

From: | _____
Subject: Re: Fw: Response to your email and questions
Date: September 18, 2017 at 1:36:53 PM CDT
To: | _____ >
Cc: Ray Lechner < _____ >

Hi, I
We met on the soccer fields this weekend, but I also need to make a written response to your email. As we discussed, I look forward to sitting down with you in person to discuss this issue.

Take care,
Mark

On Fri, Sep 15, 2017 at 7:49 AM _____ > wrote:
Hi Mark,

Per Ray's email to me below, I would like to find out how to correct the May 22, 2017, meeting minutes so they accurately reflect my comments made at that May 22 meeting. Please let me know. I would appreciate that information in advance of the September 25th board meeting.

Also, I could not find anything on the website related to Ray's statement to me at the last board meeting about needing to submit written communication a week in advance of an upcoming board meeting in order for that communication to be included in the board packet. Is there anything you could point me to for clarification on this? I am just trying to understand the process.

Thank you,

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: Ray Lechner < _____ >
To: _____ >
Sent: Friday, September 8, 2017 4:51 PM
Subject: Re: Response to your email and questions

Dear | _____ ,

I want to respond to your August 24th email. Thank you for your patience, as school opened this week and our energies were focused on smooth transitions. First, the Board will discuss amending the May 22, 2017 Board of Education meeting minutes at its September 25th meeting. Feel free to discuss this with Board President, Mark Steen.

I will do my best to address your other concerns.

Within the 2015-16 school year, we are aware of at least five significant student incidents involving racial and/or religious conflicts. These five incidents easily touched over 100 other students. Also, these 5 incidents are ones that were reported; we know that not every incident is reported to school officials. In all situations of this nature, District 39 believes that we need to respond, reflect and then be proactive. Last year was one of reflection. The proactive nature of D39 is very long standing; we are proud to be seen as educational leaders on numerous fronts.

And in keeping with our proactive tradition, on August 28th, the Board approved District 39's new Statement of Inclusion. This statement enhances the District's mission to nurture, guide, and challenge students to become creative thinkers, collaborators, and socially responsible, compassionate, and productive citizens of a global society. The Statement of Inclusion clearly communicates our District philosophy of embracing and honoring differences. This statement encompasses political perspectives. The school board and administration strive to encourage empathy for all members of our school community. This includes staff, students, and parents.

“By respecting each person's unique identity, perspective, and learning style, we create a stronger community. We honor differences including races and cultures, genders and sexual orientations, abilities and aspirations, identities and affiliations, socioeconomic status and worldviews. Embracing diversity prepares our students to thrive in an increasingly complex global community.”

While you do not seem to disagree with our adding a statement of inclusion, I want to make a couple of points.

First, I need to reiterate the district's long tradition of 1) helping students to become engaged and successful members of a global community, and 2) providing faculty and staff with the tools and training needed to help students excel academically and personally in our ever expanding world. What we provide our students and faculty is very much in keeping with the district's history of academic excellence.

District 39 supports a variety of teacher professional development opportunities. Teachers voluntarily attended the “Beyond Diversity” event held at New Trier High School. The event was geared toward participants' self-reflection and focused on helping adults acknowledge and confront their own personal internal biases so they can approach conversations with students and/or facilitate student-initiated conversations in an unbiased manner.

This type of training is an example of professional development that all Illinois school districts are now required to provide. As of July 1, 2017, a new Illinois mandate¹ states that all public school systems must provide staff working with students inservice training on “how to develop cultural competency, including understanding and reducing implicit racial bias, including affective, behavioral, and cognitive bias.” Therefore, in this respect, District 39 acted proactively.

What we are doing is being responsible educators, and taking the lead on efforts, instead of playing catch up. This is about providing meaningful leadership, and creating a school environment in which bias incidents are not tolerated or dismissed. Our aim is to help school personnel develop intervention skills--it's more than simply telling people to be kind or empathetic.

Next, when using the CRC survey to gauge parent or student perception on inclusiveness, I believe you cannot include those who marked “neutral” as either agree or disagree. Based on this, 72% of students report feeling included and 81% of parents report that their child feels included. Many would see this result as “significant,” as we want a much higher number of students reporting a sense of inclusion. This CRC finding confirms the reason the administration and Board support the School Climate initiative outlined in District 39’s Strategic Plan.

