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**From:** Staton, Jennifer A  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 29, 2018 12:58 PM  
**To:** Cordray, Mary M  
**Cc:** Foster, James H  
**Subject:** FOIA Request for Prepared Statements from Board Meeting  
**Attachments:** 2018.03.20 Gwozdz Statement.pdf

Ms. Cordray:

Thank you for your March 22, 2018, request for public records in accordance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act. You requested "a copy of the statement read by Ms. Gwozdz and notes prepared by Mr. Dowling for use at the March 20, 2018 BOE meeting ..." It is my understanding Dr. Gwozdz provided a copy of her statement to Ms. Cushingberry for inclusion with the Board meeting minutes. By doing so, Dr. Gwozdz made her statement a public record and it is attached.

Outside counsel has advised that Mr. Dowling's notes are not "documents produced by a public body" nor were they "distributed to or reviewed by" any member of the public body. Mr. Dowling has not provided his notes to Ms. Cushingberry as did Dr. Gwozdz. As such, the BCSD has no public records responsive to this portion of your request.

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Beaufort County School District  
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## BOARD MEMBER CONDUCT – CSG 3/20/18

I asked for this item to be on tonight's agenda because as an elected official I feel compelled to bring to light what is happening on the 11 member Beaufort County Board of Education. After all, this past week was Sunshine Week, "a national, non-partisan effort to highlight the critical role of open government and freedom of information at the local, state, and federal levels." (USA Today)

Our role as a Board is to set policies governing the school district and direct our employee, the Superintendent, to carry out these policies. The entire Board makes policy, not the officers. There should be an open exchange of ideas by ALL Board members during the decision-making process.

The problem the taxpayers of Beaufort County currently face is that certain Board members, those with the minority opinion, are being stiff-armed by some majority members with back-room tactics and unethical actions. This potentially puts the constituents of Districts 4, 6, 9, and 11 at a disadvantage. And worse yet, those majority members are seeking and allowing policy-making decisions by a non-elected community advocacy group called STAND. STAND has zero accountability to the public.

Let me give you some examples:

1) The dollar amount of \$76 million for the referendum going to the voters in April, dropped from the sky seconds before the motion was made by Mary Cordray. STAND by their own admission was involved in its creation. I, as a School Board Trustee, was not. Up to that point, the referendum figures had been adjusted numerous times over the course of an entire year, from a high of \$217 million to a low of \$122 million. Who suddenly decided that the referendum projects could be drastically reduced and include new construction only, without asset preservation? Who decided the bulk of the referendum money should be a \$44 million undefined Bluffton school not needed for 5 years? 89.5% of the county-wide referendum money is earmarked for Bluffton. Hmmm. This was not a well thought out plan resulting from an open exchange of ideas by ALL Board members.

2) Earlier this month I attended a day long legislative program at the state capitol sponsored by the SCSBA. A highlight of the program is for school board members to meet with their respective legislators as a group and discuss legislative school issues. To my amazement, when Board Secretary David Striebinger and I arrived at the appointed time and place for the legislative meeting, it was in full-swing with Mary Cordray, Vice Chair Geri Kinton and Evva Anderson in attendance, along with three STAND members, Amanda Walrad, Buffy Snider and Rob Lanzone. Four legislators were in attendance, Jeff Bradley, Shannon Erickson, Wes Newton and Michael Rivers. These non-elected community members were present to advocate for the referendum. Valuable time was lost with the legislators discussing non-legislative issues. After the meeting concluded, I consulted with the SCSBA asking if this was protocol for certain advocacy groups to be included in these meetings. No,

it is not. If “guests” were to be included it would be a full board decision by board vote, I was told. No such Board discussion or vote took place. In addition, participating guests are required to pay a \$75 fee each and none of the STAND members paid.

Clearly, Cordray, Kinton and Anderson are trying to run a parallel board which excludes over 1/3 (4 of 11) of the elected Board members. This is atrocious and the citizens of Beaufort County should be outraged. This is not how effective representative government works.

Despite having high hopes for Board Chair Earl Campbell, elected unanimously, I have been very disappointed with his leadership. No good leader tells the troops they are the worst ever on the battlefield. A good leader brings out the best in people. No good leader tells his critics, and I will paraphrase, to go to “H-E- double hockey stick” and then apologize for other members’ conduct but not his own. A good leader processes criticisms and builds upon them to improve the situation, rather than cast them aside and ignore them. Chair Campbell would not allow a full Board discussion in Executive Session about the FBI subpoenas, because board member John Dowling would not recuse himself. Campbell bought into attorney Davis’ argument that Dowling was “a potential litigant” based solely on the fact Dowling had submitted a FOIA for the subpoenas. Every citizen of Beaufort County is a potential litigant. Board members should not be required to file FOIAs to get information. That is absurd. Who is in charge here? We are the governing body of the district.

Since the start of 2018, the board officers, Campbell, Kinton and Striebinger, have approved three Board of Education press releases, without full Board input and/or approval. These releases were on hiring a facilitator, an apology for the insensitive picture on social media of a student dressed as Hitler and engaging in a Nazi salute, and the acknowledgement of the existence of 2 FBI subpoenas served upon the district. The only press release the Board approved was the subpoena one, but the rank and file members had zero input into the content. And ultimately, the 3 officers made the decision to deny FOIA requests for the FBI subpoenas without Board approval. The officers are not given the power or authority to act independently of the Board as a whole.

All of the officers are guilty of serious abuse of their power and their authority. They have been explicitly involved in, or have been complicit with, actions which subvert the democratic process and seriously impact the School District in a profoundly negative way. It is in the best interest of the BoE, the District staff and students, and the citizens of Beaufort County if the Board’s three officers step down. I hereby move that the Officers be required to resign their positions, effective immediately.