

ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGED COMMUNICATION

TO: Mr. Chris Fenton,
Interim Superintendent, Grosse Pointe Public School System

FROM: Mr. Kevin Sutton,
Attorney, Miller Johnson Law Firm

DATE: January 4, 2024

SUBJECT: Summary of Investigation – Complaints Against Mr. Ismail

Introduction

This investigation summary report is written pursuant to a request by the Grosse Pointe Public School System (“GPPSS” or “District”) for an independent investigation into concerns raised by two current District employees against the President of the Board of Education (“Board”), Mr. Ahmed Ismail. Specifically, Complainant #1 and Complainant #2 (collectively, “Complainants”) filed written complaints¹ with the District’s then-Director of Human Resources alleging that they had been subjected to bias and/or harassment on the basis of gender. Their complaints were chiefly based on comments allegedly made by Mr. Ismail to a now-former employee of the District as that employee was contemplating a job offer to leave GPPSS. The

¹ Complainant #2 filed her initial complaint on August 27, 2023. Complainant #2 subsequently filed multiple “addendums” to the initial complaint, communicated via email on August 28, 2023 [re: Sumbera], September 7, 2023 [re: social media post], and November 5, 2023 [re: honoring retiree]. Complainant #1 filed her complaint on August 28, 2023. An “addendum” to the complaint was provided on September 22, 2023 [re: committee assignment]. Additional allegations from Complainant #1 were advanced to the Investigator on November 13, 2023 [re: budget decisions]. See **Exhibit 1** for all complaints. *[Please note that the exhibits to this report are being produced as a separate, confidential, and unredacted file. Should the exhibits need to be produced to any party in the future, it is recommended that they be redacted in a legally compliant manner.]*

specific allegation is that Mr. Ismail commented that the Board intended to “push out” Complainants from their employment with the District.²

This matter was investigated by Mr. Kevin Sutton (“Investigator”) of the Miller Johnson law firm. The report which follows summarizes the investigative efforts undertaken to review the allegations advanced and the conclusions reached.

Initiation of Investigation

On September 14, 2023, the Investigator was contacted by Mr. Chris Fenton (Interim Superintendent) and Mr. Mark McInerney of Clark Hill regarding Complainants’ complaints. After discussing a general overview of the allegations, the Investigator confirmed his availability (subject to a conflict check) and willingness to conduct the requested investigation into the allegations. Mr. Fenton committed to facilitating the investigation in any way necessary, including the production of materials and/or securing the availability of witnesses.

Thereafter, the Investigator made direct contact with Complainants, who indicated that they had retained counsel (Mr. Jeff Donahue of White Schneider) who should be contacted directly for the purpose of scheduling investigatory interviews. Contact with Mr. Donahue was made and interviews of the Complainants scheduled. All other witnesses were contacted directly for the purpose of arranging investigatory interviews, as detailed herein.

Scope of Investigation

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with eight (8) individuals. Because of the sensitive nature of the complaints, there is only one interviewee identified by name in this report, that being Mr.

² There is also an ancillary allegation that, during the same conversation, Mr. Ismail commented that so many changes were on the horizon for the District that they “would turn [the Deputy Superintendent] white.” The Deputy Superintendent is African American.

Ismail, who is both the subject of the complaint and a public official. All other individuals are identified with the moniker of a Complainant (#1 and #2) or a Witness (#1 through #5). Any other parties identified by name were not interviewed as part of this investigation.

Documents

Documents were received by the Investigator from Complainants (through legal counsel), as well as Mr. Ismail. The Investigator also located materials through an Internet search related to the persons and allegations contained within the complaints. All of these materials were reviewed and considered as part of the investigation, as were the District's policies.

Issues

The Complainants' complaints, including addendums, total seven. The key/salient provisions from each of those complaints include:

Complainant #1 →

- Initial Complaint [August 28, 2023]:
 - “President [Ismail] is in a position of power, and these statements are extremely threatening, harassing, and retaliatory. He has threatened my career and my livelihood.”
 - “I am well aware, with the departure of the superintendent, that President [Ismail] now has more power over me and access to me than ever before, which makes his statement that much more alarming and threatening.”
 - “I believe this threat is rooted in both gender bias and in President [Ismail]’s dismissal of diversity and equity work.”
 - “I also believe this threat is catalyzed by the fact that I [work at a school] with the greatest number of African American students, students with special needs, and students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, and I have and will continue to loudly advocate for all of my students’ needs. I also believe President [Ismail]’s threat is rooted in the fact that North High School is led by three women and a black man.”
 - “I have had to make many difficult decisions regarding both staff and students. I firmly believe that I’m being targeted by and retaliated against by Mr. [Ismail] and Mr. Cotton due to several of these decisions.”
 - “In fact now, this statement to push me out is likely also grounded in my refusal to name a field after this coach who intentionally harmed marginalized students.”

- “It is clear that Mr. [Ismail] and Mr. Cotton would like me and North High School to disappear.”
- Addendum #1 [September 22, 2023]:
 - [*Suggesting retaliation by Mr. Ismail*] “The language President [Ismail] uses in this invitation (‘In late August, I emailed the recipients of this email,’) is a lie and intentionally misleading.”
- Addendum #2 [November 13, 2023]:
 - “[Mr. Cotton] was frustrated that I continued to advocate for North and wanted me to be quiet and tell the North Community that this outcome was an acceptable outcome.”

Complainant #2 →

- Initial Complaint [August 27, 2023]:
 - “As current President of the Board of Education, Mr. [Ismail] now sits in a position of increased power over my role and all administrative roles in the district. This increase in power renders his statements threatening to end my educational career even more salient.”
 - “I have had to make difficult administrative decisions regarding students and personnel. Because of these past decisions, I feel I am currently being targeted and retaliated against by Mr. Ismail for said decisions.”
 - “I feel I am being targeted and harassed by the current school board hindering my ability to finish my final years of an educational career.”
- Addendum #1 [August 28, 2023]:
 - “In June of 2018, I terminated coach Frank Sumbera at the behest of then Superintendent Gary Niehaus. Mr. Sumbera had a lengthy file of issues going back many years regarding treatment of players and their safety. I, and the entire administrative team, completely agreed with the decision of then Superintendent Niehaus to terminate Mr. Sumbera. The Grosse Pointe News however did not agree with the decision and printed multiple articles and commentary calling into question the decision to let Mr. Sumbera go.”
- Addendum #2 [September 7, 2023]:
 - [*Regarding a social media post around that time*] “I believe his response to the parent and the post on social media was to portray me in a false light and diminish my role as [a District employee] Again, I believe his comment was intended to diminish me in my role as [a District employee] and to portray me in a false light to the community.”

- Addendum #3 [November 5, 2023]:
 - *[Regarding a planned recognition for a retiring employee]* “I believe this was another attempt by President Ismail to remove me from a process that should have included me and been led by my office in conjunction with the Board of Education. In the past, [in similar circumstances] I was involved in the process and attended the board meeting to either present the award or in support of the [retiring person]. If the [] parent had not reached out to my office for details about [the retiring person’s] career I would not have been aware of the proclamation and would not attend the meeting on November 14, 2023. I believe President Ismail excluded me from a process that should have included [my] department and myself [], because my absence would portray me in a negative light to the community for not attending.

Based on the foregoing, the issues identified for investigation³ are as follows:

- (1) Did Mr. Ismail make comments to a then-GPPSS employee indicating that there was a plan or desire to “push out” Complainants from their employment with the District?
 - a. Has the Board and/or Mr. Ismail taken any actions relative to Complainants indicating an attempt to terminate Complainants from their employment with the District?
- (2) Are the comments by Mr. Ismail and/or his associated actions as a member of the Board evidence of gender bias/harassment against the Complainants?
- (3) Are the comments by Mr. Ismail and/or his associated actions as a member of the Board in response to actions taken against Mr. Frank Sumbera, a former coach, who was terminated by the District?
- (4) After the filing of the complaints in this matter, did Mr. Ismail engage in retaliatory behavior towards the Complainants?

Interviews of Complainants

The interviews of Complainants were conducted in person at the offices of the Investigator on October 30, 2023. Complainants were accompanied by Mr. Donahue. No recordings of the interviews were made with the consent of the Investigator. The following excerpts are intended

³ The complaints submitted by Complainants were considered in their entirety, even if each distinct issue raised therein is not identified as a discrete issue for the investigation.

to provide an overview of the pertinent information shared by the Complainants. These summaries are not presented as a representation of every comment, answer, or response from Complainants. Instead, the Investigator is presenting those statements and responses which are most relevant to the issues in this matter.

Complainant #1

- On learning of the comments allegedly made by Mr. Ismail:
 - **“We went directly to [Human Resources].”**
 - **“We wanted to file a formal complaint and start an investigation.”**
 - Alleged comments are **“a threat to my continued presence”** in GPPSS.
- On **“the removal of the North end”**:
 - Complainant #1 indicated that **“years ago”** when Mr. Ismail was on the Board, **“they wanted to remove Harper Woods from the District boundaries.”**
 - Complainant #1 noted that, during the latest budget process, a Board member asked the Superintendent **“how many years it would take to go to one high school.”**
- On **“gender bias and the dismissal of diversity and equity work”**:
 - Complainant #1 noted that **“three women and a black man”** lead North HS.
 - **“[Mr. Ismail] and [Mr. Cotton, Board member] want me to feel like I don’t exist.”**
 - **“They walk by me like I don’t exist.”**
 - **“I thought [Mr. Ismail] supported me. His support of me disappeared.”**
 - **“I was on the last strategic plan and pushed DEI.”**
- On the termination of Mr. Frank Sumbera, a former coach in the District:
 - Complaints against Mr. Sumbera were **“verified through an investigation and personal accounts.”**
 - **“Some people were unhappy with that decision.”**
 - **“[Mr. Sumbera] has sort of a cultish following.”**
 - **“The paper started coming after [Complainants] after the firing.”**
 - Paper used the word **“neuter”** – suggesting that Complainants are **“ball cutters,”** a term they would only use, presumably, to describe women.
 - Mr. Sumbera’s firing was **“really the first domino.”**
 - **“It shook the community”** because it was a challenge to **“bigotry and chauvinism.”**
 - **“[Complainant #2] and I became a serious threat.”**
 - **“We have tried to go high, while everyone else has gone low.”**

- On the proposed health clinic at North HS:
 - **“We have a lot of kids who don’t have access to health care.”**
 - **“The outcomes are very positive for the schools with these clinics.”**
 - **“[Mr. Ismail] is taking away my ability to take care of my kids [students].”**
- On allegations of gender harassment:
 - **“There is no white male at North to choose.”**
 - **“I watch the way I am treated compared to [other males in the District]; I firmly believe it’s because I am a woman.”**
 - **“They call us ‘the two bitches.’”**
 - **“Over the course of my career, I have stood out as a strong female advocate.”**
 - **“I know I am the only woman in the room all the time.”**
 - **“I am looked up and down as a woman”** [but not by Mr. Ismail].
 - **“I’m getting ‘Jon’d’”** [suggesting that she is being forced from the District against her will like former Superintendent Jon Dean].

Complainant #2

- On alleged comments made by Mr. Ismail:
 - Became aware of comments and understood them to be a threat to continued employment; **“I would no longer have a position.”**
 - **“Now that the Board office was squared away [with the termination of Jon Dean], [Complainants] were next.”**
 - Staff member to whom the comments were allegedly made by Mr. Ismail told Complainant #2 about them after Complainant #2 filed the instant complaint. Staff member confirmed that Mr. Ismail called him and encouraged him to stay with the District – **“be patient, don’t leave, it’s a matter of time before you are running the District.”**
- On contact with Board members:
 - **“We were told not to engage with Board members.”**
 - **“[Mr. Ismail] would call [staff member] all the time; [Mr. Ismail] wanted to shoot the s--t. [Mr. Ismail] reached out about all kinds of things.”**
- On treatment in position:
 - **“I have been scrutinized from the moment I accepted the job.”**
 - **“Every decision I’ve made has been criticized in the paper.”**
- On allegations of gender harassment:
 - **“I have made decisions in the seat that were criticized because I was a female.”**

- When appointed, Mr. Ismail looked at Complainant #2's children and said, **"are you sure you want your mom to do this?"**
- **"They want to diminish me in any way they can."**
- **"I am a strong female in a traditionally male role."**
- **"I don't care how many times I end up in the paper."**

Notable Information Obtained from Interviews

With the exception of Mr. Ismail, whose interview was conducted in person, all witness interviews were conducted remotely (via video conference). No recordings of the interviews were made with consent of the Investigator. The following excerpts are intended to provide an overview of the pertinent information shared by each witness. These summaries are not presented in the order in which the witnesses were interviewed, nor is every comment, answer, or response from each witness chronicled herein. Instead, the Investigator is presenting those statements and responses which are most relevant to the issues in this matter.

Witness #1

The interview of Witness #1 was conducted via Zoom on December 4, 2023. Witness #1 attended the interview alone.

- On present Board governance:
 - **"It is bizarre; they have created shadow Board members [through the use of committees]."**
 - **"It is the Board's prerogative to [run the day-to-day operations of the District]. It's not illegal, it's just bad governance."**
- On the North v. South dynamic as evidenced through the budget process:
 - **"North had greater reductions than South."**
 - **"There were things put back on the list at the last minute at South; that didn't happen at North."**
- On the North v. South dynamic, generally:
 - **"There is clearly a bias [on the part of the Board] towards South. A lot of it is historic."**
 - **"[Complainant #1] perceives everything as perpetuating a South v. North narrative."**
- On perceived harassment towards Complainants based on gender:

- “[Complainant #1] scares [Mr. Ismail] – she is articulate, direct, successful, and opposed to [Mr. Ismail] and [Mr. Cotton, Board member].”
- “How much of it is gender? I don’t know.”
- “If a male was [in the same position as Complainant #1], would we have this animus? Probably.”
- “They don’t like [Complainant #1], period.”
- On Mr. Ismail’s conduct towards women, generally:
 - “Does [Mr. Ismail] treat women different than men? Yes. I’ve observed it.”
 - “[Mr. Ismail] has consistently struggled with every female Board member he has served with, even those who are aligned with him.”
 - “I’ve regularly seen him treat women differently” [but did not specifically cite instances with Complainants]
 - “[Mr. Ismail’s] bias is implicit, not overt” [but did not specifically cite instances with Complainants]

Witness #2

The interview of Witness #2 was conducted via Zoom on November 6, 2023. Witness #2 attended the interview alone.

- On perceived harassment towards Complainants based on gender:
 - “Not necessarily. It might be a stretch for me.”
 - “No conversations [with anyone suggesting gender harassment].”
 - “No Board commentary [with anyone suggesting gender harassment].”
 - “I’ve heard more questioning than negative commentary. ‘Why do they do that?’ ‘Why did it happen that way?’ ‘Why do they feel that way?’”
 - “Sometimes there are things in the paper; makes you wonder – how did the news find out about that conversation?”
- On the North v. South dynamic in GPPSS:
 - “There are differences between North and South – students, parents, and funding ... which comes from the parents.”
 - “South families have the tools and resources to advocate for something and there are direct connections to the Board.”
 - “Most of the Board are South families.”
- On the Board of Education:
 - “The old Board did not do things to lose students.”
 - “The Board is micro-managing the District.”
 - “The Board is way more in the weeds, trying to be administration.”
- On the state of financial affairs/budget process:
 - “The sky is not falling.”

- **“Things were rocky during the budget reduction process. Normally, administration would solely control the process. This year, the Board wanted to cut [more than recommended by administration].”**
- **“North was cut a little more than South on FTE.”**
- **On Mr. Ismail contacting staff:**
 - **“I know some of our admins are hearing directly from [Mr. Ismail].”**
 - **“I’ve heard [Mr. Ismail] contacted them about the future and what it might look like.”**
 - **“[Mr. Ismail] is connecting with people around the issue of their wants and desires.”**
 - **“Teachers have felt uncomfortable being contacted directly [by Mr. Ismail].”**
- **On having one high school in GPPSS:**
 - **“It would be harmful for our students to be into one high school together because of the actions of the adults running things.”**
 - **“There is part of the community that wouldn’t mind losing some of our students [from Harper Woods].”**
- **On issues associated with DEI:**
 - **“‘Equity’ is a word that can’t be spoken in Grosse Pointe.”**
 - **“People are fearful that if you talk a lot about DEI, [there will be adverse consequences].”**
 - **“DEI work feels like it’s not an option now [under the new Board].”**

Witness #3

The interview of Witness #3 was conducted via Zoom on November 7, 2023. Witness #3 attended the interview alone.

- **On recent actions by the Board:**
 - **“Grosse Pointe knows they can’t stop diversity, but issues persist.”**
 - **“Some of that older belief system is on our Board now.”**
 - **“Board actions imply that they don’t support North.”**
- **On District financial health:**
 - **“We lost more kids than we thought we would. We have not recouped the kids.”**
 - **“Board came in and set parameters [for budget process].”**
 - **“One of the Board members was talking directly to union leadership.”**
- **On perceived animosity/harassment towards Complainants based on gender:**
 - **“There could be a gender situation; I was too naïve to see it at times.”**
 - **“[Complainants] are very strong people.”**
 - **“It’s a boys world; the only way [to get] respect is to be very direct and assertive” [speaking to personal experiences]**

- **“I’ve never heard anyone make derogatory comments about [Complainants]. All of the clues are contextual.”**
- Witness #3 confirmed receipt of text messages wherein alleged comments attributed to Mr. Ismail were shared. Those text messages were shared with the Investigator. The comments therein suggest that Mr. Ismail had offered sentiments during a private phone call with another individual implying that Complainant #1 and Complainant #2 would be removed from their positions in the District.

Witness #4

The interview of Witness #4 was conducted via Zoom on November 2, 2023. Witness #4 attended the interview alone.

- On perceived harassment towards Complainants based on gender:
 - **“The issues [presented by Complainants] have less to do with gender and more to do with Frank Sumbera [former coach at North HS who was terminated].”**
 - **“I have not heard anything about [Complainants] being [terminated] or being on the ‘chopping block.’”**
 - **“There were decisions [in the budget process and otherwise] that were adverse to North; [Complainants] took it hard. They felt like it was because North was being run by three women and one black man. I’ve never heard anything like that from any decision-makers.”**
 - **“That connection [to gender] has not been made for me. I’m not saying it’s not, but we need something to point to.”**
 - **“I’ve not heard anyone refer to [Complainants] as ‘the two bitches.’”**
 - **“I don’t think this is rooted in gender; [Mr. Ismail] just doesn’t like [Complainants]. We can’t do anything about who he likes and doesn’t like.”**
- On the Board, generally:
 - **“The Board has done things that have divided the community.”**
 - **“The Board is not governance; they are running the day-to-day operations.”**
- On the North v. South dynamic and associated tensions:
 - **“It is real.”**
 - **“Some of it is rooted in race.”**
 - **“South is the chosen one.”**
 - **“North feels less than; there is reinforcement for that [referring to the elimination of the health clinic at North, closely followed by the purchase of a scoreboard for South]. It definitely looks like it and feels like it to the people at North.”**
 - **“[Complainant #1] is an emotional wreck; [Complainant #1] can’t let go of the health clinic or the other decisions adverse to North.”**

- On the debate around the termination of Mr. Sumbera:
 - “[Complainants] have taken the brunt of [Sumbera’s] termination even though Gary [Niehaus, former Superintendent] made the decision. [Complainants] think it’s because they’re women.”
 - “[Complainants] did go digging. If they didn’t push it, it wouldn’t have happened. They were trying to keep kids safe – that’s the job. The decision was completely student-centered. If [Sumbera] had not been there for 50 years, he would have been walked out that day.”
 - “The Board is very upset about Frank Sumbera; this is common knowledge.”
- On efforts to name the football field after Mr. Sumbera:
 - “It’s a middle finger to [Complainants].”
 - “It doesn’t protect kids.”
 - “[Mr. Ismail] is trying to humiliate [Complainants].”

Witness #5

The interview of Witness #5 was conducted via Zoom on November 9, 2023. Witness #5 attended the interview alone.

- On the North v. South dynamics:
 - “Right after [I was hired in GPPSS], lots of people contacted me. I was given a minor [suggesting an academic minor] in the dynamic between the two schools.”
 - “There is a racial and socio-economic difference between the schools.”
 - “It’s a rivalry.”
 - “Very divisive; especially among the adults.”
- On contact with Mr. Ismail, generally:
 - “He called me about several things.”
 - “He showed up in my office a few times.”
 - “He always initiated these conversations.”
 - “I was asked to have a meeting at Mr. Cotton’s office with Mr. Ismail; it was a very uncomfortable situation.”
 - During the meeting, they said they had “big plans for me” and asked, “what job would I want in the District?” “I was taken aback; I joked and said, ‘the Big Chair.’”
- On discussion/rumors about the District consolidating positions:
 - “[Mr. Ismail] contacted me about the security of my own position when that came into question.”
 - “I got a call from [Mr. Ismail]. He said that they had big plans for me in the District, that no one could do my job the way I did.”
 - “This was at the start of the budget process, during the school year.”
 - “While I appreciated [Mr. Ismail’s] sentiments, the contract was really clear.”

