

June 6, 2012

Joyce Husseini  
Stoughton School Committee Chair

Dear Ms. Husseini:

During the televised school committee meeting held on May 29, 2012 you read aloud a letter you presumably wrote on that day. You did not extend the courtesy of giving me an advance copy. In fact, you handed me my copy after you started reading your letter on a live television broadcast. Resorting to gotcha techniques is a grossly unprofessional conduct. As promised, I read your letter carefully and find it to be irresponsible, and full of errors and mistruths. My responses are inserted below appropriate places in the text that follows.

In your first paragraph, you wrote:

Several of your actions and statements since you were elected to the board have been grossly inappropriate and unprofessional. I am making this statement to put you on notice that such behavior will not be tolerated by me, as the Chair of the School Committee.

In your allegations, you are not clear which actions you are referring to. Please know that I always take pride in my professional conduct, and assert the fact that all my actions are in the best interest of the schoolchildren, parents and the town of Stoughton. It is possible that the district administration and certain members of the school committee, apparently yourself included, perceive my actions as threat to current culture of the district administration. I choose to serve on this committee only to improve the current culture and hold the administration accountable. Furthermore, your role as the school committee chair is to be the facilitator for the members, and not to control them. School committee members have no obligation to please you or to seek your approval.

In your second paragraph, you wrote:

The policy for the District to communicate with the Committee through the First Class email accounts set up for us by the District is my decision. If you would like to terminate this account please notify me in writing or by email at my school account. Please indicate whether you would like your listing linked to another account. Your email message to employees of the school district accusing them of misconduct and threatening a lawsuit is appalling, and your actions have exposed the Committee to potential lawsuits. You are not to contact any school employee directly on School Committee business. The employees are the responsibility of the Superintendent and not the Committee.

In this paragraph, you proclaimed that you instituted a policy on your own. As you know, the school committee chair has no authority to institute a policy on her own. All policies must be approved by the school committee. Furthermore, the policy you proclaimed you instituted is illegal. The school committee can not create or adopt policies that are against the law, or public policy.

Additionally, I strongly suspect your claim that such a policy existed is false. This is because the chain of emails I received from superintendent Rizzi casts serious doubts on the credibility of your claim.

Thirteen days after I was elected to the board, on her April 23<sup>rd</sup> email, out of the blue, Dr. Rizzi said: “Dr. Gray has set up an account for you in our email system. Your user name and password for First Class are eural (username) and ural232(password). All correspondence will go through the First Class system and we will no longer use your work email for school committee purposes.”

Notice that she made no mention of any policy. If there was a policy as you falsely claim, Rizzi would have mentioned it.

Next, on her April 25<sup>th</sup> email, Dr. Rizzi disclosed: “I understand that Dr. Gray has already responded to your email. It is the will of the board, not mine personally, that all members communicate through the First Class system. Your account will remain available if you choose to use it, and all of my communications will go to the group through First Class from now on, as I have been instructed.”

In my response to Dr. Rizzi and you, I stated: ***I did not ask you to create that email account and I never used it. I know you and Larry Gray have access to it. I do not want you reading messages that are intended for me. I cannot allow you to pose as me, and I will not compromise the privacy of my constituents. One of your duties is to keep the School Committee informed. I will hold you accountable if you deliberately fail to inform me. I see you attempt to justify your conduct with the old "will of the board" argument. Please provide me with the written evidence, if the Board indeed took such an illegal decision.***

Neither you nor Dr. Rizzi was able to provide me with the written evidence proving that the Board indeed took such a decision. Instead, your May 29 letter surfaced confirming that Dr. Rizzi was not telling the truth, and the Board never took such an illegal decision.

My issue with Larry Gray is that he created a sham email account using my name, and published this sham email address on the district website, giving the false impression to the public that it is my email address. He and Dr. Rizzi has access to the sham email account. Upon counsel advice, I found out that this is a criminal act according to the Massachusetts law, and warned Larry Gray that I will reluctantly file a criminal complaint against him, unless he ceased publishing the sham email address immediately. Please note that excuses such as “my boss ordered me to break the law,” or “it was the will of the committee” will not be available to Larry Gray as affirmative defenses for his criminal act, because he is an IT professional who should know better. I did not threaten to sue Larry Gray as you falsely allege.

As evident from the above example, Dr. Rizzi cannot be entrusted to provide the school committee members the full and complete disclosure of the issues. In my opinion, she tends to provide a one-sided and barely enough information for the school committee members to think the way she wants. In fact, in her 2010 evaluation, I wrote: “In the efforts to spread “positive” information, the incumbent does not adequately represent the full realities including shortcomings and areas needing improvement in our District.” “My general perception is that Dr. Rizzi offers as little information as possible for the School Committee to carry out the meetings. Over the last year, on several occasions I have asked for information, and Dr. Rizzi offered active or passive resistance (For example, I requested notice when police/fire/ambulance is

called to the schools, as well as periodic financial reports providing information about expenses against budget on all accounts, both of which she has not honored.”

