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Dr Charles Calvertdrcharlescalvert@gmail.com
BCC: Veldran, KatherineKatherineVeldran@gov.sc.gov
Date: 10/31/2014 4:44:57 PM
Subject: Re: Serious concerns and action needed by your Board, please.

Dear Chairman McLaurin,

I am saddened that you are unwilling to consider any sort of compromise to the issue that I have shared with you and the SC Public Charter School Board. I hope that you will take time to consider a few factors that perhaps have not been dealt with clearly and while I would like nothing more than to work with you on this issue, I cannot just drop the issue without resolution for my constituents.

That, I believe, may be the one of the most serious points where you and the board cannot quite grasp my pleas - my constituents. You have continuously questioned "my account" of the board meeting events: "Neither you nor I were at the Bridges board meeting that set this entire episode in motion. So for either of us to make factual statements about the nature of the dialog that went on there is pure conjecture." Quite frankly, I do not take any pleasure in bringing a problem to you and I certainly have no need to make a problem where one does not exist but I **am** charged with representing my constituents and their best interests. My attendance at a meeting is not necessary for me to represent my constituents and their detailed accounts of the meeting. As a result of a number of complaints that I received that evening and throughout the next day, I have shared their concerns, observations, opinions and feelings on this issue and Dr. Brazzel's actions at the meeting. I believe it is inflammatory to label a constituents complaint "pure conjecture" and sincerely hope that you simply did not consider this and are not consciously questioning the integrity of the citizens I serve.

I also must share that I have never received such antagonistic responses from any board or commission that I have needed to bring such a serious issue to. From your initial response (not included in this stream), where you stated that (I paraphrase) you and the board would answer my concerns when and if you wished to, through today, where I am told that you will not discuss this any further, I have not felt that you had any interest in really hearing this complaint. I am most saddened that a group that I want terribly to support is, in fact, one that I may now have to be wary of. Mr. McLaurin, no one is perfect and I certainly do not expect that of anyone but I do expect best efforts. From the very clear accounts of my constituents, I do not believe that this is what Dr. Brazzel gave to Bridges Charter School and I believe he has even admitted such. It would have been much easier if he had taken it upon himself to apologize but since that did not happen, since your board did not see it necessary to recommend that, it seems quite disingenuous of you to dress me down for not being "amicable" as I assert that your board cares more for the state public school superintendent than it does for a charter school community of parents and students, faculty and staff who were in attendance to hear negative statements made about their fledgling school from that superintendent.

The issue here is that you want to put aside what my many in my community see as a wrong done to the people I love and serve and I am not willing to simply sweep this under the proverbial rug.

I firmly believe that we are judged on actions, not good intentions, and in this case, I maintain that Dr. Brazzel's actions were not in the best interest of the state's children, parents, educators, staff or public charter school district.

I know that you said you would not revisit this but I hope that you will reconsider that decision and have Dr. Brazzel simply apologize to the Bridges Charter School Board, parents, children, faculty and staff. What may seem inconsequential to you at your board level is actually of great importance here in our small community and especially in a newly formed educational institution.

Sincerely,
Shannon Erickson

Representative Shannon S. Erickson
129 S. Hermitage Road
Beaufort, South Carolina 29902
[843-263-1867](tel:843-263-1867)

On Fri, Oct 31, 2014 at 10:03 AM, Don McLaurin <mclaurin@mindspring.com> wrote:

Dear Rep. Erickson:

I am in receipt of your correspondence of October 30. I will attempt to address your ongoing concerns.

It is clear that you do not approve of our board's response to your earlier request that Dr. Brazzel be terminated, forced to write a letter of apology or "professionally reprimanded. First, if the board saw this as something that needed to be handled as a personnel matter it would be handled in executive session as it should be. Secondly, it seems that evidenced by the record of our October meeting the board disagrees with your assessment and chose to take no action. Again, I understand that you disagree with our position but the Superintendent reports to the board and this is our decision to make. This is simply something that you and our board disagree about – it happens. I do want to make it clear that unless the board instructs me differently in the future, I do not intend to continue to litigate this issue by email. It is done and we have important business to attend to.