- On contact with Mr. Ismail after Witness #5 received a job offer outside GPPSS:
 - “[Mr. Ismail] called me. He congratulated me.”
 - “[Mr. Ismail] said he didn’t want to see me go; there were big plans for me.”
 - “[Mr. Ismail] asked me how I would run things [in a consolidated, District-wide position].”
 - “[Mr. Ismail] said, ‘we are moving [the Superintendent] out; we are going after [Complainant #1 and Complainant #2] next.’”
 - “[Mr. Ismail] also said, ‘there are going to be so many changes, [the Deputy Superintendent] is going to turn white.’”
 - “I won’t try to infer what [Mr. Ismail] meant. I did not respond.”
 - “That conversation with Mr. Ismail confirmed my decision [to take a job outside GPPSS].”
 - “I was in a state of disbelief [about the comments made by Mr. Ismail].”
 - Witness #5 confirmed that he contemporaneously shared the comments made by Mr. Ismail via text message with another witness. The text messages, a copy of which had already been obtained by the Investigator, were reviewed with Witness #5 and confirmed as authentic.
- On perceived harassment towards Complainants based on gender:
 - “Were [Mr. Ismail’s] comments based on gender? I can’t say that.”
 - “[Mr. Ismail] held no love for either of [the Complainants].”
 - Witness #5 denied having heard anyone describe Complainants as “the two bitches.”
 - Witness #5 described engaging in conduct which he would be “praised for” while a female employee engaged in the same conduct would be called “the Wicked Witch of the West.” This was “very common” according to Witness #5. Such comments were not attributed to Mr. Ismail, however.
- On the overall state of affairs with the Board:
 - “Professionally speaking, the District was a f-----g dumpster fire.”
 - “There was a hostile takeover by the Board.”
 - “The dynamic of the Board was positioned to be more South leaning.”

Mr. Ahmed Ismail

Mr. Ismail was interviewed at the GPPSS Administrative Offices on November 15, 2023. The interview was also attended by attorney John Kava, who was present at the request of the Board of Education. Mr. Kava did not participate in the questioning of Mr. Ismail but did ask for clarification from Mr. Ismail on a few occasions during the interview. No recordings of the interview were made with the consent of the Investigator.

At the outset of the interview, Mr. Ismail provided the Investigator with a document entitled, “Responses to [Complainant #1] Statements.” Therein, Mr. Ismail offered his responses to the statements/allegations contained within the written complaint submitted by Complainant #1. A copy of the document provided by Mr. Ismail is attached hereto as **Exhibit 2**, along with a copy

of Board meeting minutes and a Detroit News article pertaining to Mr. Sumbera, which were also provided by Mr. Ismail.

- Mr. Ismail was asked about a quote attributed to him in the Grosse Pointe News from January 18, 2023 [Exhibit 3], which provided: *“I think this District can be what it used to be and what people expect. People are so generous here when it comes to the schools and we need to give them what they deserve.”*
 - **“We need to focus on academics.”**
 - **“When I was in school here, a ‘B’ from Grosse Pointe was like an ‘A’ anywhere else.”**
 - **“We used to be top 5 in the country; now we aren’t even top 10.”**
 - **“We have to get ourselves back to being the premier public school system in Michigan.”**
 - **“Our focus has been spread.”**
 - **“Since Suzanne Klein [former Superintendent], our focus hasn’t been unwavering.”**
 - **“It has to do with leadership; a void in leadership.”**
 - **“There has been a big push ... things like DEI, CRT, educational acronyms, grading for equity ... there are a lot of social and political issues that have gotten involved that weren’t here when Suzanne [Klein] was. She used to say, ‘let’s keep the main thing, the main thing.’”**
- On tensions between North HS v. South HS:
 - **“I see it mostly as athletics.”**
 - **“We want a superintendent who is globalizing things.”** Mr. Ismail cited different methodologies for grading between schools as a problem.
 - **“Each school has different needs, but the framework that manages it all needs to be consistent.”**
 - Mr. Ismail denied that there were racial tensions between schools and commented that there were **“no issues”** from a Board perspective.
- On the possibility of one high school in GPPSS:
 - **“It will never happen in my lifetime.”**
 - **“Only if you are a kamikaze pilot.”**
 - **“It doesn’t make sense.”**
- On the termination of Mr. Sumbera:
 - **“Parent complaints, I guess.”**
 - **“Everything [the Board] got was after the fact.”**
 - **“I don’t know what the breaking point was.”**
 - **“I think it had to do with an interaction with a student; tossing a bat at him or something.”**
 - **“I thought [the termination] was an overreaction.”**

- **“Ultimately, it was a [Gary Niehaus, former Superintendent] decision. [Complainant #2] didn’t have the authority. [Complainant #1] didn’t have the authority.”**
- **“There’s not that type of take down without going to the top dog.”**
- **“The Board was blind-sided.”**
- Regarding the proposed health clinic at North HS:
 - **“It was pushed through in December 2022 before the new Board members joined.”**
 - Mr. Ismail identified that his **“big problem”** with the deal was the need to sign an agreement with Beaumont that contained a 30-day cancellation clause. In the absence of that clause, Mr. Ismail indicated that he would have supported establishment of the health clinic.
 - When asked about Complainant #1’s communications with the Board on the topic, Mr. Ismail provided:
 - **“I don’t have a recollection of her being rude.”**
 - **“She’s doing her job; she’s fighting for her building. It was something she believed in; she had a vested interest in seeing it come to fruition.”**
- On his relationship with Complainant #1:
 - **“I have no relationship with her.”**
 - **“She doesn’t talk to me.”**
 - **“I don’t recall the last time she even said ‘hello.’”**
 - **“I extend a hand and she ignores me.”**
 - **“I don’t know what I did.”**
 - **“A lot of it started last year with the budget.”**
 - **“She felt I was responsible for it.”**
 - **“The tone of her voice at Board meetings” was disrespectful.**
 - **“She could have handled herself better [in her capacity].”**
 - **“She should have agreed to disagree.”**
 - **“She needed to respect her Superintendent; this was his budget.”**
 - **“I don’t think things should be confrontational.”**
 - **“She was the only [person] that came to the microphone and complained without a solution.”**
- On his relationship with Complainant #2:
 - **“We have a cordial relationship.”**
 - **“My kids had her for class.”**
 - **“Definitely a better relationship [than with Complainant #1].”**
 - **“[Complainant #2] is a very cordial person.”**
- On his communications with a staff member at South:
 - **“I’m sure I contacted him; I’m sure I did.”**

- “I talked to [staff member] about his position in the District [at the time of budget discussions]. [Staff member] was the low man on the totem pole. I told [staff member], ‘don’t leave; you are young, we have plenty of people coming up on retirement.’”
- “I became aware [staff member] was looking [for a position outside the District]. I called him. I said, ‘don’t leave – we are in a situation where people are hitting the 30-year mark; this is a great place for you to be.’”
- “I think [staff member] appreciated my concern; he thanked me for my advice.”
- Mr. Ismail denied having used the phrase “**push[ed] out**” or any derivation of same. He also denied suggesting that anyone would be leaving the employ of the District for reasons other than retirement or “**natural attrition**” in his conversation with the staff member.
- Mr. Ismail denied having made any statement at any time suggesting that there would be changes in the District that would “**turn [the Deputy Superintendent] white.**”

Applicable Policies and Regulations

District Policy 5.02, Nondiscrimination, provides in pertinent part:

The District shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including sexual orientation or sexual identity), age, religion, height, weight, marital or family status, disability, military status, genetic information, or any other legally protected category in its programs and activities, including employment. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination, and shall likewise not be permitted with respect to students or employees. The District shall not retaliate against a person who reports or opposes improper discrimination or retaliation. The District shall fully comply with all applicable federal and state civil rights statutes.

Administrative Guideline 5.02, Nondiscrimination, provides in pertinent part:

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Compliance Officer or the designee shall prepare and deliver a written report to the Superintendent that summarizes the evidence gathered during the investigation, and provides recommendations, based on the evidence and the definition of unlawful harassment or retaliation as provided in Board policy and State and Federal law, as to whether the Complainant has been subjected to unlawful harassment. The Compliance Officer’s recommendations must be based upon the totality of the circumstances, including the ages and maturity levels of those involved. In determining if harassment or retaliation occurred, a preponderance of evidence standard will be used.

The Compliance Officer may consult with the Board’s legal counsel before finalizing the report to the Superintendent.

Absent extenuating circumstances, within five (5) business days of receiving the report of the Compliance Officer or the designee, the Superintendent must either issue a final decision regarding whether the complaint of harassment or retaliation has been substantiated or request further investigation. A copy of the Superintendent's final decision will be delivered to both the Complainant and the Respondent.

If the Superintendent requests additional investigation, the Superintendent must promptly specify the additional information that is to be gathered. At the conclusion of the additional investigation, the Superintendent must issue a final written decision as described above.

The decision of the Superintendent shall be final.

Conclusions

Complainants raise a myriad of concerns that are outside the scope of this investigation, because they are based on local politics, historic racism, perceived sexism, employment decisions, Board budgetary battles, chronicles of affluence and power, or socio-economic imbalance, rather than the discrete issues identified by the Investigator as rooted in the written complaints submitted. Indeed, much of the time spent interviewing Complainants focused on those same issues, concerns, and grievances noted above; though none of which were the actual basis for the initial complaints. However, because those concerns are primarily political and historical rather than directly connected to the gravamen of this Complaint, they are noted here to acknowledge their existence and to provide context to the conclusions herein.

The genesis of the complaints in this matter was someone telling Complainants that Mr. Ismail allegedly told someone else that he wanted to “**push out**” Complainants from the District or some derivation of such a comment indicating that Complainants' employment with the District may be in jeopardy. The fear that the alleged threat may be true prompted the complaints, which do not cite a specific Board policy but contained phrases such as “gender bias,” “retaliation,” and

“harassment,” while expressly tying such perceived actions to the fact that the two employees who are the subject of the alleged comments are female.⁴

The identification of motive by any investigation is a tricky proposition in the absence of overt acts. No investigation and associated report can accurately or fairly read minds or decipher a complex network of intentions, perceived motivations, or contextual clues. Indeed, investigations are limited to the gathering of evidence provided by witnesses, determinations of credibility, an assessment as to the overall weight of the evidence collected, and the offering of reasonably drawn conclusions and recommendations. But while the scope of the investigation is narrower than the swath of concerns raised by Complainants, the Investigator can provide answers to those items identified as “Issues” in this investigative summary.

Did Mr. Ismail make comments to a then-GPPSS employee indicating that there was a plan or desire to “push out” Complainants from their employment with the District?

Mr. Ismail denied making these comments. The staff member to whom the comments were allegedly made asserted that they were, in fact, made by Mr. Ismail. In one respect, therefore, this becomes a “he said-he said” situation without a definitive answer. But the fact that the staff member shared the comments attributed to Mr. Ismail contemporaneously with another staff member in text message adds credibility to the notion that they were, in fact, made by Mr. Ismail. Those text messages were confirmed as authentic by both staff members involved in the exchange. There appears to be no obvious basis for those messages to have been fabricated or comments attributed to Mr. Ismail for no reason.⁵

⁴ Indeed, the Complainants’ complaints offer, in their own words, theories other than gender bias or discrimination for the actions of Mr. Ismail and the Board. Both Complainants, but Complainant #1 in particular, point to their advocacy for students at North HS as the primary catalyst for any animosity directed towards them, not gender. Other than advocacy, the decision impacting Mr. Sumbera is also cited; again, this has nothing to do with gender.

⁵ Relatedly, the conclusion is the same relative to the comment relative to changes in the District turning the Deputy Superintendent “white.” While not the focus of this investigation, that comment is concerning on many levels and may represent its own violation of District policy.

As such, there is, in the opinion of the Investigator, credible evidence that the comments were made by Mr. Ismail during what he clearly perceived to be a private conversation with a staff member intended to induce the staff member to stay with GPPSS. While Mr. Ismail asserted that any comments about people leaving the District were in reference to retirement or natural attrition, it seems unlikely that the staff member would have responded in the manner noted to such innocuous statements. As such, the answer to the presented question is **YES**.

Has the Board and/or Mr. Ismail taken any actions relative to Complainants indicating an attempt to terminate Complainants from their employment with the District?

The record evidences that both Complainants received two-year contract extensions in mid-2023. Both Complainants reported no record of discipline within their time with the District. While Complainants are understandably concerned about their continued employment in the District, they are under contract and can only be terminated in accordance with the express terms of those contracts. Notably, such contracts are subject to MCL 380.1229 which provides that they may only be non-renewed for reasons that are not arbitrary and capricious. Non-renewal of an employment contract solely because the employee submitted a complaint about a Board member would be both arbitrary and capricious, as well as unlawful retaliation. As such, the answer to the presented question is **NO**.

Are the comments by Mr. Ismail and/or his associated actions as a member of the Board evidence of gender bias/harassment against the Complainants?

This issue is the gravamen of the Complainants' concerns. It is true that both Complainants are female. It is clear from the record that both are accomplished, strong-willed, direct, professional, and fierce advocates for students and their building. It is also true that there are people in this world, certain men in particular, who do not like, respect, or respond well to women fitting the above description. While those with such feelings might be described as pig-headed, insecure, arrogant, or chauvinistic, people do have the right to feel how they want to feel. Board

Policy prohibits those feelings from being the motivating factor in a decision . Here, there is plenty of fodder for the notion that certain men in power in the GPPSS, including Mr. Ismail, did not respond well to women or appreciate their fierce advocacy. But there still exists a chasm between not responding well to decisions or actions taken by a woman and allowing gender to be the motivating factor in, for example, budgetary decisions made at the Board table.

On the salient issue advanced by Complainants, none of the witnesses offered direct evidence of discrimination or harassment, nor concurred with the notion that Complainants were harassed or discriminated against on the basis of gender. Witness #1 indicated that Mr. Ismail has struggled with female colleagues and, from their perspective, acted differently towards females – but stopped short of offering any direct evidence relative to Complainants. Witness #5 indicated that there was work that he would be praised for when a female counterpart might be ridiculed – but stopped short of offering any direct evidence that Mr. Ismail engaged in such conduct. Aside from those statements of limited probative value, all the witnesses generally scoffed at the notion that Complainants had been subjected to gender bias or harassment. Even Complainant #1 indicated that she was being “**Jon’d**,” suggesting she was receiving the same treatment as the former Superintendent, Jon Dean. If Complainant #1 was, by her own admission, being treated the same as a similarly situated male, she could not be the victim of gender bias or harassment. These notions largely parallel the conclusions of the Investigator, who sees plenty for Complainants to be upset about relative to the overall state of affairs in GPPSS, but after conducting this investigation, is unable to substantiate an allegation of gender bias against either of the Complainants.

The issues largely complained of by Complainants are about decisions being made by the Board which have an adverse impact on the programs/school that Complainants support. Budget

cuts to North HS might be made for a host of reasons, including alleged bias on the part of the Board toward South HS; it could be animus towards minority students, who comprise more of the North HS population than the South HS population, or it could be because South is the “the High” and many people in the community do not like the North HS community. None of those may be good reasons to make budget decisions. But none of them has anything to do with Complainants being female. The same holds true with the elimination of a health clinic, followed by the quick and inexplicable actions to put up a scoreboard at South HS costing several hundred thousand dollars. The optics on those transactions are, at best, curious. But they also have nothing to do with Complainants being female.

Finally, even with the conclusion that Mr. Ismail made the disputed comments to a staff member, there is no basis on which to conclude that the comments were rooted in gender bias or harassment. Simply because the comments were made to a male staffer who Mr. Ismail desired to retain in the District, does not make the comments gender motivated. Mr. Ismail acknowledged that he did not like the advocacy shown by Complainant #1 during the budget process. That advocacy had nothing to do with gender; instead, it had everything to do with the North v. South paradigm. Other witnesses opined that Mr. Ismail simply does not like Complainants, especially Complainant #1. But again, that perceived dislike has not been tied to gender by anyone other than the Complainants. Witness #1 even stated, “If a male was [in the same position as Complainant #1], would we have this animus? Probably.” In short, there is nothing in the record – no direct statements or actions – to substantiate a finding that Policy 5.02 was violated by Mr. Ismail.

It should be noted that while the Investigator has concluded that the evidence does not yield a finding of gender bias/harassment against the Complainants by Mr. Ismail specifically, such

conclusion is not intended as an endorsement of the GPPSS as a socially diverse, racially conscious utopia. The consternation of the Complainants and witness regarding issues of equality, especially relative to race, was palpable. While those sentiments do not substantiate a finding that Policy 5.02 was violated in this instance by Mr. Ismail, the feelings that clearly exist within the GPPSS can either propel the District to much-needed conversation or they can fester unaddressed, leading to additional issues in the future. Notwithstanding, the answer to the presented question is **NO**.

Are the comments by Mr. Ismail and/or his associated actions as a member of the Board in response to actions taken against Mr. Frank Sumbera, a former coach, who was terminated by the District?

Based on the evidence collected, it would be hard – if not impossible – to dismiss the termination of Mr. Sumbera as a significant moment in the employment trajectory of both Complainants. While Mr. Sumbera’s termination likely did not color every action which followed it, the perception of Complainants was undoubtedly impacted, even if they both continued to maintain their employment with the District. The stories provided to and reviewed by the Investigator from the *Grosse Pointe News* were befuddling [**Exhibit 4**], both in their direct attack on Complainants (chiefly Complainant #2) and in the ardent support for a coach who was dismissed for harming children. Seemingly, much of the GPPSS community was dismissive of Mr. Sumbera’s actions, as was Mr. Ismail, calling the termination an “**overreaction**.” But just as there are those who will defend coaching legends Bobby Knight or Joe Paterno until their last breath, the reality is that their conduct in certain situations – notwithstanding their status as beloved coaches who won games and undoubtedly had a positive impact on many young people – was wrong when measured by any metric.

As Complainant #1 explained, the complaints against Mr. Sumbera were “**verified through an investigation and personal accounts**,” an investigation which was spearheaded by

Complainants. For additional context, the allegations included, among others: Mr. Sumbera tossing a bat at a student, causing a bloody nose; coaches under Mr. Sumbera's direction lifting up their shirts and telling players to **"suck on my t--s because you are a p---y;"** Mr. Sumbera grabbing a hard of hearing student and screaming at him about his inability to hear; Mr. Sumbera putting a player with a concussion back into a game, which led to cognitive issues; and others. That Mr. Ismail is aware of this information, even if it was shared after the fact by the then-Superintendent, yet he dismisses it as an **"overreaction"** is troubling. As is the notion that the Board might name a field in his honor. While it is not the role of the Investigator to make a value judgment on such issues, it is easy to agree with the sentiment offered by Witness #4 that the possibility of naming a field at North HS after Mr. Sumbera is intended as a **"middle finger"** to Complainants.

The great mystery, however, is why Complainants are being blamed by *anyone* for the dismissal of Mr. Sumbera. Even Mr. Ismail noted that the decision was made by the former Superintendent Niehaus who was the **"top dog"** at the time. But even with that acknowledgment, Mr. Ismail's description of the circumstances leading to Mr. Sumbera's dismissal strikes as critical of the process and, again, an overreaction. As Mr. Ismail explained to the Investigator, Mr. Sumbera's missteps, if any, needed to be put **"into perspective,"** recognizing the years Mr. Sumbera had been there and the respect he had in the community – **"If he did something wrong, put him on an improvement place and correct it."** These comments seem to be critical of the manner in which Complainants approached the issues with Mr. Sumbera, even if they were not the ultimate decision-makers relative to his continued employment with the District.

So, while the decision to terminate resided with the **"top dog,"** there is little question that the gravity of the evidence suggests that Complainants were held to blame – at least to some extent

– for Mr. Sumbera’s removal from the District. The Investigator is left to conclude that the termination adversely impacted Mr. Ismail’s perception of Complainants. But that decision had nothing to do with gender. Even Witness #1 admitted that had a male been in the roles occupied by Complainants, there still would have been issues. Thus, the answer to the presented question is **YES**.

After the filing of the complaints in this matter, did Mr. Ismail engage in retaliatory behavior towards the Complainants?

