
Fwd: [STAFF] personnel report

joseph.sander@mcusd709.org Sander, Joseph
To: admin-all-staff@mcusd709.org Admin-All-Staff

Friday, September 15, 2023 at 9:53:38AM Central Daylight Time

Please take a look at the personnel report. Let me know if you have any questions.
Go Potters!!!

Joe

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Heppard, Brenda** <brenda.heppard@mcusd709.org>
Date: Thu, Sep 14, 2023 at 4:05 PM
Subject: [STAFF] personnel report
To: Joseph Sander <joseph.sander@mcusd709.org>, Valerie Smith <valerie.smith@mcusd709.org>

Hi Joe and Valerie,

Attached is the personnel report for next week.

Brenda

--
Brenda Heppard
Human Resources Coordinator
Morton Community Unit School District 709
1050 S. Fourth Ave., Suite 200
Morton, IL 61550
brenda.heppard@mcusd709.org
309-263-2581 ext 8023

--
Make it a great day!



Joseph G. Sander Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

Attachments:

Personnel Report September 19 2023.doc 78k

deidre.ripka@mcusd709.org Ripka, Deidre
To: joseph.sander@mcusd709.org Sander, Joseph
Cc: admin-all-staff@mcusd709.org Admin-All-Staff

Friday, September 15, 2023 at 9:56:11AM Central Daylight Time

I am certain that I am not cut out to teach Transitional Math. Transitional English, yes, but we don't offer that.

Mrs. Deidre Ripka
Principal
Morton High School
Morton, Illinois



On Fri, Sep 15, 2023 at 9:53AM Sander, Joseph <joseph.sander@mcusd709.org> wrote:
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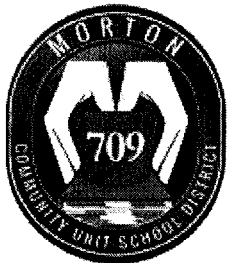
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Assistant Superintendent**

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To: deidre.ripka@mcusd709.org Ripka, Deidre
Cc: admin-all-staff@mcusd709.org Admin-All-Staff

Friday, September 15, 2023 at 10:02:47AM Central Daylight Time

C'mon...I believe in you. You can do it!

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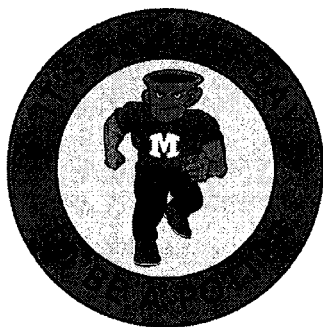
craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig Friday, September 15, 2023 at 10:08:34AM Central Daylight Time
To: joseph.sander@mcusd709.org Sander, Joseph
Cc: deidre.ripka@mcusd709.org Ripka, Deidre, admin-all-staff@mcusd709.org Admin-All-Staff

Joe, I thought for sure you'd be able to sneak that by her...

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Joseph G. Sander Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

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Make it a great day!



Joseph G. Sander Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

--

Dr. Craig Smock

Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



troy.teater@mcusd709.org Teater, Troy

Friday, September 15, 2023 at 10:26:41 AM Central Daylight Time

To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Cc: joseph.sander@mcusd709.org Sander, Joseph, deidre.ripka@mcusd709.org Ripka, Deidre, admin-all-staff@mcusd709.org Admin-All-Staff

Typically we haven't paid administrators for Other Duties as Assigned....figured it was just Joe not understanding the importance of doing things as we have always done things.



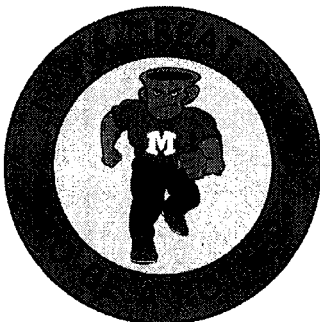
Troy A. Teater Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

On Fri, Sep 15, 2023 at 10:08 AM Smock, Craig <craig.smock@mcusd709.org> wrote:
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Assistant Superintendent**

Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



**MORTON UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709
PERSONNEL REPORT**

**September 19, 2023
Revised**

I.ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

- A. APPOINTMENTS**
- B. REHIRES**

II.PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR LICENSED FACULTY

- A. VOLUNTARY TRANSFERS**
- B. INVOLUNTARY TRANSFERS**
- C. APPOINTMENTS**
 - 1. **Logan Edward** – Substitute Teacher
 - 2. **Joshua Caruso** – Long Term Substitute Teacher for SPED Supported Study Hall at Morton High School for the fall semester effective September 18, 2023
- D. REHIRES**
- E. LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

III.EXTRA-DUTY

- A. APPOINTMENTS**
 - 1. **Rosie Durand** – Overload Assignment for Transitional Math for fall semester 2023
 - 2. **Jeffrey Arbisi** – Assistant Marching Band Director – Electronics at Morton High School

IV.SUPPORT STAFF

- A. VOLUNTARY TRANSFER**
- B. INVOLUNTARY TRANSFERS**
- C. APPOINTMENTS**
 - 1. **Bonnie Gay** – Food Service Worker at Morton High School effective September 15, 2023
 - 2. **Janet Camp** – Substitute Instructional Aide
 - 3. **Logan Edward** – Substitute Instructional Aide
 - 4. **Joshua Caruso** – Substitute Instructional Aide
 - 5. **Anna Bennett** – Sixth Grade Classroom Support Aide at Grundy School effective September 20, 2023
- D. REHIRES**
 - 1. **Peyton Cook** – rehired as Special Education Resource Aide for 2 days per week at Lincoln School effective September 18, 2023
 - 2. **Malia Ames** – rehired as Special Education Resource Aide at Lincoln School effective August 15, 2023

V. TERMINATION

NON-ACTIONABLE PERSONNEL INFORMATION

- A. RESIGNATION**
 - 1. **Mary Beth Stewart** – resigning as Spring Musical Drama Director at Morton High School for 2023-2024
 - 2. **Timothy Bradford** – released from Overload Assignment for PAS as it is no longer needed for 2023-2024
 - 3. **Joel Zehr** - released from Overload Assignment for PAS as it is no longer needed for 2023-2024
 - 4. **Yeovana Vega Rodriguez** – resignation as Food Service Worker at Morton High School effective September 8, 2023
 - 5. **Jeriamé Burgos – Vega** – resigning as Substitute/Summer Custodian effective September 14, 2023
 - 6. **Giovanstry Burgos – Vega** - resigning as Substitute/Summer Custodian effective September 14, 2023
- B. RETIREMENTS**

[STAFF] Personnel Report

joseph.sander@mcusd709.org Sander, Joseph
To: joseph.sander@mcusd709.org Joseph Sander
Cc: brenda.heppard@mcusd709.org Heppard, Brenda
Bcc: admin-all-staff@mcusd709.org

Tuesday, September 19, 2023 at 8:20:25 PM Central Daylight Time

Good Evening,

The attached personnel report was approved by the Board of Education tonight. Please inform staff as needed and enjoy the rest of the week! Go Potters!

Take Care,
Joe

--

Make it a great day!

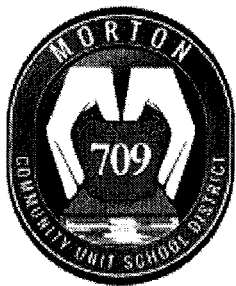


Joseph G. Sander Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

Attachments:

Personnel Report September 19 2023.doc 80k

Attached is the response to your FOIA request.



Troy A. Teater Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

On Tue, Sep 19, 2023 at 2:49 PM Heather McMeekan <hmcmeekan@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear FOIA Officer,

Under the "Freedom of Information Act," I respectfully AMEND this denied request for the following records for non-commercial purposes to be sent to me electronically via this email address, hmcmeekan@gmail.com.

1) All written complaints against Principal Michael Saunders and/or Superintendent Smock from Jan 1, 2023 - present. I understand that the names of the students will need to be redacted. ONLY the complaints coming in, NOT the school district's responses.

2) All emails, texts, memos, announcements in the School Board member's accounts, Superintendent Smock's and Principal Saunders' emails with any of the following keywords/phrases for the period of Aug 1 2023 - Present:

- Gay
- McMeekan
- LGBTQ
- "Moms for Prayer"
- "Colorful Flag"
- "Ten Commandments"
- "IL Eagle"
- "Moms for Liberty"

Thank you,
Heather McMeekan

On Fri, Sep 15, 2023 at 4:49 PM Teater, Troy <troy.teater@mcusd709.org> wrote:
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Attachments:

FOIA Response 92623.pdf 1.6M

hmcmeekan@gmail.com Heather McMeekan
To: troy.teater@mcusd709.org Teater, Troy
Cc: Craig.Smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock

Wednesday, September 27, 2023 at 5:03:32 PM Central Daylight Time

I'll narrow the time span from Sept 1-present for the emails.

On Tue, Sep 26, 2023 at 3:55 PM Teater, Troy <troy.teater@mcusd709.org> wrote:
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Warmest Wishes,

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troy.teater@mcusd709.org Teater, Troy
To: hmcmeekan@gmail.com Heather McMeekan
Cc: Craig.Smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock

Friday, September 29, 2023 at 3:56:00 PM Central Daylight Time

Due to the nature of Boolean searches, I ask that you submit the exact details of your request. I think from our correspondence I can infer your request, but since the search is so precise, I would be more comfortable if I was going straight from a request.



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Warmest Wishes,


Heather McMeekan

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Eye on Education August 28, 2023

iasa@iasaedu.org IASA
 To: jnevel@iasaedu.org
 To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org


Monday, August 28, 2023 at 8:55:32AM Central Daylight Time





Friday Closing Keynote Speaker:

Merlyna Valentine
"Prove What's Possible"



IASA 59TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE **Sept. 27-29, 2023**

August 28, 2023

eye ON EDUCATION IASA

Your daily synopsis of education news

State. Rep. Mayfield discusses Illinois Literacy Plan

The Lake County News-Sun spoke to state Rep. Rita Mayfield. From the story:

A school board member before joining the Illinois General Assembly in 2010, state Rep. Rita Mayfield, D-Waukegan, has long advocated for laws dealing with literacy and her persistence now has the Illinois State Board of Education crafting a statewide plan.

Unable to muster sufficient votes among her colleagues in Springfield after introducing legislation for a statewide literacy plan last year, Mayfield started her quest again when the 103rd General Assembly was convened in January.

Working with colleagues and stakeholders, Mayfield helped muster support for legislation requiring the ISBE to create a statewide literacy plan by the end of January. The legislature sent it to Gov. J.B. Ritzier June 16 and he signed it July 28.

[Lake County News Sun](#)

Centralia HS introduces technology to help monitor student emails

Southern Illinois New reports on Centralia HS. From the story:

Centralia High School has introduced a monitoring service for student e-mail accounts.

Superintendent Chuck Lane says it's another step to protect students.

"Gaggle is a tool for our district to use to improve the safety and wellness of our students. It will monitor their content searched online and school-appointed emails to make sure if they are talking about harming themselves or bringing a weapon to school it will alert us and we will contact the parent and the student. It's just another way to keep our students safe."

Lane says they will continue to use the app, Apptegy. It will now allow for increased communication between the school, parents, and students.

[Southern Illinois Now](#)

Editorial: Congrats to Illinois' newest Teacher of the Year, coming to us direct from Idaho

The Chicago Tribune Editorial Board wrote about education in Illinois. From the story:

Karen Lauritzen is the reigning "Teacher of the Year" for Idaho, but she recently left her job at an elementary school in the land of potatoes for a friendlier environment.

Illinois.

Shortly after receiving the top teacher honor for 2023, Lauritzen became the target of far-right activists who noted her support of gay rights and Black Lives Matter on her personal social media accounts. Abuse followed, not only from strangers but also from parents of her fourth-grade students, including one who cited a lesson she taught about the United Nations as evidence of left-wing indoctrination.