With regard to your concerns about the advances that went to two of our schools, the board agrees with your views regarding fiscal accountability. I can assure you that these actions are proper and that we have policies in place that govern how they are done. They are rare, but in these cases the schools would not have been able to pay their teachers without the help. They are not loans, simply advances against revenues that are forthcoming and there is no chance of the district not being repaid. You can rest assured that we take our fiduciary responsibilities seriously and are well aware of our responsibilities to the tax payers of the state. Feel free to contact Dr. Brazzel if you would like further details as to the processes as those are administrative in nature and he would be more conversant in the particulars.

Dr. Brazzel's emails certainly come under FOIA and are available to you with no need to file under FOIA. Responding to requests for records is an administrative function and as we abide by the

Carver method of board governance this is not something that I would handle. I am copying Dr. Brazzel with this correspondence and am sure that he will be in touch with you to get you what you need. I cannot commit to his ability to respond by the deadline you mention, but I am certain that he will work with you to the best of his ability

Rep. Erickson, it is my desire to have amicable relations with everyone with whom I interact and that certainly includes you. In order for that to be the case going forward, I have to respond, not as board chair but as an individual, to some of the negative characterizations that you have made about Dr. Brazzel and the members of our board. Neither you nor I were at the Bridges board meeting that set this entire episode in motion. So for either of us to make factual statements about the nature of the dialog that went on there is pure conjecture. I have worked with Dr. Brazzel, as a fellow board member and then Superintendent, for over five years now and can categorically state that negative *ad hominem* statements you have made about him do not accurately reflect the quality of the body of work that I and the board have seen from him. He is an honorable man and respected educator and does not deserve the personal attacks that you have made. Disagreeing with someone is one thing, but to make baseless statements about them is not constructive.

Your characterization of the board's actions regarding Bridges ("In turn, you and the board think so highly of our school, of the children that attend there, of the families who have chosen a public charter school, that you just discuss it, take no action and basically say that since you believe they're not operating the way you'd like them to, they deserve whatever they get? That is unprofessional and such a pitiful display of leadership that I am embarrassed for our state.") is false and insulting to a dedicated group of citizens who labor on behalf of the state's families for one reason – they are passionate about improving the lives of their fellow citizens. To be told by an elected representative that they are an embarrassment to the state is absolutely beyond the bounds of decency. Every member of the SPCSD board is a well-respected member of their chosen profession and community. They are all people of high achievement and character. I know each of them to have demonstrated excellence in leadership throughout their lives and to have contributed greatly in many different ways. In addition to that, they are my friends and friends do not sit idly by while their friends are being falsely demonized – especially by someone who does not even know them. For shame!

A modest proposal: We acknowledge that we have differing viewpoints on the original issue and, agreeing that all involved are honorable people of good will, set our differences aside. We all then spend our energies seeking ways to work together constructively and with mutual respect to further the goals of public education choice and excellence. We are, after all, working toward the same goals and we all love South Carolina.

With kind regards,

Donald L McLaurin, Chairman

South Carolina Public Charter School District

On 10/29/2014 10:19 PM, Shannon Erickson wrote:

Dear Chairman McLaurin,

Thank you for your email and I am sorry that you have not had internet service while you've been travelling. While I appreciate the information you share, I am very concerned that there was no action taken. At the very least, I would have expected that Dr. Brazzel would be asked to send a letter of apology to the Bridges Board. He publicly humiliated them without any notice of these "governance issues" being directly shared with the Board chair or members prior to his unannounced visit. I have spoken directly with the Bridges Board chair, Mr. John Payne, specifically about what communications he had received from Dr. Brazzel and was told there were NONE. Absolutely no calls, emails or letters from Dr. Brazzel to Mr. Payne who has served as chair for almost a year.