Therefore, in the future, I will not hesitate to check the accuracy of the statements any way I see fit, and as I deem necessary.

In your third paragraph, you wrote:

You are misguided in believing that you have the right to privacy in communicating with your constituents by email. You are an elected official and all communication between you and the public as an elected official are public record. Use of a private email account exposes you to the risk and expense of legal discovery should anyone request these emails. It was your threats of subpoena of former School Committee members’ personal emails the last time you sat on this board that led me to implement my policy.

Are you saying Larry Gray or Maggie Rizzi would ask to see copies of emails I receive from my constituents if I do not use the sham email account they created using my name? The issue here is that the parents and Town residents that I serve may see the email address they have created for me and published on the internet, and knowing that it is routed through the School’s server, they may be hesitant to communicate openly for fear that their communications are open to review by others. I have heard from a number of residents who are fearful of Maggie Rizzi or Larry Gray for potential intimidation or retaliation. This is utterly unacceptable, and is a breach of my duty and my oath. If other Committee members wish to use the address they have been provided, that is an option they choose. By no means can it be imposed on me.

By the way, I do not recall ever threatening to subpoena former school committee members’ personal emails. If you have proof, please produce it. Otherwise, a public apology from you for telling another mistruth would be in order.

In your fourth paragraph, you wrote:

Further, it is your duty as an elected official to act on matters that are School Committee agenda or action items as part of the Committee and not as a private citizen. Your decision to send letters on your company letterhead to our membership, selected Town officials and to the press circumvents our ability to act as a board on matters that concern us. You have the same right as any board member to bring an agenda item to the Chair or the Superintendent for inclusion in our public meetings.

Joyce, you are simply making things up. The open letter I gave to the selectmen and the school committee members was **NOT** on my company letterhead. Exactly like this letter you are reading now, it simply had my name, my telephone number, and my email address. Have you ever seen a company letterhead without the company name?

I am proud that I wrote and distributed that letter. It already produced useful information and hope for improvement in the near future. As outlined in that letter, it is inexcusable for the education channel to broadcast a four month old School Committee meeting day after day (sometimes twice a day), instead of more recent meetings. I do not see how that letter circumvents your ability to do your job. By the way, I received excellent feedback from Stoughton residents expressing similar experiences and extreme frustrations.

Finally, in your fifth paragraph, you wrote:

You statements at the April 24<sup>th</sup> meeting extending your condolences to our new High School principal were highly inappropriate and I apologize to the Committee for not calling you out on that behavior on the spot. I was appalled by those statements and by your allegations of wrongdoing by our former Superintendent. When such allegations are spoken at a public meeting one might perceive them to be the view of the board. Your statements do not reflect the view of this board. Please refrain from making such slanderous comments and conduct yourself in the manner appropriate to your elected position.

The offer of condolences at the April 24<sup>th</sup> meeting was made by me as a joke, and was received by the incoming high school principal Ms. Miller as a joke. Perhaps, it resonated negatively with Dr. Rizzi because she must be painfully aware of all the problems our high school has been experiencing in the recent past. Not having seen the minutes or the video record of the meeting, I do not recall which wrongdoing of the former superintendent you are talking about. Please get me a copy of the video record so I can properly respond to your allegation.

Finally, for the last time, I instruct Larry Gray to forward to me all messages he collected in the sham email account he created. I instruct Larry Gray to delete the sham email account he created. I instruct you, Larry Gray and my fellow Committee members to use my correct email address: erdem.ural@lpsti.com. Additionally, I instruct you to remove the unauthorized use of my name in the sham email address that you have published on both the Town and the District websites, as well as anywhere else it may have been posted. You may publish only the correct address I have provided and none other. Any use of my name in any other form or address would be unauthorized, and I would construe it as an attempt to defraud by assuming my identity without authorization - a crime under MGL Chapter 266, Section 37E(b). If, for record keeping purposes, you wish to record a copy of your emails to me into a repository address, I have no objection; provided, however, that (1) the sole address used for me in the address line of the email correspondence is my authorized address, and (2) that the email is direct to me without a forwarding through a routing address. You are also authorized to publish the address I have provided on the District website. I ask that the unauthorized use of my name be removed by the close of business on Friday May 18, 2012.

Furthermore, I ask that Dr. Rizzi and you do not waste school resources with attorneys researching how the superintendent or the committee chair could control the school committee members, and trying to justify ways that you can correspond with me other than that which I have authorized.

Let us not forget, an important role of the school committee is to supervise the superintendent, and not the other way around. As such, I will continue to pursue what I think is in the best interest of the schoolchildren, parents, and the town of Stoughton. I will do so by checking facts, by writing letters, and by going to the press and the authorities as necessary.

Sincerely Yours,

  
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