Lauritzen moved over the summer to a college downstate where she teaches budding educators, and the change has been good, she said in an interview. One big difference is the state's culturally responsive teaching standards, she said, which help teachers better reach their students. And she marveled about how her teenage son's new high school offers a diversity seminar that Idaho would have shunned.

"It's like heaven here," she said.

[Chicago Tribune](#)

Previewing IASA Annual Conference

Want to know more about this year's keynote speakers? Learn how IASA picks breakout sessions? And gain practical tips to maximize your conference experience? [This podcast](#) is all about IASA's 59th Annual Conference, Sept. 27-29 in Springfield. Our guests are Dr. Roger Alvey, IASA President, and Dr. Courtney Orzel, Associate Director of Professional Development.



[Click Here](#) to learn more about IASA Aflac coverage options.

How are districts preparing for the end of American Rescue Plan funds?

Education Dive reports on school spending. From the story:

As school systems plan for the end of federal COVID-19 emergency funding, the immediate priority areas for remaining monies include increasing instructional time and investing in high-quality curriculum materials, according to a survey by AASA, The School Superintendents Association.

Adding specialist staff and boosting teacher planning and development were other top priorities for investment in the near future. Spending on curriculum, such as hardware, software and professional development, likely ranked higher than adding personnel on the priority list due to worries over paying for increased staffing when these one-time funds dissipate, AASA said in a report on the survey findings.

As districts prepare for the September 2024 obligation deadline for American Rescue Plan funds, the survey reveals 53% of district leaders anticipate they will need to decrease specialist staffing, such as behavioral health personnel and reading specialists. Other top areas of projected cuts or reductions are to summer learning programs and staff compensation.

[Education Dive](#)

IASA | 2648 Beechler Court, Springfield, IL 62703-7305

Unsubscribe craig.smock@mcusd709.org

Constant Contact Data Notice

Sent by iasa@iasaedu.org powered by





OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

KWAME RAOUL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

August 23, 2023

Via electronic mail
Ms. Heather McMeekan
hmcmeekan@gmail.com

RE: FOIA Request for Review – 2023 PAC 77590

Dear Ms. McMeekan:

This determination is issued pursuant to section 9.5(c) of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (5 ILCS 140/9.5(c) (West 2022)). For the reasons explained below, the Public Access Bureau concludes that your Request for Review is unfounded.

On August 1, 2023, you submitted a FOIA request to Morton Community Unit School District No. 709 (District) seeking "[t]he search engine history of all browsers in the Principal's Office and the administration office for Ward Grundy Elementary School for the time period of Jan 1, 2023 - June 1, 2023."¹ On August 3, 2023, the District replied by stating "[t]he search engine history is not a record the [D]istrict keeps."² Later that day, the Public Access Bureau received your Request for Review, which appears to dispute the District's response. You state "[t]he browser history can be often be downloaded from browsers."³

The requirements of FOIA apply to records "having been prepared by or for, or having been or being used by, received by, in the possession of, or under the control of any public body" to which a request is submitted. 5 ILCS 140/2(c) (West 2022). FOIA generally requires a public body to conduct a "reasonable search tailored to the nature of a particular

¹E-mail from Heather McMeekan to FOIA Officer (August 1, 2023).

²E-mail from Troy Teater, [Assistant Superintendent], [Morton Community Unit School District No. 709] to [Heather McMeekan] (August 3, 2023).

³E-mail from Heather McMeekan to [Benjamin Silver], [Assistant Attorney General], [Public Access Bureau] (August 3, 2023).

request." *Campbell v. United States Department of Justice*, 164 F.3d 20, 28 (D.C. Cir. 1998). However, "[a] requester is entitled only to records that an agency has in fact chosen to create and retain." *Yeager v. Drug Enforcement Administration*, 678 F.2d 315, 321 (D.C. Cir. 1982); see also *Kissinger v. Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press*, 445 U.S. 136, 152, 100 S. Ct. 960, 969 (1980) (the Federal FOIA "does not obligate agencies to create or retain documents; it only obligates them to provide access to those which it in fact has created and retained."). FOIA does not require a public body to conduct a search that would be futile. See *Am.-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee v. United States Department of Homeland Security*, 516 F. Supp. 2d 83, 88 (D.D.C. 2007) (affidavit explaining why Federal agency did not collect the type of records requested was sufficient to demonstrate that a search would be futile and was therefore unnecessary).

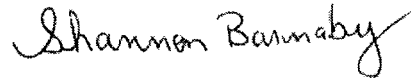
Your Request for Review asserts that the District should be able to provide you with the relevant web browser history logs because that information can be downloaded from a browser. The express wording of your FOIA request, however, seeks "search engine history" not web browser history. The District's response to your FOIA request specifically stated that it did not have any responsive records concerning your request for search engine history. Further, in an e-mail with an Assistant Attorney General in the Public Access Bureau on August 18, 2023, Mr. Troy Teater, the District's Assistant Superintendent and FOIA Officer, confirmed that while the District does have access to information concerning websites that a District device may try to access (i.e., web browsing logs) for some period of time, it does not have any records that reflect the search terms or text that an individual may have entered into a search engine or website (i.e., search engine history). This office has not received any facts indicating that the District possesses responsive search engine history records, and it appears that a search for such records would be futile. Accordingly, this office will not take any additional action on this matter.

In addition to resolving Requests for Review, the Office of the Public Access Counselor is charged with providing advice and education to both the public and public officials. See 15 ILCS 205/7(a), (b), (c) (West 2022). In that capacity, this office notes that a broad, categorical request seeking all of the District's web browser history logs for all browsers in the principal and administration's offices at a particular elementary school, for a period of six months would likely be unduly burdensome. See *Shehadeh v. Madigan*, 2013 IL App (4th) 120742, ¶¶5-6, 996 N.E.2d 1243, 1245 (2013) (finding a request that identified 9,200 potentially responsive records to be "patently broad on its face, as it sought *any* publication or record that would or could be used by *any* public body to comply with Illinois's FOIA provisions." (Emphasis in original.)) In the event that you plan to submit a new FOIA request to the District seeking web browser history logs, you may want to consider narrowing the scope of your request to one or two browser users, for a timeframe that occurred within the last 30 days, and for a much narrower period of time, such as for one or two days.

Ms. Heather McMeekan
August 23, 2023
Page 3

This file is closed. If you have questions, my e-mail address is shannon.barnaby@ilag.gov.

Very truly yours,



SHANNON BARNABY
Senior Assistant Attorney General
Public Access Bureau

77373 f unf sd

cc: *Via electronic mail*
Mr. Troy A. Teater
Assistant Superintendent
Morton Community Unit School District No. 709
1050 South Fourth Avenue, Suite 200
Morton, Illinois 61550
troy.teater@mcusd709.org

[STAFF] Fwd: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] Morton 709 Board Meeting - September 5th, 2023

timothy.braker@mcusd709.org Braker, TimothyFriday, September 8, 2023 at 1:55:16 PM Central Daylight
Time

To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Bryan Groth** <bryan.l.groth@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Sep 8, 2023, 11:18 AM

Subject: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] Morton 709 Board Meeting - September 5th, 2023

To: <amanda.leman@mcusd709.org>, <thomas.neeley@mcusd709.org>, <diane.krall@mcusd709.org>, <jerry.rudd@mcusd709.org>, <timothy.braker@mcusd709.org>, Cross, David <david.cross@mcusd709.org>, <andrew.roth@mcusd709.org>

Morton 709 Board Members,

The audience participation portion of Tuesday's board meeting was unsettling for my family on so many levels. I'm not sure where to start. For now, I will ask each of you five questions:

1. Do you personally endorse or condemn the hatred, bigotry, shaming, and proselytizing on full display in the room Tuesday evening. This would include the laughing and heckling by a person I believe to be the superintendent's adult son.
2. Are you personally willing to protect an educator that uses a work email address to subscribe to HATE or EXTREMIST groups as designated by the Southern Poverty Law Center and Anti-Defamation League?
3. Can you personally assure me that LGBTQ youth and their allies, like my son, are safe in Morton 709 schools and protected from bigotry, hatred, shaming, negative bias, discrimination and retaliation?
4. Are each of you prepared to make structural changes to increase awareness and understanding of marginalized groups at the Elementary, Junior High, and Senior High levels in an effort to reduce the hatred and bigotry within the schools and our community.
5. Will each of you publicly condemn the slanderous statement against my minor son made by the presenter wearing the militia-style shirt?

I would ask all of you to respond individually.

Respectfully,

Bryan Groth
309-696-4922

timothy.braker@mcusd709.org Braker, TimothyFriday, September 8, 2023 at 3:39:07 PM Central Daylight
Time

To: amanda.leman@mcusd709.org Amanda Leman, david.cross@mcusd709.org David Cross, diane.krall@mcusd709.org Krall, Diane, jerry.rudd@mcusd709.org Jerry Rudd, thomas.neeley@mcusd709.org Thomas Neeley, andrew.roth@mcusd709.org Andrew Roth, craig.smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock

Good afternoon

I would suggest we have one reply from the board.

I will have Dr Smock and group assist. Let one of know if you have thoughts

Tim

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Bryan Groth** <bryan.l.groth@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Sep 8, 2023, 11:18 AM

Subject: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] Morton 709 Board Meeting - September 5th, 2023

To: <amanda.leman@mcusd709.org>, <thomas.neeley@mcusd709.org>, <diane.krall@mcusd709.org>, <jerry.rudd@mcusd709.org>, <timothy.braker@mcusd709.org>, Cross, David <david.cross@mcusd709.org>, <andrew.roth@mcusd709.org>

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5. Will each of you publicly condemn the slanderous statement against my minor son made by the presenter wearing the militia-style shirt?

I would ask all of you to respond individually.

Respectfully,

Bryan Groth
309-696-4922

craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Monday, September 11, 2023 at 7:47:51AM Central Daylight Time

To: timothy.braker@mcusd709.org Braker, Timothy

Cc: amanda.leman@mcusd709.org Amanda Leman, david.cross@mcusd709.org David Cross, diane.krall@mcusd709.org

Krall, Diane, jerry.rudd@mcusd709.org Jerry Rudd, thomas.neeley@mcusd709.org Thomas Neeley,

andrew.roth@mcusd709.org Andrew Roth

Please call me with any questions.

I'll be working on a draft.

Craig

On Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 3:39 PM Braker, Timothy <timothy.braker@mcusd709.org> wrote:

Good afternoon

I would suggest we have one reply from the board.

I will have Dr Smock and group assist. Let one of know if you have thoughts

Tim

----- Forwarded message -----

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Date: Fri, Sep 8, 2023, 11:18 AM

Subject: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] Morton 709 Board Meeting - September 5th, 2023

To: <amanda.leman@mcusd709.org>, <thomas.neeley@mcusd709.org>, <diane.krall@mcusd709.org>, <jerry.rudd@mcusd709.org>, <timothy.braker@mcusd709.org>, Cross, David <david.cross@mcusd709.org>, <andrew.roth@mcusd709.org>

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I would ask all of you to respond individually.

Respectfully,

Bryan Groth
309-696-4922

--

Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



Saturday, September 16, 2023 at 11:11:57AM Central
Daylight Time

timothy.braker@mcusd709.org Braker, Timothy

To: bryan.l.groth@gmail.com Bryan Groth

Cc: amanda.leman@mcusd709.org, thomas.neeley@mcusd709.org, diane.krall@mcusd709.org, jerry.rudd@mcusd709.org, david.cross@mcusd709.org Cross, David, andrew.roth@mcusd709.org

Bcc: craig.smock@mcusd709.org

Mr. Groth,

I am sending this email on behalf of the Board of Education in response to your questions.

The Board has opted to respond as a whole, and not individually. As you may know, individual board members hold no power, acting alone.

