



#Central Scoop

RSU 16 Community News

September 2017 - Newsletter #1



Welcome to 2017-18 School Year!

Welcome back! It always feels good to have our staff and students return after summer break. During the summer, administrators and teacher leaders were busy reflecting on accomplishments from the previous year, considering next steps and planning professional development to help us achieve our goals for the future. Opening day for staff was filled with positive energy as we focused on our theme, *Remember Your Why*. Board Chair, Mary Martin, our Whittier Dean of Students, Jessica Madsen and I shared stories about why we teach and lead. We asked staff to reflect on their **why** as they move into the new school year.

In late August we received our achievement data from eMPower for third through eighth grade students and SAT for our eleventh graders. We are currently analyzing that data to identify areas of strength and areas to grow. This data will help us as we strive to improve teaching and learning across our five schools.

This summer also brought a range of complaints. Most of you know that there was a public campaign launched against my leadership, a campaign that painted a picture of RSU 16 as a district in turmoil, with widespread despair and fear about retaliation, bullying, harassment and discrimination. I was shocked and saddened. I knew these claims were not what I see and feel when I'm working with staff. It is also the opposite of the values that have been my guide for over 25 years as I have worked on behalf of students and public education.

Since so many of you have been exposed to the campaign and have been asking for a response from me, this newsletter will serve that purpose. The newsletter will provide my response and include details about the campaign, the review of complaints and next steps for the District. If after reading the newsletter, you still have questions or want to share a concern or offer support, please send me an email at tmeserve@rsu16.org or call 998-2727 to set up a meeting.

Sincerely,

Tina Meserve, Superintendent of Schools.



STAFF CONCERNS

The initial complaint began with a small number of staff members. These employees created a document of complaints and wanted a vote of no confidence to be held against the Superintendent. The Association told one of these individuals that the document contained inaccurate information and that there was no support for that action. The employee decided to act alone and distributed the document of complaints to all five schools in RSU16 without correcting the inaccurate information. The employee requested a meeting at each school and a vote of no confidence. The staff did not act on the request. I retained a copy of the document from the Association and shared it with the Board.

PARENTS WERE CONTACTED

When the staff did not respond, parents were solicited for support. The message went out and several parents joined the campaign. A flyer was created that said, "Support our Teachers and Children". The flyer said I was cutting programs and denying services to children, as well as a claim that staff had "many concerns" but hadn't spoken out "until now" for fear of retaliation. The flyer asked parents to come to the Board meeting on June 12th.

A group of approximately 30 people showed up asking for my resignation. They claimed to have a petition and one hundred signatures but they did not provide either to the Board. After several attempts, a Board member received a list of 66 names that included 2 staff members and 64 parent/community members. Of these names, many were multiple members from the same families. Most of whom had never voiced any concern with the Superintendent prior to that meeting. The Board never received a petition of actual complaints from this parent group.

We contacted the Board's law firm, Drummond Woodsum (DW), and received legal counsel. The lawyer reviewed the document created by the staff member and said there was nothing illegal or unethical in the document.

Even with that information, the Board made the decision to employ outside counsel to review the complaints because of the aggressive tactics employed by the group and the seriousness of the allegation.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

Gathering Information: The Board's law firm, Drummond Woodsum (DW), conducted the review of complaints. Their process was open for approximately 5-6 weeks. Staff, community members and parents had an opportunity to send complaints to DW or request an interview. The Concerned Citizens group sought support for their campaign. They posted flyers throughout our communities and on social media with contact information for DW Consultant, Ann Chapman.

The Interviews: Ms. Chapman interviewed the self-identified leaders of the Concerned Citizens and 2-3 staff members who were not part of the group. Even with an active campaign, Ms. Chapman only received 4-5 complaints beyond the initial group - one was from a former teacher who was unhappy with her placement on the salary scale and the others were related to basic decisions like procedures for calling off school for inclement weather.

The Oral Report: When the review was complete, Ms. Chapman met with the Board Chair and me to go over her results and then met with the Board at a Special Session. They went into executive session to hear the details of the review.

Sharing the results: The Board released a statement to the Lewiston Sun Journal following the report. A link to the article is attached. [Superintendent Cleared](#)

THE COST



The decision to conduct the review was difficult in part because of the cost associated with such a decision. In the end, the potential long-term impact of ongoing accusations outweighed the cost of hiring an outside consultant to review the complaints. The total cost of the review to date is \$17,865.62. Our total legal budget for the year is \$24,000 so the review will have a significant impact on the budget.

EXECUTIVE SESSIONS

The Concerned Citizens group voiced concern about the results of the review being provided to the Board in Executive Session. As protected by Law, personnel issues are confidential. The Superintendent is an employee of the Board; therefore, the Board is bound by law to conduct any meeting concerning the Superintendent's performance in executive session.

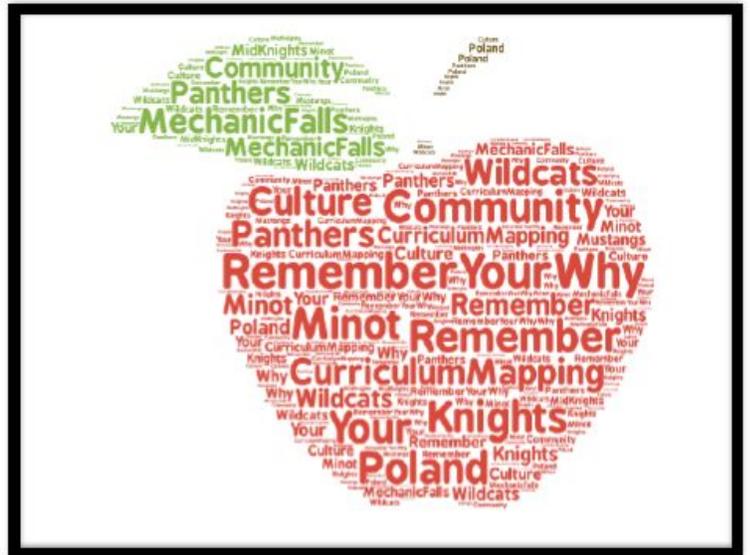
NEXT STEPS

The review revealed misunderstanding about the role of the Board and Superintendent. The review also revealed that there is a communication gap between the Superintendent, Board and the public. We are committed to correcting those deficits. Through collaboration with Town Officials and the Teacher's Association, an Advisory Committee was created by the Board. Membership includes staff, community members and Board members. This committee will identify communication gaps and make recommendations to the full Board. Information about the Advisory Committee is posted on our website. [Advisory Committee](#)

#RSU16PROUD

I feel privileged to serve as Superintendent of RSU 16. I believe teachers change lives, and I know from personal experience the difference a public education can make in a child's life. I was the first generation to attend college in my family and this was due, in large part, to the teachers in my life. When I walk through our schools, step onto our buses, into cafeterias or on our athletic fields, I see our staff having the same impact on the children of our communities. Please know that I, too, will always work tirelessly for the staff and students in my care.

This year you will see that we are united around our own campaign to *teach/work with joy* and to always *remember our WHY*. I encourage you to join us in celebrating the work we are doing every day for the children of our three towns. Watch for our Facebook and Twitter posts with hashtags #rsu16proud, #kidsdeserveit and #learningisfun.



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Download our Mobile App to follow all our schools/departments

*For Android: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.relianceco.cma.rsu16>

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