

Statement by Chardon Board of Education President Karen Blankenship

Sept. 19, 2022

NOTE: The statement has been formatted for clarity, including the addition of subheadings.

There are a number of unsubstantiated and undocumented claims that have been brought by board member Todd Albright that I need to address tonight.

It is important to keep in mind that each and every one of the board members was elected by the voters of the Chardon School District and that we all come from different backgrounds and with different viewpoints.

One of the duties of a school board is to develop policies to help govern the district. These policies are not only for our administrators, staff and students. These policies also pertain to the board as a whole and as individual board members.

I would like to quote something from the Ohio School Boards Association of which we are active members:

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL BOARD

The role and function of board members often are misinterpreted by the public. The board is a policymaking body and members are the chief advisers to the superintendent on community attitudes. Board members do not manage the day-to-day operations of a school district; they see to it that the system is managed well by professional administrators.

Per policy 0142.3, on December 22, 2021, Dr. Hanlon, Deb Armbruster and myself conducted a new board member orientation for our 2 newly elected board members CJ Paterniti and Todd Albright. At this orientation in addition to other materials, these 2 board members were presented printed copies of the following policies:

- i. Bylaw 0118 Philosophy of the Board
- ii. Bylaw 0122 Board Powers
- iii. Bylaw 0122.1 Member Powers
- iv. Bylaw 0123 Code of Ethics
- v. Bylaw 0141.2 Conflict of Interest
- vi. Bylaw 0148.1 Board-Staff Communications
- vii. Bylaw 0164 Notice of Meetings
- viii. Bylaw 0165.1 Regular Meetings
- ix. Bylaw 0165.2 Special Meetings
- x. Bylaw 0166 Executive Sessions
- xi. Bylaw 0167 Voting
- xii. 0167.1 Use of Electronic Mail/Text Messages
- xiii. 0167.2 Use of Personal Communication Devices
- xiv. Bylaw 0169.2 Open Meetings - Sunshine Law
- xv. Bylaw 0171 Review of Policy
- xvi. Bylaw 0175.1 School Board Conferences, Conventions, and Workshops
- xvii. Bylaw 0147 Compensation

along with a discussion on where they could access all the district policies online through BoardDocs.

At the Chardon school board organizational meeting on January 10, 2022, all 5 five board members unanimously approved the district's board policies. Once again, all our district policies are available on BoardDocs.

YOUTUBE VIDEO

Many things have come to my attention since our August board meeting that goes against many of these district policies that we all approved on January 10th. I find it interesting that these policies are quoted when people are trying to get their points across, but ignored when they go against someone's message that they are trying to justify.

On September 1st I was made aware of the following video: "Todd Albright Reports to Voters." Even though Todd begins the video stating he does not speak for the board in this presentation, The video begins with a caption of: "Todd Albright School Board Member 1/2022 - 12/2025" and a backdrop that includes two of the Chardon Schools logos. In my opinion this video could be construed as being taped in one of the district's buildings.

One of the items Mr. Albright refers to is the board action from our August 15th board meeting concerning an agenda item on our student athletic handbook. He talks about the action taken and continues to speak against the OHSAA form on the reasons he voted against it.

Per policy 0123 Code of ethics/Code of conduct letter P. express my personal opinions but, once the board has acted, accept the will of the majority.

The most disturbing claim on Mr. Albright's video, and referenced again in a Facebook comment, refers to a student coming to him about a 7th grade teacher at 8:29am promoting pornographic and obscene materials. After hearing this I immediately contacted Dr. Hanlon and found out that an investigation had been started into these previously unreported allegations made by Mr. Albright after his video was reviewed. Not only did the district conduct an internal investigation, the information was reported to job and family services to do their investigation because he accused a staff member of what could be a criminal act resulting in charges of a misdemeanor or even a felony. The district takes these accusations seriously. The fact that Mr. Albright had this information and never reported it to JFS or to the superintendent may constitute a violation of ORC 2151.421 Reporting child abuse or neglect.

Here are the results of this investigation that was conducted concerning three of Todd Albright's complaints that he mentioned on his video "Todd Albright Speaks to Voters"

Conclusion

Mr. Todd Albright stated three complaints regarding the curriculum of the Chardon Local School District in a video posted to Youtube.com (August 31, 2022). The first complaint, regarding declining math proficiency will be reviewed separately. The second complaint, regarding promoting the promotion of dystopic futures, abortion, suicide, and sexual promiscuity could not be reviewed because Mr. Albright did not provide specific book(s) (author, title, publisher), nor did Mr. Albright provide specific objections and reasoning. Mr. Albright acknowledged that his second complaint was a generalization of the entire curriculum: "it's not widespread, but it's in there, in the curriculum and in the libraries and mentioned in classrooms. (4:57).