The Board of Education is not responsible for any words spoken, nor the tones, attitudes, or decorum of the public in the boardroom. I did address interruptions to the speakers, on two occasions. Apart from extreme profanity, the Board is not to disrupt speakers during the time for audience participation. That evening, there were certainly several disruptions from many people on all sides of the issues. The Board certainly does not condone any disrespectful behavior nor attempts to stop others from speaking. The freedom of speech allows for all types of speech, even if it is inflammatory or offends others in the room. Unfortunately, there is also no guarantee that people will withhold their reactions to what is said, nor that the speech will be suitable for children to hear.

Although, according to our policies, employees are allowed to use work email for personal use, it is the Board's intent to recommend and advise employees to use their own private email account for personal use.

With respect to "hate group designations," the Board is not aware of any group to which Mr. Saunders subscribes that would commonly be considered a "hate group." Some organizations may feel that beliefs contrary to theirs constitutes hate or extremism. The bottom line is that the Board expects all people to be treated with respect and dignity, and we will deal with any situation where that expectation for conduct is not met.

We have policies and practices in place intended to prevent and stop mistreatment, bullying, and other types of harassment. But, we are not in 100% control of what students might say or do on any given day. Certainly, there are consequences for violators that we will enact based on our policies. That said, students do have the right to free speech and the freedom of religion.

In fact, students' freedoms are greater than that of school employees. And, under those rights, students may engage in conversations that are contrary to your views or your child's views. If those conversations are civil and welcome, as an exchange of ideas, then there is no harassment, even though there is disagreement. A student who communicates one belief should reasonably expect that another student might counter that belief, because both students have the freedom to passionately, but respectfully, express agreement or disagreement with one another.

If disagreement on sensitive topics is troubling for a student, that student can obviously avoid this type of confrontation and disagreement simply by not engaging in controversial conversations with other students. Once a student expresses a desire to stop a conversation, it can be considered harassment if other students continue the argument. This is the case whether students are discussing favorite baseball teams, movies, or other more serious matters. No matter the topic, passions can elevate to the point where the conversation should stop as it is disrupting the school environment for one or both students.

We believe that we already have the policies and practices in place to address bullying, discrimination, and harassment. These policies pertain to all groups and ages equally. We would encourage anyone who feels that this is happening to them, regardless of their age, identity, or beliefs, to report it immediately to a school authority. We will be reminding people of these policies and how to report incidents of harassment so that it can be addressed as soon as possible.

Again, unless the comments are extremely profane, the Board has no authority to limit a person's speech nor make any determinations about whether or not statements are "slanderous." That is a

legal, fact-based determination that is best made by a court of law, and not our Board.

Sincerely,

Tim Braker, Board President

On Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 11:18AM Bryan Groth <bryan.l.groth@gmail.com> wrote:
Morton 709 Board Members,

The audience participation portion of Tuesday's board meeting was unsettling for my family on so many levels. I'm not sure where to start. For now, I will ask each of you five questions:

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5. Will each of you publicly condemn the slanderous statement against my minor son made by the presenter wearing the militia-style shirt?

I would ask all of you to respond individually.

Respectfully,

Bryan Groth
309-696-4922

[STAFF] Re: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] 2023 PAC 77590**troy.teater@mcusd709.org Teater, Troy**

Thursday, August 17, 2023 at 9:49:55 PM Central Daylight Time

To: Shannon.Barnaby@ilag.gov Barnaby, Shannon

Cc: Craig.Smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock

Mrs. Barnaby,

On August 1st, Ms. McMeekan requested:

"The search engine history of all browsers in the Principal's Office and the administration office for Ward Grundy Elementary School for the time period of Jan 1, 2023 - June 1, 2023."

Search engines like Google Search, Bing, Yahoo, DuckDuckGo, Baidu, Yandex, and others are programs designed to search databases like the web-based on the criteria a user enters. The district does not record the criteria entered in search engines, so we are unable to provide the information that she requested.

The district does track websites that district devices try to access or browsing history. So we know when search engines are being accessed, not what criteria are being used in search engines. There isn't a recorded history of searches.

We did not deny the request. We can't fulfill the request because we do not have those records.

As far as web browsing logs (which you are referencing), we do have those and I would agree that the public is entitled to them. Our browsing logs would not go back to January 1 and depending on the machine and the number of users, a week of browsing history can be enormous.

I am more than happy to assist Ms. McMeekan in gaining access to the records we have, but I have found at times it is difficult to determine exactly what she is requesting. I recently worked with Benjamin Silver, from your office, to help Ms. McMeekan request an email search that wasn't unduly burdensome

If Ms. McMeekan would like browsing history, I would recommend narrowing the search down to a single user or two users, selecting a time interval within the last 30 days, and making the time interval a day or two (depending on the days selected). That might be a manageable search that we would have the records.



**Troy A. Teater Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent**

On Thu, Aug 17, 2023 at 6:26 PM Barnaby, Shannon <Shannon.Barnaby@ilag.gov> wrote:

Good Afternoon, Mr. Teater:

I hope this email finds you doing well. Our office is in receipt of the attached Request for Review (77590). Before we proceed formally, I wanted to reach out to you to see if you were aware of this office's previous determination that entries in web browsing logs pertaining to the transaction of public business are public records subject to disclosure. I've attached an example to this email. Please read and let me know if the Morton Community Unit School District 709 would like to reconsider its position in this Request for Review. If not, we can certainly go to further inquiry and will be more than happy to consider the District's arguments. Please let me know either way at your earliest convenience. Thank you.

Very Truly Yours,

Shannon Barnaby

Senior Assistant Attorney General

Public Access Bureau

Office of the Illinois Attorney General

shannon.barnaby@ilag.gov

(312-550-4480)

Pronouns: she/her/hers

craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Friday, August 18, 2023 at 7:54:04AM Central Daylight Time

To: troy.teater@mcusd709.org Teater, Troy

Well said.

On Thu, Aug 17, 2023 at 9:50 PM Teater, Troy <troy.teater@mcusd709.org> wrote:

Mrs. Barnaby,

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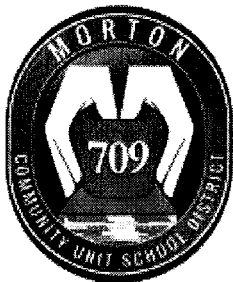
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Senior Assistant Attorney General

Public Access Bureau

Office of the Illinois Attorney General

shannon.barnaby@ilag.gov

(312-550-4480)

Pronouns: she/her/hers

--
Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



troy.teater@mcusd709.org Teater, Troy
To: Craig.Smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock

Friday, August 18, 2023 at 11:49:53AM Central Daylight Time

FYI



Troy A. Teater Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Barnaby, Shannon** <Shannon.Barnaby@ilag.gov>
Date: Fri, Aug 18, 2023 at 10:18AM
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] Re: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] 2023 PAC 77590
To: Teater, Troy <troy.teater@mcusd709.org>

Good Morning, Mr. Teater:

This is helpful information. Thank you.

Very Truly Yours,

Shannon Barnaby
Senior Assistant Attorney General
Public Access Bureau
Office of the Illinois Attorney General
shannon.barnaby@ilag.gov
(312-550-4480)
Pronouns: she/her/hers

From: Teater, Troy <troy.teater@mcusd709.org>
Sent: Thursday, August 17, 2023 9:50 PM
To: Barnaby, Shannon <Shannon.Barnaby@ilag.gov>
Cc: Craig Smock <Craig.Smock@mcusd709.org>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] 2023 PAC 77590

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Shannon Barnaby

Senior Assistant Attorney General

Public Access Bureau

Office of the Illinois Attorney General

shannon.barnaby@ilag.gov

(312-550-4480)

Pronouns: she/her/hers

This is a staff email account managed by Morton Community Unit School District 709. This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error please notify the sender.

[STAFF] Re: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] 2023 PAC 77517**troy.teater@mcusd709.org Teater, Troy**

To: Benjamin.Silver@ilag.gov Silver, Benjamin

Cc: hmcmeekan@gmail.com Heather McMeekan, Public.Access@ilag.gov Public Access

Bcc: Craig.Smock@mcusd709.org

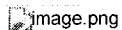
Monday, July 31, 2023 at 9:11:57AM Central Daylight Time

Mr. Silver,

I ran the search for emails containing the keywords indicated in the request from January 1, 2022 to May 25, 2023. The search resulted in 58,608 emails.



I re-ran the search for emails containing the keywords indicated in the request for the revised timeframe of March 1, 2023 to May 25, 2023. The search resulted in 8,979.



If we print, read and redact 8,979 emails at 20-30 per hour it would take us roughly between 300 and 450 hours to complete. Since some of these emails may contain sensitive personal information regarding our families, we would be limited in who can actually review the emails to redact.

I believe the request would be unduly burdensome for the district. How should I proceed?



Troy A. Teater Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

On Fri, Jul 28, 2023 at 12:53 PM Silver, Benjamin <Benjamin.Silver@ilag.gov> wrote:

Dear Mr. Teater:

Attached is a letter from the Public Access Bureau regarding 2023 PAC 77517. Please note that this Request for Review concerns Ms. McMeekan's narrowed June 9, 2023, FOIA request, in which she offered to exclude records contained on a private phone or e-mail account.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best Regards,

Ben Silver

Assistant Attorney General

Public Access Bureau

C: 773-590-7878

benjamin.silver@ilag.gov

Attachments:**image.png** 73k

image.png 73k

troy.teater@mcusd709.org Teater, Troy
To: Craig.Smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock

Tuesday, August 1, 2023 at 7:50:53AM Central Daylight Time

And.....



Troy A. Teater Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Heather McMeekan** <hmcmeekan@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Jul 31, 2023 at 3:43 PM
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] 2023 PAC 77517
To: Teater, Troy <troy.teater@mcusd709.org>
Cc: Public Access <Public.Access@ilag.gov>, Silver, Benjamin <Benjamin.Silver@ilag.gov>

Hi,

I'd be willing to further narrow the time frame to March, 2023. How many are found when doing the search with the narrowed timeframe?

Also, most of those are likely spam, needing no redaction.

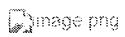
If one person's email is receiving such a high volume of emails with language mentioning extremist groups, language, key terms, I have these questions

- 1) Are appropriate spam filters in place?
- 2) Are the incoming spams being marked/reporter by the email user?
- 3) What are the top ten domains sending the highest volume of such emails with these key terms to a tax-payer funded email address?
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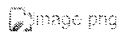
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Assistant Superintendent

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C: 773-590-7878
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Attachments:

image.png 73k

image.png 73k

troy.teater@mcusd709.org Teater, Troy
To: hmcmeekan@gmail.com Heather McMeekan
Cc: Public.Access@ilag.gov Public Access, Benjamin.Silver@ilag.gov Silver, Benjamin
Bcc: Craig.Smock@mcusd709.org

Tuesday, August 1, 2023 at 12:11:50 PM Central Daylight Time

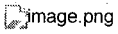
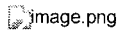
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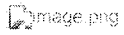
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image.png 73k
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Cc: Public.Access@ilag.gov Public Access, Benjamin.Silver@ilag.gov Silver, Benjamin
Bcc: Craig.Smock@mcusd709.org

Monday, August 14, 2023 at 2:26:00 PM Central Daylight Time

Ms. McMeekan,

Your response can be found at: <https://www.morton709.org/freedom-of-information>



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On Mon, Aug 7, 2023 at 10:08AM Heather McMeekan <hmcmeekan@gmail.com> wrote:
Hi,

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"Black Lives Matter"
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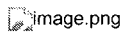
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troy.teater@mcusd709.org Teater, Troy
To: Craig.Smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock

Monday, August 14, 2023 at 3:12:48 PM Central Daylight Time

And another happy customer.