The complaint addendums submitted by Complainants, suggest that Mr. Ismail engaged in retaliatory conduct after the filing of the complaints in this matter. As to Complainant #1, the concern had to do with her being left off an ad hoc committee. As to Complainant #2, the concern emanated from both a social media post and the recognition of a departing District employee. In each instance, whether it was a case of Mr. Ismail not knowing how to act during a pending investigation or engaging in conduct with specific malicious intent, the examples proffered by Complainants are of significant concern. While the noted conduct does not represent an unlawful adverse employment action, it certainly suggests an intent to not engage with Complainants as would be expected in the normal course of their employment.

The Board should be advised in no uncertain terms that any actions undertaken towards Complainants because of their complaints in this matter will likely be determined to be retaliatory under Policy 5.02. Thus, the answer to the presented question is **YES**.

Other Items and Recommendations

Aside from the key issues advanced in the complaints, there were a host of other issues raised throughout the process of the investigation which warrant attention from administration and/or the Board. Offered in no particular order:

- Members of the Board contacting staff directly to talk about a wide range of operational issues is not advised, nor is meeting with staff off-site for school business purposes. As Witness #1 noted, **“it’s not illegal; it’s just bad governance.”**
- Clearly, there is a feeling amongst many staff that the Board has moved beyond the permissible scope of its authority. The notion expressed by Witness #2 that, **“the Board is way more in the weeds, trying to be administration,”** was a sentiment shared by more than one witness. This could be problematic over time and is something that administration and the Board should examine, particularly as a new Superintendent takes leadership over the District.
- The options for “punishing” a member of the Board for violations of policy are, of course, limited. The Board may censure a member for conduct it collectively believes violates policy or District standards. Removal from a committee or a petition to the governor for removal from the Board entirely are also options. But in the final analysis, the Board and the District are left with few options to hold accountable a Board member who has not met the call of the office from a conduct perspective.
- As noted above, it is the Board’s discretion whether or not to honor an individual by naming a field or any other school building, property, or item after him or her. Given the circumstances surrounding Mr. Sumbera’s termination and the nature of the allegations advanced against him, the Board should be counseled about the ripple impacts of such a decision. Indeed, in an environment where “re-

victimization” is a hot and important topic, actions to exalt Mr. Sumbera may have a significant blow-back component.

- It is painfully evident that a significant divide exists between the North and South ends of the GPPSS community. While composition of the Board is left to the voters, it is quite clear that a toxic cocktail of demographics, socio-economic status, power, influence, and support – whether perceived or real – is harming large segments of the school community. And while it is possible that only those on the North end see an issue – very rarely do those holding all the cards perceive there to be any problem in the game – those on the North end clearly feel that they are treated as “less than” and that they have received a short end of the stick as it pertains to multiple budget and operational decisions. Efforts are recommended to bridge this divide in a manner that might dull or even negate the sentiments that were expressed by all of the witnesses in this matter.
- We speak frequently to students about restorative efforts when communications have broken down and/or been strained between young people. But restorative efforts are not limited to students. Here, it certainly appears to the Investigator that a restorative effort should at least try to be undertaken between Mr. Ismail and Complainants. While it takes willingness on both sides to meet and discuss, the Investigator recommends District leadership attempt to facilitate such a process.
- As it pertains to Complainants, their complaints in this matter and the findings of this investigation should be a major consideration for the District and/the Board in future discussions and/or contemplations about staffing, contracts, etc. While that is not to say that either Complainant is “untouchable” from an employment status,

termination and/or non-renewal of either in the absence of compelling evidence of misconduct is likely to be met with claims of retaliation. Certainly, this is something that the Interim Superintendent and/or new Superintendent can discuss with legal counsel to ascertain the full spectrum of considerations.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as the Investigator in this matter.

Exhibit 1

[External Message]

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

From: **Kate Murray** <MurrayK@gpschools.org>

Date: Mon, Aug 28, 2023 at 7:52 AM

Subject: investigation

To: Nicole Pilgrim <pilgrim@gpschools.org>

Nicole,

I'm writing this email both to confirm and to explain my filing of a formal complaint against School Board President Ahmed Ishmail on Friday, August 25, 2023. I came to see you in person to speak about this issue, as I found it extremely disturbing. It is my understanding that a formal investigation of President Ishmail will begin immediately.

On Friday, I was made aware that President Ishmail allegedly made explicit statements to another administrator stating that he and other board members were going to "push out" me and Athletic Director and Assistant Principal Michelle Davis from our leadership

positions at North High School. President Ishmail is in a position of power, and these statements are extremely threatening, harassing, and retaliatory. He has threatened my career and my livelihood. The decisions that the current board majority have made have caused at least four members of the Executive Administrative team to leave, including our superintendent, Dr. Jon Dean. I am well aware, with the departure of the superintendent, that President Ishmail now has more power over me and access to me than ever before, which makes his statement that much more alarming and threatening.

I absolutely believe President Ishmail's threat to be true, as his and Treasurer Cotton's previous behaviors have all led up to this point. I firmly believe that it is their intention to complete this desired outcome. I believe this threat is rooted in both gender bias and in President Ishmail's dismissal of diversity and equity work. I also believe this threat is catalyzed by the fact that I am the principal of the high school with the greatest number of African American students, students with special needs, and students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, and I have and will continue to loudly advocate for all of my students' needs. I also believe President Ishmail's threat is rooted in the fact that North High School is led by three women and a black man.

I have been a Norseman for 28 years and the principal for the last 12 years. As the leader of this school, I have had to make many difficult decisions regarding both staff and students. I firmly believe that I'm being targeted by and retaliated against by Mr. Ishmail and Mr. Cotton due to several of these decisions. I'm fearful that I might lose my job and more. This is personal. My family lives here and my kids attend school in the Grosse Pointe Public School System. His statements don't just threaten my job; they threaten my family and the life I've established here.

Mr. Cotton is the owner of the Grosse Pointe News, which has printed myriad articles over the last six years condemning me and my leadership. He and several other board members disagree with the removal of a coach who harmed students. In fact now, this statement to push me out is likely also grounded in my refusal to name a field after this coach who intentionally harmed marginalized students. These articles have attempted to diminish my capacity to lead and therefore have lessened my ability to take care of North High School.

Shortly after the new School Board members were sworn into office in January, it became very clear that they had a targeted, specific agenda that would lead up to the removal of central office and building administrators. Within days of assuming office, the Board called a special meeting to cancel a grant for a teen health clinic at North that had been approved by the previous board. One board member even attempted to intentionally slander me during the board meeting and her behavior went unchecked by President Ishmail. I believe his desire to push me out is in retaliation for my gaining a state funded grant to take care of students.

The creation and implementation of this year's budget was clearly an attack on North High School and its staff. This year's drastic budget reductions harmed North far more than any other school. The North community showed up to the May 19th Board meeting to appropriately share their concerns, and the meeting lasted nine hours. Since then,

Mr. Cotton attempted to patronize the North community by condescendingly defining the word “compromise” during a board meeting. Since then, the board majority has passed several resolutions to limit and silence public comments at board meetings. It is clear that Mr. Ishmail and Mr. Cotton would like me and North High School to disappear. They have even discussed the possibility of closing North at several Facilities Committee meetings.

Needless to say, the behavior of Mr. Ishmail and the board majority has caused me great distress. I am constantly fearful and anxious, and they have made going to work extremely difficult. I have sought medical attention for my deteriorating health including headaches, difficulty sleeping, panic attacks, digestive issues, depression, and high blood pressure. I have had to seek medical care for all of these issues. In fact, one day last spring at school, the school nurse was called to attend to me and my high blood pressure and its effects. The stress this has caused has had a large negative impact on me and my family.

Please know that I am a proud Norseman. I have spent my entire career at North. I taught English and French for fifteen years, was an AP for a year, and now I am in my 12th year as principal. I have been lauded for my many accomplishments over the years, including earning highly effective ratings on my evaluations. I would like to finish my career as I started it, at North, taking care of our Norsemen. Unfortunately, I feel I am being targeted and harassed, which could end my ability to complete my career as I started it.

I will be seeking my own legal counsel and am prepared to take further legal action if President Ishmail's statements are confirmed and steps are taken to “push me out” of my career and life in Grosse Pointe.

Kate Murray

--

Kathryn C. Murray

Principal, Grosse Pointe North High School

Grosse Pointe Public School System

Our Vision: OneGP - where *everyone* learns, *every* day

Our Mission: Promote Innovation ® Maximize Potential ® Embrace Community

313.432.3204 murrayk@gpschools.org

twitter: @katecalmurray

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From: Kate Murray <MurrayK@gpschools.org>

Sent: Friday, September 22, 2023 9:17 AM

To: Nicole Pilgrim <pilgrim@gpschools.org>; McInerney, Mark W. <mmcinerney@clarkhill.com>

Cc: Kate Murray <murrayk@gpschools.org>

Subject: Fwd: Superintendent Transition Committee Meeting

[External Message]

Good Morning,

I would like to add this email to my complaint. I was not an original recipient of the email invitation to be a part of the Superintendent Transition Ad Hoc Committee. I was not invited in August. This is the first invitation I have received. The language President Ishmail uses in this invitation ("In late August, I emailed the recipients of this email,") is a lie and intentionally misleading. Please add this information to the investigation.

Kate Murray

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

From: **Ahmed Ismail** <ismaila@gpschools.org>

Date: Fri, Sep 22, 2023 at 8:49 AM

Subject: Superintendent Transition Committee Meeting

To: Christian Fenton (GPPSS) <fentonc@gpschools.org>

Cc: Roy Bishop <bishopr@gpschools.org>, Howell, Keith (GPPSS) <howellk@gpschools.org>, Nicole Pilgrim <pilgrin@gpschools.org>, Christopher Stanley <stanlec@gpschools.org>, Moussa Hamka <hamkam@gpschools.org>, Kate Murray <MurrayK@gpschools.org>, Rodger Hunwick <HunwicR@gpschools.org>, Jodie Randazzo <jodie.randazzo@yahoo.com>

Good morning, Chris,

In late August, I emailed the recipients of this email with an invitation to serve on an Ad Hoc Superintendent Transition Committee. Its purpose is to aid you in guiding the system through the transition to our new superintendent and to share ideas from each level of our buildings.

I would appreciate it if you would please connect with the recipients to work out a date and time for our first meeting. An hour should be more than enough time to get the ball rolling.

Thank you and best wishes,

Ahmed

Ahmed Ismail, President

Grosse Pointe Public School System - Board of Education
313-343-9060

Note: The opinions expressed in this email are those of the sender and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the balance of the Board of Trustees and/or the administration of the Grosse Pointe Public School System. Emails sent to or from this email address are accessible by the public under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

The exhibits attached to this email totaled more than 100 pages on the budgetary discussions referenced in the email. As these materials would all be publicly available, they have not been included here.

From: Kate Murray <katecalabresamurray@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, November 13, 2023 2:44 PM
To: Jeffrey Donahue <jdonahue@whiteschneider.com>
Subject: budget numbers

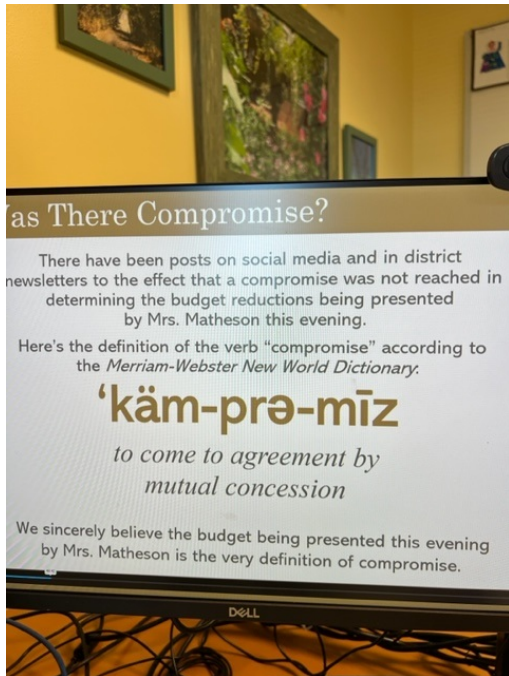
Jeff,

In our discussion with Kevin, I was asked to go back and find the exact numbers pertaining to FTE last spring. I've attached three documents that will help with that and also here is an overall summary:

South's student to teacher ratio went from 21.9 to 22.6 caused by a 5.1FTE reduction. However this was not how their numbers ended. They were given another .4 FTE over the summer so I am unsure what their final ratio was. The original change in their ration was .7 but after the additional FTE it's obviously less than that.

North's student to teacher ratio has historically been lower than South's due to our different student populations. Our ratio went from 20.7 to 21.9 caused by a 5.1 FTE reduction. This reduction caused a change of 1.2 in our ration, which is significantly different from South.

As I shared, Sean Cotton attempted to humiliate and patronize me during the BOE meeting on June 12th. You can see his slide with the definition of compromise at the 48:41 mark. He was frustrated that I continued to advocate for North and wanted me to be quiet and tell the North Community that this outcome was an acceptable outcome. Subsequently the protocols around public comment and length of meetings has changed.



Upon reflection on the above information and the information I shared with Kevin, I believe Sean Cotton along with Nicole Pilgrim and Amanda Matheson should all be interviewed.

The final attachment is a new resolution that is coming out of the Policy Committee. I most definitely feel it will be weaponized and used against me and North.

Thank you,
Kate Murray

[External Message]

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

From: **Michelle Davis** <DavisM@gpschools.org>

Date: Sun, Aug 27, 2023 at 12:11 PM

Subject: HR Concern and Formal Investigation Request

To: Nicole Pilgrim <pilgrim@gpschools.org>

Cc: Michelle Davis <DavisM@gpschools.org>

Hello Nicole

After speaking with you regarding my concerns about alleged statements made by the GPPSS school board president, please accept this email as a written request to begin a formal investigation into Mr. Ahmed Ismail. Mr. Ismail has allegedly made statements that he and certain members of the board of education were looking to “push” both myself and Dr. Kathryn Murray out of our administrative positions at Grosse Pointe North High School.

In the past few months, the GPPSS Superintendent and several other district administrators have left their former positions which has subsequently left few layers of protection between building level administration and the GPPSS Board of Education. As current President of the Board of Education, Mr. Ishmail now sits in a position of increased power over my role and all administrative roles in the district. This increase in power renders his statements threatening to end my educational career even more salient.

In my role as the Assistant Principal and Athletic Director at Grosse Pointe North High School, I have had to make difficult administrative decisions regarding students and personnel. Because of these past decisions, I feel I am currently being targeted and retaliated against by Mr. Ismail for said decisions. I am fearful of the loss of my job and feel threatened that I may be “pushed out” or removed from my AD/AP position by this new school board. The new treasurer of the GPPS Board is related to the ownership of *The Grosse Pointe News*, which has printed several damning articles about me over the past six years. These articles have attempted to diminish me as an administrator, an athletic director, and even went as far as to print my resume in an attempt to “prove” that I was, in their opinion, not qualified to serve in the role of Assistant Principal and Athletic Director. I believe Sean Cotton is also in a position of power and currently threatens my educational career with GPPSS.

I have served Grosse Pointe Public Schools for 25 years. I was a business educator at Grosse Pointe North for 19 years prior to taking my current position. I have always been a strong, competent woman who holds true to my values and beliefs. This has been especially true the past six years being a woman in a traditionally male role as athletic director. For 25 years, I have enjoyed and looked forward to going to work every day to serve Grosse Pointe North and I have received numerous highly effective evaluations over my career. I feel I am being targeted and harassed by the current school board hindering my ability to finish my final years of an educational career.

Currently, I fear my position is in jeopardy. I am struggling to get motivated to attend school and find little joy in my administrative role; the only thing that keeps me attending is the quality educators and resilient students in our building. I frequently have headaches and struggle to sleep at night. My stress has a daily impact on my physical health and I have a high level of anxiety and frequent depression. I am seeking therapy to obtain coping skills and to support my mental health. The stress and anxiety is having a negative impact on my family and has created undue and unnecessary stress and anxiety for them as well.

I will be seeking the advice of legal counsel and would pursue legal action if the Board of Education President, Ahmed Ismail’s alleged statements are confirmed and actions are taken to “push” me out of my educational career with Grosse Pointe Public School System.

Thank you for taking the time to address and formally investigate the allegations.

Michelle Davis
Assistant Principal/Athletic Director
Grosse Pointe North High School
CTE Administrator Liaison
Grosse Pointe Public School System

Our Vision: OneGP - where *everyone* learns, *every* day

Our Mission: Promote Innovation® Maximize Potential ® Embrace Community

(313) 432-3255 davism@gpschools.org

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

From: **Michelle Davis** <DavisM@gpschools.org>

Date: Mon, Aug 28, 2023 at 3:39 PM

Subject: Re: HR Concern and Formal Investigation Request

To: Nicole Pilgrim <pilgrim@gpschools.org>

Hello Nicole

I would like to add this addendum to my HR Concern and Formal Investigation Request Statement. as this was recently brought to my attention. Please see below:

Addendum:

In June of 2018, I terminated coach Frank Sumbera at the behest of then Superintendent Gary Niehaus. Mr. Sumbera had a lengthy file of issues going back many years regarding treatment of players and their safety. I, and the entire administrative team, completely agreed with the decision of then Superintendent Niehaus to terminate Mr. Sumbera. The Grosse Pointe News however did not agree with the decision and printed multiple articles and commentary calling into question the decision to let Mr. Sumbera go. They even reviewed his file and, in their opinion, found it

“no big deal.” Sean Cotton is now a member of this school board and in a direct position of power over me. One of the ways I feel they are attempting to force me into leaving Grosse Pointe involves this summer’s discussion, that I was recently made aware of, which is the idea that Grosse Pointe North should now be forced to honor Mr. Sumbera this upcoming school year. There have been discussions about naming a field or part of a stadium after him. I do not find it coincidental that these proposals have been offered up and pushed by the new school board in light of the fact of their stated mission to attempt to force me out. The thought of having to stand and honor a man that was terminated for cause five years ago has certainly added to the stress and anxiety of my job, which I believe was precisely the point.

Michelle Davis

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

From: **Michelle Davis** <DavisM@gpschools.org>

Date: Thu, Sep 7, 2023 at 12:38 PM

Subject: Addendum #2 to Formal Investigation Request into BOE President Ahmed Ismail

To: Nicole Pilgrim <pilgrim@gpschools.org>

Hello Nicole

Please see the email below from a North parent and the response from GPPSS Board President Ahmed Ismail. I believe his response to the parent and the post on social media was to portray me in a false light and diminish my role as the AD/AP at Grosse Pointe North. I spoke with the South AD and he stated he never invited Mr. Ismail to take photos on the sideline at football games. Mr. Ismail took it upon himself to attend the games. Mr. Ismail attends the games and takes photos for his personal business "The Portrait Place".

I have included the post below from The Portrait Place. Again, I believe his comment was intended to diminish me in my role as AD/AP at North and to portray me in a false light to the community. Please add this email as an addendum to my request for a formal investigation sent on August 27th.

PARENT EMAIL

Hello!

So I am going to rant a little and follow it up with a question.

For years now, I have been so disgusted with the BOE and how they show up for everything South

and hardly anything North. It makes it even worse when they go on and on about how wonderful the choir, band, play, sporting event, art show , etc was. I have even written letters to personally invite the BOE members to our performing arts events, but of course, all I get is crickets!

I have also personally asked Ahmed why he doesn't take pictures at our musical or concerts like he does South. And he always has an excuse (he was out of town; he was ill, etc.).

On FB this past week, The Portrait Place page posted photos of the first home football game at South (one of his many South posts of the week). Someone asked if he was going to take pictures at the North game and he said, "why yes I will, if their AD invites me and it isn't raining." So this is a twist. He will now blame his absence at North events on North.

This leads to my first question: Would you want him there? ☐

And the 2nd question: would you or Mrs. Davis be willing to invite him to take his pictures?
(I have attached a screenshot of his statement.)

So thank you for hearing my rant and considering my questions. Maybe North is better without him. I just don't want him to North as his excuse to always show his favoritism to South.

SOCIAL MEDIA POST



Michelle Davis
Assistant Principal/Athletic Director
Grosse Pointe North High School
CTE Administrator Liaison
Grosse Pointe Public School System

Our Vision: OneGP - where *everyone* learns, *every day*

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From: Michelle Davis <michelleabood5@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, November 5, 2023 7:45 AM
To: Jeffrey Donahue <jdonahue@whiteschneider.com>
Subject: Additional Information for formal complaint

Hello Jeff

Please see the information below, I would like to add this to my formal complaint and the information I discussed with you and Mr. Kevin Sutton at our meeting on October 30, 2023.

