

The following letter was read on 9/11 to the TSD401 School board, by the entire admin team and TEA, who stood in support of the following important message:

We are in attendance this evening, at the request of the board, to share concerns we have with actions that have and are currently being taken by Board member Kathleen Haar that are having a significant impact on our organizations and the people who learn and serve there.

First, we have been made aware of public comments you have posted on social media regarding district hiring, specifically the hiring of 10 teachers who you implied were hired inappropriately. Additionally, you specifically called out those district teachers in response to the posting about “unqualified locals” which implied they were somehow unqualified, when in fact, they ARE in line with the State’s requirements for certification. You also put these teachers on the same list as a former district employee who was charged with two felonies and whose actions were absolutely inappropriate. Here are our concerns with your actions:

- The info you posted sent a clear message that these teachers were somehow not qualified or that somehow inappropriate hiring processes were used, which was not the case. As schools, our department chairs, team leaders, and colleagues are a crucial part of each interview process. This process has happened in many of our schools long before policies were changed two years ago. Despite your inference to the contrary, hiring decisions are absolutely made with the input and support of our staff.
- Additionally, by putting them on the same list as someone charged with multiple felonies, you are associating these teachers with the former staff member and their charges. Our concern is that it was simply misinformation and misrepresentation you made public. This will wrongly impact people's perceptions of these teachers. Your position as a board member also lends credibility to something that is not credible or factual. Misinformation is harmful. Misinformation combined with authority is toxic.
 - (#13, ISBA Code of Ethics) Give staff the respect and consideration due skilled, professional employees and support the employment of those best qualified to serve as district staff, while insisting on regular and impartial evaluation of all staff
 - (#14, ISBA Code of Ethics) Present personal criticism of district operations to the superintendent or administrator, not to district staff or to a board meeting

The social media posting you participated in also included misinformation by the poster, a former teacher, that we cannot weigh in on because of HR law and district policy. It would be a violation to do so.

Unfortunately, the posting was filled with misinformation and a narrative by the poster that was simply not factual. When a board member participates in those types of activities, it reflects poorly on the district and its people. Your position gives credibility to misinformation, which is also harmful. Whether intending to or not, your participation in the postings had the potential to sway public opinion in a direction that presented administrators as bigoted and partisan, which is not the truth. Additionally, it is not a fair action because those who know the misinformation cannot respond or clarify for those reading.

- (Board policy 1405) Board members will note that individual postings made to social media sites should be considered carefully in light of how they would reflect on the poster, the Board of Trustees, and the District. Opinions expressed by staff on a social networking website have the potential to be disseminated far beyond the speaker’s desire or intention and could undermine the public perception of fitness of the individual to serve students’ interests.

As a board member you have a responsibility to visit the schools annually. Multiple administrators, including myself, have reached out to you multiple times and invited you to come and talk about any concerns you have. You have not responded to our invitations. We have invited you to come to discuss your concerns regarding hiring processes, daily attendance, and other district processes, including a willingness to receive direct feedback as a principal. You have not come to the middle school, or any of the elementary schools to see our daily operations, nor have you taken the time to get to know what we

do and the great staff who do it. How can you adequately make decisions on behalf of (or criticize) a school/individual you have not visited or taken the time to understand? We have great schools in our valley. We have excellent teachers. Are we perfect, no. But, if you had taken time to come and see, not only would you have been able to receive clarification to concerns you have, you would also find custodians, food service staff, paras, office assistants, teachers, and admin who are genuinely trying to grow our schools, to confront our weaknesses, and to build a thriving culture. I'm confident you would value what we are working to accomplish.

- (Board policy 1400) Trustees should make a point to visit each school of the District not less than once each school year to examine its condition and needs. Individual Board members interested in visiting schools should, out of courtesy, make arrangements for visitations through the principals of the various schools. Such visits shall be regarded as informal expressions of interest in school affairs and not as "inspections" or visits for supervisory or administrative purposes.

We have other concerns about actions you have taken that indicate an agenda other than students, staff well-being, and the health of our district, but we will keep this focused on the above items. You have shared many, many concerns (which is your right) about what we are doing as a district. These, we have not reacted to, but we draw the line at purposefully creating misperception about good people who do excellent work on behalf of our community. Your actions are impacting our district and our staff, including the teachers you inappropriately named, our community, the board, and our admin team.

As educators we strive to do our job with honesty, compassion, fairness, and respect for others. In no way are we perfect, but we will never stop trying. As educators we have worked our entire careers to bridge social gaps and help kids respect the differences of others. These differences are what makes our district, and our nation, great. We are genuinely confused as to why you are now targeting teachers (and their leaders). Unfortunately, this is not the first incident in which the district has been impacted by the communication method you are choosing, assume negative intent and then discuss your assumptions publicly, rather than actually talk to the schools and individuals involved.

In conclusion, we are reading this as an admin team, because we are asking you to stop targeting individual schools, individual teachers, and individual administrators. Your actions are having a negative impact on staff morale and our ability to keep students at the center of our focus. It is causing realtime harm and we are having a hard time keeping up with the damage. Your approach is also generating mistrust that is unfair and very difficult to repair. These outcomes are real and they are not sustainable.

Our hope is to vocalize our concerns, be heard, and return to our mission and purpose as a district. We also warmly extend an invitation to anyone who has questions or concerns about our schools. Let us reason together and build understanding as teammates rather than adversaries.

Sincerely,

Megan Christiansen, Superintendent

Brian Ashton - Principal, Teton Middle School, Basin Alternative HS

Megan Bybee - District Director, Systems of Support

Ann-Marie Kunz - Assistant Principal, Teton Middle School

Kristin Weston - Principal, Rendezvous Elementary School

Sam Zogg, Principal, Teton High School

Nate Murdock, Vice Principal Teton High School

Jason Stucki - Principal, Tetonia Elementary / Special Education Director

Omar Ponce - DLI/EL Director

LeaAnn Gomez - Principal, Driggs Elementary

Leslie Hoopes - Principal, Victor Elementary