Troy A. Teater Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Heather McMeekan** <hmcmeekan@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Aug 14, 2023 at 3:03 PM
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] 2023 PAC 77517
To: Teater, Troy <troy.teater@mcusd709.org>
Cc: Silver, Benjamin <Benjamin.Silver@ilag.gov>

Thank you. I appreciate your help in getting this data.

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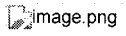
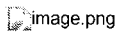
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image.png 35k

image.png 73k

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McMeekan 3-1-23 to 3-31-23

UPDATE COPY CLEAR

VIEW SAVED QUERIES

Type:(Gmail) Mode:(All data) Sent between 2023-03-01 and 2023-03-31 Time zone:(America/Chicago) Terms:(**"Awake IL" OR "CRT" OR "black lives matter" OR "face theory" OR "black student" OR "blue lives matter" OR racism OR feminist OR homophobia OR LGBTQ+ OR jew OR "drag queen" OR transgender OR queer OR pride OR rainbow OR Christian OR bible OR "3%" OR gadsden OR "Betsy Ross" OR maga OR "Proud Boys" OR pritzker OR "mask madate" OR militia OR trump OR "Jan 6" OR biblical OR evangelical OR biden OR "let's go brandon" OR queer OR GOP OR republican**) Accounts:(**michael.saunders@mcusd709.org**)

EDIT QUERY

COUNT

EXPORT

Count **3,630**

Accounts with matches **1**

DOWNLOAD ACCOUNTS WITH MATCHES

Search

SAVE

CLEAR

VIEW SAVED QUERIES

Type:(Gmail) Mode:(All data) Sent between 2022-01-01 and 2023-05-25 Time zone:(America/Chicago) Terms:(**"Awake IL" OR "CRT" OR "black lives matter" OR "race theory" OR "black student" OR "blue lives matter" OR racism OR feminism OR homophobia OR LGBTQ+ OR jew OR "drag queen" OR transgender OR queer OR pride OR rainbow OR Christian OR bible OR "3%" OR gadsden OR "Betsy Ross" OR maga OR "Proud Boys" OR pritzker OR "mask madate" OR militia OR trump OR "Jan 6" OR biblical OR evangelical OR biden OR "let's go brandon" OR queer OR GOP OR republican**) Accounts:(**michael.saunders@mcusd709.org**)



EDIT QUERY

COUNT

EXPORT

Count **58,608**

Accounts with matches **1**

DOWNLOAD ACCOUNTS WITH MATCHES

Chicago Tribune

Breaking News



**Former President Donald Trump
facing additional charges in
classified documents case**

Search

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CLEAR

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EXPORT

Count **58,608**

Accounts with matches **1**

DOWNLOAD ACCOUNTS WITH MATCHES

Re: [STAFF] Board meeting

craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig
To: michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Saunders, Michael
Cc: joseph.sander@mcusd709.org Sander, Joseph

Monday, September 11, 2023 at 9:27:56AM Central Daylight Time

Sounds good.

On Mon, Sep 11, 2023 at 8:31AM Saunders, Michael <michael.saunders@mcusd709.org> wrote:
That works for me if it works for both of you.

On Mon, Sep 11, 2023 at 7:29AM Sander, Joseph <joseph.sander@mcusd709.org> wrote:
How about Wednesday, after the Leadership meeting?
Joe

On Sun, Sep 10, 2023 at 8:55 PM Saunders, Michael <michael.saunders@mcusd709.org> wrote:
Hello Craig,
Hope you had a good weekend! Just wanted to bring the following comments from the Board meeting video to your attention. At some point before the next board meeting, I would like to discuss how these comments can be addressed.
Michael

Heather McMeekan

8:29 "the principal who needs to be investigated for assaulting a child for the crime of hanging a pride flag poster in the school"

Michelle Gaede

27:13 "all 3 (Saunders, Smock, Krall) have had a hand in creating an unsafe space for teachers, staff, students, and parents who do not hold their same beliefs"

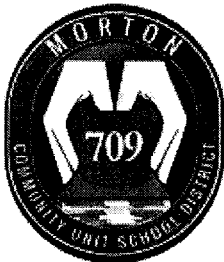
Bryan Groth

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NNy4ZMs4>

--

Make it a great day!



Joseph G. Sander Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

--

Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



Board meeting

michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Saunders, Michael

Sunday, September 10, 2023 at 8:55:14 PM Central Daylight Time

To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock
Cc: joseph.sander@mcusd709.org Joseph Sander
Bcc: michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Michael Saunders

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MORTON

Community Unit School District 709

1050 South Fourth Ave · Suite 200 · Morton, Illinois 61550-2596 · Phone (309) 263-2581

TROY TEATER, Ed. D.
Assistant Superintendent

March 22, 2024

Dear Ms. McMeekan,

On March 21, 2024, we received a determination from Katie Goldsmith, Assistant Attorney General in the Public Access Bureau. Ms. Goldsmith's determination is for the district to release:

"[a]ll emails, texts, memos, announcements in the School Board member's accounts, Superintendent Smock's and Principal Saunders' emails with any of the following keywords/phrases for the period of Aug 1 2023 - Present (September 19, 2023)." "Gay," "McMeekan," "LGBTQ," "Moms for Prayer," "Colorful Flag," "Ten Commandments," "IL Eagle," and "Moms for Liberty."

On November 2, 2023, we released records containing these search terms for August 15, 2023 - September 1, 2023. We will release records from August 1, 2023 - August 14, 2023, and from September 2, 2023 - September 19, 2023.

Due to the nature of the release and according to 5 ILCS 140/3(e) which allows for a 5-day extension when *"requested records require examination and evaluation by personnel having the necessary competence and discretion to determine if they are exempt from disclosure under Section 7 of this Act or should be revealed only with appropriate deletions"*, you can expect a response by April 5, 2024.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Troy A. Teater', followed by a long horizontal line.

Troy A. Teater Ed.D.

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Leadership shifts: 4 superintendents split with districts as others plan retirement

newsletter@districtadministrationmagazine.com DA Daily PM Newsletter

Tuesday, September 19, 2023 at 3:05:28 PM Central Daylight Time

To: DA@omeda.com DA Daily PM Newsletter
To: thomas.neeley@morton709.org

[View in browser](#)



The Two-Minute Afternoon Briefing for K-12 Leaders

Advertisement

DA District Administration | ED TALK

**Online Learning vs. Remote Learning:
Strategies for Success in Each Model**

September 28, 2023 | 2:00PM ET REGISTER NOW

TRENDING ON DA

Iterative learning: Why our schools need to abandon compliance

Dana Mortenson, DA guest columnist

Educators must adopt an approach that frees students to try, fail and learn from that failure, tweak what they're doing and try again. This will empower students to learn and relearn for the rest of their lives.

[Read more >>](#)

Sponsored Content

Your Partner for Online Learning Success

Sponsored by FlexPoint Education Cloud™

We have created a guide to help school and district leaders like you learn the fundamentals of online learning, its benefits, and how to implement a program to fit the

needs of your students, families, and teachers. Download the free guide.

[Learn more >>](#)

TOP STORY



Leadership shifts: 4 superintendents split with districts as others head for retirement

Superintendents for Hamilton Southeastern Schools and St. Louis Park Public Schools resigned suddenly as an Arizona school board voted its leader out after getting sued by the state.

[Read more >>](#)

Sponsored Content

A HALO of Protection for Schools

Sponsored by IPVideo Corporation

HALO 3C gives schools a HALO of protection by detecting vaping, aggression, vandalism, and more. These features protect all areas of schools, including bathrooms, locker rooms, and classrooms while protecting the privacy of students and staff by not recording audio or video.

[Learn more >>](#)

AROUND THE NATION

San Antonio ISD releases preliminary school consolidation plan impacting half of the district's schools

Texas Public Radio

All told, the preliminary school consolidation plan presented to the board Monday night would impact half of the district's 98 campuses and cut the number of buildings SAISD operates by 20%. In addition to the 19 schools recommended for closure, 30 would receive more students, relocate, or change their grade configuration.

[Read more >>](#)

How a rural Alabama school system outdid the country with gains in math

AP News

Piedmont City schools notched significant improvement in math, landing in the top spot among school districts across the country in a comparison of scores from before and during the pandemic. Nationwide, students on average fell half a year behind in math, researchers say.

[Read more >>](#)

Student's LGBTQ mural must be removed from Michigan school, board says

NBC News

The high schooler, who painted the mural after winning a student art contest, said she hoped the mural would "make people feel welcome."

Read more >>

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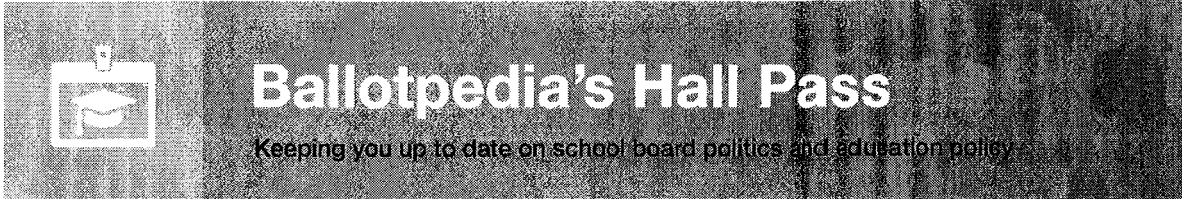
[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Hall Pass: Your Ticket to Understanding School Board Politics, Edition #77

updates@info.ballotpedia.org Ballotpedia
To: editor@ballotpedia.org Ballotpedia
To: thomas.neeley@mcusd709.org

Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at 3:03:49 PM Central Daylight Time

On the issues: The debate over whether schools need more male teachers

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Welcome to Hall Pass

September 13, 2023

Welcome to Hall Pass, a newsletter written to keep you plugged into the conversations driving school board politics and governance.

In today's edition, you'll find:

- On the issues: The debate over whether schools need more male teachers
- Share candidate endorsements with us!
- School board filing deadlines, election results, and recall certifications
- Here's who approves K-12 curriculum in the 50 states
- Extracurricular: education news from around the web
- Candidate Connection survey

Share story ideas or reactions by replying to this email.

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On the issues

In this section, we curate reporting, analysis, and commentary on the issues school board members deliberate when they set out to offer the best education possible in their district. Missed an issue? [Click here](#) to see the previous education debates we've covered.

According to the most recent data from the National Center on Education Statistics (NCES), the percentage of male teachers in U.S. public schools dropped from 33% in 1980 to 23% in the 2020-2021 school year.

Today, we'll examine arguments about whether the trend is cause for concern.

Richard Reeves writes that fewer male teachers is a problem and that positive male role models are important for children's academic achievement, especially for boys. Reeves says male teachers are more likely to serve as mentors and lead after-school programs and extracurricular activities.

Ryan Fan writes that male teachers should not be expected to serve as mentors or father-like figures for their students and that both men and women can be positive role models. Fan says there is no evidence suggesting teachers' gender affects education outcomes. He says the problems facing education are systemic and not tied to teacher demographics.

Head of the Class | Richard Reeves, *No Mercy / No Malice*

"I do think it is a problem and a policy concern. The emptying out of men from our schools is bad news for at least three reasons. First, having a male teacher improves educational outcomes, especially in certain subjects like English (where boys are lagging furthest behind girls). One study suggests that if half the English teachers in middle schools were men the achievement gap in reading between girls and boys would fall by approximately a third — a massive effect. ... Second, male teachers are much more likely to take on after-school activities, especially coaching sports teams. A recent Brookings study finds a gender pay gap among K-12 teachers of about \$2,200 a year in favor of men. The difference in base pay is just \$700 a year. Most of the gap, about \$1,200 a year, is explained by the extra pay men get from doing extracurricular work. ... Third, the men in our schools are mentors to both male and female students. A recent study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that having an informal mentor in high school improved educational performance across a range of measures; most impressive was a 9% increase in college attendance."