November 3, 2023

A parent reached out to my office to inquire about statistics, records, and details with regard to a 31 year North coach who is retiring this year, Scott Cooper. My secretary took a message from the parent who said he was reaching out for information about Coach Cooper because of the proclamation happening for him at the November 14, 2023 board meeting. I was unaware of the proclamation and how it began so I returned the parents' call. He informed me that Board President Amhed Ismail asked him to gather the information. I inquired with our district office and they confirmed that President Ahmed Ismail had asked them to put Scott Cooper's name on the calendar, however he did not mention it was for a proclamation or that he was a North coach to the Superintendent's secretary. She was just asked to add Scott Cooper's name to the agenda and schedule a 10 minute recess after President Ismail spoke for refreshments after the presentation. The Superintendent's secretary was not aware he was a North coach and I believe President Ismail failed to inform her because past practice would have had her reach out to me.

I believe this was another attempt by President Ismail to remove me from a process that should have included me and been led by my office in conjunction with the Board of Education. In the past, any time a coach has been presented with an award, recognition, etc. I was involved in the process and attended the board meeting to either present the award or in support of the North coach. If the North parent had not reached out to my office for details about Coach Cooper's career I would not have been aware of the proclamation and would not attend the meeting on November 14, 2023. I believe President Ismail excluded me from a process that should have included the North athletic department and myself as the athletic director, because my absence would portray me in a negative light to the community for not attending.

The North parent reached out to President Ismail on Friday, November 3, 2023 in an email (to his business email not his Board of Education email), which included me, to request President Ismail or a board member reach out to me and the North athletic department for any details with regard to Coach Cooper's career. My office has not heard from President Ismail or any other board of education member. Please see the

email below.

Fri, Nov 3, 11:57AM (2
days ago)

Michael Leonhard

<Michael.Leonhard@yourlowestquote.com>

to

ahmed@potraitplacegp.com, davism@gpschools.org

Hello Ahmed,

I made contact with Michelle Davis and Teresa Bennett over at the North Athletic Office about obtaining statistical information on Coach Cooper's career for the BOE Proclamation that we spoke about being presented to him at the 11/14 BOE Meeting. Michelle Davis said they can help you with the needed information and to have either yourself or whomever else from the BOE will be working on this to contact the AD Office at North Directly at 313-432-3255.

Thanks to all helping with this.

Michael Leonhard

Exhibit 2

RESPONSES TO DR. MURRAY STATEMENTS

"...On Friday, I was made aware that President Ishmail allegedly made explicit statements to another administrator stating that he and other board members were going to "push out" me and Athletic Director and Assistant Principal Michelle Davis from our leadership positions at North High School...."

RESPONSE: No such statements were ever made. The only statements in any way similar that were ever made were to a former assistant principal who was worried about his job being eliminated and was looking for a new job. My advice to him was to stay in the system, as a number of our administrators were nearing their 30-year mark, which is a typical point of retirement, and that he would be in an ideal position to move up the ladder should he so desire. Examples of those administrators would be Dr. Murray, Mr. Hunwick, Mrs. Davis, Mr. Fitzpatrick, and Mr. Spryszak, just to name a few.

"...President Ishmail is in a position of power, and these statements are extremely threatening, harassing, and retaliatory. He has threatened my career and my livelihood. The decisions that the current board majority have made have caused at least four members of the Executive Administrative team to leave, including our superintendent, Dr. Jon Dean. I am well aware, with the departure of the superintendent, that President Ishmail now has more power over me and access to me than ever before, which makes his statement that much more alarming and threatening...."

RESPONSE: Dr. Murray knows full well that the departure of certain administrators was their decision and not that of the school board. Her statement that "...President Ishmail now has more power over me and access to me than ever before..." is just not factual, as Dr. Murray knows full well. There is a process in place for building level administrator reviews and it does not include me or other members of the school board.

"...I absolutely believe President Ishmail's threat to be true, as his and Treasurer Cotton's previous behaviors have all led up to this point. I firmly believe that it is their intention to complete this desired outcome. I believe this threat is rooted in both gender bias and in President Ishmail's dismissal of diversity and equity work..."

RESPONSE: I am shocked that Dr. Murray would make any claim that I have any kind of gender bias. I would appreciate knowing ONE example of this. With regards to my "dismissal" of diversity and equity work, I find this statement insulting, especially in that my family was one of the first Muslim families in the Grosse Pointe Public School System and my father built a mosque in our school system when I was growing up. She has no idea of what it is to be a member of a minority class.

"...I also believe this threat is catalyzed by the fact that I am the principal of the high school with the greatest number of African American students, students with special needs, and students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, and I have and will continue to loudly advocate for all of my students' needs. I also believe President Ishmail's threat is rooted in the fact that North High School is led by three women and a black man..."

RESPONSE: Growing up as a member of the group of socio-economically disadvantaged students, I find Dr. Murray's allegation above particularly insulting. As to my commitment to the special needs community, I recommend that you contact a former Grosse Pointe North parent, Ms. Jeanne Lizza, as to my decades-long involvement with Special Kids, Inc., a non-profit organization she heads that provides services for special needs children and young adults. Dr. Murray also seems to forget that I was an advocate for the appointment of her black assistant principal, Geoffrey Young, who is a stellar administrator.

"...I have been a Norseman for 28 years and the principal for the last 12 years. As the leader of this school, I have had to make many difficult decisions regarding both staff and students. I firmly believe that I'm being targeted by and retaliated against by Mr. Ishmail and Mr. Cotton due to several of these decisions. I'm fearful that I might lose my job and more. This is personal. My family lives here and my kids attend school in the Grosse Pointe Public School System. His statements don't just threaten my job; they threaten my family and the life I've established here...."

RESPONSE: Dr. Murray has failed to provide any evidence of any retaliation against her. She still has her position and is collecting her paycheck. Since I am not involved in her review process, I don't have a clue what is listed as areas of improvement in her annual review. I would suggest one area would be to learn to communicate with community members and residents that she has known for over two decades with openness and respect that is clearly lacking in her statements.

"...Mr. Cotton is the owner of the Grosse Pointe News, which has printed myriad articles over the last six years condemning me and my leadership. He and several other board members disagree with the removal of a coach who harmed students. In fact now, this statement to push me out is likely also grounded in my refusal to name a field after this coach who intentionally harmed marginalized students. These articles have attempted to diminish my capacity to lead and therefore have lessened my ability to take care of North High School...."

RESPONSE: As I have stated previously, I have no involvement in the Grosse Pointe News. With regards to naming a field or any other school property, Dr. Murray has no say in that process as she well knows. There is board policy that governs the naming of district assets. As to her statements that a coach "harmed" marginalized students, please have her provide proof of this statement. As I have stated previously, I don't believe Mr. Cotton was the owner of the Grosse Pointe News when the alleged statements she references were published. Please ask her to provide proof otherwise.

"...Within days of assuming office, the Board called a special meeting to cancel a grant for a teen health clinic at North that had been approved by the previous board. One board member even attempted to intentionally slander me during the board meeting and her behavior went unchecked by President Ishmail. I believe his desire to push me out is in retaliation for my gaining a state funded grant to take care of students...."

RESPONSE: Dr. Murray continues to act as though Grosse Pointe North High School is her personal property, a fact she knows full well is not the case. The prior school board rushed to approve a health clinic at North that would have required an expenditure of \$1 million, despite the fact that our fund equity was in the single digits. I did not bring the motion to stop the spending of money we didn't have – it was brought by two other board members. As far as her obtaining a state grant, I do not know that she is the one who obtained it. I was very uncomfortable that she did not seek bids from hospital systems other than the one with which she is affiliated. My reason for voting against the project was simple – it included a 30-day cancellation clause for Beaumont Hospital, which would have left us with an empty clinic with no recourse against Beaumont. No business person would invest \$1 million with a 30-day non-recourse cancellation clause.

"...The creation and implementation of this year's budget was clearly an attack on North High School and its staff. This year's drastic budget reductions harmed North far more than any other school. The North community showed up to the May 19th Board meeting to appropriately share their concerns, and the meeting lasted nine hours. Since then, Mr. Cotton attempted to patronize the North community by condescendingly defining the word "compromise" during a board meeting...."

RESPONSE: The initial cuts to the Grosse Pointe North budget were proposed by the administration, not the school board and not by me. EVERY school in the school system had cuts. As far as Dr. Murray's concerns with Mr. Cotton's statements, she should address those with Mr. Cotton.

"...Since then, the board majority has passed several resolutions to limit and silence public comments at board meetings...."

RESPONSE: The board has made changes to our public comment policy to bring it more in line with that of other school systems. The changes were vetted through our Policy-Contract Committee and their suggestions were brought to the board for a vote.

"...It is clear that Mr. Ishmail and Mr. Cotton would like me and North High School to disappear. They have even discussed the possibility of closing North at several Facilities Committee meetings...."

RESPONSE: I take great offense to this, as my investment in Grosse Pointe North far precedes Dr. Murray's birth. I was a member of the first graduating class of Grosse Pointe North. Two of my sons graduated from Grosse Pointe North. When we moved back from Bloomfield Hills, we chose our home's location so that our sons could attend Grosse Pointe North. I give scholarships annually to Grosse Pointe North students and go out of my way to employ Grosse Pointe North students after school. As far as a discussion at our Facilities-Finance Committee meetings, I believe there was a five-minute discussion about the fact that both of our high schools are at about 50% occupancy and that we will need to resolve this issue. The reality is that neither high school is going to close. If anything, portions of the buildings will need to be re-purposed.

"...Needless to say, the behavior of Mr. Ishmail and the board majority has caused me great distress. I am constantly fearful and anxious, and they have made going to work extremely difficult. I have sought medical attention for my deteriorating health including headaches, difficulty sleeping, panic attacks, digestive issues, depression, and high blood pressure. I have had to seek medical care for all of these issues. In fact, one day last spring at school, the school nurse was called to attend to me and my high blood pressure and its effects. The stress this has caused has had a large negative impact on me and my family...."

RESPONSE: I don't see how I have contributed to Dr. Murray's self-induced insomnia and anxiety.

RESPONSES TO MICHELLE DAVIS COMPLAINT STATEMENTS

"...Mr. Ismail has allegedly made statements that he and certain members of the board of education were looking to 'push' both myself and Dr. Kathryn Murray out of our administrative positions at Grosse Pointe North High School..."

RESPONSE: No such statements were ever made. The only statements in any way similar that were ever made were to a former assistant principal who was worried about his job being eliminated and was looking for a new job. My advice to him was to stay in the system, as a number of our administrators were nearing their 30-year mark, which is a typical point of retirement, and he would be in an ideal position to move up the ladder should he so desire. Examples of those administrators would be Dr. Murray, Mr. Hunwick, Mrs. Davis, Mr. Fitzpatrick, and Mr. Spryszak, just to name a few.

"...In the past few months, the GPPSS Superintendent and several other district administrators have left their former positions which has subsequently left few layers of protection between building level administration and the GPPSS Board of Education. As current President of the Board of Education, Mr. Ishmail now sits in a position of increased power over my role and all administrative roles in the district. This increase in power renders his statements threatening to end my educational career even more salient...."

RESPONSE: The review process for building level administration does not involve members of the school board. There is no process under which a board member or the Board President is involved or has any pathway to influence how the superintendent reviews the building level administration. I believe these reviews are done by the superintendent and/or the Assistant Superintendent (Dr. Bishop).

"...In my role as the Assistant Principal and Athletic Director at Grosse Pointe North High School, I have had to make difficult administrative decisions regarding students and personnel. Because of these past decisions, I feel I am currently being targeted and retaliated against by Mr. Ismail for said decisions. I am fearful of the loss of my job and feel threatened that I may be "pushed out" or removed from my AD/AP position by this new school board...."

RESPONSE: Please provide examples of Ms. Davis' bad decisions. I don't have any interaction with Ms. Davis regarding her personnel and student decisions. I have never commented to her on her decisions in regards to a student or personnel decision she has made. If she has made a poor decision with regards to personnel or students, her principal (Dr. Murray) and/or central office administration would be involved in bringing a bad decision to her attention.

"...The new treasurer of the GPPS Board is related to the ownership of The Grosse Pointe News, which has printed several damning articles about me over the past six years. These articles have attempted to diminish me as an administrator, an athletic director, and even went as far as to print my resume in an attempt to "prove" that I was, in their opinion, not qualified to serve in the role of Assistant Principal and Athletic Director. I believe Sean Cotton is also in a position of power and currently threatens my educational career with GPPSS...."

RESPONSE: I don't understand what relevance Ms. Davis' concern about an article in The Grosse Pointe News has to do with me. I have no ownership in the Grosse Pointe News. As a point of reference, I believe the articles Ms. Davis is referring to were published before Mr. Cotton became the owner of The Grosse Pointe News.

"...I have served Grosse Pointe Public Schools for 25 years. I was a business educator at Grosse Pointe North for 19 years prior to taking my current position. I have always been a strong, competent woman who holds true to my values and beliefs. This has been especially true the past six years being a woman in a traditionally male role as athletic director. For 25 years, I have enjoyed and looked forward to going to work every day to serve Grosse Pointe North and I have received numerous highly effective evaluations over my career. I feel I am being targeted and harassed by the current school board hindering my ability to finish my final years of an educational career...."

RESPONSE: I don't what relevance this statement has to me. I know of no instance in which Ms. Davis has been targeted or harassed by the current school board. Please provide examples.

"...Currently, I fear my position is in jeopardy. I am struggling to get motivated to attend school and find little joy in my administrative role; the only thing that keeps me attending is the quality educators and resilient students in our building. I frequently have headaches and struggle to sleep at night. My stress has a daily impact on my physical health and I have a high level of anxiety and frequent depression. I am seeking therapy to obtain coping skills and to support my mental health. The stress and anxiety is having a negative impact on my family and has created undue and unnecessary stress and anxiety for them as well...."

RESPONSE: Ms. Davis has never brought the alleged angst she feels that I have caused her to my attention until this complaint was filed, despite the fact that I have know her for most of her teaching career. Prior to this complaint, she made absolutely NO attempt to address her concerns through a conversation with myself and/or the superintendent.

"...I will be seeking the advice of legal counsel and would pursue legal action if the Board of Education President, Ahmed Ismail's alleged statements are confirmed and actions are taken to "push" me out of my educational career with Grosse Pointe Public School System...."

RESPONSE: I can't control Ms. Davis' desire to retain legal counsel for an imaginary threat to her career. It saddens me that she didn't extend the courtesy to me in light of our past relationship to request that we meet to discuss her unfounded concerns.

"...In June of 2018, I terminated coach Frank Sumbera at the behest of then Superintendent Gary Niehaus. Mr. Sumbera had a lengthy file of issues going back many years regarding treatment of players and their safety. I, and the entire administrative team, completely agreed with the decision of then Superintendent Niehaus to terminate Mr. Sumbera. The Grosse Pointe News however did not agree with the decision and printed multiple articles and commentary calling into question the decision to let Mr. Sumbera go. They even reviewed his file and, in their opinion, found it "no big deal." Sean Cotton is now a member of this school board and in a direct position of power over me. One of the ways I feel they are attempting to force me into leaving Grosse Pointe involves this summer's discussion, that I was recently made aware of, which is the idea that Grosse Pointe North should now be forced to honor Mr. Sumbera this upcoming school year. There have been discussions about naming a field or part of a stadium after him. I do not find it coincidental that these proposals have been offered up and pushed by the new school board in light of the fact of their stated mission to attempt to force me out. The thought of having to stand and honor a man that was terminated for cause five years ago has certainly added to the stress and anxiety of my job, which I believe was precisely the point..."

RESPONSE: Again, I am being assumed to have some control over alleged articles by The Grosse Pointe News prior to Mr. Cotton ever owning the newspaper. The board has received a request from a number of prominent members of the community that Mr. Sumbera be recognized for his 49 years of service to the community. No board action has been taken on this request. As only one member of a seven-member board, I fail to see how I am being blamed for Ms. Davis' fear that Mr. Sumbera may be honored.

SPORTS

Legendary coach Frank Sumbera out at Grosse Pointe North

By **David Goricki** The Detroit News

Published 5:56 p.m. ET June 29, 2018 | Updated 6:26 a.m. ET July 1, 2018

Frank Sumbera, one of the most successful coaches in Michigan high school history, is out as head football and baseball coach at Grosse Pointe North.

Sumbera, 70, said he was blindsided Wednesday when he was told by Grosse Pointe North administrators that if he didn't retire or resign he would be fired.

"They terminated me as the football and baseball coach, said they had some parents on the baseball team that said I was giving their boys mental anguish and not treating them fairly, putting them supposedly in an unsafe environment, which I don't know what that even means," Sumbera told The Detroit News on Friday.

Sumbera has been involved in coaching Grosse Pointe North football for 49 years. He has been the head football coach since 1981 and the head baseball coach since 1973.

More: East topples West in high school baseball All-Star game

"I was in a meeting with them at 9 o'clock Wednesday morning and Kate Murray, the principal, was there with athletic director Michelle Davis and the human resources person, Nicole Pilgram," Sumbera said. "They told me as of June 27th that I was being terminated as the head football and baseball coach and I go, 'What? Are you kidding me?' They said they did this investigation amongst some players, and parents wrote letters, asking them to get rid of me. I asked them, 'How many of the other parents did you talk to?' and they said they couldn't give me that information. They wouldn't even show me the letters. ... I just don't understand it."

Multiple messages were sent to Davis by The News on Friday but were not immediately returned.

Grosse Pointe North issued this statement:

"On June 27, 2018, Principal Kathryn C. Murray sent an email to North Varsity Baseball and Football parents and players, stating: Today, we received notice of the retirement of Grosse Pointe North High School Head Baseball and Head Football coach Frank Sumbera, effective June 29, 2018. We understand that transition plans have to be made. The coaching staff has been notified. Michelle Davis, our Grosse Pointe North High School Athletic Director and Assistant Principal, will keep the baseball and football parents and families informed as we move forward.

"Frank Sumbera has been head of our varsity baseball and football programs for nearly fifty years. His dedication to the Grosse Pointe North High School student athletes, assistant coaches and community will long be his legacy. We want to thank Frank for his years of service and wish him the best in his retirement."

Grosse Pointe North Board President Brian C. Summerfield said: "The Board was made aware of the retirement announcement shortly before it was made. It is unfortunate that social media is spreading misinformation, particularly in this offensive manner."

Sumbera is the third-winningest baseball coach in state history with 1,097 victories, including a Division 1 state championship in 2006 and a 21-12 record this past spring. He also has more than 200 wins as a head football coach.

Sumbera said administrators weren't prepared when he told them he would not retire or resign.

"I wanted to know what the terms and the conditions were for my termination, in other words, 'Why?' and they didn't know what I was talking about," said Sumbera. "They told me I had to do it by 3 o'clock Wednesday afternoon and I never did it. I wasn't

going to retire. If they wanted to fire me, fire me.

"I wasn't going to retire or resign because I didn't do anything wrong. I'm a Christian man and I don't yell at the kids. I haven't touched the kids. I talk to them in a positive manner. I don't let my assistants use profanity. I don't allow the players to use profanity. I was just totally blindsided by the whole thing."

Grosse Pointe Superintendent Gary Niehaus said he is sticking by the statement.

"He gave us a verbal retirement on Wednesday, made in front of three of our administrators, so I don't know where you're getting the word 'terminated' from unless you're getting it off of social media," Niehaus told The News. "The principal was in the meeting with him as well as the athletic director. I think they did a fair and equitable investigation and I think the outcome was shared with him. I think he did give a verbal retirement."

Dan Griesbaum has coached against Sumner for the past 35 years as head coach of Grosse Pointe South, which won the Division 1 state championship this month, defeating North during its postseason run.

"I can tell you that the coaching fraternity is finding this extremely difficult to understand because they know Frank, have competed against him and know what he stands for," Griesbaum told The News. "I have never in 35 years of competing against his teams ever seen anything objectionable in terms of his treatment of players. I have never witnessed anything abusive, either physically or verbally. I hope that somehow this can be rectified and he can continue doing what he loves to do."

"He has done so much for that school and those kids for so many years, and to allow this to happen because of disgruntled parents is puzzling to say the least."

Sumner's former players were also shocked by the news.

"It's just really hard since this is a man I've known since the 10th grade and have great respect and admiration for," said Billy Babcock, who played for Sumner in the early 1980s before playing professionally. "I was born and raised in the Woods (Grosse Pointe Woods) and my whole family went to North. My son, Luke, will be a freshman at North this year and I was really looking forward to him playing for Frank."

John Hackett was one of the first players to play for Sumner back in 1981.