Regarding your request to see actual responses from the survey, these are not public documents; we have been advised by our legal counsel not to release this information. (There is confidential information that would identify individual students)

District 39 did not and has not worked directly with the SEED organization or used any of their materials; other presenters have not used SEED materials with our staff. You are forming connections that are simply not there.

Pat Savage Williams is a New Trier High School teacher/township colleague who was invited to speak to staff and as a member of a panel of speakers for the parent night. These speakers were invited as members of the community to represent different perspectives and viewpoints, exactly what we want to embrace. The other panelists invited to join Pat were Rabbi Hillel Gamoran, Reverend Dr. Mark Teasdale, Biz Lindsay-Ryan, and Corrie Wallace. As a group, they represented different “races and cultures, genders and sexual orientation, abilities and aspirations, identities and affiliations, socioeconomic status and worldviews.” Again, differences to be honored based on our Statement of Inclusion.

While the District doesn’t have books to loan, the titles that you inquired about are readily available from other sources. They include:

Whistling Vivaldi - Stereotyping and how it affects what we do

The Power of Resilience - How to foster resilience in ourselves and our students

Empathy, Why it Matters and How to Get It - Why empathy is important

The Homework Myth - The purpose of homework

The Other Wes Moore - Fostering high expectations for all students

Teaching Tolerance (tolerance.org) is a highly regarded organization that has been, “celebrating diversity and reducing prejudice among young people,” since 1991. They provide many varied resources for teachers to learn from and use with respect to approaching difficult conversations with students, reflecting on internal biases, and helping students to feel included in our school community. Resources are developed by educators and are a part of a widely used bank of materials available to all educators across the country. Teaching Tolerance is widely respected, and has partnered in the past with organizations in our community, such as the Illinois Holocaust Museum, to offer professional development for educators, aimed at giving teachers strategies to help with difficult conversations, and to build an inclusive community in the classroom. These are just some of many resources made available to teachers throughout the school year. However, we certainly encourage many different resources and opportunities to support the development of our teachers.

In fact, State Superintendent, Tony Smith, sent the following email message to all school districts, which endorses Teaching Tolerance on August 15, 2017:

“All Illinois students, families, and staff have the right to both feel and be safe in every school every day. There is no room for racism, hate, or violence in our schools. In light of the tragic events that occurred this past weekend, I want to remind you of the anti-bias and anti-hate resources available on our website. The National Network of State Teachers of the Year has a diverse list of books broken down by grade level, and organizations such as **Teaching Tolerance** and Facing History and Ourselves offer lesson plans, professional development, and other educator resources to help combat bias and build safe and inclusive classrooms, where all members of the school community feel supported as they explore new ideas and question their beliefs.”

District 39 currently uses Second Step materials with students to support social-emotional growth. A review of these materials is a part of our Strategic Plan this year and will be shared through reports to the Board of Education.

As a District, It is our responsibility to understand that situations and conversations often happen spontaneously in our schools. We need to make sure, through training, that our staff is prepared to respond as those moments arise. At times, teachers may find themselves having to help students manage these conversations -- making certain that their own personal perspectives and biases are in check. This is required in order to keep the conversations between students supportive and inclusive.

Finally, I understand your views. We agree that diversity, inclusion and empathy are very important to address. We will continue to move forward honoring all of the diversity that our student and parent community represents.

Thank you,

Ray

¹CULTURAL COMPETANCY AND RACIAL BIAS: 105 ILCS 5/10-20.60

(all personnel at least once):

Effective July 1, 2017, in-service training required for school personnel to include training

to develop cultural competency, including understanding and reducing implicit racial bias, including affective, behavioral, and cognitive bias.

