

Governor Haley,

I am asking that you very carefully read this letter that was sent to Mr. David McDonald at Northwest Middle School in Travelers Rest concerning one of the best teachers you will ever have working for you. This is a serious matter to the community of Travelers Rest, which is under your watch and care. A copy has also been sent to Mr. Royster and Mick Zais. Thank you for your consideration.

Doe, John  
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Mr. McDonald,

I am writing to you concerning the termination of Mr. Shawn Blakely's job at Northwest Middle School, or as it may be stated that his contract is not being renewed. I need to begin by saying that my family has gone above and beyond to support you in your first year at Northwest Middle. This school has been in need of many changes over the past several years. The community as a whole was excited to have you come and improve our school for all of our children, but as with any change comes anxiety and reluctance. During the year, several of us have supported you and your decisions and have made it known to the community. We have seen many phenomenal improvements and new opportunities. There have been many positive changes and we are so appreciative of your hard work and dedication to our children, our school, and our community. We thank you. However, since finding out that Mr. Blakely will not be allowed back to teach at Northwest next year, the community is heartbroken and also outraged. This includes parents and students.

Mr. Blakely is one of the most outstanding and upstanding teachers our children have ever had. My child has stated that Mr. Blakely is the BEST teacher she has ever had. I agree 100%. She has a love for math that she never had before being a student in his class. She wants to study and do her homework like never before. Coming from this child, it is the best compliment anyone could receive. I have seen him give lunch money to kids who did not have money to eat on numerous occasions. I have seen him buy drinks (soft drinks) being sold at school dances and functions for kids who have no money and are thirsty. He has asked me to bring diet drinks to events when I am volunteering, specifically for a child who was a diabetic and he knew

that child did not have extra money. He thinks about details like this because he cares more than you will ever know. He comes to school sporting events that he is not coaching, to support his students. He gives them encouragement and positive feedback like I have never seen. There are kids at this school that would not come to school, or don't care if they did, were it not for Mr. Blakely. They do not want to disappoint him and want to make him proud. Parents discuss these things. He has such a high moral character. He sets such an example for our kids in and out of the classroom, on and off the basketball court. I cannot stress this enough.

We as parents know that the "politically correct" reason on paper for Mr. Blakely's contract not being renewed next year is that he did not pass his ADEPT and we also know that he is not even being given a second chance. We know about the "notebooks" that the teachers have to keep and what is supposed to be in them. We know he supposedly did not have enough information in his "notebook" and we know he was not given a chance to correct it. We as parents do our research. We also know that Mr. Blakely was marked against for making a mathematical mistake in class which he corrected. We know much of this information from various reliable sources in the community. I make mistakes. You make mistakes. We all do. It is a problem if we do not correct them and learn from them. NO ONE is perfect. It is unbelievable that a teacher's job is on the line because he is teaching, mentoring, protecting, and caring for his students and trying to make learning interesting. It is also absolutely ridiculous that his students' test scores and grades and success are not a major part this decision! Apparently my child's academic success doesn't really matter. That is obvious.



We know that Mr. Blakely will stand up for our children to do what's right and protect them and make them better human beings. I want a teacher who is not afraid to speak up for my children. He knows what's best for his classroom and students. He is with our kids every day. He has rarely missed a day of work. He tutors so many children in our community to help them be as successful as they can be. Parents seek him out first as a tutor. It is his passion to teach our children. So many teachers do not have that passion and dedication. I want a teacher who will fight for my kids! It is comforting to know that he will take care of my children when I cannot be there. I also know where my child stands in his class, as far as behavior and grades and so much more. He talks to me when I see him, e-mails, and calls if there are any concerns, praises, and just wants to share something funny that my child did that day. It is very nice to hear all of those things. I NEVER worry when my child is in his class.

Travelers Rest is a VERY close community. People grow up here. We go to college. We move back to work and live here. We raise our families here. This goes on generation after generation. You do not see this closeness in most communities. I know that you are new to this area. Our community is welcoming, but when our children are hurt or their well-being is not a priority, you will hear from us. We are doctors, lawyers, judges, nurses, teachers, business owners, and so much more. We are people who work hard. We also know that Travelers Rest schools have NEVER received the support, finances, or respect that other schools in the district have received in the past several decades. Our families have seen it for generations. Even people who live in other parts of Greenville will tell you the same. Look at Northwest compared to all of the other middle schools just in our region. It is

obvious to those of us who live here and those who visit our school for events and activities. Parents from other schools ask why we did not get a new school when the rest of Greenville County did. It is very unsettling to see that we pay our taxes for them to be spent to better the rest of the county. These are the types of things that lead people to believe that we are ignorant, uneducated, and will not stand up for what is right. You are all sadly mistaken. You just have no idea.

It is so disappointing and heartbreaking to see that a teacher's job relies mostly on the ADEPT and these "notebooks" instead of their students' scores, grades, and performance. A student's success is a true reflection of a teacher's performance. My child has become extremely successful in math because of Mr. Blakely and his teaching skills and methods. He makes it interesting and makes them WANT to learn.

I will not be including my name to this letter. It has been proven by the loss of Mr. Blakely's job that it only hurts our children to stand up for them and try to protect them. I am very aware of the politics of the school district and know that my children would suffer for my speaking out on their behalf. I am very educated on the school system as I have family members in your same position.

You are making a mistake that could only hurt your status in the community that you have worked so hard to attain. We know that this decision can be overturned. The people in this community have been very verbal about their feelings on the loss of one of the best teachers you will ever have. I am afraid to say that the trust and support you have worked so hard to earn this year is disappearing, and may never be able to be earned back.

A copy of this letter has been sent to Mr. Burke Royster,  
Superintendent of Greenville County Schools, Mr. Mick Zais, State  
Superintendent of Education for S.C., and Governor Nikki Haley.

Signed,

A very disheartened and concerned parent