"I've had the pleasure to both play for Coach Sumner and coach against him for 25 years while at Grosse Pointe South," Hackett said. "He has been a great mentor to myself and so many other players over the years. He has developed very strong bonds with his players and is an icon in not only Grosse Pointe but throughout the state of Michigan. Both Coach Sumner and Dan Griesbaum are MHSAA Hall of Fame coaches and are two of the most respected coaches in the state of Michigan. He will be missed by many."

Craig Como played for Sumner in the mid-1980s and said: "Learning of Coach Sumner's dismissal was devastating. What's even worse is how Grosse Pointe North's administrators treated this man after 50 years of service. I played for Coach Sumner in the mid '80s and can honestly say that next to my own father, he is the best coach, friend and mentor I have had in my life. For anyone to disparage his name and question his character acts that way out of selfishness for themselves or their children."

"Coach Sumner did a great job of balancing accountability while keeping it fun for all of us," said Jon Palazzo, who also played for Sumner in the mid-1980s. "I loved playing for Frank and thank him for all he did for my teammates and I."

Another former player, from the early 2000s, Charlie Kaiser, said Sumner "is a man with great integrity and is a foundation of the Grosse Pointe community. Even though he has many great accomplishments in his career, his greatest accomplishment is the positive influence he has had on so many of our lives."



**Grosse Pointe Board of Education
Minutes of the Regular Session of July 23, 2018
Brownell Multipurpose Room
260 Chalfonte, Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236**

I. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/ROLL CALL

President Summerfield called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Board members present: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by all in attendance

Also Present: Superintendent Gary Niehaus, Deputy Superintendent Lisa Abbey and Human Resources Director Nicole Pilgrim.

II. APPROVAL OF BOARD AGENDA FOR JULY 23, 2018

It was Moved by: Trustee Abke

Supported by: Trustee Ismail

That the Board approve the Board Agenda for July 23, 2018.

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

III. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

A. Seth and Laura Romine – Financial gift to Elementary Art Department

Dr. Niehaus noted that Mr. & Mrs. Romine were unable to attend this evening and will be present at the August 13, 2018 Board meeting.

Dr. Niehaus read a statement to the board and community members viewing the meeting this evening and if anyone would like a copy, they may contact the Superintendent's office to request such.

No one can take away 49 years of coaching memories at Grosse Pointe North High School as the Head Football Coach and Head Baseball Coach. We know Frank Sumbera is a Hall of Fame coach in both sports. We know his teams earned over 1000 baseball victories and over 200 football victories.

We also know that he has players who hold great memories. We have coaches that have been loyal to Coach Sumbera and his program. He has had the opportunity to work with players and coaches for 49 years, impacting nearly 5000 student athletes.

As a district we have honored Coach Sumbera at a board meeting just like this. We are willing to plan a retirement celebration to honor his coaching years at a football game this fall. We all want Frank to receive the honor he deserves as a Norseman.

We all wanted this to end in a different way. But we believe the time has come for him to no longer coach at Grosse Pointe North High School. We need to move on in a different direction.

Here is what I can tell you about the personnel process. Coach Sumbera met with the Grosse Pointe North Principal, Athletic Director, and a HR representative. We received a verbal retirement. He denies that retirement/resignation. Central office had a subsequent face to face meeting with Coach Sumbera and his attorney to discuss reinstatement. The district made the decision to move on with the head football coach interviews. We interviewed seven candidates. Four were asked to come back for a thirty minute workout with the varsity football players and an assistant football coach. Three finalists interviewed with Dr. Jon Dean, Michelle Davis and Kate Murray on Friday, July 20, 2018. We chose Joseph Drouin.

I know that I have used "WE" to describe our intentions and actions. As a Superintendent, I always have the final decision on personnel. The Board of Education hires the superintendent. The superintendent handles the supervision of all school system employees. A superintendent hires, recommends and dismisses employees.

Every step along the way, I knew what was going on and supported the decision. The board president and board attorney were informed of the decision before the letter from Principal Kate Murray was released at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 27, 2018 to baseball and football families. Ultimately, I am held accountable for what happened with the decision, process and public relations dilemma. That does not change our decision.

We do want to honor Frank for his 49 years as a coach at Grosse Pointe North High School. We do want to move forward. We hope our community will help us do so knowing that every decision is made with the best interest of students in mind.

B. Plante Moran CRESA – PreBond Planning and Program Management Services

Dr. Niehaus explained that Plante Moran was not available to attend this evening and that they will be in attendance at the next meeting, August 13, 2018. The Board of Education was given a copy of the agreement to review and ask questions. He wanted to express how important this process is to the program. Plante Moran would become an owners rep. They will represent the District in securing an architect, construction manager, reviewing our plans and putting in a focus on what would come first. We talked about two series, one that would be sold initially and potentially a second series in place in 2020-2022. Dr. Niehaus asked the Board to submit any questions they may have to President Summerfield or Dr. Niehaus with regard to the contract.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON CONSENT AGENDA ACTION ITEMS

No speakers

V. PUBLIC COMMENT ON REGULAR AGENDA ACTION ITEMS FOR JULY 23, 2018

No speakers

VI. CONSENT AGENDA ACTION ITEMS FOR JULY 23, 2018

It was Moved by: Trustee Ismail

Supported by: Trustee Weertz

- A. Approval of Memberships
 - 1. Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB)
 - 2. Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSA)
- B. Approval of Resolution on Indemnification
 - 1. Liability Indemnification
 - 2. Asbestos Indemnification
 - a. Operation and Maintenance Employees

- b. Designated Agent
- C. Approval of Fidelity and Treasurer's Bonds
- D. Approval of Designated Agent
- E. Approval Debit/Credit Card Users

THAT the Board approve the Consent Agenda Action Items for July 23, 2018 as presented.

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

VII. AGENDA ACTION ITEMS FOR JULY 23, 2018

A. Approval of Special Session, Public Hearing and Regular Meeting Minutes of June 25, 2018

It was Moved by: Trustee Gafa

Supported by: Trustee Weertz

THAT the Board approve the Special Session, Public Hearing and Regular Meeting Minutes of June 25, 2018 as presented.

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

B. Approval of Human Resources Report for July 23, 2018

It was Moved by: Trustee Abke

Supported by: Trustee Gafa

Ms. Abbey spoke for Dr. Dean, who was absent this evening. She noted that there are a couple of teacher positions that they are asking the Board to approve as well as a new hire for Principal at Richard, John Kernan, who is replacing Mary MacDonald-Barrett.

THAT the Board approve the Human Resources report for July 23, 2018 as presented.

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

Mr. Howell introduced John Kernan as the next Principal, who thanked the Board of Education for approving the Human Resources Report. He is excited to get started at Richard and working with the community.

C. Approval to Decline Schools of Choice

It was Moved by: Trustee Weertz

Supported by: Trustee Ismail

THAT the Board approve to Decline Schools of Choice as presented.

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

D. Approval of Tentative Agreements

Ms. Abbey commented that the Board of Education had the opportunity to review the tentative agreements. These are within the parameters that the Board of Education established in terms of expenditures. These are all one-year agreements with the Plant Association being a three-year agreement, with this being the beginning of the second year.

1. THAT the Board approve the GPEA 2018-19 agreement as presented.

It was moved by: Trustee Profeta

Supported by: Trustee Weertz

Trustee Ismail asked for clarification on the titles.

GPEA –Teachers

GPAEOP – Office/Secretarial members

GPEPA – Parapro's

GPAA - Administrators

GPPAA - Custodial

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

2. GPAEOP 2018-19

THAT the Board approve the GPAEOP 2018-19 agreement as presented.

It was moved by: Trustee Weertz

Supported by: Trustee Ismail

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

3. GPEPA 2018-19

THAT the Board approve the GPEPA 2018-19 agreement as presented.

It was moved by: Trustee Weertz

Supported by: Trustee Profeta

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

4, GPAA 2018-19

THAT the Board approve the GPAA 2018-19 agreement as presented.

It was moved by: Trustee Gafa

Supported by: Trustee Weertz

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

5. Wage Reopener GPPA 2018-19

THAT the Board approve the Wage Reopener GPPA 2018-19 as presented.

It was moved by: Trustee Weertz

Supported by: Trustee Gafa

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

6. Non-Instructional Staff and Technology Employment Agreements

THAT the Board approve the Non-Instructional Staff and Technology Employment Agreements as presented.

It was moved by: Trustee Gafa

Supported by: Trustee Abke

Ayes: Trustees Abke, Gafa, Ismail, Pangborn, Profeta, Summerfield and Weertz

Absent: None

Nays: None

Motion carried by a 7-0 vote.

VIII. AGENDA ACTION ITEMS FOR AUGUST 13, 2018

- A. Approval of Regular Meeting Minutes of July 23, 2018
- B. Approval of Human Resources Report for August 13, 2018
- C. Approval of Policies – (First Read)
 - 1. 1421 Criminal History Record Check, Administration
 - 2. 3121 Criminal History Record Check, Professional Staff
 - 3. 4121 Criminal History Record Check, Support Staff
 - 4. 8321 Criminal Justice Information Security
 - 5. 4162 Controlled Substance and Alcohol Policy for Commercial Motor Vehicle (CMV) Drivers and Other Employees Who Perform Safety Sensitive Functions

Trustee Weertz, Chair of the Policy Committee, stated that the Administration meets with NEOLA several times a year to update policies and take their recommendations. These are policy changes that are recommended by NEOLA. They are basic updates and routine in nature.

Trustee Gafa asked that since these are routine in nature that they be put as a consent agenda item at the July 13, 2018 regular meeting of the Board.

IX. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION

A. Check Register

Ms. Abbey noted that we are at the end of our fiscal year and that we are still working through the year.

B. Residency Verification Update

Per Ms. Abbey, she says we are at about 387 parents who still need to re-verify their residency. Last year at this time, we were at approximately 550. A reminder to residents that if they stop in the Residency office now to verify, it would only be a five minute process versus coming into the office in August, where there could be a wait time.

C. Board Requests

No requests this month.

D. Bid Results – Secured Entrance Maire Elementary

Deputy Superintendent Abbey reviewed the bid result package with the Board for the Secured Entrance for Maire Elementary. Only two vendors had responded with slightly higher prices than budgeted. Out of all the elementaries, Maire is the best school in terms of least disruptive to the school and best cost. North American Construction was the lowest of the bids, the district is very familiar with their work and at this time, we are recommending to move forward.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

- A. Regular Meeting of the Board, Monday, August 13, 2018, 7:00 p.m., Brownell Multipurpose Room
- B. Regular Meeting of the Board, Monday, August 27, 2018, 7:00 p.m., Brownell Multipurpose Room
- C. Regular Meeting of the Board, Monday, September 17, 2018, 7:00 p.m., Brownell Multipurpose Room

XI. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-ACTION ITEM

George Farrell, 623 Notre Dame, GP spoke about Couch Sumner

Karen Twomey, 12 Poplar Park, Pleasant Ridge and LeMar Lemmons, 8523 East Outer Drive, talked to the Board of Education regarding their services that they can offer, friendship and conversation.

Jennifer Steinhebel, 230 Moran, GP Farms talked to the Board about hosting a student from another District to play Hockey, not in the GP schools.

George McMullen, 1382 Hollywood, GP Woods spoke about Rocket Fiber, the Bond and the new Administrators.

Ryan Bowen, 1458 Roslyn, GP Woods gave his support for the Administration at GP North High School and Human Resources.

XII. OTHER COMMENTS FROM BOARD MEMBERS AND SUPERINTENDENT

Trustee Profeta wishes that the Board could work better together.

Trustee Abke, no comments.

Trustee Ismail asked the audience about running for the school board.

Trustee Gafa thanked the speakers this evening and welcomed the new principals.

Trustee Pangborn, no comment.

Trustee Weertz, no comment.

Superintendent Niehaus reminded the community to come out and complete their residency and have a good rest of the summer.

President Summerfield thanked everyone at the meeting this evening. He reminded people that social media is a terrible place to get your news. Remember Dr. Niehaus has an open door policy, please contact Dr. Niehaus or President Summerfield before sharing incorrect information.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

President Summerfield adjourned the meeting at 8:37 p.m.

Cindy Pangborn, Secretary

Exhibit 3

Pointer of Interest: School board president reflects, looks ahead

🔊 [Open Audio Article Player](#)

By *Ted O'Neil* on January 18, 2023

0:00 / 0:00

A middle school science project and a love of photography led to a career Ahmed Ismail enjoys so much, he says his work at The Portrait Place is his hobby.

“The day after I had my hip replaced last November, I asked my wife to drive me to the office,” he laughed. “She wouldn’t do it, but I enjoy what I do so much it doesn’t seem like work. I don’t golf. I used to ski but can’t do that anymore. This is my hobby.”

Ismail, now in his fourth stint on the Grosse Pointe Public School System Board of Education, was elected president earlier this month by his colleagues.

“I think this district can be what it used to be and what people expect,” he said. “People are so generous here when it comes to the schools and we need to give them what they deserve.”

Growing up in the Harper Woods part of GPPSS, Ismail attended Poupard Elementary School, Parcels Middle School and Grosse Pointe High School, then was part of the first graduating class at Grosse Pointe North High School in 1970.

His bio on the GPPSS website says he considers himself a lifelong learner.

“That comes from my father,” Ismail said. “He was an academic and instilled that in us from a very early age.”

Imam Vehbi Ismail came to the area in the late 1940s and established the Albanian American Moslem Society. In the 1960s, he built the Albanian Islamic Center on Harper near Allard, the area’s first mosque. “His father’s father was the leader of all Muslims in Albania,” Ismail said. “Being the oldest son it was a bit expected of me to follow that path, but life took a turn.”

That turn was a science fair at Parcels where Ismail decided to study the effects of radiation on fruit flies. It helped that his mother, Betty, who still lives in the Harper Woods house where the family grew up, ran the X-ray department at Hutzel Women’s Hospital in Detroit.

“The doctors would put my jars on the X-ray machine and then I would take photographs of the mutations,” he recalled. “I had all these jars in the basement of this banana mush-like baby food and that’s what the fruit flies would feed on.”

But first Ismail had to figure out how to document his research. Enter Studio Camera on Mack, then owned by Carl Joyner.



Ahmed Ismail’s senior yearbook photo from Grosse Pointe North.



Courtesy photos
Ahmed Ismail, center, with Michigan Association of School Boards Executive Director Justin King, left, and former Grosse Pointe Public School System Superintendent Suzanne Klein as Ismail receives his first recognition for MASB training in 2005.

“I hopped on my bike and rode over there and he showed me how to take photographs through a microscope,” Ismail said. “I was fascinated. The more I learned about photography, the more I liked it. He taught me everything he knew and I soaked it up like a sponge.”

By high school, Joyner offered Ismail a job as a stock boy.

“I was always hanging around the place anyway so he offered me a part-time job,” he said. “I just never left. Carl used to always tell me, ‘slow your motor and don’t be so rambunctious.’ He was a true gentleman and a scholar. He was like a second father to me.”

After finishing high school, Ismail thought about taking a job at Altman Camera in Chicago, which he said was the largest camera store in the country at the time. “Carl told me he was thinking about retiring, so he sold me his third of the business,” Ismail said. “He had two silent partners but they didn’t really know anything about photography.”

Ismail gave Joyner a down payment and agreed to a payment schedule.

“We went to see his attorney and the guy asked what I was putting up as security,” Ismail said. “Carl told him I gave my word and we shook hands. That’s how you did it in those days.”

Business took off in the 1970s as camera companies started selling automatic cameras. “When Canon came out with the AE-1, it really set the market on fire,” Ismail said. “At one time I had 60 people working for me and we even had a human resources

department.”

Ismail began traveling to Japan several times a year, working as a consultant for Minolta so they could better understand the American market.

“In the mid-1980s Japan developed a machine that could print a photo in an hour,” he said. “I bought one and we became the first one-hour lab in the area. People would stand on the sidewalk and stare through the window just to watch photos being printed.”

Ismail married his wife, Mary Ann, in 1987, and they opened other one-hour photo labs around metro Detroit.

only the second or third Muslim family to move into the area and people were so welcoming. We were the only family on our street without a Christmas tree in the window and no one ever said anything.”

Ismail won re-election in 2008, but a stroke in 2009 forced him to resign. It was around then he and Mary Ann scaled back their business to the current iteration, The Portrait Place.

“It’s fun because we’ve got parents bringing in their children who we photographed as children,” he said. “Mary Ann takes most of the portraits. She’s much better at it and far more patient than me. I work on things like retouching photos.”

Ismail was elected to the board again in 2014, but chose not to run in 2018. That changed in 2020, due in part to board decisions he didn’t agree with, such as closing Poupard and Trombley and moving fifth graders to the middle schools.

During his various stints on the board, Ismail also has gotten involved with taking training classes through the Michigan Association of School Boards, eventually becoming a mentor to board members in other districts. Of some 4,500 school board members statewide, only 113 have taken more MASB training, according to the GPPSS website.

Ismail has continued his support of the district outside of his board involvement. The Ismail Family Academic Excellence Award goes to one graduating senior at each high school every year and is done so in honor of a person Ismail thinks had a profound impact on his life. For South’s ArtFest, The Portrait Place provides grants for complimentary printing services to top photography students.

Looking ahead to leading the board this year, Ismail said there is work to be done.

“I’ve lived in places like Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills, but nowhere are people more generous when it comes to the schools than here,” he said. “But we’ve got challenges, especially with aging buildings.”

Ismail recently has expressed concerns about some of the spending the district has undertaken.

“We have to be very careful,” Ismail said. “Without our schools, Grosse Pointe is a vacuum.”

Exhibit 4

Grosse Pointe News

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OUR VIEW

Heartbreak over hotel

The City of Grosse Pointe has pulled the plug on a hotel to be built on parking Lot 2, north of Kercheval between Notre Dame and St. Clair. That's a shame. We favored the idea of a hotel in The Village and still do.

Pedersen Development Co., the "preferred developer," was putting together plans and financials for a hotel and parking structure facing St. Clair and Notre Dame, respectively. The hotel was to be 54 feet tall and less than 100 rooms.

Grosse Pointe Kurt Pedersen sought assurances from the city that, following satisfactory completion of due diligence, the city would provide the necessary variances to site and build the hotel and parking structure. The city was unable to provide the necessary assurances and, instead, sent Mr. Pedersen a letter seeking to terminate the "preferred developer" agreement.

The termination comes three months after the city council granted a six-month extension of the "preferred developer" agreement. Pedersen Development Co. was to come back to the city within 60 days of the extension with a pro forma on financial viability.

What is interesting is that while it took a vote of the council to offer and extend the "preferred developer" agreement, it only took a letter from the city to terminate it.

But that is now water under the bridge. Time to move on.

Since we — and most people — believe we still need a hotel in Grosse Pointe, how about the property behind CVS Pharmacy off St. Clair that Sunrise Development put together for a senior condominium development?

In 2006, Sunrise sought to build a four-story, 79-unit building on the nearly two acres it put together. Following the inability to meet pre-sales goals and the 2007 housing bubble burst and resulting recession, Sunrise Development gave up on the project.

The property is still there, sitting vacant. In fact, with an eye to the future, the city council five years ago this month designated the property as a "transition district." Permitted uses in the district, which extends to St. Paul, would be hotels, apartments, townhouses, senior housing and existing single- and two-family homes.

"People would like to see a hotel there," Grosse Pointe John Jackson, the city's planning consultant, said at the time.

The transition district limits structures to four stories and 42 feet in height and provides for setbacks and a step-back design so buildings would not seem too imposing.

Of course, as with anything new, residents were opposed. Some thought 42 feet, seven feet higher than typical residential, was too high. Others did not like a hotel abutting residential property.

We think these concerns can be resolved and we hope someone takes up the mantle of a hotel in The Village.

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Pure
Grosse
Pointe

Katie Schmitt just moved to the area from Wisconsin and was exploring July 4. She thought this spot of grass in Grosse Pointe Shores looked like a good place to take a break and read a book.

PHOTO BY KENNE LANDUYT



Coach Sumbera deserves better

We were surprised last week to learn of Grosse Pointe North head baseball and football coach Frank Sumbera's "retirement." We were dismayed then when he told The Detroit News he was being forced to retire, which he said he did not do.

Clearly, we are not hearing the full story. Mr. Sumbera, 70, began teaching in the Grosse Pointe Public School System in the 1960s. He began coaching baseball in 1973 and football in 1981. He has 1,037 baseball wins under his belt (No. 3 in the state) and 210 football victories. He was inducted into the Michigan High School Football Association Hall of Fame in 1998. At his induction, he already had been named County Coach of the Year (five times), MAC Division Coach of the Year (four times), Regional Coach of the Year (three times), Free Press and Detroit News Metro East Coach of the Year (twice) and Head Coach East All Stars (1997). That does not include the last 20 of his 50 years at North.

