

February 2, 2024

Dear NECSD Community,

Today I will hand in my resignation from the Board of Education. I want to state clearly that it is my informed opinion that the Newburgh Enlarged City School District Board of Education is not providing oversight of the Newburgh Enlarged City School District. The entire structure of the board has been altered, power has been given away, and oversight duties have been abdicated. I warned my colleagues on the board not to vote to do so. The seriousness of their actions, I believe, will be realized by everyone in the months ahead.

I ran for the Board to champion transparency, honesty and integrity. It is clear at this time that this is not a priority of the majority of the members of this board. In my opinion, there has been a purposeful effort to not only block a transparent process, but to distract and divert attention from the issues at hand. My unanswered questions and concerns include but are not limited to: Why have our school ventilation systems not received the upgrades the public asked for through our Covid money? How many positions and programs previously paid for through the General Fund were moved to American Rescue Plan and CARES funding sources, and why? What plans were created and implemented by senior staff at the district level to reduce chronic absenteeism, comprehensively address gaps in academic achievement, streamline the provision of services to our exceptional learners, review the current curriculum, create a comprehensive system of data, ensure the implementation of the code of conduct is effective in creating safe learning environments, move away from having vendors train our teachers instead of experts in current research, and to develop our staff's ability to apply the Science of Reading in their practice?

In my opinion, despite evidence of misguided decisions from the previous board and superintendent, there has been little to no change in the ability of the Board of Education to examine any relevant issues with transparency and community collaboration. Trust needed to be rebuilt and that was the only way. It would not have been an easy process, but it was necessary. Transparency requires the ability to dissent. It requires the ability to admit mistakes were made. But all avenues to the open and honest process we needed were destroyed when three members decided to vote lock step with two board members who had been failing in oversight duties under the previous superintendent. I have heard time and again how we should move past the disaster of paying out hundreds of thousands of dollars to someone who left the district after allegations of sexual harassment of our employees. But as anyone who has ever "moved past" anything knows, you don't move past things without confronting and reflecting on the conditions that brought them. We are asked to overlook that this happened under the governance of the previous Board of Education. How was it missed? What were the conditions that the subordinates of the superintendent were working under that allowed these events to so openly transpire? How did it get that far? Are we still retaliating against staff, as was alleged under the last superintendent? How does this affect our ability to recruit and maintain a productive and professional staff? Is the intent of the PR we are generating to encourage our students, or is it still too focused on supporting career agendas? The majority of this board seems wholly intent on recreating and reliving these errors. The community was never given the fresh start we voted for. All efforts toward transparency have been met with total personalization of the inquiries in a carefully orchestrated narrative of victimhood created to focus all attention on the superintendent and select board members

instead of the children. We are operating from the same basis we did before - a kind of cult of personality in which the obsession with image supersedes the duty to recognize failed systems. This reduces the powers of the board to act appropriately as a check and balance. This is exactly what got us to the place in which our tax dollars were squandered to pay for failed leadership. The public voted for transparency to avoid this. There was an opportunity to build trust that was not taken.

It is astounding that the Board of Education functions inside of its bubble when most of the community agrees that the board's charter is to take action to improve the district. I was recently told that an issue in our community should be brought to me because the board is "the boss of the superintendent." While this may, in fact, be the role of a board of education in a functioning public school district, I must be clear with the community- this is not what this school board is about.

What is the state of the district? How would the public know? At a recent board meeting one of the members motioned to remove public discussion of achievement scores from the agenda, and the majority voted in support. At the time I said this was negligent. I stand by that. But so the public is clear, it was practically monumental that we had that data to discuss and that it got as far as it did. Think about that - how is it possible that discussion of the academic achievement of our students is not the priority at every one of our meetings? From my experience, any board member asking for data is usually told that it is a difficult process that takes great effort. We were also told that asking for data unnecessarily distracts the people running the district from their tasks. My question about this phenomenon has been and remains, how are you running the district without this knowledge at your fingertips?

"What is not measured will not improve." -William Thompson.

In prior years there has been concerted effort and taxpayer investment in data software and consultants. If you google "Newburgh School District Data" you will find beautifully produced videos discussing the great data initiatives. It seems this was another case of the image being more important than the system, because I do not see a system of data that is facilitating results. If you question this, like anything else at a board meeting, you find we are unable to even discuss changing course. No mistakes can be acknowledged or reflected upon without it becoming Titanic level drama. We are in the same ship, with the largely same crew and the same course, basically, as we were under the last superintendent.

Beneath the perception management there are some remnants of the Turnaround School model that our previous superintendent was a proponent of. This wasted precious time and millions in New York City, and needs once and for all to be removed from our district. Under this model the assumption is that the teachers bear the brunt of responsibility for failing schools, and that people from far away from the classroom are best able to control a district from a central office. What this does is to increase accountability for the front line staff - teachers and building level administrators. When you do this with no scrutiny of the systems that support them you end up where this district is - with staff accountable in non-working systems. The Board of Education is reduced to a cheerleading squad. One of our members made a speech chastising the "helicopter" approach to board membership. In my view, we were supposed to be the helicopters. We are not parenting children. We are fulfilling a vital role in a system of checks and balances as elected officials in the democratic process that gives us public schools. If the Board of Education is not watching, who is?