The third complaint, regarding a specific book (All Boys Aren't Blue), cannot be further reviewed because despite the specificity of Mr. Albright's complaint, the specific book is not available to Chardon students through the Chardon Local School district curriculum or resources. Additionally, teachers have not taught, presented, nor recommended that book during the 2022-23 school year.

Mr. Albright's statement (via Facebook) that "a teacher recommended (in my opinion pornographic) obscene material to 12 and 13 year olds" has been reported to the Geauga County Department of Job and Family Services for their investigation, and they were provided contact information for Mr. Albright for subsequent questions. They have not been able to investigate because there has not been an identified alleged perpetrator or alleged child victim.

DRESS CODE VIOLATIONS

The next issue I would like to publicly address tonight is the dress code violations. On Tuesday September 13th, I released a statement in response to the outpouring of community concerns raised over a situation related to the enforcement of the student dress code in our schools.

First, I met with Dr. Hanlon to discuss the issue and gather the facts leading up to that event. The fact is that this was because board member Todd Albright made a request to the superintendent, CHS principal and CMS principal. which Todd confirmed in an email, to join Mr. Albright at the corner of Allynd and North Street at 2:45pm on August 31st to observe students walking home. Keep in mind that the board hires and evaluates the treasurer and superintendent. Some have asked why the superintendent and building administrators were in attendance. Dr. Hanlon, Mr. Murray and Mr. Tomco were only in attendance because of Mr. Albright's request.

Per policy 1230 Responsibilities of the Superintendent letter K. perform such other duties as the board may direct or assign

As I mentioned earlier the board creates and approves policies, but it is up to the superintendent and administrators to enforce the policies:

Per policy 1210 Board-Superintendent Relationship

The Board of Education believes that, in general, it is the primary duty of the Board to establish policies and that of the Superintendent to administer such policies. Policy should not be originated or changed without the recommendation of the Superintendent. The Superintendent should be given the latitude to determine the best method of implementing the policies of the Board.

The Superintendent, as the chief executive officer of the School District, is the primary professional advisor to the Board. S/He is responsible for the development, supervision, and operation of the school program and facilities. His/Her methods should be made known to the staff through the administrative guidelines of the District.

The Board shall retain oversight supervision of such procedures.

This policy also states:

The Board is responsible for determining the success of the Superintendent in meeting the goals established by the Board through annual evaluations of the Superintendent's performance. The Board, in formulating its position with regard to the performance of the Superintendent, shall rely, whenever possible, on the objective outcomes of its evaluations rather than on subjective opinions.

Per policy 5511 Dress and Grooming

The Board of Education recognizes that each student's mode of dress and grooming is a manifestation of personal style and individual preference. The Board will not interfere with the right of students and their parents to make decisions regarding their appearance, except when their choices interfere with the educational program of the schools.

This policy also includes, but not limited to:

The Board authorizes the Superintendent to establish a reasonable dress code in order to promote a safe and healthy school setting and enhance the educational environment. The dress code shall be incorporated into the Student Code of Conduct or Discipline Code.

Accordingly, the Superintendent shall establish such grooming guidelines as are necessary to promote discipline, maintain order, secure the safety of students, and provide a healthy environment conducive to academic purposes.

The Superintendent shall develop administrative guidelines to implement this policy that:

A. Designate the principal as the arbiter of student dress and grooming at the building level;

B. invite the participation of staff, parents and students in the preparation of a dress code that may specify prescribed dress and grooming practices, but may not amplify the rationale for prohibition established by Board policy;

D. ensure that all rules implementing this policy impose only minimum and necessary restrictions on the exercise of the student's taste and individuality;

In my opinion, to sum up the dress code policy: all dress code violations are handled by the building administrators during school hours. The district has no authority over a student's attire after school is dismissed.

And I think it is important to note this information collected by Dr. Hanlon and shared with me as of September 14, 2022, in regards to dress code violations and enforcement for this school year 2022-2023 to date:

To date, CHS/CMS administrators report zero complaints concerning dress code enforcement from staff, parents, or community members other than the complaint under discussion. District administration has received zero complaints concerning dress code enforcement from staff, parents, or community members other than the complaint under discussion.

Building administrators respond to student dress code referrals first with an informal response focused on addressing the reported issue. If a student continues to appear with repeated dress code violations, the process becomes formalized with disciplinary action documented by the administrator.