Obviously, Coach Sumbera was the best of the best and we were lucky to have him. So what happened? What could the coach possibly have done to warrant such an inglorious end to an amazing half-century career?

Knowing Mr. Sumbera as we do (as do the thousands of kids and parents who have come through his programs at North), there is no acceptable reason for forcing him out the way they did.

Mr. Sumbera said he was "blindsided" at a June 27 meeting he had with North Athletic Director Michelle Davis, North Principal Kate Murray and Human Resources Director Nicole Pilgrim. He said in a statement he was told he had until 3 p.m. to hand in his letter of resignation. He said it was "callous" and "uncaring."

We agree. And apparently so do nearly 3,000 signers of an online petition. As of Monday evening, 2,805 people had signed Laura Colbeck's "Get Frank Sumbera back as coach" petition on change.org.

After meeting with Mr. Sumbera, Principal Murray sent out a letter to North baseball and football parents stating, "Today, we have received notice of the retirement of Grosse Pointe North High School head baseball and head football coach Frank Sumbera, effective June 29, 2018." The head football coach vacancy was posted June 28 on the district's website.

Large organizations are not good at changing direction, so we doubt Mr. Sumbera will be rehired for the 2018-19 football and baseball seasons. That's a pity.

Because of the administration's ham-handedness, Coach Sumbera will not be able to enjoy the accolades and retirement parties he surely deserves and would have gotten had he been able to announce — should he have been so inclined — that 2018-19 would be his last year coaching at North. Tragic, but typical in today's world.

Good luck, Coach. We're with you!

LETTERS

The Grosse Pointe News welcomes your letters to the editor. All letters should be typed, double-spaced and signed. Letters longer than 250 words may be edited for length. All letters may be edited for content. We reserve the right to refuse any letter. Include daytime phone number for verification or questions. The deadline for letters is 3 p.m. Monday. Letters to the editor may be emailed to editor@grossepointenews.com.

Coach Sumbera
termination

To the Editor:

I received notice of Coach Frank Sumbera's termination the very day after it happened from his former players. When I emailed the Grosse Pointe public school board, I was informed he had retired.

On Friday, June 27, The Detroit News ran an article and Coach Sumbera had been interviewed. No retirement was made. Rather, he was given an ultimatum to write a letter of retirement or his contract was to be terminated. He did not retire. Why did the school board flat out lie to me?

I am a former player for Coach Sumbera. He is a great coach and cares for his players. I was previously featured as a guest columnist in which I wrote a tribute to Coach Sumbera in the Jan. 7, 2016, issue of the Grosse Pointe News.

I suspect something shady is up and I believe it is not on the part of Coach Sumbera. He should be reinstated or given a chance to coach

at Grosse Pointe South.

If the latter option I proposed becomes a reality, I will gladly trade my Norsemen hat for a Blue Devils hat.

This is no longer about loyalty to my alma mater. It is about my loyalty to people who have had a positive influence on my life and coach Frank Sumbera is one of those people.

GEORGE FARRELL
Grosse Pointe North
Class of 1986

Frank Sumbera
out at North

To the Editor:

Having had a son play baseball at Grosse Pointe North for Frank Sumbera, I was shocked to read in The Detroit News that he was being removed from his football and baseball coaching positions.

During my son's time there, I observed a man of integrity and character who ran a straight-up program and was respectful of his players.

Having had two boys play baseball in the Grosse Pointe Woods-Shores Little League, I'm firsthand fully aware of

the political meat grinder that is in place. Far too many parents are far too involved in the organization, positioning themselves as coaches or volunteers in efforts to ensure their child makes the "tournament team" or that they are selected for other special teams.

Just four years ago a group of disgruntled parents overturned the existing Little League leadership, displacing coaches who no longer had kids playing but still coached for their love of the game and being replaced by fresh faces to move the league in a better direction. As a result I opted for Federation Baseball over GPWSLL for my youngest son's final year as a 12-year-old.

Interestingly now, four years later, a man who's in the High School Hall of Fame, after decades of successful coaching, is being thrown to the street based on the comments from a few disgruntled parents and players (sound familiar?) without an explanation or a chance to refute the charges.

This action is shameful and disgusting. To quote the principal: "Is this what they do at North?"

I know of no company that would fire somebody under such ambiguous circumstances without addressing the issues with the person beforehand. I hope he has a good lawyer and, unfortunately, the taxpayers may wind up paying the bill.

DAVID RAICEVICH
Grosse Pointe Woods

Sumbera deal
mind-blowing,
outrageous

To the Editor:

This is how we treat people now. Throw them to the curb. I think human resources departments have lost their minds, along with the Grosse Pointe school system.

The treatment of Coach Sumbera at Grosse Pointe North is mind-blowing. It is not the number of wins he has; it is the number of young lives he has changed, made better citizens.

Parents, I feel, have too much say in coaching decisions. You cannot coach with them in the dugout or on the sidelines. People confuse teaching and coaching with toughness. We have become too soft in the learning process. We have lost respect for authority.

In life, there will always be someone in authority. Someone who makes the decisions, rules you must go by, trying to teach them something or make them a better person. Playing behind people in a team sport is the hardest thing.

The point is, it is a team sport. In the end, Coach Sumbera has done well over the years. The community will miss him more than they know. His treatment was outrageous. Everyone should go out on their own terms. He deserved that.

CHRISTOPHER A. BIELSKI
Grosse Pointe Park

The opinions expressed in letters and guest columns are not necessarily views shared by the Grosse Pointe News.

Invented something? Patent it.

Camp Invention teaches lessons on protecting intellectual property

By Mary Anne Brush
Staff Writer

An 8-year-old participant at this year's Camp Invention at Brownell Middle School came up with such a great idea, she was told not to talk about it. Not until she patented it, that is.

At this year's camp, held June 25 to 29, participants learned, in partnership with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, the importance of protecting their intellectual property with a patent.

Camp Invention, a nationally recognized, nonprofit summer enrichment camp, challenges children in kindergarten through grade 6 to find their inner inventor by learning the process of innovation. The camp has come to Grosse Pointe more than 20 years, according to Bob Hasinski, regional program manager for the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

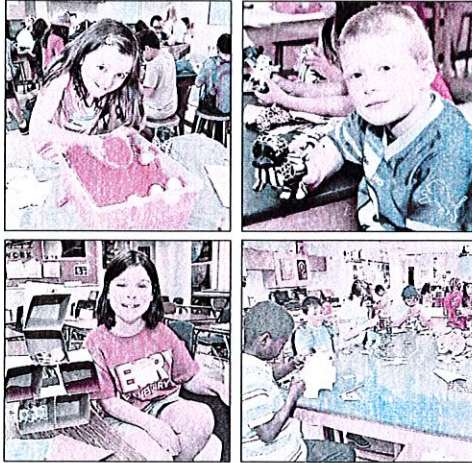
Hasinski runs all the programs in Michigan and Puerto Rico.

"This is a camp that always does very well," said Hasinski. "Even with a new staff, it's like a well-oiled machine."

Kerby Elementary School teacher Jodie Randazzo, new to the program as director, made it a family affair by bringing her children, ages 8 and 9, with her.

"They are loving it. They love the different theme every day," she said.

On Monday, children wore their color group. Tuesday was silly hat day. Wednesday was "represent yourself day"



PHOTOS BY RENEE LANDVIT

Clockwise from top left, fifth-grader Emmanuelle Dillman runs her hands through the blood cells bin in Robotic Pet Vet. In addition to reverse engineering and building a robotic dog, campers learned about veterinary care. Fourth-grader Mason Dillingham with his robotic pet Dave. Campers work on their robotic dogs. In Mod My Mini Mansion, third-grader Carina Jensen made a mansion with a kitchen, two bedrooms, a bathroom, a living room and playroom. She also created toys that pick themselves up and a self-cooking stove.

and Friday, the final day of the camp when parents joined campers for an inventors showcase and awards ceremony, was crazy sock day.

On Thursday, campers wore their Camp Invention T-shirts in honor of special guests Alfred Kindred, assistant regional director at the Midwest Regional Patent & Trademark Office in Detroit; Jared Logan, a student at Harvard University interning for the USPTO; and

Sara Sass, a member of the patent office's Washington, D.C., headquarters on a four-month outreach detail in Detroit. Hasinski and Randazzo led the visitors on a tour.

"What we're here to do is observe future inventors," Kindred said. "At the patent office, that's what we do. We're here to see the kids in action and see how we can partner with the National Inventors Hall of Fame to make sure we (educate kids) about

intellectual property. ... That's part of our DNA, trying to get people to be more creative and not only that, to show them how important it is to protect their intellectual property. And how important that is now because we are no longer a manufacturing economy. We're a service-oriented economy, which means if the United States is still going to stay ahead in the technological game, we have to make sure people are inventing here and

are protecting their invention."

"You can be an inventor at age 5 or you can be an inventor at age 95," said Sass. "You can apply for a patent either way."

"I wish I had something like this when I was in school," said Logan. "I love this. Just being able to see all these inventions and different mind sets putting their heads together coming up with something that can be protected and patented. I really think future inventors are in this room."

One of those future inventors was the 8-year-old who came up with both a problem — her dog barking while her mother was on the phone — and a solution.

"Her solution to that problem is actually an invention," Kindred said. "And not only that, she named it something unique and I told her, 'Don't say that again.' Not until she could patent the idea, at least."

Each year, the program features a new curriculum inspired by National Inventors Hall of Fame inductees. This summer the curriculum included Opibot, in which campers launched into the future with their own small, self-driving robots that sense changes in light; Robotic Pet Vet, in which campers nursed their robotic puppies back to health; Mod My Mini Mansion, which gave campers the opportunity to design their own futuristic smart homes filled with gadgets, LEDs, technology and innovations; and Stick To It, in which young innovators invented and crafted solutions to real-world challenges by building their own prototypes.

"I felt like I went to Lawrence Tech teaching this class," said Jane Pliech, an art teacher at Pierce Middle School who is the instructor for Mod My Mini Mansion. "I learned more about green technology than I've ever known and it's all about things I've known little pieces about. ... I've been learning so much about how I can make my house greener. Whoever invented this (module) is over the top."

Pliech said students are learning about wind, solar and hydroelectric power, geothermal technology and water reuse while creating their modern mansions.

"They have to come up with new and inventive ideas," she said, adding, "Inventors think, but most importantly they listen to problems. They're problem solvers."

Charles White, a rising seventh-grader at Parcels Middle School, said he wants to solve problems for people in the future. His favorite program was Stick To It because "we get to build anything we want. It's called the 'knock your socks off' challenge." He was building a robot to help "people with chores or whatever they need help with. Maybe it can get food for them," he said.

Stick To It also was Morgan Barsh's favorite because "we get to invent stuff. We make an idea and then we build the prototype." She added it's important to stick to something "because then you actually finish." Barsh is going into fifth-grade at Poupart Elementary School.

Emmanuelle Dillman, a rising fifth-grader at Defer Elementary School, had difficulty picking a favorite activity.

"They're all fun," she said.

LETTERS:

Continued from page 6A

decreased because the schools haven't been maintained.

There is a faction in our community who will argue mismanagement on the part of the district, but the reality is that as a donor district, GPPSS residents pay far more in school taxes than we receive back from Lansing.

These same people will argue we shouldn't put money into existing buildings without closing a facility, but do we hold off on all maintenance until a decision like that is made, potentially a year from now?

Is it responsible to endanger our students and staff and to hold our property values hostage because of ongoing disputes with administration on unrelated matters?

The responsible choice this fall is to vote yes on the GPPSS infrastructure bond.

JEN EVANS
Grosse Pointe Park

Coach Sumner deserves better

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to "Our View: Coach Sumner Deserves Better." As a longtime employee of the district, I couldn't agree more with the article's sentiments.

Frank Sumner is a friend, colleague and a man of great character and integrity. The fact he was let go from the

school he loved and devoted decades to in such a disrespectful manner is shameful.

Frank may have been tough and demanding at times, but he truly bled green and gold and now all of his memories, memorabilia and gear are tarnished. His license plate spells out the word Norsemen!

But doesn't one want the varsity football coach to be tough and demanding on kids? Isn't the point of high school sports to foster growth both physically and mentally, create a sense of discipline and spread school spirit?

Since there has been no indication of what "mental anguish" Frank caused his players, the community is left to make assumptions that degrade his character.

The fact the classless parents who complained (and ultimately got what they wanted by getting him fired) are bragging on social media about getting what they wanted is disgusting. The names he has been called by them are despicable.

The fact the "investigation" into these complaints involved the parents and the players who had issues with the coach and didn't involve any other parents, players or assistant coaches, or "minimal" participants, according to the superintendent, makes the whole thing feel like a big set up.

It may have been time for North to move in another direction, but it should not have happened this way.

Frank deserves the baseball field named after him, a celebration of his successful career and loads of praise from his colleagues and former players. Instead, he was ambushed and shown the door.

The other issue here is the outcome of this debacle for teachers, coaches and other extracurricular leaders. It seems if a few vocal parents take their complaints to the administration about what happens in a classroom, on the field or stage, you could be terminated without getting the full story.

Parents are welcome to have opinions and express them if they are unhappy, but a few disgruntled people or outcomes (not enough playing time) shouldn't end the career of a dedicated educator.

Until the complete story is fully addressed, the community is left to discern what they believe happened. As a district employee, and a parent, it seems parents now run the show and that scares me.

What is done is done, and Frank Sumner will no longer be under the Friday night lights or in the dugout and it is time to accept that change.

But, he deserves better than what he has been given and the district should rectify the situation and give him the send-off he truly deserves.

A CONCERNED GPPSS EMPLOYEE
Editor's note: For obvious reasons, we agreed to run this letter without the employee's name.

We support GPNHS

To the Editor:

We support the Grosse Pointe North High School administration and the Grosse Pointe Public Schools in their staffing decision as it pertains to Coach Frank Sumner. We feel compelled to send this letter given that the GPNHS leadership cannot comment publicly on personnel issues and thus cannot respond — nor should they.

To be clear: We did not play for, nor did we have any students who played for Mr. Sumner or in the football or baseball programs. Nor did we interact with him during our years as parents of GPNHS students. We have never approached anyone in the administration regarding his coaching skills or strategy.

But we have had numerous interactions with Ms. Murray and Ms. Davis. Our recently-graduated students were involved in athletics, student government and other clubs, as well as classes taught by Ms. Davis. We were actively engaged in various parent organizations.

Ms. Murray and Ms. Davis have always been very approachable, reasonable and practical. They manage a large high school and athletic department, serving multiple constituencies and handling issues and conflicting opinions on a daily basis.

Knowing the GPNHS leadership as well as we do, we are confident this staffing decision was not a quick-trigger, reactive action as some have pre-

sented it to be. We have complete faith it was researched, evaluated and alternatives sought and considered.

Not every decision the administration makes may be popular, but it may be appropriate given all of the facts (that we are not privy to) and a thoughtful review.

We are deeply saddened by how some have chosen to portray the administration, including the Grosse Pointe News, particularly because GPNHS cannot comment on a personnel issue.

Based on numerous national and state benchmarks, GPNHS is a leading academic and athletic institution thanks to the team led by Ms. Murray.

The community has chosen experienced, thoughtful, objective professionals and administrators to guide our students. They have earned our respect and deserve our support.

RYAN MCCARTHY
BOWERS
MARK BOWERS
Grosse Pointe Woods

Where does the buck stop?

To the Editor:

Reading the Coach Sumner story is a tragedy for our community. What is the chain of command in our school system?

1. Superintendent?
2. School board president?
3. School board?
4. Principal?

Who planned this character humiliation? When did they plan it and who all was informed at what time and gave their

approval?

Only three names are given for the event: Kate Murray, Nicole Pilgrim and Michelle Davis.

How can our school system have such lack of sensitivity that it can allow such disgraceful actions against a 50-year exemplary employee?

The damage has been done to a loyal, extremely well-liked community teacher. How can his self-worth be restored with less than the release of the person responsible and the full reinstatement for Mr. Sumner?

The buck should stop here.

Hurray for Mr. Sumner and his great career.

STEVEN SMITH
Grosse Pointe Farms

Let's retire athletic director

To the Editor:

My wife and I have lived in Grosse Pointe Woods over 50 years. Our four children are products of Grosse Pointe education.

Our children were enrolled in the athletic programs offered by Grosse Pointe North High School.

Mr. Frank Sumner has left a very positive, lasting impression on our children.

It is inconceivable that he has been asked to retire. The third most winning coach in the state of Michigan.

Let's retire the Grosse Pointe North athletic director for this mistake. We hope the school board can resolve this matter.

SALVATORE AND
MARILYN TESTA
Grosse Pointe Woods

Grosse Pointe News

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OUR VIEW

Woods seeks Headlee fix

The city of Grosse Pointe Woods is asking voters for a 4-mill Headlee override to counter revenue losses due to plunging property values following the 2008 housing bubble collapse. As housing values dropped, so did the city's revenue.

According to an informational sheet sent to homeowners, the city's taxable value dropped from \$8.67 million in 2008 to a low of \$6.01 million in 2014. It has since rebounded some to \$6.5 million in 2017, 25 percent less than it was in 2008. City revenue based on property taxes would have declined proportionately.

The informational sheet also notes a \$6.091 million loss in revenue sharing funds over the 13-year period, 2003-2016.

Yet, despite the setbacks, the city said it has maintained a "budgetary status quo" and has continued to provide residents the services they expect. The Woods administration and council have been able to do this by numerous cost-cutting and cost containment measures:

- ◆ Eliminated nearly 25 percent of full-time and part-time positions and deployed other staff cost-saving measures amounting to \$11,141,000 since 2006.
- ◆ Contracted basic and advanced life support services with Medstar in 2014.
- ◆ Contracted assessing services with WCA Assessing in 2016.
- ◆ Eliminated retiree health care for new employees hired after 2011.
- ◆ Implemented five unpaid furlough days for all city employees in 2011.

- ◆ Concessions made by all city employees to forego wage increases from 2009 to 2015.

But even with these measures, according to the city, it has been unable to replace or resurface roads, maintain municipal buildings and other facilities and replace vehicles and equipment. Consequently, the mayor and council see no choice but to go to voters for a Headlee override.

If the 10-year, 4-mill Headlee override is approved by voters, it will raise an additional \$2,784,098 for the city in 2019. The city would use the funds for:

- ◆ The hiring of two additional public safety officers.
- ◆ Maintaining staffing levels.
- ◆ Repair and maintenance of facilities throughout the city.
- ◆ Capital improvement bond funding to replace an obsolete E911 system and public safety and public services equipment.

The cost to a homeowner with a 2018 median taxable value of \$95,000 and a state equalized value of \$190,000 would be \$380 per year or \$31.66 per month, according to the city.

We feel the city's pain, but we fear the Headlee override will be a hard sell with homeowners, what with a SMART transit tax on the primary ballot and, on the November ballot, the Grosse Pointe Public School System's \$111 million bond proposal.

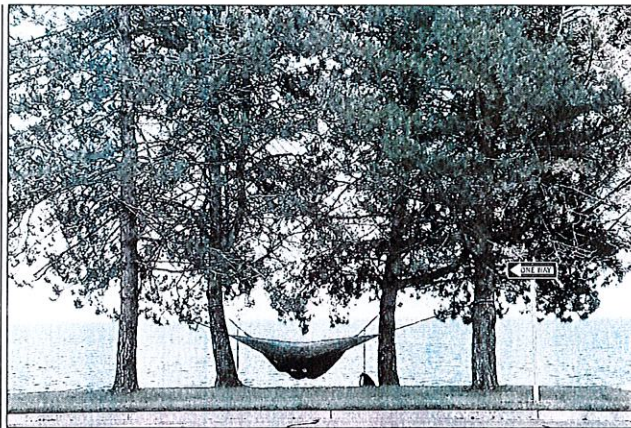


PHOTO BY RENEE LANDUYT

Pure Grosse Pointe

Two people enjoy the serenity of the water from hammocks along Lake St. Clair.

FEATURED LETTER

Weigh remedy on newsprint tariffs

The following letter was sent to Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and International Trade Commission Chairman David Johanson.

Dear Secretary Ross and Chairman Johanson:

We write to express concern regarding the countervailing duty and anti-dumping investigations into the import of uncoated groundwood paper from Canada, including imported newsprint. As the commission approaches the final phase of the investigation, we ask that you carefully take into consideration the negative impact a trade remedy will have on the U.S. newspaper industry.

