

From:

concernedaboutISD728 <concernedaboutISD728@protonmail.com>

Sent

09/24/2021 (5 months ago)

To: daniel.bittman@isd728.orgsara.weisHolly

Thompsonchristi.tullbaneanthony.waltershane.steinbrecherjoel.nelsonkimberly.michelsJenny EricksonJames

Hello ISD 728 Board Members and Dr. Bittman,

Our organization wanted to follow up on a couple things, and, out of respect for the fact that the beginning of the school year is very busy, we waited until now to give the board and Dr Bittman some time to adjust to the new school year.

First, regarding our last meeting with Dr. Bittman and our f/u emails thereafter. A month and a half has passed without specific responses to some of our inquiries about the white supremacy signs that are hanging in Elk River High School and now also have photo evidence of some in Sauk Middle School. We're hoping that the board can respond to the questions posed in early August that are still outstanding. Please see below a partial copy and paste from email response from Dr. Bittman on August 10th where responses were not transparent or complete. Has this yet been discussed with leadership? If not, what is the timeline to discuss? Please respond to number 12 specifically. It seems odd that the district would feel uncomfortable answering a question about an exclusive sign and it's message given the district's mission of inclusivity for all students.

How does the sign support the district's mission? This would require more discussion and we do not feel comfortable commenting on your question without additional conversation.

12. Given the exclusive message...This would require more discussion and we do not feel comfortable commenting on your question without additional conversation.

13. How would a more inclusive message... We will bring these questions to leadership teams for more discussions throughout the future, and will continue to use the feedback from you and other stakeholders to modify and adjust both practices and messaging.

14. Your recommendation to reconsider the sign before the school year...We do not anticipate a different decision for the start of the school year as most staff do not work during the summer. We will however plan to discuss the sign issue throughout the year and will consider your feedback. We are happy to let you know if/when a different decision is made.

If the board could please specifically respond with transparency to each of these sincere questions it would be greatly appreciated.

Second, our organizational leadership has had two meetings with Dr Bittmann, one in May and one in July. In May we inquired about the investigation into the **incident regarding Troy Johnson** and the four and a half minute video clip that went viral. **Dr Bittman indicated that what we saw was only part of a larger video and the district investigation determined that the part we saw was Mr Johnson role playing and that he later went on to decry violence. We have recently been able to recover the full video of the interaction between Mr Johnson and this freshman class. There are two videos, one is 24 minutes and one is 9 minutes in length covering the entire class period. These videos clearly**

demonstrate that the findings of the district investigation, from what was communicated by Dr. Bittman in the May meeting, do not reconcile in any way. Mr Johnson not only did not go back to deny violence, but white privilege came up in the conversation as well as blanket statements about predominantly white students in the room and their assumed views of African Americans. This demonstrated complete bias and no attempt on either the freshman teacher in the classroom or Mr. Johnson inquiring of students first what their viewpoints were before making broad assumptions based on their skin color. Per District policy 606, we feel there are many red flags regarding what occurred during this teacher/student interaction that directly violates multiple items in section VI of this policy.

Please note, both policy 606 and the full length videos have been turned over to our legal team for review and recommendations. At this time, we are not planning on taking legal action, first hoping to work with the district and school board in a reasonable way to resolve this matter appropriately for all parties.

Because we want to maintain a working relationship with District leadership and the board, we are also open to providing copies of these videos to the district to assist in exposing the truth for the district's investigation and to the community at large. Because these files are large, they cannot be sent by email but our leadership would agree to come into the district office to allow district staff to download them from a jump drive. We have documented from the minor's parent that we have permission to do this. We also request a follow-up meeting scheduled with 728 United (formerly Concerned About ISD 728) leadership to address any changes in the outcome of the investigation regarding this matter and whether or not this district employee, once further investigation is completed with the addition of these full videos, will continue to have access to our students.

Additionally, at the meeting in July, we provided parent statements about the Johnson situation and the subsequent bullying of some students in the aftermath on school grounds that resulted in some students disenrolling fully from the district because of the trauma they experienced. We followed up with this family and found that the only district outreach to them was that Mr. Caskey only requested the full videos, there was no mention of the bullying situation or any follow-up with the parent's statement regarding what happened the next day in class with the teacher's emotional breakdown which was interpreted by some parents as a manipulation tactic. We respectfully request information on whether a specific investigation was completed regarding this matter and would like to know why the specific family and or student was never interviewed if an investigation was completed. If no investigation was completed, we request an explanation as to why.

Again, we remind the district that parents have had many good and positive interactions with hard working teachers and district staff. Unfortunately, this incident and the way it was followed up on, along with other recent issues and what was found in the comprehensive data pull, has resulted in a breach of trust between our families, nearing 300 now, and the district.

Please know all of our leadership communication is shared with every member of our group. We also encourage parents and taxpayers within our group to respectfully communicate their concerns with the district directly.

Please let us know if you would like leadership to come in to download these videos and when the board and Dr. Bittman would be available to meet with our organization as a follow-up to this issue.

We know that the meeting between Dr. Bittman and Mr. Qualls of Take Charge MN on August 30th had to be canceled. Following up with Mr Qualls recently, he is waiting to hear back from Dr. Bittmann's secretary to reschedule their meeting and he eagerly looks forward to talking with Dr. Bittman, and hopefully, board members can also participate in this meeting. Mr. Qualls has valuable, evidence-based information to share with the district regarding significant issues that plague the

black community in terms of impacts on family structure that must be addressed to assist students of color to thrive academically. We hope Dr Bittman's office can reach out ASAP to Mr Qualls' organization to reschedule this meeting.

Finally, 728 United has also partnered with other organizations in the state working for the academic improvement of all students, including brown and black students as well as creating racial unity through adhering to Martin Luther King Jr's. methods and ideas. Below we have provided a couple links to these organizations and a few of their videos, we strongly urge district leadership and board members to take a look. 728 United hopes to facilitate meetings with the board and/or the superintendent and district leadership in the future with these organizations to continue to educate our district on the evidence-based data regarding academic performance and what creates successful students regardless of external physical characteristics as well as meaningful ways to build racial unity versus division. As you know, a major part of our mission is high quality academics for all students. Evidence-based data shows that access to high quality cognitive education is a major pillar that drives individual success and, for those lower socioeconomic students who are stuck in cyclical poverty, provides one of the best opportunities for them to escape this cycle.

<https://www.fairforall.org/>

<https://youtu.be/WW1un7xzu1M>

<https://theexodusmn.org/>

<https://youtu.be/eG1EWvjZUak>

<https://takechargemn.com/>

We look forward to the district's response to all of these items. Please take your time reading through this email because there are several requests for information.

Please note, we have updated our organizational name, though our email address will remain the same at this time for efficiency purposes.

Best,



728 United
Advocates for Academic Excellence

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