Do We Really Need More Male Teachers? | Ryan Fan, *Medium*

"The stereotype is 'these kids don't have positive male figures in their lives,' which is true in some cases but not necessarily true in every case, and I find it a logical fallacy to conclude that because some students don't have positive male role models in their lives, a male teacher is supposed to fill that role. I saw a colleague and good friend, who my supervisors didn't think was doing what he

was supposed to do, once get told 'you could be a positive Black male figure in these kids' lives, but you're not!' That's just way too much of a gap and too much pressure to put on someone. We're just teachers. The sudden need to become a positive father-like figure is a bit too much, and I don't think it's very fair either. And research from the Economics of Education Review found there is no empirical evidence to support teacher gender having an impact on student academic performance across 15 OECD countries. The bigger role models for children are peers or relatives over teachers. ... More male teachers is not a band-aid for education's problems. These problems are all very systemic, but when I think back to my teachers it wasn't the gender of the teacher that ever made me connect with them at a deeper level."

Share candidate endorsements with us!

As part of our goal to solve the ballot information problem, Ballotpedia is gathering information about school board candidate endorsements. The ballot information gap widens the further down the ballot you go, and is worst for the more than 500,000 local offices nationwide, such as school boards or special districts. Endorsements can help voters know more about their candidates and what they stand for.

Do you know of an individual or group that has endorsed a candidate in your district?

[Click here to respond!](#)

School board update: filing deadlines, election results, and recall certifications

Ballotpedia has historically covered school board elections in about 500 of the country's largest districts. We're gradually expanding the number we cover with our eye on the more than 13,000 districts with elected school boards.

New Hampshire

Fourteen seats on the Manchester School District school board in New Hampshire are up for election this year, with a primary on **Sept. 19**. The general election is Nov. 7.

November elections

Nov. 7 is the biggest election date of the year, and voters across the country will decide state and local races—including for school boards (subscribe to our *Daily Brew* newsletter for Ballotpedia’s coverage and analysis of elections up and down the ballot). Throughout the fall, we’ll preview the most interesting and pivotal school board elections happening that day. Let’s step back and take a look at the big picture.

We’re covering school board elections in the following **16** states on Nov. 7:

School board elections on Nov. 7, 2023

This table shows the 16 states where Ballotpedia is covering school board elections on Nov. 7, 2023, and associated upcoming filing deadlines. Dates shaded in blue are upcoming.

State	Filing deadline
Colorado	September 1
Idaho	September 8
Iowa	September 21
Kansas	June 1
Kentucky	June 6
Minnesota	August 15
Mississippi	September 6
New Hampshire	July 21
New Jersey	July 31
New Mexico	August 29
North Carolina	July 21
Ohio	August 9
Pennsylvania	August 1
Texas	August 21
Virginia	June 13
Washington	May 19

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In seven of those states—Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington—we are covering *all* school board elections on Nov. 7. We’ll be bringing you detailed coverage of many of those elections.

Here's who approves K-12 curriculum in the 50 states

Recently, debates over what gets taught in public school classrooms have increasingly reflected national partisan concerns—so much so that governors and even presidents have waded into the curriculum controversies.

Consider two examples involving prominent governors.

In 2022, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) signed legislation requiring school districts to make public all instructional material, required readings, and library books, while also allowing parents to file formal objections to material they find unacceptable.

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) this year said he would fine the Temecula Unified School District after the board, citing references to Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man elected to public office in California, voted to reject an elementary school social studies curriculum. On Sept. 7, the California Assembly voted to send AB 1078 to Newsom's desk. The bill would prohibit school districts from rejecting "instructional materials that accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity of our society." Newsom has publicly backed the bill but has not signed it as of this writing.

These examples provide a glimpse into the *political* conflicts over curriculum. But what do state laws actually say about who sets public school curricula?

To answer this question, we searched our database for state-specific information about curriculum authority, requirements, and statutes in every state. Depending on the state, the law directs state-level entities—like state boards of education—or local districts or schools to develop and approve curriculum. In some cases, state and local entities may both develop and approve curriculum.

- In 45 states, a local entity (such as school districts and local schools) develops curriculum.
- In Colorado, North Carolina, and Rhode Island, state-level entities (such as state boards of education and state education agency leaders) develop curriculum.
- In South Carolina and Texas, both state-level entities and local entities develop curriculum.

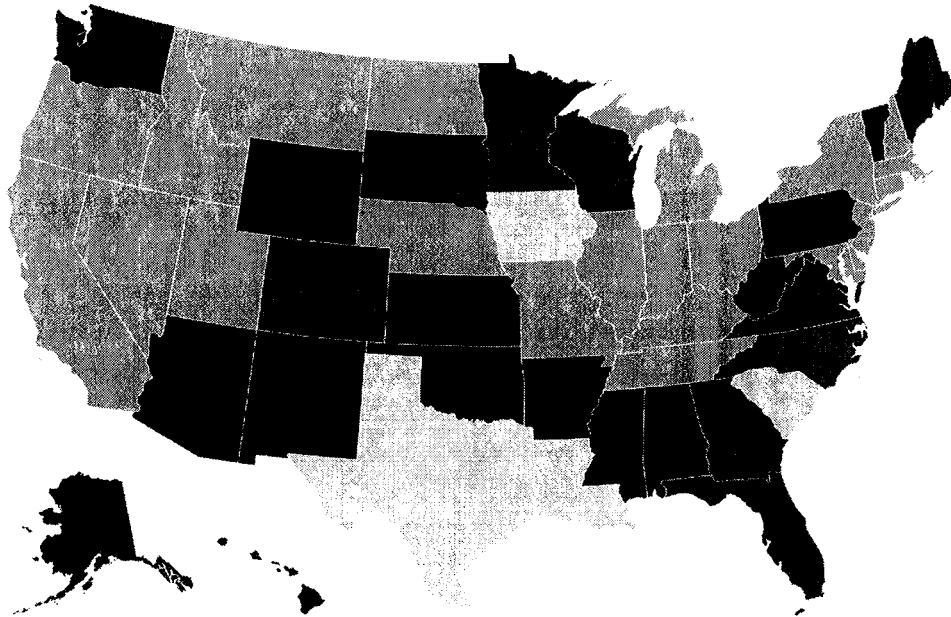
When the law gives state-level entities the responsibility to develop curricula, the law can either *recommend* or *require* that local schools or districts use the state-developed curriculum in the classroom.

The map below shows the states that *recommend* districts to use state-developed curriculum, the states that *require* districts to use state-developed curriculum, and the states that *allow* local schools or districts to develop

curriculum without state recommendations. Five states use a combination of state recommendations, state requirements, and local authority. Those states—Iowa, Louisiana, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Texas—are represented on the map as "Other."

State K-12 curriculum authority

Local districts
 Other
 State recommendation
 State requirement



Source: Ballotpedia

BALLOTPEDIA

- Iowa grants authority to local entities to develop curriculum but requires some state-level core curriculum items be met.
- Louisiana grants authority to local entities to develop curriculum but requires approval of local curriculum by the state board of education.
- Rhode Island develops curriculum at the state level and maintains some requirements and some recommendations for local districts to follow.
- South Carolina and Texas develop some state board of education curriculum requirements and grant some local discretion to schools and districts for curriculum development.

Here are a few examples from our database:

In Oklahoma, where local districts approve school curriculum, state law § 70-11-103.6a-F says:

School districts shall exclusively determine the instruction, curriculum, reading lists and instructional materials and textbooks, subject to any applicable provisions or requirements as set forth in law, to be used in meeting the subject matter standards. School districts may, at their discretion, adopt supplementary student assessments which are in addition to the statewide student assessments.

In Missouri, where the state board of education makes recommendations about curriculum to local districts, state code § 160.514(5) says:

The state board of education shall develop written curriculum frameworks that may be used by school districts. Such curriculum frameworks shall incorporate the academic performance standards adopted by the state board of education pursuant to subsection 1 of this section. The curriculum frameworks shall provide guidance to school districts but shall not be mandates for local school boards in the adoption or development of written curricula as required by subsection 6 of this section.

Depending on the state, K-12 curriculum may also reflect or incorporate state content standards—educational learning and achievement goals that state education officials either require or recommend that local schools satisfy through the curriculum.

Click here to learn more about K-12 curriculum authority, requirements, and statutes in the states.

Extracurricular: education news from around the web

This section contains links to recent education-related articles from around the internet. If you know of a story we should be reading, reply to this email to share it with us!

- Virginia Went to War Over History. And Students Actually Came Out on Top. | *Politico*
- Three big questions, asked and answered, about Chicago's move to an elected school board | *WBEZ Chicago*
- Why These Districts Are Suing to Stop Release of A-F School Ratings | *Education Week*
- The conservative push for "school choice" has had its most successful year ever | *Vox*
- Florida Expected to Approve Classical Exam as a Competitor to the SAT | *The New York Times*
- New Poll Shows Voters See Room for Improvement in School Boards | *RealClearEducation*
- Salesforce Foundation Grant to Train Teachers on AI | *Government Technology*
- Oklahoma follows Florida in allowing PragerU in schools | *The Hill*

Take our Candidate Connection survey to reach voters in your district

CANDIDATE CONNECTION

Today, we're taking a look at responses from two candidates facing off on Nov. 7 in the nonpartisan general election for Cheyenne Mountain School District 12 Board of Education at-large in Colorado. Three seats are available, and five candidates are on the ballot.

Incumbent Susan Mellow, who assumed office in 2017, and challenger Betsy Kleiner are the only candidates who've completed the survey as of this writing.

Here's how Mellow answered the question, **"What areas of public policy are you personally passionate about?"**



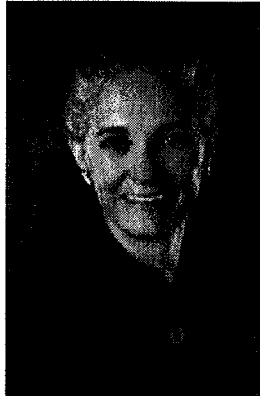
"School Finance. Cheyenne Mountain is among the lowest in receipt of per pupil funding from the State of Colorado, and with the additional funding generously provided by our local taxpayers, the district has been able to keep per-pupil expenditures below the state average while providing excellent educational opportunities for our students. With possible changes to the school finance formula on the horizon, I intend to continue to advocate for fair funding from the state for Cheyenne Mountain. I will also continue to advocate for state and federal governments to fully fund

requirements they place on our district.

School Safety/Mental Health. Needs in these areas have been increasing over time, and they work hand-in-hand. During my tenure on the Cheyenne Mountain Board of Education, in addition to maintaining a school resource officer at Cheyenne Mountain High School, we have moved from the use of a contract security team to a security team of district employees, allowing for the development of long-term relationships and invaluable institutional knowledge. We have also strengthened intergovernmental partnerships and communications to better handle any emergency. More students are presenting with mental health concerns, and we have consistently added more school psychologists and social workers to properly address student needs. This landscape continues to change, and I support the district's efforts to continue to monitor and adjust as necessary."

[Click here to read the rest of Mellow's responses.](#)

Here's how Kleiner answered the question, "**What areas of public policy are you personally passionate about?**"



"Betsy shares our community vision to continue vigorous academic achievement and broad career opportunities for our students. She believes in clear communication and transparency and enjoys working in collaboration with other stakeholders to ensure creative solutions. She understands the power of listening, advocacy, kindness and compromise. Betsy is passionate about our community and our students and looks forward to serving as a member of our local Board of Education."

[Click here to read the rest of Kleiner's responses.](#)

In the 2022 election cycle, **6,087** candidates completed the survey.

If you're a school board candidate or incumbent, [click here to take the survey.](#)
And if you're not running for school board, but there is an election in your community this year, share the link with the candidates and urge them to take the survey!