While we support efforts to combat illegal trade practices to level the playing field for U.S. companies, the imposition of up to 32 percent in tariffs on paper from Canada has the potential to cause even greater harm to an already struggling newspaper industry. Of equal importance, the tariffs on uncoated groundwood paper from Canada are not supported by the U.S. paper industry that it is intended to benefit, and has the potential to endanger more than 600,000 jobs across the United States, including jobs in our home state of Michigan.

Consumers of newsprint tend to buy newsprint in their region, close to their printing operations. The lack of available U.S. groundwood paper producers in the Midwest region has led to an increased reliance on Canadian imports in order to meet production capacity. According to the October 2017

preliminary International Trade Commission report (publication 4732), the Midwest received around 35 percent of uncoated groundwood paper from Canada. Producers in our state are concerned that the combination of countervailing and anti-dumping duties could negatively impact their bottom line and their ability to cover increased costs.

The potential consequences of these actions could lead to supply disruptions, job loss, movement of greater content to digital platforms, and scenarios that would harm not only the papers but the communities they serve. Local newspapers are essential to our communities, since they are often the primary distributor of regional news and local small business advertisements.

This case could have serious economic implications for print newspapers in Michigan and throughout the country. If these tariffs remain in place, local newspapers will suffer, undermining our nation's commitment to a free and accessible press. As such, we urge you to weigh the impact a remedy will have on the newspaper industry as you deliberate during your investigation.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

BRENDA L. LAWRENCE

JOHN MOOLENAAR

DANIEL T. KILDEE

FRED UPTON

SANDER M. LEVIN

Michigan Congressional Delegation

LETTERS

The Grosse Pointe News welcomes your letters to the editor. All letters should be typed, double-spaced and signed. Letters longer than 250 words may be edited for length. All letters may be edited for content. We reserve the right to refuse any letter. Include daytime phone number for verification or questions. The deadline for letters is 3 p.m. Monday. Letters to the editor may be emailed to editor@grossepointenews.com.

Frank Sumnera Sports Complex?

To the Editor:

This letter is in support of Coach Frank Sumnera. My son played in the Grosse Pointe North baseball system 2004-07. I found Coach Sumnera to be gracious, decent and fair with all the boys on the team. Never once did I ever hear him use inappropriate language nor berate the team in any way.

I only ever witnessed respect on that team, both from Coach Sumnera and his staff toward the players and from the players toward the coaching staff. My son never reported to me any inappropriate behavior. The team was very professionally run. Coach Sumnera's

recent treatment at the hands of the Grosse Pointe North administration is nothing short of deplorable.

For a man to have devoted so many solid, positive years to Grosse Pointe North and to the athletic program there, his 11th hour clandestine termination has shown the Grosse Pointe administration to be gutless, spineless, spiteful, cowardly and petty.

Treat him like an adult, school administration. To paraphrase Coach Sumnera, if they'd wanted to fire him, then they just should have fired him, rather than squeezing a "retirement notification" out of him and then offering up a wholly patronizing statement "thanking" him for

his years of service.

I agree with the unnamed Grosse Pointe school employee in the July 19 edition of Letters to the Editor; the baseball field should be named in his honor.

Even better still, the baseball and football fields should be named the Frank Sumnera Sports Complex.

He should have been afforded an opportunity to take a "victory lap" season and given a proper and dignified send-off.

GEORGE CHAPEL

Grosse Pointe Woods

Grandparent for GPPSS bond

To the Editor:

As a grandparent of one Grosse Pointe Public School System graduate, two grandchildren currently in the schools and two grandchildren who will soon be GPPSS students, I strongly support the school bond initiative.

I did my homework, attended one of the Town Hall meetings, where I learned about the critical infrastructure needs of the schools, and have attended school board meetings as well.

Our students and incredible staff should learn and work in buildings that are well maintained and safe.

Like many of the homes in our beautiful community, our schools are old. And, like any homeowner knows, we must invest in the maintenance of our buildings.

Unfortunately, there simply is not enough money in our school budget to do the needed maintenance and increase security to meet modern standards, while maintaining small class sizes and offering our students all of the vital opportunities to participate in not only world class academics but in art, music, theater and sports programs that are also truly outstanding.

Our outstanding schools are the cornerstone of the community we love. I will be supporting our schools and our community by voting yes on the bond in November, not only for my own grandchildren but for the future of the community I've lived in more than 50 years.

MARIA SIMON

Grosse Pointe Farms

See LETTERS, page 7A

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OUR VIEW

Bloody nose ends career

In the Aug. 2 Grosse Pointe News, letter writer Fred Satterfield expressed frustration over why Frank Sumner is no longer head football coach at Grosse Pointe North High School. Did he retire or didn't he? He wrote that surely the Grosse Pointe News could do some investigative journalism and get to the bottom of the saga.

At the time, we were actively investigating the story. We had several Freedom of Information Act requests submitted to the school district. Since then, we have examined Mr. Sumner's personnel file and hundreds of pages of letters, emails and memos from the school district.

We found nothing that rises to the level of sacking the coach. And make no mistake, what happened to Mr. Sumner was a sacking. Call it forced retirement or resignation, whatever. He did not discontinue coaching of his own free will.

Administrators present at the June 27 meeting where they planned to tell Mr. Sumner his coaching days at North were over, say he verbally gave his resignation. The coach denies it. Since the administrators have no signed documents or recordings of the meeting, we have to believe Mr. Sumner when he says he at no time gave a verbal resignation.

School administrators say there was an "incident" and they have plenty of documentation to justify the sacking of Coach Sumner. They don't. The so-called "incident" happened midseason during varsity baseball practice. After giving one of his players a lesson on bunting, Coach Sumner flipped the bat back to him. Unfortunately, the player was staring off into the dugout instead of paying attention to his coach. According to the player and another player who said he witnessed the event, the coach told the boy, "You've got to pay attention, son."

The bat flip reportedly gave the boy a bloody nose. He left the field. He did not seek out the trainer. He did not report it to anyone. Neither Mr. Sumner nor his assistant coach recall the incident. In fact, the father of the player did not report it until weeks later near the end of the season. By the player's own admission, it was a "minor" nosebleed.

The school district's "documentation" consists of a survey of baseball and football parents and emails sent to the district. The results of the survey are anecdotal at best, biased and orchestrated at worst. Most negative responses were from parents who complained their sons did not get enough playing time or the coach did not hype them to college recruiters. There were no negative responses among the football parents.

In our view, the "incident" was so minor it hardly rates consideration — this is varsity baseball, after all, not T-ball. We further believe a new, inexperienced athletic director at North let himself be unduly influenced by disgruntled parents, who became increasingly hostile at games and on social media.

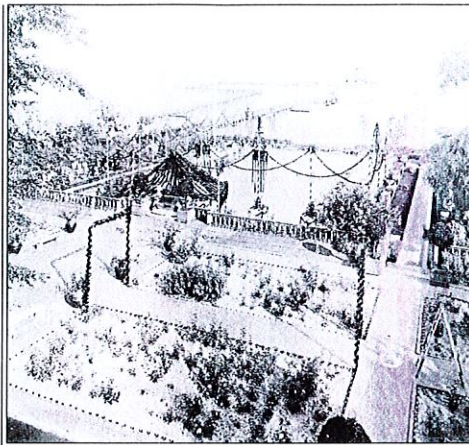


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GROSSE POINTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Grosse Pointe past

A view of the backyard at Rose Terrace 1, home to Horace and Anna Dodge, which was located next to Grosse Pointe Memorial Church and the Grosse Pointe Club. In the photo, the backyard is decorated for Horace Dodge Jr.'s wedding in the early 1920s. The boat in the distance is The Delphine, named after their daughter. Photos may be purchased at the Grosse Pointe Historical Society. Call (313) 884-7010 for details.

Meet the STAFF

A weekly column featuring the fine people working to bring you the Grosse Pointe News each week.

Melanie Mahoney

DISPLAY ADVERTISING
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

- Years at GPN: 26 years
- Describe your job at the paper: Retail insertion order entry, pagination, invoicing, accounts receivable, collections, "on call" classified ad entry, greeter.
- Hobbies, favorite things to do when NOT at work: Camping with my family in Michigan and beyond, Bible study, Christian music and sometimes classic rock, singing, gardening, movies and bingeing TV shows.

- Tell our readers a bit about yourself: I love the Lord Jesus; have been married to my husband, Denis, 34 years; have lived in St. Clair Shores 30 years; have three children and eight grandchildren, ages 9 years down to 7-week-old twins.



Favorite thing about working at the Grosse Pointe News: My co-workers are team oriented and positive.

That her decision — which deprived the legendary coach of the satisfaction of ending his career in his 50th year with dignity — was backed by the principal, a deputy superintendent and Superintendent Gary Niehaus we find troubling. In fact, we found no evidence that loyalty toward or respect for Mr. Sumner's nearly five decades of service to the district even went into the thinking process.

One wouldn't blame the coach for being bitter. Instead, Mr. Sumner and his attorney, Gary Spicer, have decided to turn a negative into a positive by forming The Frank Sumner Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization designed to provide scholarships to Grosse Pointe students in and out of

sports. Coaches' children also will be targeted for scholarships.

Already the foundations Mr. Spicer manages have donated some \$5 million to prep sports programs in the Pointes and Southeast Michigan. The Frank Sumner Foundation will add to that generosity to support our students on and off the field.

In fact, the foundation's first fundraiser will be a celebration to honor Mr. Sumner's 50 years plus coaching career. Good luck, Coach. We look forward to honoring you Oct. 24 at Barrister Gardens Banquet Center. (Look for details of the event in an upcoming issue of the Grosse Pointe News.)

LETTERS

The Grosse Pointe News welcomes your letters to the editor. All letters should be typed, double-spaced and signed. Letters longer than 250 words may be edited for length. All letters may be edited for content. We reserve the right to refuse any letter. Include daytime phone number for verification or questions. The deadline for letters is 3 p.m. Monday. Letters to the editor may be emailed to editor@grossepointenews.com.

Not ashamed of 'no' vote

To the Editor:

The undersigned unashamedly admits he was among the wise 13 Grosse Pointe Woods taxpayers who snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by voting "no" in our city's bizarre 10-year, \$27.8 million Headlee Override millage election Aug. 7.

Of course, I cannot prove that exactly. But since voters' anonymity is mandated, and after an official recount has concluded there were 2,941 opposed against 2,928 in favor, neither can it be disproved.

So much for yet another lesson in

whether a single vote — or more precisely, a minuscule 13 out of 5,869 — can make a huge difference in a tight race where millions of taxpayer dollars are on the line.

It has been suggested in a previous Letter to the Editor that the 2,941 Woods citizens like myself who opposed the massive 4 mills in new taxes for the next 10 years should be ashamed of ourselves and further posited we "must not care if our city declines." News bulletin: We are neither "too poor" nor "too selfish" to pour another \$2.7 million a year into the city's bottomless tax pit, as that writer suggested. What

we "care" about, and are wise to, is the game city hall plays every few years, repeatedly trying to get us to override a voter-approved Headlee taxation ceiling by plucking our heart (and purse) strings with pleas for more "public safety" and "road repairs."

Woods voters passed a sensible 2.1-mill, \$10 million, 10-year road bond just four years ago. This year they insist they need more money for lots of vague projects because housing values went down — a decade ago? Most Woods' homes today are assessed at more than three times what we paid for them a generation ago.

In short, 4 mills today represents a burdensome ton of cash to Woods residents in all economic spheres. And taxes never go down.

Luckily there is little likelihood the Headlee Override will be resurrected — or some new tax scheme hatched — by Nov. 6. That's when the Grosse Pointe library and public schools both get their fresh shots at your checkbook.

PETE WALDMEIR
Grosse Pointe Woods

If it ain't broke ...

To the Editor:

I must disagree with the writer who advocated making streets one-way for the convenience of bicyclists. This is an expensive solution for a nonexistent problem. I am myself an ardent cyclist and bicycle advocate who has cycled in many cities and in my opinion Grosse Pointe streets are plenty wide enough to share with cars given standard road courtesies.

There are other good reasons for maintaining two-way streets on all but the narrowest thoroughfares, of which St. Paul and Vernor cannot be counted. Two-way streets have a traffic-calming effect as opposed to one-ways that encourage greater speeds. To suggest there is little cost to making such a change is also erroneous because "one way" and "no turn" signs would have to be installed at every intersection.

See LETTERS, page 7A

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The opinions expressed in letters and guest columns are not necessarily views shared by the Grosse Pointe News.

Grosse Pointe News

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OUR VIEW

North coach
— round two

As you read this, the new crop of applicants for Grosse Pointe North High School head varsity baseball coach will have been screened, according to a timeline sent to parents by the school's athletic director, Michelle Davis, published elsewhere on this page of the Grosse Pointe News.

As parents and readers will recall, this will be the second coach to be hired to fill the vacancy caused by the abrupt and unwarranted dismissal of veteran head coach Frank Sumner last June after 49 years of employment with the school district.

Since Coach Sumner's firing was done in haste and with little forethought, the North administration was forced to hire a new head football coach at short notice, resulting in an embarrassing 1-8 season with no wins at home. Will North varsity baseball suffer the same fate? We fear so.

Readers will also recall a baseball coach had already been screened and hired by a committee of North parents and administrators. The candidate, however was found to have serious character flaws — besides being woefully under-qualified and inexperienced, in our opinion — and the offer of employment was quickly rescinded.

Now we have the same cast of characters taking another stab at hiring a qualified head varsity coach, which should have been a relatively simple task given the pool of talent and experience we have right here in Grosse Pointe, many of which were already involved in North baseball and under Coach Sumner.

But the young administration at North seems hellbent to hire someone young and from the outside. Someone they (and parents) can get to know to them.

We fear the athletic program under Ms. Davis is doomed — if not already lost. She appears not to know how to maintain, let alone build, a strong program. And the Norsemen wound is self-inflicted.

Had Ms. Davis gone to Coach Sumner at the end of the 2017-18 school year and said, "Coach, next year will be your 50th year with the district. What say you go out with a bang. Let's play up your Golden Year at North. Make it a celebration. In the meantime, let's put together a strong succession plan to secure North's athletic prowess."

But, no, Ms. Davis, backed by the principal, deputy superintendent and superintendent, acted hastily, unnecessarily ending a man's career under a cloud. The sheer lack of empathy and consideration of years of service is mind-boggling. Why would any qualified coach want to come to North and take the risk of suffering the same fate?

We also question why parents are playing such a prominent role in selecting and hiring a head varsity coach. We also question the purpose of the "mini sessions" with seniors in a gym.

Any qualified applicant for head varsity coach at North would, and should, come with a long track record of accomplishments and success. Administrators shouldn't need parents or students to select a head coach. It should be obvious.

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Katherine R. Thompson - Assistant Head of School for Enrollment
& Marketing, Grosse Pointe Academy

Meet the STAFF

A weekly column featuring the fine people working to bring you the Grosse Pointe News each week.

Jody McVeigh

EDITOR

◆ Years at the paper:

Nearly four

◆ Describe your position at the paper:

I write feature stories and profiles of community members, edit copy, lay out pages and manage the editorial staff.

◆ Do you have any hobbies?

Working out, baking, reading and writing.

◆ Tell our readers a bit about yourself:

I love being entertained; I'm big on movies, music, books and art. I've been married 12 years; have three stepsons and two granddaughters; and adore my fuzzy buddy Gypsy, a cat I adopted from the Grosse Pointe Animal Adoption Society.

◆ Favorite thing about working at the Grosse



◆ Pointe News:

Meeting new people in the community and sharing their stories with our readers. The people I've met in Grosse Pointe have helped make this the most fun job I've had in my 22-year journalism career.



The Grosse Pointe Public School System

Grosse Pointe North High School

Athletic Department

707 Vernier Road

Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan 48236-1594

Telephone: (313) 432-3217

Fax: (313) 432-3218

Dear North Families,

Several community members have asked about the process and timeline to identify an outstanding Varsity Baseball Coach for the 2018-19 school year and beyond. GPPSS is committed to an inclusive process according to the timeline below:

- Between now and January 2, 2019 – Paper screening
- January 8-11, 2019 – 3-6 p.m. - First set of interviews with parents, coaches, teachers, and building administrators; including background checks.
- January 15, 2019 – 12-2 p.m. - (1/2 day for exams) Mini sessions with the senior boys, the athletic director and building administration in the gym.
- January 17, 2019 – Final interviews with Principal, Athletic Director, and the superintendent.
- January 21-23, 2019 – Announcement of coach
- January 23-25 – Begin interviews for sub varsity level coaching staff

We will need parents to participate as part of the interview process. Please see dates and times above. If you would like to participate in this process, please contact me at 313-432-3255 or davis@m.gpschools.org January 2, 2019, with your name along with the name(s) and grade(s) of your children at North.

Sincerely,

Michelle Davis

Assistant Principal/Athletic Director

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Chief Kennedy remembered

I was saddened to learn late last week of the passing of former Grosse Pointe Public Safety Director Bruce Kennedy. Mr. Kennedy was the director in the City when I first joined the Grosse Pointe News in 1988. I simply called him "Chief," as did the other directors in the Pointes at the time — Dick Caretti in the Park, Bob Ferber in the Farms, Jack Patterson in the Woods and Dan Healy in the Shores.

Mr. Kennedy was born in Iowa but grew up as a youth in Detroit and on a family farm in Port Hope. After serving in the U.S. Navy in World War II, he returned to Detroit and joined the police department, where he worked for 20 years, rising to the rank of detective inspector and commanded the armed robbery/major theft bureau, juvenile divisions and chief of detectives. He was selected to attend the FBI

National Academy and remained close to the bureau his entire career.

Along the way, Mr. Kennedy earned bachelor's and master's degrees in criminal justice and police administration, taught night school and co-authored a book with his college professor son, Daniel P. Kennedy.

Kennedy was hired in 1977 as the City's first public safety director in the midst of a heated legal battle with firefighters who resisted cross training as police officers. Having successfully merged the police and fire departments, Mr. Kennedy served ably as public safety director in the City for 25 years.

I remember Mr. Kennedy as being very friendly and courteous and patient to a certain young reporter new to the Pointes. I regret not being able to attend his funeral service Saturday at St. Paul on the Lake Catholic Church. I don't doubt that law enforcement was more than adequately represented.

Mr. Kennedy was also an avid handball player. He started playing in the 1950s at a YMCA; so did I ... some 50 years later! He competed for nearly 70 years, winning a multitude of local, state and national championships. Despite all of his achievements in law enforcement and on the handball court, Mr. Kennedy's proudest achievements were his 67 years of marriage to Italia and together raising one daughter and three sons.

Fittingly, the family has asked that donations be made to The Hundred Club of Detroit, P.O. Box 1018, Fenton, MI 48430. The Hundred Club is a nonprofit organization that supports the families of fallen police and fire officers in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

Rest in peace, Chief!

LETTERS

The Grosse Pointe News welcomes your letters to the editor. All letters should be typed, double-spaced and signed. Letters longer than 250 words may be edited for length. All letters may be edited for content. We reserve the right to refuse any letter. Include daytime phone number for verification or questions. The deadline for letters is 3 p.m. Monday. Letters to the editor may be emailed to editor@grossepointenews.com.

The opinions expressed in letters and guest columns are not necessarily views shared by the Grosse Pointe News.

GROSSE POINTE SOUTH

By Bob St. John
Sports Editor

It was the first year as the Blue Devils head coach for John

The boys golf, ranked No. 1 in Division 1 the entire season, crushed the competition to win a

The softball team used a late-inning comeback to beat Grosse Pointe North 8-7 in a district title game. The Blue

South enjoyed a pretty successful fall season, led by the football team.

Head coach John Willard and his boys tennis team made the state finals.

The girls golf team made the state finals, and the cross-country programs had two representatives in the state finals, Devon Krasner and Charlie Rulison.

By Bob St. John
Sports Editor

Head coach Ron Kochan and his boys basketball team finished with a winning record, going 12-10, and the girls hockey squad, under the tutelage of Casey Quick,

In the spring season, head coach Mark Seppala and his boys lacrosse team finished 6-0 to win the MAC Red Division for a second straight season, and

Squads which finished below the .500 mark

The few teams to enjoy success in the fall were the boys and girls cross-country programs under Diane Montgomery and

The girls soccer team was .500, while the volleyball squad, girls golf, girls

However, after a dozen offensive social media posts were discovered, the coach was fired just days later.

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London
female short hair
black & white
5 months old
has 2 identical
sisters

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By Bob St. John
Sports Editor

In the spring, the girls soccer led the way with a fourth straight appearance in the Division 4 state semifinals.

Wrapping up the spring was the girls tennis team and first-year head coach Mark Miller. Sophomore Melanie Zampardo made the state finals at No. 1 singles and made the

The school also fielded a girls swim team in the fall. They were small in numbers, but those who competed enjoyed a successful season and made it to the Division 2 state

NORTH:

Continued from page 8A

Administrators Association.

