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June 13, 2018

Joseph Baird
14338 Tuscany Pointe Trail
Naples, FL 34120

RE: OIG Correspondence #: 2018060005

Dear Mr. Baird:

The Florida Department of Education, Office of Inspector General received your complaint regarding various concerns with the Mason Classical Academy School Board of Directors and Administration.

Under the state constitution, local district school boards are charged with the power and authority to operate, control, and supervise the public schools within the district, (Article IX, Section 4, Florida Constitution). Thus, local school boards have the authority to determine the policies deemed necessary for the operation of the school district and the schools within the district. Examples of the power of school boards include the power to open and close schools, and appoint and dismiss school personnel, (Sections 1001.41, 1001.42 and 1001.43, Florida Statutes). The people of a district have direct control over the local school board through the election process.

School districts are not subdivisions of the Department of Education, and we do not possess general supervisory control over the decisions of local school boards within areas allotted to them constitutionally. In contrast to the power of local school boards to control public schools, the functions of the Department of Education and the State Board of Education, are to establish policy for the state system of public education, such as establishing educational objectives and long range plans (Sections 1001.01,1001.02, 1001.03, and 1001.10 Florida Statutes); and to serve as the conduit for state funding of schools(Chapters 1010 and 1011, Florida Statutes). The Department of Education, through the State Board of Education, only has such supervisor power over the educational system as is provided by law and not inconsistent with a local school district's authority (Article, IX, Section 2, Florida Constitution).

Upon our review of the information you provided to our office, we have concluded that your complaint concerns do not fall within our jurisdictional purview. However, in assisting you with finding resolution, we are referring your complaint to the parties that have the authority over such matters.

By way of this letter, we are forwarding your complaint information to the Director of Independent Education and Parental Choice, to the District Superintendent in Collier County, and the School Board Chair, for their review and action deemed appropriate.

We hope this information is helpful and thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention.

Sincerely,

Edward G. Rawls, Jr.
Director of Investigations

Enclosure

Cc: Kamela Patton, Superintendent, Collier County School District
Roy M. Terry, Chair, Collier County School Board
Adam Miller, Director, Independent Education and Parental Choice

Welcome Edward Rawls

Office of Inspector General

Complaint Details

Complaint ID	926
Status	Complete

Contact information of the person filing complaint

Name	Joseph Baird
Home Address	14338 Tuscany Pointe Trl, NAPLES, Florida, 34120
Home Phone	2394506705
Work or Home Email	jbaird123@gmail.com
Your Employer	
Work Address	
Work Phone	
Work Unit/Section/Location	
Contact Preference	Home Phone
Current/Former/Applicant State Employee?	

Information about the person, business, organization who committed the alleged violation:

Person, Business, or Organization(subject):	Mason Classical Academy Board of Directors and Administration
Subject's Employer:	Unknown
Subject's Business Address:	3073 South Horseshoe Drive, Suite 104, Naples, Florida, 34104
Work Phone	2392272838
Subject's Position/Title:	Board Members, Principal and Compliance Officer
Unit/Section/Location:	Naples FL

If the subject of the alleged violation is a Department of Education employee, is he or she supervisor of the person filing complaint?	No
Have you notified anyone else or any other agency of the allegation(s)?	Yes
If yes, what were the results?	

What Happened?[Complaint Description]