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[EXTERNAL EMAIL] 10 states are home to the most equitable school districts

enewslatters@districtadministrationmagazine.com DA Daily Newsletter

Monday, September 11, 2023 at 4:02:07 AM Central Daylight Time

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The Two-Minute Briefing for K12 Leaders

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3 ways to design virtual learning that boosts math scores

Todd Mahler, DA guest columnist

Most teachers understand that math learning recovery depends on data-informed, student-centered instruction. But without the right technology, it's a methodology that's difficult to deliver.

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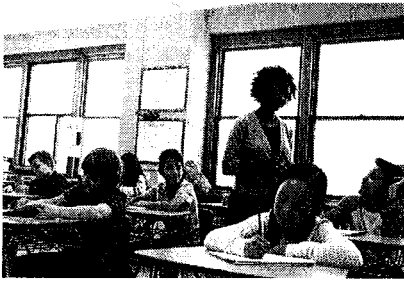
4 Virtual PD Tips Every Educator Should Know

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Tap into the limitless opportunities of virtual PD. This free, quick-read article offers four distinct learning pathways and tips for choosing the best option.

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TOP STORY



These 10 states are home to the most equitable school districts

WalletHub's analysis compared states based on two metrics: average household income and public elementary and secondary school spending per pupil. Where does your state rank?

[Read more >>](#)

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7 Learning Zones to Create in Your Classroom

Sponsored by Demco

Each student, subject, and teaching style requires something different. Zoning makes it easy to meet all of these unique needs at once, enabling educators to achieve maximum flexibility without overhauling the space every day. Read on for fresh zoning ideas.

[Read more >>](#)

UPCOMING WEBINARS / DA Ed Talks

The 3 Grading Reform Challenges Every School Leader Must Overcome

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Attend this web seminar with Dr. Matt Townsley, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Northern Iowa, and Becky Pepler, Director of the FIRST Education STAGR Center, to learn about the most common challenges that can arise, and practical ways for district leaders to address them.

[Register now >>](#)

Engaging All Students with Esports in Education: Sharing Strategies and Lessons Learned as Esports Programs Grow Nationally

Sponsored by FETC

Listen to the shared experiences of this panel of district administrators and esports leaders to gain insight into the how, what and who to leverage to build technology partnerships and community support for esports programs.

[Register now >>](#)

Sustaining Data-Driven Instruction Throughout the School Year

Sponsored by Istation

In this 20-minute DA Ed Talk with the associate superintendent of curriculum and instruction from the Ector County ISD in Texas, learn how to use multiple data points to help teachers monitor progress, make "in the moment" instructional adjustments, and set students up for sustained success throughout the rest of the year.

[Register now >>](#)

AROUND THE COUNTRY

California lawmakers OK bill to fine school boards that ban books over race, LGBTQ+ issues

Los Angeles Times

Bill would allow fines against school boards that ban textbooks based on their inclusion of LGBTQ+ and race lessons — an attempt to halt escalating culture wars playing out in right-leaning enclaves of the liberal state.

[Read more >>](#)

Miami-Dade school board again shuts down LGBTQ month

Politico

Over the last two years, the school board in Miami, like many other counties, has been reshaped with candidates aligned with Gov. Ron DeSantis and conservative leaders who support the parental rights policies labeled as “Don’t Say Gay” by opponents.

[Read more >>](#)

Chicago Teachers Union president defends sending her son to private school

WBEZ

Stacy Davis Gates is facing backlash for sending her eldest child to a private high school, a decision she says represents a stark statement about disinvestment in public schools and drives home why the fight to fully fund neighborhood schools is so important.

[Read more >>](#)

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[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Superintendent wonders when educators stopped being viewed as heroes

newsletter@districtadministrationmagazine.com DA Daily PM Newsletter

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TRENDING ON DA

Being shelf-less: How digital reading and listening boost literacy

Gretchen Zaitzeff, DA guest columnist

Reading apps allow educators to drop entire libraries into students' hands, inviting them to read in print, on their phones while traveling, and through their headphones when being active.

[Read more >>](#)

TOP STORY



Superintendent wonders when educators stopped being viewed as heroes

How the public went so quickly from calling educators the heroes of the pandemic to "villains" and "groomers" bothers Papillion La Vista Community Schools Superintendent Andrew Rikli.

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AROUND THE NATION

Houston ISD's Mike Miles doubles down on open-door classroom policy

Chron

Miles said requiring teachers to leave their doors open during class time is about administrators observing the quality of instruction.

[Read more >>](#)

American classrooms need more educators. Can virtual teachers step in to bridge the gap?'

USA Today

Most observers, including some providers of these very services, agree this isn't ideal. Students with virtual teachers often say they like the classes but would prefer the instruction to be in-person.

[Read more >>](#)

Over 30 new LGBTQ education laws are in effect as students go back to school

NBC News

Students and teachers have to contend with a variety of restrictions on LGBTQ content and bathroom and pronoun use.

Read more >>

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[EXTERNAL EMAIL] These are 2023-24's best high schools for 3 reasons

enewslatters@districtadministrationmagazine.com DA Daily Newsletter

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TRENDING ON DA

An Amazon wish list of reasons to help your teachers buy back-to-school supplies

"Our schools are, sadly, under-resourced and there is an unstated expectation that educators will spend their own money on school supplies and equipment," Vice President of the National Education Association Princess Moss told *USA Today*. "We don't ask nurses and doctors to provide their own equipment for doing their jobs."

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TOP STORY



These are 2023-24's best high schools for 3 reasons

U.S. News' analysis of nearly 18,000 public schools across the country ranks schools based on college preparedness, student achievement and STEM education.

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UPCOMING WEBINARS / DA Ed Talks

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Attend this 20-minute DA Ed Talk to gain exclusive access to insights from these meetings about how to support equitable, positive literacy outcomes and high achievement for multilingual learners.

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How AI Will Empower Administrators and Educators for Tomorrow's Learning

Sponsored by Imagine Learning

Artificial intelligence has transformative potential to revolutionize K-12 education. In this DA Ed Talk, two edtech experts will outline how AI-powered technology can and will empower educators to personalize instruction, optimize teaching, and create more effective learning environments.

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The 3 Grading Reform Challenges Every School Leader Must Overcome

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Attend this web seminar with Dr. Matt Townsley, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Northern Iowa, and Becky Pepler, Director of the FIRST Education STAGR Center, to learn about the most common challenges that can arise, and practical ways for district leaders to address them.

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AROUND THE NATION

Forsyth County Schools cancel talks after author says the word 'gay' to elementary school students

Georgia Public Broadcasting

Author Marc Tyler Nobleman has spoken to students of all ages all over the country hundreds of times about the the history of the superhero Batman—without incident.

[Read more >>](#)

Where's 'woke'? Republicans test a different education message

The New York Times

Ron DeSantis rose to prominence in part on his “anti-woke” agenda, especially when it comes to education. In some settings, culture-war messaging seems to be receding.

[Read more >>](#)

More than 150 bats found inside Utah high school as students returned from summer break

USA Today

The Brazilian free-tailed bats entered the Salt Lake City school through small openings on the third floor of the school, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources said.

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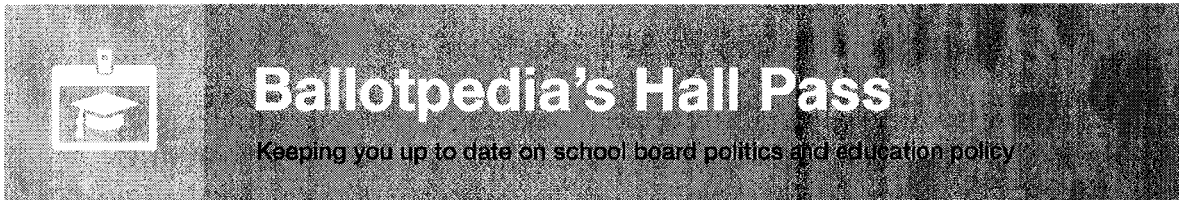
[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Hall Pass: Your Ticket to Understanding School Board Politics, Edition #71

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To: editor@ballotpedia.org Ballotpedia
To: amanda.leman@mcusd709.org

Wednesday, August 2, 2023 at 3:03:20 PM Central Daylight Time

On the issues: The debate over Florida's Black history curriculum standards

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Welcome to Hall Pass

August 02, 2023

Welcome to *Hall Pass*, a newsletter written to keep you plugged into the conversations driving school board politics and governance.

In today's edition, you'll find:

- On the issues: The debate over Florida's Black history curriculum standards
- School board filing deadlines, election results, and recall certifications
- Three members of the Temecula Valley Unified School District face recall effort after voting to reject social studies curriculum
- Extracurricular: education news from around the web
- Candidate Connection survey

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On the issues

In this section, we curate reporting, analysis, and commentary on the issues school board members deliberate when they set out to offer the best education possible in their district.

The debate over Florida's Black history curriculum standards

The Florida Board of Education on July 19 passed updated curriculum standards. Debate over the standards has centered on language in the Black history component that says schools should teach “how slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit.”

Jamelle Bouie writes that the phrasing of the curricular standards suggests that Black people benefited from slavery. Bouie says few slaves learned useful skills during their enslavement and says the portions of the Florida standards related to the development of skills deemphasizes the experiences of the majority who were not fortunate enough to gain useful experience.

Rich Lowry writes that the Florida standards do not say that slaves benefited from slavery. Instead, Lowry says the standards related to slaves who developed skills emphasize the resilience and strength of slaves despite their oppression.

Ron DeSantis and the State Where History Goes to Die | Jamelle Bouie, *New York Times*

“The good-faith explanation for this language, if you’re inclined to be generous, is that the authors wanted to emphasize the agency and skill of the enslaved, whose labor fueled large parts of the American economy in the decades before Emancipation. It’s an important point that you can also find in the College Board’s Advanced Placement class in African American studies. ‘In addition to agricultural work, enslaved people learned specialized trades and worked as painters, carpenters, tailors, musicians and healers in the North and South,’ the A.P. guidelines state. ‘Once free, African Americans used these skills to provide for themselves and others.’ Similar points, yes, but the language isn’t quite the same. In addition to using the term ‘enslaved’ rather than ‘slave’ — a linguistic shift that continues to be a subject of real debate — the language for the A.P. curriculum emphasizes that Black Americans could use these skills only after Emancipation. This is key. Slaves were owned as chattel by other human beings who stole their freedom, labor and bodily autonomy. To say that any more than a fortunate few could ‘parlay’ their skills into anything that might improve their lives is to spin a fiction.”

The Left Will Say Anything about Florida | Rich Lowry, *National Review*

“This is not the first or second thing, or even the 19th, that you’d want students to learn about slavery, but it is also indisputably true and part of the record. No one is saying the enslaved “benefited” from slavery. It’s not an endorsement of slavery to point out that slaves looked for every crack in the system to try to

improve themselves and gain some autonomy — rather, it's an endorsement of the pluck, initiative, and resilience of an oppressed people operating in the worst of circumstances. We are supposed to believe that enslaved African Americans strained against their awful condition in every way (as they actually did) — learning to read, protecting their family life, worshipping on their own, defying their masters when they could, creating an elaborate system of escape — but they never, ever learned a skill to their own benefit. This is, of course, nonsense. Learning skills was another aspect of African-American agency, which was never wiped out no matter how much their oppressors tried to make it so. ... Was slavery good for these men? Absolutely not. The point is what they accomplished despite slavery, not because of it."

Share candidate endorsements with us!

As part of our goal to solve the ballot information problem, Ballotpedia is gathering information about school board candidate endorsements. The ballot information gap widens the further down the ballot you go, and is worst for the more than 500,000 local offices nationwide, such as school boards or special districts. Endorsements can help voters know more about their candidates and what they stand for.

Do you know of an individual or group that has endorsed a candidate in your district?

