

Subject: Re: Note

From: Mark Cohen <cohenm@mokena159.org>

Date: 2/23/2024, 10:01 AM

To: Julie Oost <oostj@mokena159.org>

CC: Eric Bush <bushe@mokena159.org>

Julie,

Do you want to chat next Wednesday after the interviews for Cathy's position? Thanks.

Mark

On Thu, Feb 22, 2024 at 5:31 PM Julie Oost <oostj@mokena159.org> wrote:

Good afternoon, Gentlemen. I know it hasn't been 24 hours since our board meeting, but I am not too proud to admit that the meeting has stayed in my mind, as have past meetings. I know we each have our own styles and positions, but I hope we can agree that we (as a whole team) need to improve our communication and how we treat each other. I am writing to ask that you please help our team of 8 to improve. Without us making an effort this is never going to happen.

It was disheartening to see clear coordination amongst some of the BOE and Superintendent ahead of yesterday's meeting, but I was not afforded any insight into what was going on.

There are many things that took place that troubled me. When Kelli asked why didn't Eric call or otherwise respond to her emails (which I understand was many), everyone jumped in to say that would be doing board work outside of a meeting. That puzzles me. Why would it be considered board work to inform us of our district attorney giving an opinion about Kelli's request? Why would it be considered board work to call and give your personal opinion on an issue?

Next, how can you deem something as the "will of the board" without having a public meeting? Clearly, calls were made to deem something the "will of the board" so how is that different than calling to give your (one board member) personal opinion? Setting aside the fact that the "will of the board" cannot be determined outside of a public (or properly set closed) meeting, there was no attempt to call or email me for my opinion. I can only assume that since I said I would go with Kelli that you then assumed that I agreed with the request. Even if I did, which I am not saying I did, I should have been called. This is a board of 7 - each with equal vote - no one, or group, is better than the other.

I would respectfully state and request the following:

1. Please make a statement at the beginning of our meeting that sets meeting expectations and public comment parameters. We cannot continue to allow the audience to make snide comments or otherwise heckle during the meetings. It is unprofessional and goes against our rules, not to mention, common decency. The only reason it stopped yesterday was because a parent asked them to stop. That's embarrassing.
2. When a board member requests an item be added to the agenda, it needs to be added. That is the policy. I requested that a discussion of the agenda change be added to the agenda. That was

literally ignored, and instead, a one-sided discussion was given. That is not right. I would have supported the change as long as the BOE continued to have a time to discuss, but no one reached out. Further, since neither of you afforded me the time to discuss before the change was made, I tried to fill out a form to speak at the communications sections of our (the BOE) meeting and not only was I told no, but neither of you had the decency to talk to me, you (Mark) sent Cathy. This is our meeting - if I am not afforded any communications outside the meeting, and stopped at every turn at the meeting, when exactly can I do the work I was elected for?

3. Please ensure that we follow all the protocols we agreed to at our IASB meeting. We can't pick and choose. No more personal attacks and obvious disdain. It's just unprofessional. We all agreed those were the expectations and that we would follow them.

4. Treat everyone the same - if one gets, all get. In a perfect world, that principle should also go for discussion/calls/emails. We need to stop daisy-chaining things through one person. We are each one board member speaking for ourself. What took place yesterday should never have happened. It was beyond "no surprises". I had no idea of the "collective" thought and that our attorney was contacted and gave an opinion. Why was I not afforded the same insight? That aside, it sounded to me that one simple phone call to Kelli would have stopped this. I would have appreciated it if someone would have called me to share the collective opinion. I can only speculate that that was purposely done and that is a real shame.

5. Please afford me the same mentor opportunity that was given to Sam. Clearly, I am not liked, but I have a job to do. If I have to resort to email because no one will talk to me, fine, but when I email, people get mad that I emailed. Then I'm told... I email too much... I ask too many questions... I shouldn't have meetings about my questions... I can't have a mentor... I can't deviate in the slightest in a meeting or it's deemed a surprise... you get the picture. That's a recipe for failure, which is something I truly hope you are not trying to support.

6. Please set up meetings in small group discussions that wouldn't violate OMA to air out issues. Perhaps we set aside one evening and rotate in 15 minute time slots to say our peace. We need to work this out - at least the public face of the relationship.

You've both shared with me that the past several months have been possibly the most challenging in leadership. It has also been for me. I used to chair a meeting of almost 50 state representatives with an audience of company execs and we would hash out policy - definitely not always agree - but we would leave and grab a drink. While it may seem a stretch to get to the drink, we need to get to a place where we can get around the table and at least be cordial with each other.

We need to stop this toxic environment, and I am respectfully asking for your support and help. Let's show the community that we can show each other grace (especially when we disagree) and move on and continue to do good things. Will you please join me in this goal?

I welcome a time to discuss.

Grace and peace,
Julie Oost

Board Member
Mokena School District 159



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