And so what is the view of the role of the Board of Education in the present majority? I judge by actions. The majority is mired in their obsession with personal image, social media, conspiracy theory, investigations, and petty complaints. We are distracted and have time wasted by board members rising meeting after meeting to lecture us all on perceived slights between fully grown adults that they can't seem to manage via conversation outside of the board meetings. We listen to members drone on and on about their perception of the ethics, morals, and behavior of other board members. Occasionally community members are clearly recruited to join in and they are leaked misinformation to create a show at our meetings. But I ask you, how often did these board members do this to address the factual basis of the real issues of this district? Does the public even know what these are? If you go by what is discussed at board meetings you would think the voters of this community have the social status of the adults sitting at the board table as their number one priority.

And that was not our job. Our job was to get to the truth and confront it. The truth is not some ambiguous idea that may or may not be understood depending on who you feel you are allied with. The truth is in the numbers –the numbers that speak to whether the goal of this district - to educate our students - is happening or not. This Board of Education is not even asking for a discussion of the numbers. Instead of the change people voted for, five members of this Board of Education made the same exact mistake some of them made with the last superintendent and gave everyone at the helm a raise and contract extension before anything improved; before we were even given a plan for anything to improve; without even discussing what needed to improve. Who writes checks like that?

The majority of our students continue to be unable to read and do math at grade level. Despite reams of evidence presented to this board, to the superintendent and to the community about the Science of Reading, the Board of Education has done little to nothing to understand the issues surrounding the Right to Read and act on them, even now as the Governor herself points to the clear body of evidence. This district would not even screen a viewing of the film The Right to Read when other school districts, like New Paltz viewed it and are already half way through their first year of revising their approach to reading instruction. The majority of this Board of Education behaves as if they have never heard of it. At the last meeting a board member asked "What can we do about reading?" as if this has not been a huge national debate for the past four years. How is it that this Board of Education has had no forum or public discussion about the reading crisis and what to do about it? We are the Board of Education.

What have we been doing, those of you not watching, might ask? Well, for meeting after meeting various board members have played at removing and/or checking the President and Vice President, who are presently typecast in a drama narrative as the attackers of the superintendent. There have been inordinate amounts of time wasted on allegations by board members of elaborate conspiracies, questioning the motivation and intent of other board members, monitoring the behavior of other board members, reminding the board members of what to say and do, how to act, and whatever personal offense they may have had at any given moment. The superintendent has asked us multiple times to investigate Facebook posts. How is any of this the Board's priority? How is this serving the children of the Newburgh Enlarged City School District? So much time and money in legal fees have been spent on what I see as possibly the most immature actions of elected officials at the local level that I have ever witnessed. The narrative doesn't even make sense. Board members were so worried about the image of the school district that they appealed to the Commissioner of Education to remove the President of the Board of Education over foolishness like the positioning of seats and gossip from a dinner party. We taxpayers paid the board's lawyer to write this. What an utter embarrassment. I am resigning, so I am

going to say this. Grow up! Our kids are watching. People don't like one another, we get it. You do not have to like people you serve with or work with, it is one of the great things about democracy. You can dislike the other members on a board as much as you want, but it does not excuse you from your duty to improve the school district. The amount of time wasted in the public forum on this was not just shameful, it was in my opinion obviously purposeful. The purpose was to block transparency, and it has worked thus far. As I said in a recent meeting, every minute spent discussing these petty issues was time not used addressing issues to benefit the students.

I did not run for the Board of Education to take pictures, attend events, expand my social circle, get invited to join other Boards, enrich my family or myself, advance anyone's career, settle gripes, boost my ego, or gain followers on Facebook. I ran to bring transparency, honesty, and integrity to the highest governing democratic body of the district, because I believed it could work. I am resigning because this Board of Education will tolerate none of the above, and has acted repeatedly, in my opinion, to upend the democratic structure. I tried to stick it out to see if things would change. It is clear now that if I stay, those benefiting from the continued refusal of the board majority to fulfill oversight duties will only continue to use those of us who may dare to vote against the wishes of the senior staff as scapegoats. I am trying to hope that without us, the Board of Education and district leadership will use the time spent writing speeches about Mr. Stridiron and others to write speeches to address the real needs of our students. Perhaps instead of focusing on social media, orchestrating outrage and obsessing over perception management they will see fit to read about relevant issues, review actual performance results, and to orchestrate and support a real response to the issues plaguing our district.

I am grateful to the good people who make up the Newburgh Enlarged City School District, many of whom are friends, family, teachers and administrators that have done an excellent job in educating my children across thirty years of paying education taxes in this district for our community. I had hoped to help that be the experience for all of the members of this community, because I so believed and continue to believe that only public education will achieve true equity. But in order for that to happen you must have a functioning school board. I hope the public will see fit to fill the seats we are leaving, and the seats of those up for re-election this year with new faces.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry Ryan Lamar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jerry Ryan Lamar