I appreciate that you do not know me, I fully understand your prejudice of someone questioning your actions and that of Dr. Brazzel, but please hear me clearly and believe me when I share with you that I have the BEST interest of our state's children and our state's education system, most specifically in this case, our state's Public Charter School system at heart. I am an educator, school administrator and businesswoman who has worked in public and private education, served on several local, state and national boards and commissions and currently serve the citizens of our state as the Representative of House District 124. I am an advocate for children, a proponent of charter schools, a champion of your cause, your budget allocation from the General Assembly, and the very basis of your existence, public school choice. That said, I believe that the Public Charter School District must operate on a higher standard in order to prove themselves and stay a viable entity that is supported by the General Assembly. I do not believe that Dr. Brazzel is accomplishing that.

I do not make these charges lightly or without reason. I have not experienced any action by Dr. Brazel that showed me quality leadership or regard for the citizens whose hard-earned tax dollars pay his salary. When I attempted to assist Bridges early in last year's school calendar, I was addressed with little to no respect by an IT staffer in an email after Bridges was not able to get assistance with the printing of their first report cards. Dr. Brazzel condoned that and basically told me that I nor Bridges should count on the district for assistance such as that because they just didn't get paid enough to do that. When the Bridges head of school resigned, Dr. Brazzel did not visit the school to take stock of the situation or see if he could offer any support, he just unilaterally blamed the Board, without even seeing for his own eyes what was actually going on. Now, he makes no attempt to speak with the current Bridges Board chair to see if the complaints he says he is getting are warranted but decides it is a good idea to show up at a public board meeting, the night before board election ballots are mailed out, and berate the Board. You say he admits "that it was not his finest work" - how magnanimous of him. In turn, you and the board think so highly of our school, of the children that attend there, of the families who have chosen a public charter school, that you just discuss it, take no action and basically say that since you believe they're not operating the way you'd like them to, they deserve whatever they get? That is unprofessional and such a pitiful display of leadership that I am embarrassed for our state.

I do appreciate your invitation to attend one of your board meetings and I will try to make time on my calendar for that. I was especially intrigued to learn that the board voted to give an advance of funds to one of the charter schools. As a business person and fiscally conservative member of the General Assembly, I have some questions and concerns about this action. Fiscal matters are very sensitive and should be transparently and legally administered. Does the Charter School law cover this type of fund distribution? Have you been advised by counsel on how these funds should be accounted for, legal agreements drawn up in case there is any default or problem, etc.? Are fund advances a regular occurrence? How many advances of funds have you approved in say the past two years? What action is required of the district and school in the event that the school does not perform / meet the qualifications to receive these funds to "balance" their account? Are these advances available to all of our public charter schools as part of the services/support provided by the district? Does the district charge any fees or interest on this "borrowed" money? What criteria are used to make a determination of whether or not the school is eligible for an advance? Please do not misunderstand my questions/concerns as negative, I believe that in most instances we should be inclined to help our schools succeed but I simply need to understand the processes and be assured that there are proper accounting requirements/functions and legal policies in place to protect the state from loss of funds, the Public Charter School District from fund shortages and for safe and appropriate use of taxpayer funds.

In closing, thanks again for your email and your invitation to attend a meeting. I have three requests of you at this point. I would like the Board to consider having Dr. Brazzel issue a written apology to the Bridges Board for his unprofessional behavior at their board meeting. I believe that this is the least he can do. I would like answers to the questions regarding the fund advance practices. I would also request all email, electronic and written correspondence between Dr. Brazzel and Bridges Charter School administration, staff, parents and board members from June 2014 to today, Wednesday, October 29, 2014. These can be shared with me in hard copy (delivered to my statehouse address: Rep. Shannon Erickson, 320-C Blatt Building, Columbia SC 29211) or electronically via this email address (repshannonerickson@gmail.com) by Monday, December 1, 2014, please.

Sincerely,
Shannon Erickson

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On Wed, Oct 29, 2014 at 5:43 PM, Don McLaurin <mclaurin@mindspring.com> wrote:

Dear Rep. Erickson,

This is to follow up again to your recent email. I apologize for the delay in responding, but I have been traveling almost constantly since our last board meeting on October 9.