"When negative and derogatory statements are made in the news media regarding specific members of our organization, it only hurts the entire Grosse Pointe community," she said. "In today's society, divisiveness is trendy. We have the ability, however, as members of the school board, central office administrators, principals, teachers, school staff, parents and community members, to work together to establish a different trend in Grosse Pointe, one of collaboration and mutual respect. The GPAA believes that this is what will make a difference for our students — your children — and the future of the Grosse Pointe community."

"Every choice we make as adults is an opportunity to model for our youth how we believe that they should behave," she continued. "We work diligently to create a culture that discourages bullying within our schools, yet behavior from adults in our community does not always echo the same message."

Mike Rennell, president of the Grosse Pointe Education Association, responded to the editorial by reiterating support for North's administration.

"It is very dangerous journalism to come to conclusions without all the facts," he said, yielding his remaining time — generally spent sharing "good news items" — to North business and technology department chairman Sean McCarroll.

McCarroll read a letter signed by all North department chairs "to protect our house from the malicious words published in an editorial in the Grosse Pointe News last Thursday."

"As instructional leaders in the building, North's department chairs want to address these claims and unilaterally denounce them as unsubstantiated acts of journalistic impropriety," he said. "When community leaders such as the editor of the news publish personal criticisms against members of our school community, they unjustly impugn the entire Grosse Pointe public school district, from our values to the service that we provide to the community. As in all matters, we seek only to do what's best for our kids and will not stand to have our actions unfairly and unjustly attacked without setting the record straight."

"You sit behind your desk and question the decisions that are made in our building without even bothering to understand our values and procedures," he concluded. "We question your professional motives and stand in unity as we support our school, our administrators, our coaches and our kids — because that is what we do here."

President Brian Summerfield expressed his support of the Grosse Pointe administration on behalf of the board and also used his board time for public comments — as did trustees Christopher Proleta, Kathleen Abke and Judy Gafa — to reiterate personal support.

"Certainly the owner of the Grosse Pointe News is entitled to his opinion," Summerfield said, "but

I've said this before — I think what we need as a community is to think about what the effect is on our messaging. It's always better to be positive and to look at things in ways we can work together to make our community better."

Said Gafa, "As the mother of three children who went through North with Kate Murray, I cannot speak highly enough of her. ... At the end of the day, I stand with North."

Abke, also a North parent, said she appreciated the speakers, including three North parents, saying "what was brave and true" and noted several North students were present before the meeting to offer their support.

"The kids said they wanted to speak, but (Michelle Davis) said, 'But you have midterms in the morning.' She encouraged them to go home because they need a good night's sleep and they need to study and they need to take their midterms. That is what they do there — they take care of kids."

Grosse Pointe News publisher John Minnis, who did not attend the Monday night school board, said the paper stands by its editorial.

"It is not uncommon for a newspaper to be critical of decisions made by a public school official or officials," he said. "In this case, the summary firing of the longest and winningest coach in Grosse Pointe North history after 49 years with the district, deserves scrutiny — as does the hiring of a young replacement with only three seasons of post-college coaching experience, none as head coach. We can, and should, do better than that."

Teacher of THE WEEK



Rachel Neumann



COURTESY PHOTO

School: St. Clare of Montefalco Catholic School

Years at St. Clare: 1
Grade/Subject: Third- and fourth-grade blended classroom

Nominated by: Ann Tonissen, principal

Principal's quote:

"Rachel is a dedicated and talented first year teacher and a perfect addition to our extraordinary school staff. Rachel has enthusiasm and passion for her students. She has the energy to excite every child's ability and interest in learning. Rachel can successfully reach each of her students by teaching them interactively and creatively within their various levels of academic development. Rachel demonstrates an elevated level of professionalism when working with both

students, parents and colleagues."

What do you enjoy most about teaching?

I enjoy all of the students and families that I cross paths with. I love connecting with my students and helping them grow in all aspects of their life, not just academically.

Describe a teaching accomplishment you're proud of or a "teachable moment" you experienced.

I am most proud of the way I continue to adapt my teaching so that the students in my classroom are successful. I try my hardest to make learning fun so that my students want to come to school every day.

Please share a book or person that has inspired you or your teaching.

I have a lot of amazing mentors in my life, including my family, teachers and principals who have helped me get to where I am right now. I wouldn't be the teacher I am today without all of their support.

Favorite quote:

"Character is doing the right thing when nobody's looking."

— J.C. Watts

Winter spectacular tickets on sale

Grosse Pointe South choirs are preparing for competition. The public is invited to a sneak peek during the Winter Spectacular, a one-night only event 7 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 31, at the Christian A. Fenton Performing Arts Center, 707 Verrier, Grosse Pointe Woods. The event is sponsored by Vogel Advisors.

The Winter Spectacular features the Pointe Singers, Tower Belles and

South Singers, all presenting their latest numbers as they prepare to compete against other nationally ranked high school choirs.

The Pointe Singers, Tower Belles and South Singers will compete at Huntington North High School in Huntington, Ind., Feb. 8 and 9, and the Pointe Singers and Tower Belles will compete at Bishop Leurs in Fort Wayne, Ind., on March 1 and 2, where the Pointe

Singers will defend their grand champion status and the Tower Belles will defend their first place status in the women's division.

Tickets, available at gpsouthchoir.org and Duffey & Co., 15120 Kercheval, Grosse Pointe Park, are \$10 for main floor and balcony seats and \$8 for students and senior citizens. Gold cards are accepted at Duffey & Co. and at the door.

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FOIA committee grants appeal

By Mary Anne Brush
Staff Writer

Mark McInerney first represented the Grosse Pointe Public School System as legal counsel in 1995. During that time, he doesn't recall a denied Freedom of Information Act request being appealed — until recently.

On Sept. 5, the Board of Education FOIA review committee met to review an appeal brought by Grosse Pointe Woods resident Steve Saigh, whose request for the list of candidates applying for the assistant principal/athletic director position at Grosse Pointe North High School and their resumes was denied. McInerney served as the hearing officer during the public meeting.

The role of the committee, made up of Trustee Christopher Profeta, chairman, Trustee Chris Lee and Treasurer Judy Gafa — with President Brian Summerfield serving as Gafa's substitute in her absence — was to determine the merits of Saigh's appeal and either uphold the denial or grant his request.

According to McInerney, Saigh emailed his request June 17, to then-FOIA coordinator Lisa Abbey. On July 2, GPPSS Superintendent Gary Niehaus, acting coordinator after Abbey's retirement, "responded and denied the request because No. 1, the district does not

have the list that Mr. Saigh was asking for and is not required by FOIA to create one," McInerney said, "and 2, disclosing the resumes of the applicants for assistant principal and athletic director would be a clear and unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the applicants."

On July 16, Saigh submitted an appeal of the denial stating, "I am not appealing the decision to provide a list of the applicants as I understand Mr. Niehaus has indicated such a list does not exist. I am, however, appealing the refusal to provide the resumes which clearly do exist. The basis for this denial is alleged to be an invasion of the applicants' privacy. However, such position ignores the fact that the names of the applicants can simply be redacted and therefore there can be no invasion of privacy. It is not appropriate to withhold an entire document when it can be redacted to remove the information that is sought to be protected."

Deputy Superintendent of Educational Services Jon Dean, representing Niehaus, who was absent due to a prior commitment, addressed the rationale for the original denial as well as the administration's position on redacting information on the resumes.

"The reason for the initial denial is the position of the administration is that

providing that information would be an invasion of privacy for those individuals and compromise them with their current employer as well as potentially reduce future applicants for positions within our school district," Dean said. "As far as redacting, you really can't redact a resume, especially for an executive or even management-level position. ... It's the opinion of the administration that redacting that information makes the document meaningless because the amount of redacting would (result in) a document all blacked out."

During public comments, Saigh said, "I'll start off by saying I don't agree with anything that you're saying. I'm not asking for anything other than the meat of the resume. ... And for the record ... this goes back to Jan. 16 of this year. And I have responses from Gary Niehaus that is very typical of this administration. You ask a question and they dance; they go around it and they give you everything but what you ask for. And it prompts me, because I get angry."

"I never get a straight answer. Not once," he continued. "... All I want is the body of the resume. That's all I'm asking for. We have a right to know who we're hiring — the quality of who we're hiring."

Wendy Saigh, who said she was speaking as a member of the public and

not as an attorney or the wife of the requester, reminded the committee, "The FOIA is a disclosure statute. It says you shall disclose any public record unless there's an exemption. The exemptions that are delineated in the statute are narrowly construed. So if there's an opportunity to release a document and redact something that's exempted, you're obligated to do that by law."

"If you release the document that's all blacked out except for a few lines, then that's up to the recipient of that document to decide what to do next," she continued. "You don't get to just make a decision that it's meaningless and then deny a request. That's not how the FOIA is supposed to operate."

After a closed session to seek legal counsel, the committee reconvened and voted 3-0 to approve Summerfield's motion to provide the requested resumes, but with any information redacted that, in the judgment of the administration, might reveal the identities of the applicants.

The committee agreed the resume of the successful applicant, Michelle Davis, would only be subject to redactions of personal information such as an address, phone number and social security number, as her identity as North's assistant principal

and athletic director is public information.

Davis was appointed to the position by the board Aug. 28, 2017. According to a Grosse Pointe News article Aug. 31, 2017, she earned a Master of Arts degree in educational leadership at Eastern Michigan University and worked at North 17 years teaching business classes.

According to the article, Davis became head of the business and technology department in 2010. She spearheaded the review and restructuring of the business curriculum for grades 9 to 12; led the review and restructuring of the industrial technology curriculum for grades 6 to 12 and technology curriculum for grades K to 12; and took the initiative with North's school store, among other accomplishments.

Coaching experience listed on her resume includes freshmen girls' basketball and junior varsity girls' softball at North, Michigan AAU girls' basketball, middle school basketball and softball at St. Joan of Arc, Little League baseball in St. Clair Shores and JV girls' basketball and JV girls' softball at Elisabeth Ann Johnson High School in Mount Morris.

The search process involved teams of North teachers, parents, students and educators along with administra-

ULS guest artist series

FRIDAY, SEPT. 13

◆ University Liggett School is hosting the first in its guest artist series for the year at the Manogian Arts Gallery featuring artist Laurie Mueller with an opening reception at 6 p.m. The exhibition runs through Sept. 23. Individual artwork will be for sale. All opening receptions are free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served. For more information, contact Rebecca Wall at rwall@uls.org.

FRIDAY, OCT. 25

◆ Artist Marat Paransky will be featured with an opening reception at 6 p.m. The exhibition runs through Oct. 28.

THURSDAY, NOV. 21

◆ Artist Linda Allen will be featured with an opening reception at 6 p.m. The exhibition runs through Dec. 2.

THURSDAY, JAN. 9

◆ Artist May Hiddleston will be featured with an opening reception at 6 p.m. The exhibition runs through Jan. 13.

tors from other buildings. Of the 45 applicants, Niehaus met with the final two candidates and recommended Davis to the board, which approved the appointment 7-0.

Dean said while "the administration has a strong desire to maintain a process that provides the best quality and pool of applicants," he supported the committee's decision to uphold the appeal.

"I firmly believe and support our Board of Education and I think they always try to reach the fairest decision they can," Dean said.

Certificate of excellence

Each year the Alliance Française de Grosse Pointe recognizes one student per grade for his or her achievement in French from local high schools. Each student receives a book and certificate and is honored at a

ceremony at The War Memorial.

This year's recipients from University Liggett School are, from right, Chloe Knickerbocker, 10th grade; Sarah Riashi, 9th grade; and Davidson Cheng, 12th grade.

Cheng received a scholarship for having been honored two years during high school.

Not pictured is Nate Hodgson, 11th grade.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ULS



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Saigh emails: Criticism or harassment?

DELAY:

Continued from page 1A

By Mary Anne Brush
Staff Writer

THE GROSSE POINTES

— Steve Saigh's complaint seeking injunctive relief against Grosse Pointe Public School System Superintendent Gary Niehaus and the Board of Education for banning him from school property claims "there was no 'bitter campaign of harassment and intimidation' by plaintiff. No reasonable person would have been intimidated or harassed by speech from plaintiff that was nothing more than critical comment of certain administrative practices and procedures in the district."

"Nobody got intimidated. Nobody got harassed. That's his interpretation," Saigh's attorney, Michael Schwartz, said at a press conference Jan. 8.

"I find it insulting — in fact, I'm outraged — that I've lived in this community as long as I have and this guy comes into this



Steve Saigh, right, and his attorney, Michael Schwartz, held a press conference Jan. 8.

community and after four years he says these things about me? It's disgusting," Saigh said.

The Grosse Pointe News obtained 563 pages of emails through a Freedom of Information Act request, with 1,122 additional pages from a follow-up FOIA

request. Emails reflect a pattern of Saigh asking questions and Niehaus responding in a timely manner to address his concerns.

Multiple emails were critical of North's athletic program, in particular, its hiring practices and the performance of its football and baseball teams.

On Jan. 28, 2018, in an email to Niehaus, Saigh wrote North was "deteriorating on a daily basis" and "Kate (Murray, Grosse Pointe North principal), Michelle (Davis, North athletic director) and yourself need to resign immediately. Once the media gets involved and exposes the dysfunction you allowed to flourish under your watch, maybe then GP will get the cleansing which is so desperately needed."

In other emails, he referred to North's athletic program as "pitiful," "a joke," "an embarrassment" and "dysfunctional." Davis as "a laughing stock" and Murray as "bottle heads" and "hypocrites," among other insulting language.

As an example of Davis' "inabilities as athletic director," Saigh asked what her consequences were for "failing to schedule enough football games this season," accusing her of being "cavalier" about only scheduling four home games.

"Aren't there supposed to be six home games? Could this loss of two games hurt North for playoff contention? What is the financial loss for failing to schedule these two home games?"

Niehaus responded that each team in the conference is assigned nine games, with four home games and five away games and five home

games and four away games in alternating years.

"I've never been so disgusted watching tonight's pep rally for Michelle," Saigh wrote Jan. 14, 2019, referring to a board meeting attended by North community members to support North's athletic program and hiring practices, many speaking during public comments.

"Who has a pep rally to garner support for failing at their job? Seriously. This pep rally only fuels the flames for what the community already knows. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go throw up."

On Oct. 1, 2019, Saigh forwarded an anonymous email he received filled with profane, demeaning and insulting language directed at him. It was written from a burner email account with the title: "Just Stop."

"Someone has anger issues," Saigh wrote. "I'm willing to share the cost of finding out where it came from and the author of it. I'm not in any way suggesting it came from anyone in this email train but because of the tone of it who knows what they're capable of?"

Not receiving a response, he followed up the next day: "I thought in the interest of protecting two of your high school administrators I would have heard from someone? Sure the majority of the authors (sic) hatred and anger is directed at me, but I'm not so certain I'd be so cavalier with regards to the portion of this email directed at Kate Murray and Michelle Davis."

Niehaus responded he had sent the email to Grosse Pointe Woods police chief John Kosanke and detective Ryan Schroeder for investigation.

On Oct. 10, 2019, in a widely copied email, Saigh threatened to hand out "professionally made brochures" highlighting Davis' qualifications compared to resumes of applicants for the athletic director position — information he obtained after he was granted a FOIA request upon appeal — at the North vs. South football game at South Oct. 18.

"Spoiler alert, there is none," he wrote. "These will be distributed at (what) was once a great cross town rival football game. I just hope the ghost email author doesn't get mad? I won't knowingly share this email with him. He sounds like a bad man and the last thing I want is to upset him and his group of very well organized and influential community leaders. So let's keep this between us ok?"

The ban prevented him from attending.

Editor's note: Steve Saigh is an account executive at the Grosse Pointe News.

and we're going to be done for five years," Read said.

Following the vote to delay submitting the document, council voted again, unanimously, to explore the cost and terms of hiring an urban planner to re-evaluate the master strategy that was developed by the Park's Planning Commission.

But Planning Commissioner David Gaskin, who spoke before the initial vote, cautioned that an outside contractor's work might cost as much as \$50,000. The master plan before council was developed during a period of almost two years with community input and has undergone about 15 revisions, he added.

"Do as you wish, but you will spend a lot of money," Gaskin said.

Also at the meeting, Mayor Robert Denner presented formal resolutions recognizing outgoing council members Dan Clark, John Chouinard and Barbara Detwiler.

BANNED:

Continued from page 1A

Grosse Pointe North High School, where his son is eligible to attend next year.

Niehaus said Saigh is welcome to accompany his son to North's open house; he simply needed to ask permission, as stated in the Oct. 16, 2019 letter imposing the ban due to "a bitter campaign of harassment against Grosse Pointe North High School Assistant Principal Michelle Davis and Principal Kate Murray."

Niehaus and the attorney for the school district, Mark McInerney, met with Saigh and Schwartz Nov. 5 to resolve the situation, Niehaus said.

"We gave him some options. And in the letter it states, if there's an event you want to attend, you need to ask permission. And that option remains open today."

The complaint seeks a court order to lift the ban in its entirety and reimburse Saigh for his attorney fees.

"Perhaps now I've got the Grosse Pointe public school administration and Board of Education's attention," Saigh said at a press conference held at Schwartz's office Jan. 8. "There must be consequences for their bullying behavior."

"Why are they doing this? Because I am one of the administration's leading critics and they are desperately trying to silence me," he continued. "The actions by Superintendent Gary Niehaus, his administration and the Board of Education have forced me to file this lawsuit."

Niehaus said he has an open-door policy and welcomes criticism from all community members, including Saigh, but imposed the ban when emails — 693, according to his count — escalated.

After the ban, "the intimidation, the mean, the nasty, the uncalled-for comments — they stopped," Niehaus said. "But we had to go that far to get him to stop."

According to the letter, Davis and Murray, "as well as other staff in the District, particularly at Grosse Pointe North,

believe that you have created a hostile work environment for them, and they are fearful of being confronted by you either at school or even off school premises."

In closing, Niehaus wrote: "We regret having to impose these restrictions and limitations upon you, and we will certainly endeavor not to permit them to affect the continuing education of your son. As superintendent, however, I cannot and will not tolerate further intimidation and harassment of district employees, and I regard these restrictions and limitations as necessary to prevent further such actions on your part."

"I support the superintendent's action to protect district employees who feel a real threat while performing their jobs," board President Margaret Weertz said. "We have a harassment and anti-bullying policy that applies to everyone, students and adults alike, and he followed it."

According to the district's policy on bullying and cyberbullying, "Appropriate behavior, treating others with civility and respect, and refusing to tolerate harassment or bullying is expected of students, as well as administrators, faculty, staff, visitors and volunteers."

Complaints of bullying are promptly investigated. If it's determined bullying has occurred, action may include "exclusion from school property by parents, guests, volunteers and contractors." The superintendent is responsible for ensuring the policy is implemented.

Harassment, according to the district's anti-harassment policy, refers to "any threatening, insulting, bullying or dehumanizing gesture, use of technology, or written, verbal or physical conduct directed against a member of the school district community or a third party."

"I strongly support Michelle and Kate and the job they do at North," Niehaus said. "I'm going to protect all of my faculty, staff, students, administration from someone who is as aggressive as he is."

The Week Ahead

THURSDAY, JAN. 16

◆ DTE Energy provides Grosse Pointe Farms, Shores and Woods residents a plan to improve electric reliability at an open house, 4 to 6 p.m. at Woods city hall, 20025 Mack Plaza.

TUESDAY, JAN. 21

◆ Grosse Pointe Farms City Council meeting and work session, 7 p.m. at the Pier Park community building, 350 Lakeshore.
◆ Grosse Pointe Shores City Council meeting, 7 p.m. at city hall, 795 Lakeshore.

THURSDAY, JAN. 23

◆ Grosse Pointe Library Board of Trustees meeting, 6:30 p.m. at Ewald Library, 15175 E. Jefferson, Grosse Pointe Park.

SATURDAY, JAN. 25

◆ Grosse Pointe Park's annual Chilly Fest, noon to 4 p.m. at Windmill Pointe Park and Patterson Park. The event includes the fourth annual chili cook-off, inflatables, s'mores, rides, face painting, arcade games, animal rides and more.
◆ City of Grosse Pointe's 16th annual Winter Fest and Pig Roast, 1 p.m. at Neff Park. The event includes curling, a scavenger hunt, ice sculpting, a petting farm, broomball and more.
◆ Grosse Pointe Woods Winterfest, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Ghesquiere Park. The event includes food trucks, a petting zoo, pony rides, ice skating and more.

It takes a neighborhood to know the neighborhood.

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