[Click here to respond!](#)

School board update: filing deadlines, election results, and recall certifications

Ballotpedia has historically covered school board elections in about 500 of the country's largest districts. We're gradually expanding the number we cover with our eye on the more than 13,000 districts with elected school boards.

Upcoming school board elections

Washington

Washington held school board primary elections in the following districts on **Aug.**

1:

- Cheney School District
- Lake Washington School District
- Seattle Public Schools
- Spokane Public Schools

Also on **Aug. 1**, residents voted in a recall election against three of the five members of the Richland School District school board—Audra Byrd, Semi Bird, and Kari Williams. As of this writing, unofficial results show the “yes” votes—as in “yes” to remove from office—for all three sitting around 55-56%. Washington uses mail-in ballots, and the county is scheduled to certify the results on Aug. 15.

Recall supporters said that the board members violated the Open Public Meetings Act; violated district policies, procedures, and code of ethics; and voted to make masks optional while a statewide mask requirement was in place. All three board members denied any wrongdoing.

One board member, Semi Bird, is running as a Republican candidate for governor in 2024.

[Click here to read more about this recall.](#) You can read our 2023 mid-year recall report, which includes data on school board recalls efforts, [here](#).

Kansas

Three seats on the Wichita Public Schools school board are up for election on Nov. 7. A primary election occurred on **Aug. 1** for the At-Large seat. Primaries for Districts 3 and 4 were canceled.

- Wichita Public Schools

Idaho

Recall elections against Zone 4 representative Keith Rutledge and Zone 2 representative Susan Brown, members of the West Bonner County School District school board in Idaho, are being held on **Aug. 29**. The recall effort began when the board voted 3-1 to reject curriculum it had previously endorsed because of concerns about social emotional learning. [Click here to read the recall petitions and Rutledge’s and Brown’s responses.](#)

Three members of the Temecula Valley Unified School District face recall effort after voting to reject social studies curriculum

Three members of the Temecula Valley Unified School District Board of Education are facing a recall effort from One Temecula Valley Political Action Committee, an organization that says it was formed “in response to a very real and dangerous threat to local governance posed by political and religious extremist views.” The recall effort comes less than a month after the board members voted against adopting a textbook for elementary school students. The vote garnered attention across the state and country, including from California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) and other state officials.

Temecula Valley Unified School District is the 32nd largest school district in California, with an estimated enrollment of about 28,000 students.

According to our database, there was an average of 34 recall efforts against an average of 80 school board members each year between 2009 and 2022. A total of 19.6% of the school board members included in the efforts faced recall elections, and 10% of school board members were removed from office. So far in 2023, we’ve tracked 36 efforts against 66 officials. [Click here to see more of the school board recall elections we’ve covered.](#)

On May 22, the Temecula Valley Unified School District board voted 3-2 against adopting a new social studies textbook for use in the district’s 18 elementary schools. The textbook, published by the Teachers Curriculum Institute (TCI), is one of four supported by the State Board of Education. Board members Joseph Komrosky, Jennifer Wiersma, and Danny Gonzalez voted against adopting the curriculum, while Allison Barclay and Steven Schwartz voted in favor of doing so.

Komrosky and Gonzalez said they did not agree with the mentions of Harvey Milk in the textbook’s supplemental materials. They both called Milk a pedophile in reference to a report that Milk had a relationship with a 16-year-old when he was 33.

Wiersma said the process of choosing a textbook did not have enough input from parents, citing California Education Code § 51100, which states: “Family and school collaborative efforts are most effective when they involve parents and guardians in a variety of roles at all grade levels, from preschool through high school.”

Weirsma also said: “When I look at the TCI [Teachers Curriculum Institute] curriculum, I don’t see American exceptionalism. I don’t see all the things we need to see. We are going to hit the standards, but if we are totally going to utilize TCI, we need to talk about bias. I don’t see a fair and balanced viewpoint. I don’t see the civics.”

The district had previously been using a textbook that was out of compliance with the FAIR Act, a 2011 state law requiring districts to teach the history of, among other subjects, “Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans.”

The One Temecula Valley Political Action Committee PAC served the three members on June 13. The PAC said: "We understand that the chaos created by these board members has caused concern and frustration within our community. Therefore, we are taking action to ensure that our schools can move forward in a positive direction."

Recall supporters must collect signatures equal to 10% to 30% of registered voters depending on the jurisdiction's population and have 40 to 160 days to do so depending on the size of the jurisdiction.

On June 7, Newsom and Attorney General Rob Bonta (D) issued a statement asking the board for more information about why they rejected the textbook. Newsom said, "California is closely watching the actions of malicious actors seeking to ban books, whitewash history, and demonize the LGBTQ+ community in Temecula and across the state. If the law is violated, there will be repercussions."

The board reviewed the textbooks again on July 18 and again voted 3-2 to reject them. After the second vote, Newsom announced the state would fine the district \$1.5 million for violating state law and send it copies of the textbook, charging an additional \$1.6 million to cover shipping.

On July 21, the board voted 4-0 to approve the new curriculum. The vote also postponed one lesson for fourth graders pending further review. Wiersma and Komrosky voted with the other members of the board to approve the curriculum. Gonzalez was absent.

Gonzalez, Wiersma, and Komrosky were elected to four-year terms on the board in November 2022. The Inland Empire Family PAC, which says its goal is to "support conservative candidates who will stand for parental rights," endorsed all three board members. In December, the board voted 3-2 to ban the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the district, a decision that prompted high school students in the district's schools to walk out of class.

Newsom has backed Assembly Bill 1078 (AB 1078), a bill that would require a two-thirds vote for school boards to reject existing curriculum or books. State Rep. Corey Jackson (D) sponsored AB 1078, saying: "AB 1078 is a necessary response to protect our children's access to diverse perspectives, encourage critical thinking, and promote inclusivity in our schools."

AB 1078 passed the state Assembly 62-16 (with two absences) on June 30 and is now before the Senate.

Wiersma said, "If AB 1078 were to become law, it would use bullying techniques to threaten trustees who make good, but unpopular decisions, for their schools; this is how a democratic republic works."

The California School Boards Association also opposes AB 1078. Carlos

Machado, a legislative advocate for the organization, said, "We think that this is going in the wrong direction and could eventually hurt the district, its programs, employees and the students that are served by the district by withholding funds from the district."

You can learn more about the recall attempt against the three Temecula Valley Unified School District board members here.

Extracurricular: education news from around the web

This section contains links to recent education-related articles from around the internet. If you know of a story we should be reading, reply to this email to share it with us!

- D.C. public schools slashed tech budget ahead of new school year | *The Washington Post*
- His job is helping small California school districts with their unique needs | *EdSource*
- The Surprising Thing That Gets Students to Stick With AP Courses | *Education Week*
- A Hearing on Learning Loss and a Preview of the Election Battle to Come | *The 74*
- Florida to vote on reinstating partisan school board elections | *Alligator*
- First religious charter school in the US faces legal challenge | *The Hill*
- These two Utah school districts took opposite paths when the pandemic hit | *The Salt Lake Tribune*
- Pennsylvania looks to new school funding formula, but the timeline is unclear | *WESA*

Take our Candidate Connection survey to reach voters in your district



Everyone deserves to know their candidates. However, we know it can be hard for voters to find information about their candidates, especially for local offices

such as school boards. That's why we created **Candidate Connection**—a survey designed to help candidates tell voters about their campaigns, their issues, and so much more.

If you're a school board candidate or incumbent, click here to take the survey. And if you're not running for school board, but there is an election in your community this year, share the link with the candidates and urge them to take the survey!

The survey contains over 30 questions, and you can choose the ones you feel will best represent your views to voters. **If you complete the survey, a box with your answers will display on your Ballotpedia profile.** Your responses will also appear in our sample ballot.

In the 2022 election cycle, **6,087** candidates completed the survey.

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Join us on our mission to deliver unbiased and accurate information about American politics and policy to our millions of readers. Your support in 2023 will allow us to continue our mission to build the most comprehensive coverage of the nation's rapidly changing political landscape.

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SUPPORT BALLOTPEDIA

Ballotpedia is a 501c3 organization, established in 2007, to deliver accurate and unbiased information about American politics and policy. All gifts to Ballotpedia are tax-deductible to the extent of the law.

BALLOTPEDIA

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[STAFF] Fyi

kate.wyman@mcusd709.org Wyman, Kate
To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock

Friday, August 25, 2023 at 5:13:08 PM Central Daylight Time

Craig,
I am confident you are aware this article has been published and on social media today.

<https://illinoiseagle.com/2023/08/25/thousands-of-anti-lgbtq-emails-found-in-morton-school-principals-work-email-account/>

Kate

craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig
To: kate.wyman@mcusd709.org Wyman, Kate

Friday, August 25, 2023 at 5:14:09 PM Central Daylight Time

Yes I am, thank you.

On Fri, Aug 25, 2023 at 5:13 PM Wyman, Kate <kate.wyman@mcusd709.org> wrote:

Craig,
I am confident you are aware this article has been published and on social media today.

<https://illinoiseagle.com/2023/08/25/thousands-of-anti-lgbtq-emails-found-in-morton-school-principals-work-email-account/>

Kate

Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



[STAFF] Fwd: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] FOIA Request

valerie.smith@mcusd709.org **Smith, Valerie**
To: troy.teater@mcusd709.org Troy Teater
Cc: craig.smock@mcusd709.org Craig Smock

Friday, August 25, 2023 at 4:37:03 PM Central Daylight Time

**Valerie Smith**

Administrative Assistant

Superintendent & Board of Education

1050 S. FOURTH AVE MORTON, IL 61550 valerie.smith@mcusd709.org

TELEPHONE: (309)263-2581 x:8040

FAX: (309)266-6320

"Being joyful isn't what makes you grateful. Being grateful is what makes you joyful." - Ann Voskamp

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Elizabeth Seils** <ESeils@week.com>
Date: Fri, Aug 25, 2023 at 3:46 PM
Subject: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] FOIA Request
To: info@mcusd709.org <info@mcusd709.org>

Good afternoon,

This is a Freedom of Information Act request for school district emails including the words "Black Lives Matter," "CRT," "LGBTQ," "gay," "trans" and "colorful flag."

I would also like any memos on the district or school level containing those words. If there is a different way administrators communicate with their faculty and staff, please let me know so I can amend my request.

This is not a commercial request, but rather for information-gathering purposes. Happy to answer any questions. Thank you in advance!

Elizabeth Seils

Multi-Media Journalist | 25News

c: (773) 960 - 0618 | o: (309) 698 - 3743

Morton CUSD 709
PRESS RELEASE
Regarding the Illinois Eagle Article

The purpose of this press release is to correct many errors that were written in an article on the Illinois Eagle website by Bonnie Kurowski against Grundy Principal, Michael Saunders.

Beginning with the title of the article, I object to the statement that there were not thousands of anti-LGBT emails found in Michael Saunders' email account. That is false. And, these emails were not written by Mr. Saunders, but merely received by him from a number of Christian organizations, some of which he does subscribe to. Anyone is welcome to view the contents of the Freedom of Information Act request [HERE](#) and judge for himself or herself.

Morton School District allows its employees to use its technology and email services for personal use. That is clearly stated in [Policy 5:125](#), item #8, "Use personal technology and social media for personal purposes only during non-work times or hours. Any duty-free use must occur during times and places that the use will not interfere with duties or otherwise be disruptive to the school environment or its operation." So, the statement that Ms. Kurowski wrote, that Board Policy 5:125 prohibits the personal use of computers is patently false.

Our employees come from many diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Each one can subscribe to websites that contain many different ideologies and religions. And, they all have the freedom to believe the way they wish, provided that they adhere to board policies, remain neutral, do not attempt to indoctrinate students, and operate with equality and in the best interest of all students. It should not surprise anyone that several devoutly religious people, including Muslims, Jews, Christians, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and many others possess and adhere to religious doctrine that is contrary to the LGBTQ lifestyle.

