, and insulting to the superintendent. This has included yelling and interrupting Dr. Suggs, his staff, and other board members as individuals attempt to make presentations, answer questions, or make a comment. This tone is also expressed in email dialogue."

This is a strange assertion that is difficult to prove or disprove. We are passionate people who all care deeply for kids. We will struggle and argue over what we feel to be the most effective policies or programs, but at the end of the day we enjoy a laugh together and spend time talking about our families and mundane concerns with one another. I don't recognize this board in her description. The only incident in which there was yelling was immediately followed by a public apology and private apology which was graciously accepted with the promise that the two involved would work together on many projects through the years.

Her assertion that board members feign ignorance to delay votes is also put forward with no evidence. It would be easy to verify how many times documents have been resent. I would guess it would be less than ten times. It would also be more gracious to assume that sometimes people misplace documents or do not have the time to read them, just like Ms. Fisken says about herself.

The charge that the board wants to micromanage the daily operations of the district contained three pieces of evidence. The first piece of evidence is that the current board wants to reinstitute a program called PRE. This program has to do with how we evaluate our curriculum. First, this has only been discussed, but because we could not come to a consensus we are still discussing this program. As of now our curriculum department evaluates itself. Most board members have agreed that this is not an effective means for evaluation, but we are still in preliminary discussions. At the same time it is important to note that state law and board policy say that the board is responsible for all programs. We will make this decision in consultation with the

superintendent, but we are responsible under the law for making sure all programs help all kids. That is what we were elected to do.

Her next assertion was that the board recommended better hiring practices to the administration. The board recently discussed how the district couldn't effectively educate ESL kids without ESL endorsed teachers. We wanted the administration to know that this needed to be a high priority. The administration agreed and shared with us that they will be having a minority hiring fair in April that will allow us first chances on ESL endorsed teachers.

Finally, Ms. Fiskien argued that we questioned the refusal of a lawyer to meet with a client in a building. We did question that, and we will continue to question any action that denies kids or parents access to a lawyer. This is a fundamental civil right.

It is the board's responsibility to make sure that all programs, policies, and personnel are in place to help our kids. It is the superintendent's job to hire those people, follow our policies, and institute programs that meet our goals. It is subsequently the board's responsibility to check up on the superintendent. We are to work together in a symbiotic relationship, and we believe we are learning to do that. It is worth noting that every board member in the last few months has said publicly that we do not want to micromanage.

Ms. Fiskien's fourth assertion contained five points. Her insistence that the board "fails to support Dr. Suggs on the majority of issues" can be easily verified, and her statement is simply false. The board continues to support the administration on the majority of issues. Her first piece of evidence has to do with the fee for the 1:1 computer initiative. We did oppose the administration's requirement of this fee, not because we wanted to destroy the program, but because we received a long email from our attorney suggesting that this program was most likely in violation of Arkansas law. So the board chose to follow the law.

She then argues that the board opposed the original meeting date for the millage committee. Again, there was a rational reason. The board was newly constituted, and new members needed more time to forward names for the committee.

Her third piece of evidence was that this board opposed the administration on employee terminations. Again, this information is easily verified. Two employee termination hearings have come before us. One employee did not have her lawyer and asked for a continuance. It was granted. We voted to terminate another employee as the superintendent requested. Again her assertion is simply false.

Fourth, she claimed we opposed the administration on principal assignments. This again is not true. We asked for our attorney to make sure we were within state hiring laws because the administration wanted to hire two interim principals as permanent principals. We are expecting to hear from our attorney at the next meeting.

Finally, she asserts that we failed to support forming an exploratory committee on the possibility of reconfiguring Hall High School. Again this is just not the truth. A motion was made to kill the committee because of the lack of communication from the administration to the board about the committee's function, but after a long and fruitful discussion that motion was removed. The committee continues its work and the administration is now doing a great job of communicating about that committee.

Ms. Fisker's assertion about mobile devices comes with no evidence. We all have our phones out during meetings, including Ms. Fisker.

We cannot legally discuss executive sessions, so I will not directly address this concern.

Ms. Fisker ends her diatribe with this lament, "Unfortunately, in my opinion, the LRSD is headed down an even darker path than in recent years. I believe that the current board has and will continue to set a new high level of dysfunction."

I am saddened that Ms. Fisker feels such despair. When I see all we have done in four short months, I feel more hopeful than I ever have for the LRSD. We are going to follow the law. We are going to hold people accountable. But most importantly, children are going to be educated under this board and superintendent—not just a select few, but every child. This new board has members now fully committed to doing revolutionary things to educate **every child** in our district. It is a daunting task but one that we are perfectly capable of handling.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jim Ross  
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