The events at the Bridges Preparatory School board meeting that prompted your correspondence were fully discussed at the above mentioned meeting. Fortunately Dr. Calvert was there and was able to voice the concerns that he and others had regarding the meeting. Dr. Brazzel explained why he had attended the meeting and reiterated concerns that the staff has had regarding the governance of Bridges. He also stated that in hindsight he would have handled things differently even though he continues to be frustrated by the ongoing problems that we at the district have had with governance at the school.

All-in-all I think we had a healthy discussion which was held in open session, as it should have been. (As an aside, we would enjoy your attending one of our board meetings. We have been told by many knowledgeable people that they are a model of how boards in South Carolina should operate.) After hearing both Dr. Brazzel and Dr. Calvert there were no motions from the board so no action was taken.

There are three things that I can state that are factual. A) The SCPCSD Board has great confidence in and respect for the leadership that Dr. Brazzel has provided the district, and it has made great strides under his guidance. B) Dr. Brazzel himself has stated that the events in question did not represent his best work. C) There are serious governance problems at Bridges that our staff has worked hard for two years to help correct and which have caused much frustration. Most of those concerns revolve around a lack of understanding of the role of a board resulting in micromanagement by board members.

The District staff will continue to work with Bridges to help it be all that it can be. The sole interest of the District is to assist our school in reaching the goals set out in their charters. There is much at Bridges to be proud of and we are determined to make all of our schools places which deliver excellence to the students of South Carolina. I am certain that is something that we all support.

If you would like to discuss this further, I would be happy to have a conversation either by phone or in person.

With kind regards,
Don McLaurin

On 10/6/2014 8:32 PM, Shannon Erickson wrote:

Dear SC Public Charter School Board Members McLaurin, Staley, Bounds, Epps, and Bagley:

I am absolutely beside myself as I write this email regarding SC Public Charter School District Superintendent, Dr. Wayne Brazell. As a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives, an educator and a parent, none of what I am about to relay is acceptable.

I have have received numerous reports that Dr. Brazell attended a Bridges Preparatory Charter School Board meeting last week, specifically, Thursday, October 2, 2014. That alone is noteworthy since he has, to my knowledge, never attended one prior to this and just recently has actually visited the school, which I do not believe he has done - even when the original head of school left and Bridges almost had anarchy ensue with one of the original board members, but I digress.

He attended the public board meeting, asked to recognized, then berated the board for micromanaging, holding too many meetings, having breakfast with the head of school and some other board members, etc. He chastised the board chair and members in front of the public which included business partners, staff, parents and students. Additionally, he publicly informed the chair that he would be issuing a letter of concern on these perceived shortcomings. He even publicly questioned some of the decisions the board was making during their meeting, like the use of a consultant to do a needs assessment for the school so that decisions can be made for future growth, expenditures, etc. with appropriate data.

I have concerns, huge concerns, that NONE of this was communicated to the board by Dr. Brazell before that evening's meeting. There was no phone call, no email, no letter of concern, NOTHING - according to the current board chair and former board chair whom I questioned about this situation after I was alerted to this unacceptable behavior by a SC educational professional.

Further, the public inquisition came following complaints from two parents from the school (the school has approximately 200 parents), a fact that Dr. Brazell revealed himself when he was asked by the former board chair following the meeting what the impetus was for this public dressing down. Dr. Brazell told him that he received phone calls from two parents almost every day complaining about the Board. He said that the Bridges Board met more than any other charter school in the state and he was tired of the complaints. When the Board chair asked who the parents were, explaining that he'd like to see if they could work out things with them personally, Dr. Brazell said he would not disclose that. The former Board chair asked if that information was available through an FOIA and Dr. Brazell said it was "but that it might backfire on you". I, nor the board member, know quite how to take that statement but it feels strongly like a threat of some sort.

