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May 20, 2019

Ms. Annemarie Maini  
President  
South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education  
525 Academy Street  
Maplewood, New Jersey 07040

Re: MMS Principal Contract Renewal  
Via Electronic & Postal Mail

Dear Ms. Maini:

I am writing for clarification on the process by which the contract of Maplewood Middle School principal Ms. Dara Gronau was renewed, and the basis of that renewal in light of her resignation from that position. In the interest of public transparency, the Black Parents Workshop is requesting that the notes and minutes of the Board's Personnel Committee and executive session meetings related to the contract renewal be released in 72 hours. We trust that the Board will provide these documents voluntarily, otherwise they will be requested pursuant to the state's Open Public Records Act.

On May 13, 2019 we sent a letter to you via electronic mail detailing our support for a change in the leadership of Maplewood Middle School based upon Ms. Gronau's resignation. We specifically cited the poor performance of the school on statewide assessments of school building

performance in addition to several incidents we are aware of, and have been directly involved with, that question the competence of the school building leadership. In that letter we noted:

“In its recent school grading report, the state Department of Education assigned Maplewood Middle School a score of 33.63, putting the school in the 23<sup>rd</sup> percentile of schools. By comparison, South Orange Middle School, a school once on the state Focus Schools list, was assigned a score of 63.65 in the 72<sup>nd</sup> percentile of schools. When examining the state school performance reports, there is also a significant achievement gap between white and Black students at Maplewood Middle School.”

We now seek answers to the following questions related to the vote of the Board to renew Ms. Gronau’s contract.

1. Did Ms. Gronau submit a letter of resignation to the Board of Education for her position of principal of Maplewood Middle School? If so, what is the date of the letter and the date she submitted as her final day of employment?
2. Did Ms. Gronau submit a letter to the Board of Education rescinding her resignation? If so, what is the date of that letter and the date it was to take effect?
3. Were there any evaluations completed of Ms. Gronau’s performance and, if so, what was the outcomes of those evaluations?
4. If such evaluations exist, were Board members aware of these evaluations prior to the vote to renew Ms. Gronau’s contract?
5. Why was Ms. Gronau’s resignation listed as a ‘resignation and renewal’ on the public meeting agenda of May 13, 2019?
6. Did the Board counsel advise the Board president, Board Personnel Committee or the full Board in executive session on Ms. Gronau’s resignation prior to the vote of the Board?
7. On what basis did the Board make the decision to designate Ms. Gronau’s resignation as a ‘resignation and renewal’ rather than a ‘resignation and nonrenewal’?
8. Did any Board member communicate directly with Ms. Gronau after she submitted her resignation, or any local government official, resident or community group, to strategize on ways to retain Ms. Gronau’s employment?

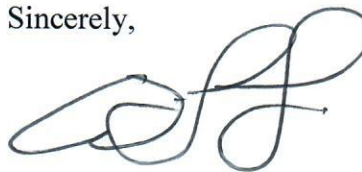
9. What was the vote in executive session on Ms. Gronau's resignation?

It is the Black Parents Workshop's contention that by refusing to accept Ms. Gronau's binding resignation, and renewing her contract without a valid letter from Ms. Gronau rescinding her resignation, the Board of Education overstepped its oversight authority and interfered in a personnel matter that is the purview of the Superintendent. Further, the Board's actions violate the spirit of public transparency and 'duty of care' and its actions invalidate the vote taken on May 13, 2019.

We believe the actions of the Board of Education in this matter are contrary to the public interest. In addition, we believe that certain actions taken by certain Board members may be in violation of provisions of the School Ethics Act. As we seek the truth regarding how this decision came about, we are of the opinion that Ms. Gronau has tendered her resignation, the Board is obligated to accept that resignation, and Ms. Gronau should vacate that position at the close of the school year.

We await your response to this communication. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Fields', with a stylized, cursive flourish extending to the right.

Walter Fields  
Chairman  
(973) 738-7876 - Direct

cc: Dr. Thomas Ficarra, Interim Superintendent  
Board Members  
Dr. Lamont Repollet, NJ Commissioner of Education  
Mr. Joseph Zarra, Interim Executive County Superintendent, Essex County  
Hon. Gurbir S. Grewal, New Jersey Attorney General