

From: "Elliott Goodrich" <egoodrich@mlsd161.org>
Sent: 8/2/2021 10:06:15 PM
To: "Vickey Melcher" <vmelcher@mlsd161.org>, "Susan Freeman" <sfreeman@mlsd161.org>, shintz@mlsd161.org, adegooyer@mlsd161.org
Cc:
Bcc:
Subject: Special Meeting

Good Evening Everyone,

I wanted to send you this email to clarify a few things before the meeting tomorrow. I will start with the facts of how this situation began.

A few weeks ago I was having a conversation with one of our employees about how things have been going in the district. They mentioned many things both good and bad. One thing that they mentioned in passing was that many of our employees had received a stipend. I had not heard anything about the stipend. I asked them if Josh had received it, which they confirmed that he had. I was shocked by this because I had never heard of Josh taking a stipend and doing so would be in violation of the intent of the contract we have with him. I don't know for sure what is and isn't allowed by law, but I do know that when we agreed on the contract there was a solid understanding that his contracted pay would be the entirety of his pay because we were committed to transparency and wanted the community to be able to tell exactly how much he was paid. The employee that told me this did not intend to "blow the whistle" on Josh. They were adamant that they did not want to be exposed because they were very concerned about losing their job or being punished if their identity was revealed. Once again, they were not intending to reveal wrongdoing, but none the less I felt I needed to learn more.

I proceeded to ask additional employees if they had any concerns about things going on in our district. I did not give them any hints about what concerns I might be interested in. Many other concerns were raised (as they usually are) but none were of a financial nature. I then asked Stephanie for details about what stipends Josh had been paid. She provided those details. I made Vickey aware of what was provided and she confirmed that she was unaware of and had not approved of any stipends for Josh. I asked Josh to explain his justification for paying himself the stipends without board approval or notification. He did so and you have all been provided that explanation. At this point Vickey and I did not see eye to eye on how to proceed.

I found this situation to be very problematic and because I could not seek advice from Josh, whom I would normally turn to, I sought advice from our State Auditor and our ESD Superintendent. The State Auditor said it could be problematic but had no further advice other than if we suspected criminal activity we should report it to our local Prosecutor's office. Michelle Price was more helpful. I asked her what we should do if we were concerned about Josh paying himself stipends and are there other areas we should be concerned about. She said that there are three main ways a Superintendent could pay herself.

1. Stipends
2. District Credit Card
3. Superintendent Purchase Orders

She advised that if there were concerns about one then we should look into the others.

Based on this advice I then sent an email to Stephanie and Sylvia asked for detailed information about Josh's credit card and PO activity. This information was denied to me by Mr. Stevens at the request of Vickey and Susan (that is based on the email I received.) I was very disappointed by this. I have never seen a board member denied information like this before.

Because I was denied this information, I do not know for sure if there are any issues with Josh's credit card or PO purchases, but I believe that we have a fiduciary responsibility to look into all of those areas. Hopefully we will not find any additional issues and can decide how to move forward.

Along the way there have been many people that has given me bits of information that have fueled my concerns. I have not included those or shared them because I do not have hard evidence to corroborate them, and many others are not directly related to the issues of stipends, credit card purchases, or PO purchases. The only thing that I have seen directly is the breakdown of the stipends that Josh paid himself.

There are a few things you should keep in mind as we move forward

- I have no personal agenda against Josh. I like Josh and have no interest in seeing his career harmed. I have had concerns about his performance as Superintendent but I have always been upfront with him and you about those things. None of my previous concerns rose to the level of concern that would justify the actions we now must contemplate.
- I do not want to be involved directly in any investigation moving forward beyond reviewing any findings of the investigation and working on how to move forward. I hope that we can find a professional, that is not an interested party, to investigate this matter and provide us with the facts, including what happened and when.

- I believe (this was confirmed by both Barb and Michelle Price) that as a District we would put any employee that is faced with these serious allegations on immediate paid administrative leave to allow for a fair and comprehensive investigation. I think we should do the same in this instance and withhold judgement until the investigation is complete.
- I am aware that we have policies that call for written complaints. If that is required then please consider this my formal written complaint. It has been less than 15 days since I became aware of these issues.
- I am also aware that we have a whistleblower policy. I have mentioned this to a number of people that have shared information with me. None of them believe that it would actually protect them from retaliation if their identity was made known. I do not agree with this, but I respect our employees enough to not force them to do something they believe will ruin their career. I will also point out that this was not brought to my attention intentionally, but was part of a larger general conversation with one person that led me to ask others from additional details.

At the end of the day I hope that we can find a way to move forward that will be fair and equitable to Josh and at the same time allow us to fulfill our oversight responsibilities and obligations.

Sincerely,

Elliott Goodrich