To whom it may concern: I am a former member of the Mason Classical Academy Board of Directors in Collier County, Florida. Mason Classical Academy (MCA) is a public charter school, and I served as the treasurer from early August 2016 until early October 2016. I wish to alert the office of the Inspector General to the potential of fraud being committed at MCA as well as the likelihood of multiple and frequent Sunshine Law violations. Below is a list of the parties who are involved. - Mrs. Kelly Lichter - MCA Board of Directors President, Founder of MCA, and sitting board member of Collier County Public School Board. - Ms. Laura Miller - MCA Board of Directors Secretary - Mr. David Hull - MCA Principal - Mr. Chuck Marshall - MCA Compliance Officer Before referring this matter to the Collier County Public School Board, please note that Mrs. Lichter is a current member of that board. Additionally, another member of the Collier County Public School Board, Mrs. Erika Donalds, was heavily involved in the founding of MCA and her husband, Byron Donalds, was a member of the MCA board of directors at the time the events described in these complaints occurred. Mrs. Donalds is likely not able to be an objective participant in any investigation concerning MCA. I also wish to explicitly point out that Mr. Byron Donalds is not included in any of these complaints. As long as I served on the board of directors I did not witness any unethical or unprofessional behaviour from him. Before I go into the details of the complaints, I need to point out that while I have been aware of the potential for mismanagement of government money since 2016, I did not speak up about this for two reasons. While I did see suspicious behavior from Mr. Hull and Mr. Marshall, I had no evidence of actual fraud being committed and because the school was providing a good education to several hundred students, I saw no reason to cause problems for the school. I was also afraid my children who were enrolled at MCA would be punished by Mr. Hull in a spirit of revenge. Mr. Hull has a well known reputation for punishing parents and teachers in retaliation for complaints against the school. Since that time, I have witnessed Mr. Hull being deceptive, manipulative, and mean spirited on multiple occasions. Because Mr. Hull is in charge of managing a several million dollar budget of government money without any oversight and is not held accountable to anyone, I have become concerned about the potential for fraud or at the very least misuse of government money and feel I can no longer remain silent about the events that I have witnessed over the past few years. I have withdrawn my children from the school, so now I am able to speak freely without fear of retaliation from Mr. Hull. Background ---------- I first got to know Mr. Hull in 2014 during the school's first year in existence. Our families became friends and we were regular guests in the Hull's home. Through the Hulls, we met Mrs. Lichter while on a camping trip. We became close family friends with the Hulls and Lichters in the months following. We used to have family get togethers at the beach on weekends and there was the occasional party at one of our homes for special occasions like Thanksgiving, Memorial Day and Christmas. In late 2015, Mr. Hull asked if he and his wife could come over to my house to talk to me and my wife about some problems with the MCA board of directors. When he arrived at the house, he mentioned to us that we should not tell anyone about this meeting because he could get in trouble for meddling with the board. He explained that there were many problems with the MCA board members interfering with his duties at the school. He thought that some of the board members (Matt Mathias, Byron Donalds, Jason Lane) were conspiring to have him fired. I don't recall specifics very well, but he led us to believe that those board members in cooperation with several other parents had created false rumors about him and attempted to assassinate his character in order to justify his firing. He alleged that this same group was also attempting to find a way to force Mrs. Lichter off of the board in order to make it possible to take over the school - they wanted to eliminate Mr. Hull and Mrs. Lichter and put others in charge who did not value the mission of the school. He asked me if I would be willing to serve on the board in order to balance it out in his favor, and also to help find a way to eliminate those three members from the board since they were going to destroy the school if they succeeded. I believed Mr. Hull's story and asked how much work was going to be involved if I served as a board member. Mr. Hull's response was something like "It's no work at all. All we need is for you to show up to meetings and vote. Nothing else. I'll manage everything. Laura Miller is a great board member - she just stays out of my business and never causes any trouble. She just shows up to meetings and votes. We want more board members like that. It's easy. Even Kelly gets too involved sometimes. Just copy Laura Miller and you'll be fine." In retrospect, he was telling me that he wanted board members that wouldn't hold him accountable for anything. Shortly after that, Mrs. Lichter contacted me and confirmed what Mr. Hull had told me - she wanted me to join the board to help combat the other members who were plotting against them. I wrote a letter to the board and asked if they would consider allowing me to serve on the board. At the board meeting on 1/11/2016, Mrs. Lichter presented my candidacy to the board and requested a vote. Ms. Miller moved to approve me as a board member, but there was no second to the motion, so no vote occurred. However, it was clear that Mr. Donalds, Mr. Lane and Mr. Matthias were not in favor of my joining the board. Over the course of the next 7 months, there were several family gatherings at which Ms. Miller, Mrs. Lichter and Mr. Hull were present. During these get togethers there was a substantial amount of conversation about bitter disagreements among the board members and infighting between Mr. Hull and the Finance Committee. They regularly talked about how they might be able to force the other 3 members off of the board. Eventually, Mr. Matthias resigned due to a conflict of interest with his business, and Mr. Lane

resigned in order to focus more on his insurance business. Mr. Donalds was running for the Florida State House of Representatives and it was clear he would win the primary in August and run unopposed in the general election in November. This meant Mr. Donalds would soon need to resign as well, so Mrs. Lichter brought my nomination back to the board for a vote on August 8th, 2016. The vote passed unanimously and I became the new Treasurer. Looking back, I now realize that Mr. Hull wanted to put me on the board because I had no experience and he thought that I would just do whatever he wanted me to. He thought he had a "yes man" on the board. It was also a little strange that I was made Treasurer because I have absolutely no financial background of any kind. I realize now that this is exactly the kind of person that Mr. Hull wants as Treasurer - someone with no financial experience who will not closely examine the school's financial activity and who will do nothing except show up to meetings and vote. Complaints ---------- Complaint #1: ---------- The first complaint is that Mr. Hull, Mrs. Lichter, Ms. Miller, and Mr. Marshall have knowingly and willfully created an environment at MCA where fraud can occur without detection by conspiring to block the formation of a Financial Oversight Committee as was my duty as Treasurer to form. Furthermore, they have continued to allow the school to operate without this oversight since my resignation from the board in 2016. It was clear from my experience during my second and third board meetings on 9/6/2016 and 10/4/2016 that Mr. Hull in cooperation with Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller clandestinely blocked my efforts to form a Financial Oversight committee. This was done at Mr. Hull's request. Mr. Marshall's involvement was not so direct, he contributed to the effort through his arguments supporting the effort to block the formation of this committee. At the first of these board meetings on 9/6/2016, it was agreed by all board members that my first order of business was to form a new Financial Oversight Committee. We all agreed that I should notify all parents of the school that we were forming this committee and solicit resumes from parents who wanted to serve. We agreed that we would all interview candidates during the next month and return to the next meeting prepared to vote on candidates. Mrs. Lichter suggested that I get some board member training from Dr. Carpenter who is an independent consultant that provides training for charter school board members. Dr. Carpenter works closely with Hillsdale College (MCA is a Hillsdale charter school) and is well known by Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller, so it made sense for me to seek his guidance in forming a committee. Ms. