**www.blackparentsworkshop.org**

## No Excuse for Not Answering Questions
## The Truthfulness of a Candidate Matters

(Maplewood, New Jersey) – The Black Parents Workshop Inc. takes exception to the proposition that a Board of Education candidate could not respond to our questionnaire due to a conflict of interest, if elected, since this organization is in litigation against the South Orange-Maplewood School District. The questions we raised are central to issues of equity in the school district and warrants the consideration of every candidate who professes to want to represent our children.

We are particularly troubled when a candidate, Shannon Cuttle, suggests the counsel to not respond to our questionnaire came from an organization that oversees school boards in our state. The issue of transparency, or lack thereof, has plagued our Board of Education for some time. Campaigns are an opportunity to not just hear where candidates stand on the issues but to observe the manner in which they operate and conduct themselves. The campaign season gives us a window to observe how an individual will function if elected.

The Black Parents Workshop reached out by e-mail and telephone to the New Jersey School Boards Association General Counsel Cynthia Jahn to determine if candidate Cuttle had been advised to not respond to our questionnaire. It is the General Counsel's office that would provide any advice on inquiries related to matters of law. We received the response below:

Frank Belluscio <FBelluscio@njsba.org>

Good Afternoon Mr. Fields,

I am responding to your email and telephone inquiries to Cynthia Jahn, NJSBA general counsel.

We do not have a record of an inquiry on this subject from a school board candidate in South Orange-Maplewood. However, that would not rule out the possibility that the candidate had spoken with another member of the Association staff.

Frank Belluscio
Director of Communications

We take this as an indication that no such counsel was given to Shannon Cuttle by the New Jersey School Boards Association. Further, no one outside the office of the General Counsel would be in a position to formally offer such counsel. If Shannon Cuttle did receive counsel, we would like to know on whose advice Shannon depended.

It is the evasiveness on very <u>specific</u> issues that leave us to question the veracity of candidate Cuttle. **The hiring of Black teachers**. **The full implementation of the state-mandated Amistad Black History curriculum**. **Ending racial disparities in student discipline**. **Access to advanced-level and Advanced Placement (AP) classes**. **The qualities desired in the next superintendent**. Vague rhetoric claiming a 'commitment to equity' or 'supporting diversity' and a lack of specificity no longer suffices as acceptable in a school district that is under the monitoring of the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, has been the subject of a civil rights complaint filed by the ACLU, ACLU-NJ and the UCLA Civil Rights Project and is now facing a federal civil rights lawsuit by this organization. **Our children and voters deserve better**.

In a state noted for its ethical failings among public servants, we must turn the corner when we simply shrug off such behavior and demand better from individuals who promise their trustworthiness in exchange for votes. Time and again the public make excuses that come back to haunt us later. In this situation, as has been the case in other incidents, history teaches us that the lie or the cover-up is always *worse* than the offense.

A blanket non-response, though still problematic, would have been more honest than the concocting of an excuse behind a nonexistent legal shield.

We applaud the candidates who provided thoughtful responses to these critical questions. Conversely, we reject the legitimacy of **any** candidate who one, does not provide specific answers to these critical questions, and two, who is evasive and not truthful when making an excuse for not doing so. **The truth matters**.

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