

June 20, 2019

Dr. Herbert Berg
Superintendent
Beaufort County School District

Dear Dr. Berg,

I am writing to express my concern regarding a recent interaction with a Beaufort County School Board member which I feel exemplifies a hostile work environment. This concern is in regards to an interaction that I had with School Board member William Smith.


On June 6, 2019, I attended a meeting at the district office for Teachers of the Year for the district along with the incoming Superintendent, Dr. Rodriguez. Sometime near the end of the meeting, board member William Smith entered the meeting room. To my knowledge, Mr. Smith was not invited to the meeting for Teachers of the Year with the new Superintendent. Following the meeting, I went over to Mr. Smith to acknowledge him and introduce myself as one of the Teachers of the Year. I informed him that I invited Dr. Rodriguez to visit the schools with the respective School Board members. Mr. Smith whipped his head around and then asked what Dr. Rodriguez's response was. I stated to Mr. Smith that I looked forward to seeing him in the building with Dr. Rodriguez next year. Mr. Smith then remarked that there needs to be more diversity at our school. I explained to him that having more community involvement in the school would be very helpful and that community presence along with the board member presence would allow us to show the many good things happening at the school. I also expressed that there is good leadership at the school who have invested into a shared vision which is making good things happen in the building. Again, Mr. Smith replied with there needs to be more diversity and transparency. I felt his response was directed towards the leadership of the school and I again replied that we have a great leadership team and that we need more community support. Mr. Smith then shook his head and stated that he knows the community and that there needs to be more diversity and transparency.

There are a few things regarding this interaction which troubles me deeply. First, Mr. Smith appeared in this meeting for Teachers of the Year which I believe he was uninvited and I believe was inappropriate at the time. I believe Mr. Smith's presence could have influenced the interactions with the Teachers of the Year and the new Superintendent due to his role as a School Board member. Also, I feel that as a school board member that represents my school, his interaction and comments to me reflected a lack of support and trust in the hard work we are doing in my building. I feel his behavior and comments to me to be intimidating in that he was arguing with my position which was advocating for community presence and the shared presence of the board members and Superintendent inside the building. His comments to me, were negative in nature and were delivered in a public setting in the media center at the district office in the presence of other educational professionals in the room. Finally, his repeated comments about diversity made me feel that his position suggested that administration and staff members at my school are not effective because of their race.

This conduct concerns me deeply. Mr. Smith is a School Board member who not only represents the interests of my school but all schools. I feel that his behavior and comments to me in a public setting exhibits a position of non-support that is coupled with racial undertones. As an employee that works in a school that has a board member that is non-supportive of the leadership and the school in which I work, this is very unsettling. A hostile work environment is one which unwelcome conduct or comments based on gender, race, nationality, religion, disability, sexual orientation, age, or other legally protected characteristics unreasonably interfere with work performance or intimidates an offensive work environment for the employee. Such conduct can diminish an employee's productivity and self-esteem both in and out of the workplace. I believe that it will be difficult as a teacher and a school to win the trust of the community that we serve when the elected official publically addresses staff members with comments of distrust and a lack of support.

If I should be needed to discuss these matters further, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,



Vicki Shockley
Teacher of the Year
Lady's Island Middle School