From:
Subject: Response to your email and questions
Date: August 24, 2017 at 9:13:54 PM CDT
To: Ray Lechner <[_____](#)>
Cc:
<[pa](#)>
<[ke](#)>
<[ce](#)>
Reply-To: <[_____](#)>

Hi Ray,

Thank you for your email in response to my questions from the May 22 Board of Education meeting and for Katie's reply. I have a few follow up responses and questions/requests:

1.) Please correct the [board minutes](#) from the May 22, 2017, D39 Board of Education meeting to accurately represent my comments during that meeting. The full text of my comments are below for your convenience. The May board minutes state " She [_____] expressed concern about teaching empathy and diversity at school" and this is not accurate. What I did say was "Thank you for attempting to address this important topic of school climate, which is important to all of us." and "A healthy school climate is a worthy goal and learning empathy, kindness and compassion is something our kids should do both in school and of course at home." My concern was not about teaching empathy/diversity but how it was being taught and the **choice of materials and outside speakers** to support teaching empathy, school climate, diversity, inclusion, kindness and all the other concepts under the umbrella of the D39 equity team initiative.

I hope more care in the future will be taken to accurately record the statements of community members who invest time in making them.

2.) I have read the CRC School Climate Report with interest and have a few questions:

- How is the school board and administration addressing the results, particularly the findings that teachers, students and parents report conservative kids are feeling harassed?
- Could you please release specific comments from the survey about that? I know this information was not sought outright by the survey, but this underscores the importance of getting to the bottom of why this is happening.

3.) It has come to my attention that six D39 teachers participated in a development program at New Trier called "Beyond Diversity", which is a program of Glenn Singleton's Pacific Educational Group, another organization that offers a highly controversial, extreme left-wing view of race in the context of education. If you google "PEG", one of the top articles on their site is "What is Wrong with White Teachers?" PEG was hired to consult with a St. Paul MN high school with [devastating effect](#) for the district and which has even resulted in [lawsuits](#). Why was this option made available and who authorized it?

4.) To my question I asked at the May board meeting "Why choose materials [and individuals] from these divisive, one-sided organizations [i.e. SEED and SPLC's Teaching Tolerance] to train the teachers on teaching kids empathy, kindness and compassion?", I would appreciate a direct answer. Your response contained the "what and who" was selected but not the "why".

I understand you draw a distinction between training and development, but regardless of the terms used my questions remain: Why these organizations? Why these materials? Who is selecting them? What is the process for vetting and selecting?

Here are two articles that have come out about SPLC since I made my statements (see these links to [Wall Street Journal](#) and [Politico](#) articles) that give me even greater pause about this organization which produces "Teaching Tolerance" materials you have utilized.

I would expect that our school, which is funded by taxpayers of all political stripes, would take great pains to select organizations and materials that are balanced in terms of their political views. SEED, PEG and SPLC are not mainstream organizations, but rather feature a one-sided, progressive left-wing views on many issues, including those of race and identity politics. I again question the use of these organizations' speakers and materials for teaching this most important topic of empathy and kindness to our children and would appreciate an answer to my "why these organizations" question.

I will again note that Pat Savage-Williams, whom you invited to speak with our teachers during a professional development day and at a parent information night, is an outspoken proponent of The National SEED Project and their controversial views on power, privilege and oppression. At the December 6, 2016, D39 "empathy" night for parents, Ms. Savage-Williams acknowledged how "radical" her work is perceived in our community and how she will "push" it here. One method in which SEED works is by "engag[ing] allies from dominant groups in listening, learning, and taking thoughtful strategic action in order to help break down patterns of oppression." These are distinct, extreme left-wing views not shared by the mainstream and quite frankly echo Marxism. This has no place in our schools.

6.) It is problematic that there are no materials or outlines for parents to review about these new "conversations" around race/religion/gender/empathy that your staff will be having with our kids. Transparency is crucial for trust in our educational partnership regarding our children, and there is none without supporting materials to review.

From the June board meeting it sounds as though the school will be conducting a review of materials currently used (i.e. Second Step). It is because these social emotional topics extend far beyond the "three R's" that extra vigilance with respect to transparency and communication with parents is needed in terms of how you select and implement supporting materials. How will you provide this transparency? Several board members stressed the importance of communication in their candidacies. I hope they deliver.