There are so many points that anger me about this "visit" that I have trouble deciding which is most egregious. First, I would say that Dr. Brazell's behavior is reprehensible and I believe he is not fit for this position since his job should be to shore up our state charter school system, not tear it down by chastising VOLUNTEERS. He should have been professional enough to share his concerns with the Board and Board chair directly, in writing, first and to offer to share the parent concerns with them directly to get things worked out. He could have actually offered to come meet with both groups and assist with the issue (perhaps like I did when his office had no interest in the school's success during the aforementioned upheaval its first year). Instead, he blindsided them in public, taking only one perspective against the group tasked to lead the schools mission. He never shared his concerns, never asked for the Board's side of the story, never bothered to take any proper professional action or to care that he was chastising elected school leaders in front of their peers but most importantly, their children.

Secondly, Dr. Brazell's unwillingness to share who made the complaints is a major obstacle. If he is not prepared to be open and honest with the citizens of our state, specifically this Board in this instance, about information that is PUBLIC, I would suggest that he is guilty of a crime. SC law is very clear about transparency and as a state employee, he cannot withhold information as he chooses and to do so puts his office, our state charter school office, at risk.

Thirdly, what a sad leadership model he is for our citizens and our children and no wonder we have state charter schools not succeeding if this is his management style. He has never been to a Bridges Charter School Board meeting and the time he does choose to come is not to congratulate one of his newer schools on starting their second year off with a newly purchased building or 100% retention of its teachers, or to see how wonderful the classroom teachers are doing, how excited the children are while they are learning or even to share his sympathies and console the children, parents and staff who are grieving from the tragic loss of one of the school's most beloved science teachers to a sudden heart-attack last Wednesday morning. He came without any notice to the Board chair or me, the State Representative of this area (who he has heard from in regard to this school's success), to denounce the hard work this Board has been doing and to threaten the Board with administrative action. What kind of management degree does Dr. Brazell have to believe that this was a prudent course of action?

I have had concerns about Dr. Brazell's leadership of this important office based on earlier conversations with him, actions he has taken, or not taken, and the lack of support I have witnessed for our Beaufort area state charter schools. His visit to Bridges last week confirmed my fears and was completely unacceptable. I simply

cannot, will not, stand by and allow this type of behavior when dealing with our state's valuable resources, its children, its involved parents, its precious educators and our fledgling state charter school district.

Due to the seriousness of his actions, I would respectfully request that Dr. Brazell either be asked to resign or terminated. If your Board does not agree with the seriousness of these actions, I would, at the very least, require Dr. Brazell to write a public letter of apology to the Bridges Preparatory School Board, faculty, staff, students and parents for his unprofessional behavior and unsubstantiated accusations and that he be professionally reprimanded by you for his actions at last Thursday's Board meeting. The letter of apology should be received by the Board no later than Monday, October 13, 2014. I would also like to see a letter of caution issued to him regarding legal "Freedom of Information Act" policy so that our state is not liable for any further untoward action he may take in that regard.

Additionally, this public ambush was very uniquely timed to occur the night before ballots for the next Board election were mailed to the families who will be voting on the board candidates. These ballots hit mailboxes of parents less than 24 hours after Dr. Brazell publicly, without proper investigation and without regard for the reputation of the Board members, pronounced them unfit. It is not a stretch of the imagination to believe that Dr. Brazell and the two parents who allegedly complained may have planned this event to paint the Board in an unfavorable light. I request your Board do a full investigation of Dr. Brazell's visit, the complaints he has received, communications to and from Bridges Charter School Board, staff & parents, and of possible premeditation and collusion between Dr. Brazell and others regarding the election as well as regular functioning of the school. Please submit it to me and the Bridges Preparatory Charter School Board by Monday, November 3, 2014. It is imperative that we know the true actions of all so that Bridges may move forward appropriately and positively.

I look forward to hearing from you as to what action will be taken and thank you for your time and attention to this time-sensitive and serious situation.

Sincerely,
Shannon Erickson

Representative Shannon S. Erickson
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