From the beginning of this school year to date, CHS (enrollment 1,155 students) has addressed 10 dress code issues informally and 7 documented disciplinary incidents.

From the beginning of this school year to date, CMS (enrollment 753 students) has addressed 7 dress code issues informally and 0 documented disciplinary incidents.

COMMENTS TO CITY COUNCIL

As for the city council, city manager Randy Sharpe, Police Chief Niehus and everyone else in attendance at the city council meeting on Thursday September 8th, I would like to apologize and set the record straight. At no time have I ever heard anyone in the district say we had a bad working relationship with the city. The city officials have always been supportive of the schools, staff and students.

Once again Mr. Albright was speaking "as a resident of the city," but discussing district business. Business that was to be addressed between Dr. Hanlon and Mr. Sharpe as to the next steps concerning the signs for the student crossing on Maple Ave. I learned from viewing the video of the city council meeting that according to Mr. Albright, the district was possibly interested in relocating the existing crosswalk that is in front of the student parking lot and crosses to the high school. That was news to me. Dr. Hanlon is very good at updating the board on issues and/or discussions as a result of a superintendent's committee meetings and I do not recall that ever appearing in an update.

Todd speaking at a city council meeting on these issues violate the following policy:

Policy 0123 Code of Ethics/Code of Conduct F. delegate authority for the administration of the schools to the Superintendent and staff

FURTHER VIOLATIONS

As you can see Todd Albright has violated a number of board policies that I mentioned already, here are a few more violations that I feel I need mention:

Policy 0123 Code of Ethics/Code of Conduct

In addition, the Board of Education believes that each member should agree to work cooperatively and effectively with others and conform his/her behavior to the following code of conduct by collectively and individually agreeing to:

M. refuse to become involved with micromanagement

Policy 1100 District Organization

Responsibility shall flow clearly from the Superintendent through the administrative staff to the operational personnel.

It shall be the responsibility of the Superintendent to determine the need for and define operational requirements sufficient to ensure the smooth functioning of the District. Maintenance of an efficient, skilled operational staff is essential to the effective performance of the system.

We have an organization chart, along with:

Policy 0148.1 Board-Staff Communications

The Board of Education desires to maintain open channels of communication between itself and the staff. The basic line of communication, will, however, be through the Superintendent.

A. Staff Communications to the Board

Communications from staff members to the Board or its committees shall be submitted through the Superintendent. The Superintendent shall forward such communications received from staff members to the Board. This procedure is not intended to deny any staff member his/her constitutional right of free speech or the right to appeal to or otherwise address the Board on important matters through established procedures.

B. Board Communications to Staff

All official communications, policies, and directives of the Board of staff interest and concern to the staff will generally be communicated through the Superintendent, who shall also keep staff members informed of the Board's concerns and actions.

C. Social Interaction

Both staff and Board members share an interest in the schools and in education generally, and it is to be expected that when they interact at social affairs and other functions, they will informally discuss such matters as educational trends, issues, and innovations, and general activities of the District. However, since individual Board members are not authorized to act on behalf of the Board unless in open public session or when specifically vested with such authority, it will be considered to be unacceptable conduct for Board members to discuss individual personalities, personnel grievances, or other complaints with members of the staff. Instead, staff members should be encouraged to utilize the procedures,

established in Board Policy or the collective bargaining agreement to have their concerns, complaints, or grievances addressed.

Policy 0122.1 Member Powers

Board members as individuals do not separately possess the powers that reside in the Board of Education, except when and as expressly authorized by law or this Board.

And to support my statement about policies also pertain to board members:

Policy 0131 Legislative

The Board of Education shall make such rules and regulations as are necessary for its governance and the governance of its employees and students of its grounds or premises by adopting bylaws and policies for the organization and operation of this Board and this School District and shall be bound to follow such bylaws and policies.

For anyone that also has seen/heard other unfounded/undocumented/unreported issues concerning harassment and bullying recently in news stories either in print or on TV, social media or heard on the radio, we do have policies for anyone that would like to file a complaint. These policies exist for parents, community members, staff and students. We have anti-harassment policies, anti-bullying policies and we even have a whistleblower policy. And once again as stated in

Policy 0148.1 Board-Staff Communications

staff members should be encouraged to utilize the procedures, established in Board Policy or the collective bargaining agreement to have their concerns, complaints, or grievances addressed.

The school board, not an individual board member, should be the last step when it comes to investigating or responding to a complaint due to the requirements of policies at the district level.

If you have a question, concern or complaint please reach out to Dr. Halon at the board office either by phone or email.