As I was quoted in the article, I would like to say that this was one of the more accurate parts of the article, as I did indicate that, "Principal Michael Saunders is a highly respected educator and man of character who is an advocate for all students. Our school board has several policies in place that protect the rights of parents and students in our district. These non-discrimination policies also require neutrality from our employees when it comes to matters of religion or ideology. Furthermore, our policies seek to maintain the utmost respect for all students, regardless of the beliefs or ideologies that they hold dear." If you would like to view our district's policies, please go to our website: www.morton709.org Click on the policies link under the board of education tab. A few of the many examples of the aforementioned policies include Policy 6:82, Policy 7:10, Policy 7:20, Policy 7:130, and Policy 2:20."

However, Ms. Kurowski left out of her story the final paragraph in my response to her that I sent her. It read, "We will not be responding further to your inquiries. Any effort to publicly

malign the reputations of Mr. Saunders or the school district through false allegations will be referred to our school attorneys for possible action.” I think I know why she left that out.

The reason that I wrote this final statement was due to the research that I conducted on her as a reporter. Just a few months earlier, in April, as part of a federal lawsuit against her, she was made to apologize for her conduct against members of the Edgar County Watchdog in Florida. See the [ARTICLE](#). In that article, you can also read the [signed apology letter](#) that Ms. Kurowki wrote, in part, “I apologize for the numerous false statements I made about each of them. I acknowledge that the false statements I made about Plaintiffs rise to the level of constitutional malice and were intended to harm their reputations. I am woefully sorry for any injury to their reputations that I may have caused.” And, I am sorry for the malicious manner in which I published false statements concerning (several names). I was wrong to intentionally malign their reputations and am woefully sorry for having engaged in this wrongful conduct.” There are many other details in this very long apology letter that anyone can read for himself or herself.

Apparently, one of her goals is to publicly malign people who hold conservative values. So, to be clear and transparent, what is true in this story is that Michael Saunders is a devout Christian who subscribes to Christian organizations. Any school employee has the freedom, likewise, to subscribe to organizations that suit them and receive emails that are religious or political in nature. No employee has the right to violate any of our board policies or expectations of conduct, and Michael Saunders has only upheld them to the fullest extent, and we will not stand by and allow a person who admittedly lies to others to disparage the reputation of an employee of our district.

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Sept 5 School Board Meeting - Following Up

dan.beckler.777@gmail.com Dan

Thursday, September 7, 2023 at 4:20:40 PM Central Daylight Time

To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org, joseph.sander@mcusd709.org

Good afternoon, Dr. Smock & Dr. Sander,

I attended and spoke in defense of the school board's statement and in defense of Mr. Saunders this past Tuesday. Again, thank you for the way the board handled this.

I'd like to say that I'm a strong supporter for LGBTQ issues and overall awareness... I have nothing but love and support for all children who are on the journey to figure out who they are and who they may choose to love as they grow into adulthood. All of us have been on that journey at some time and the destination is unique to each of us.

Even though I consider myself an "ally", I was very disturbed and sickened by the arguments and statements made by some of those "advocating" for those concerned LGBTQ families and students. I felt that two of the speakers in particular were simply there to exploit our students for the sake of creating a spectacle, perhaps for the national stage. Despite this, I feel that a couple of the other pro-LGBTQ speakers DID make a couple points which should be considered by the school board outside of that particular agenda. But their attempts to connect those points to a non-sequitur argument attempting to tear down the career and reputation of such a valued educator & administrator was inappropriate, illogical, and caused those points to be lost in rhetoric and posturing.

But what also resonated with me was the fact that several of our students perceive that they have faced bullying and hate within our schools and community due to how they present themselves to the world. I wonder if Morton CUSD 709 has the capacity / ability / mandate to provide some resources to teachers and staff of our schools... perhaps some guidance on what teachers can do if a student comes forward in confidence to them or asks about LGBTQ topics... education about awareness in suicide rates among LGBTQ-identifying children and potential steps or ways to intervene... I'm not urging you to step into any sort of legal quagmire or grey areas as I honestly don't know what the schools could or could not do around providing resources to LGBTQ kids. But I can't help think of the two students (perhaps former?) at the meeting who were clearly trying to communicate that they felt excluded but their voices were lost amidst the shouts of others.

I appreciate your time in reading this, and I hope there are some positive and appropriate actions that would further aid these kids on their personal journeys.

Dan Beckler

1301 S Missouri

Morton, IL 61550

309-339-1729

dan.beckler.777@gmail.com

craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Friday, September 8, 2023 at 8:36:37 AM Central Daylight Time

To: dan.beckler.777@gmail.com Dan

Bcc: joseph.sander@mcusd709.org, timothy.braker@mcusd709.org Timothy Braker, troy.teater@mcusd709.org Troy Teater, michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Michael Saunders

Hello, Mr. Beckler,

First of all, thank you for being at our board meeting and having the boldness to speak and share your perspective, especially with so many cameras rolling.

Like you, I was focused on trying to sift through many emotional points and comments, on both sides, to determine what our district can do to improve the lives of our students. Certainly, we can not tolerate unfair treatment or bullying by students or staff, regardless of the issue or worldview. We have forms and procedures in place to address harassment, but perhaps that is an area we need to stress to everyone once again.

We do have several faculty members -- school psychologists, counselors, and social workers -- who support and counsel students who are dealing with difficulty in their lives or are struggling with their relationships and/or sexuality. There certainly is a place for students to go, in addition to many trusted teachers who listen. I know this because I just met with one of those supporting people this week who poured out her heart to me about the many kids that she sees who are in heartbreaking, crisis situations with no place to go. Any notion that LGBTQ kids might be abandoned or "on their own" at MHS or MJHS is definitely not factual. We have those bases very well covered by some very outstanding, loving people.

But, what is very difficult to control, of course, is what any given teenager might say to another teenager. As we have seen with Mr. Saunders' critics, and what we saw at the board meeting, the mere mention of a religious view counter to one's own beliefs is viewed as hate speech by some. It's viewed as harassment. And I'm sure that kids can be more cruel than just quoting Bible verses. I do not think we are ever going to solve that one. But, it is our intentional district goal to teach students to listen to opposing views and to disagree respectfully, unlike so many adult examples that we see in our lives. We will certainly keep working on that.

Again, Mr. Beckler, thanks so much for showing up and reaching out. Concerned parents and community members like you make Morton a great place to live.

Have a nice weekend!

Craig Smock, Supt.

On Thu, Sep 7, 2023 at 4:20 PM Dan <dan.beckler.777@gmail.com> wrote:

Good afternoon, Dr. Smock & Dr. Sander,

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Even though I consider myself an "ally", I was very disturbed and sickened by the arguments and statements made by some of those "advocating" for those concerned LGTBQ families and students. I felt that two of the speakers in particular were simply there to exploit our students for the sake of creating a spectacle, perhaps for the national stage. Despite this, I feel that a couple of the other pro-LGTBQ speakers DID make a couple points which should be considered by the school board outside of that particular agenda. But their attempts to connect those points to a non-sequitur argument attempting to tear down the career and reputation of such a valued educator & administrator was inappropriate, illogical, and caused those points to be lost in rhetoric and posturing.

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1301 S Missouri

Morton, IL 61550

309-339-1729

dan.beckler.777@gmail.com

--

Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



Friday, September 8, 2023 at 8:49:55AM Central Daylight Time

michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Saunders, Michael

To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Very well said!

On Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 8:36AM Smock, Craig <craig.smock@mcusd709.org> wrote:
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Dan Beckler

1301 S Missouri

Morton, IL 61550

309-339-1729

dan.beckler.777@gmail.com

--

Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Friday, September 8, 2023 at 8:59:14AM Central Daylight
Time

To: michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Saunders, Michael

Thanks!

On Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 8:50AM Saunders, Michael <michael.saunders@mcusd709.org> wrote:
Very well said!

On Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 8:36AM Smock, Craig <craig.smock@mcusd709.org> wrote:
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dan.beckler.777@gmail.com Dan
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Friday, September 8, 2023 at 10:41:30AM Central Daylight Time

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Thursday, October 19, 2023 at 9:53:12AM Central Daylight
Time

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craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Thursday, October 19, 2023 at 10:55:18AM Central Daylight Time

To: dan.beckler.777@gmail.com Dan

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[STAFF] Re: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] Sept 5 School Board Meeting - Following Up

craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Friday, September 8, 2023 at 8:36:37AM Central Daylight Time

To: dan.beckler.777@gmail.com Dan
Bcc: michael.saunders@mcusd709.org

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But what also resonated with me was the fact that several of our students perceive that they have faced bullying and hate within our schools and community due to how they present themselves to the world. I wonder if Morton CUSD 709 has the capacity / ability / mandate to provide some resources to teachers and staff of our schools... perhaps some guidance on what teachers can do if a student comes forward in confidence to them or asks about LGBTQ topics... education about awareness in suicide rates among LGBTQ-identifying children and potential steps or ways to intervene... I'm not urging you to step into any sort of legal quagmire or grey areas as I honestly don't know what the schools could or could not do around providing resources to LGBTQ kids. But I can't help think of the two students (perhaps former?) at the meeting who were clearly trying to communicate that they felt excluded but their voices were lost amidst the shouts of others.

I appreciate your time in reading this, and I hope there are some positive and appropriate actions that would further aid these kids on their personal journeys.

Dan Beckler

1301 S Missouri

Morton, IL 61550

309-339-1729

dan.beckler.777@gmail.com

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Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Saunders, Michael

Friday, September 8, 2023 at 8:49:55AM Central Daylight Time

To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Very well said!

On Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 8:36AM Smock, Craig <craig.smock@mcusd709.org> wrote:
Hello, Mr. Beckler,

First of all, thank you for being at our board meeting and having the boldness to speak and share your perspective, especially with so many cameras rolling.

Like you, I was focused on trying to sift through many emotional points and comments, on both sides, to determine what our district can do to improve the lives of our students. Certainly, we can not tolerate unfair treatment or bullying by students or staff, regardless of the issue or worldview. We have forms and procedures in place to address harassment, but perhaps that is an area we need to stress to everyone once again.

We do have several faculty members -- school psychologists, counselors, and social workers -- who support and counsel students who are dealing with difficulty in their lives or are struggling with their relationships and/or sexuality. There certainly is a place for students to go, in addition to many trusted teachers who listen. I know this because I just met with one of those supporting people this week who poured out her heart to me about the many kids that she sees who are in heartbreaking, crisis situations with no place to go. Any notion that LGBTQ kids might be abandoned or "on their own" at MHS or MJHS is definitely not factual. We have those bases very well covered by some very outstanding, loving people.

But, what is very difficult to control, of course, is what any given teenager might say to another teenager. As we have seen with Mr. Saunders' critics, and what we saw at the board meeting, the mere mention of a religious view counter to one's own beliefs is viewed as hate speech by some. It's viewed as harassment. And I'm sure that kids can be more cruel than just quoting Bible verses. I do not think we are ever going to solve that one. But, it is our intentional district goal to teach students to listen to opposing views and to disagree respectfully, unlike so many adult examples that we see in our lives. We will certainly keep working on that.

Again, Mr. Beckler, thanks so much for showing up and reaching out. Concerned parents and community members like you make Morton a great place to live.

Have a nice weekend!

Craig Smock, Supt.

On Thu, Sep 7, 2023 at 4:20 PM Dan <dan.beckler.777@gmail.com> wrote:

Good afternoon, Dr. Smock & Dr. Sander,

I attended and spoke in defense of the school board's statement and in defense of Mr. Saunders this past Tuesday. Again, thank you for the way the board handled this.

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Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Friday, September 8, 2023 at 8:59:14 AM Central Daylight
Time

To: michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Saunders, Michael

Thanks!

On Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 8:50 AM Saunders, Michael <michael.saunders@mcusd709.org> wrote:
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