7.) And while I appreciate your feeling we need an inclusion/diversity statement and that other school districts are doing it, I would like to point out that the CRC school climate report presented that [94% of students](#) either had no opinion about feeling included or felt included. (Question 11)

8.) I still have seen no statistics or numbers about bullying incidents that you quoted as necessitating the equity effort. You mentioned at the D39 parent night there were "increased incidences" but have not disclosed any information in this regard. I do not seek specific names of course but numbers would be helpful and appropriate to disclose.

9.) Finally, I would like to know if the school can provide access to copies of the books you referenced in Katie's email which was part of your email to me.

I have devoted my life to making sure my children would do unto others as they'd have others do unto them. I hope the school teaches something consistent with this timeless truth and truly teaches kids how to be kind to others. The best way to do this is for teachers to model it in the classroom.

Diversity, inclusion and empathy is too important a subject to not get it right. In light of the school climate survey, I think the D39 administration, school board and teachers owe it to our kids to do a better job of choosing materials from organizations that truly teach kindness and not K-8 versions of left-wing identity politics that groups like SPLC, PEG and SEED peddle. These are not groups who are truly welcoming to all but rather preach a distinct, left-wing worldview. They have no place in our schools.

Many thanks,

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Text from Statement by _____ at May 22 D39 School Board meeting:

"A healthy school climate is a worthy goal and learning empathy, kindness and compassion is something our kids should do both in school and of course at home. I suppose I am little surprised that Second Step didn't already do this. In our home, empathy, kindness and compassion are learned within the context of loving your neighbor as yourself.

But what concerns me about the equity team initiative -- whose goal I assume is to improve school climate and teach kids empathy, kindness and compassion -- is that the school used resources for teacher training from polarizing organizations like Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance group and the National SEED Project. With SPLC, which produces Teaching Tolerance materials, if you disagree with their narrow worldview, you are labeled a "hater" or "hate group." They had listed Dr. Ben Carson, a world renowned neurosurgeon, former presidential candidate and current HUD Secretary, on their hate list and ended up removing him and apologizing. In recent years SPLC has become politicized now operates less as a non-profit defending against hate and more as a fundraising organization for spreading a specific ideology. SPLC also has a dubious record when it comes to monies raised versus what they pay out to victims of the hate crimes they represent.

As for SEED, according to its website, "SEED helps us [i.e. training participants] to connect our lives to one another and to society at large by acknowledging systems of oppression, power, and privilege." What do systems of oppression, power, and privilege look like in a school filled with classrooms of youngsters aged 5 - 12? SEED seems to think that it is necessary for some groups to check inherent attributes - often ones that people have no control over like race and gender - before they can truly relate to others, which is ridiculous. My 2 year old mixed race niece - whose mother, my sister, is white, and father, my brother in law, is black doesn't need me and her uncles and cousins and grandmother and grandfather to check our white privilege. She needs us to love her, teach her about the golden rule and encourage her to be anything she wants to be in life.

You have said that the two SEED trainers who have come to the school are not coming as SEED trainers, but this is confusing since at a parent information night SEED was mentioned several times and a SEED facilitator, Ms. Savage Williams, said of her SEED equity work:

"I believe as important as it is, it's more important to do this work in Wilmette and Winnetka because this work on race, when I talk about it here I know it's radical and it's not done very often and it's extremely important because it's not intuitive, it's not easy and and I will do it and I will push it."

I don't see how this squares with a school initiative where we are hoping to establish a climate of kindness and empathy.

So a few questions:

Why choose materials and individuals from these divisive, one-sided organizations to train the teachers on teaching kids empathy, kindness and compassion?

In the absence of a curriculum could you provide copies of training materials used to train teachers so parents can know what language is being used to talk with our kids about empathy, kindness and compassion? I assume our wonderful teachers are doing so in a professional manner but when I learned materials from Teaching Tolerance and SEED are being used it concerned me.

Also, please define the terms "equity, inclusivity, and diversity" as it relates to our school climate, the equity team initiative and teaching our kids about empathy, kindness and compassion. These are words I hear and I think mean different things when you are talking in different contexts. Clear communication is so very important and helpful.

Thank you for attempting to address this important topic of school climate, which is important to all of us. But please turn to less divisive, polarizing organizations for training resources.

Thank you for your service and I look forward to hearing from you."

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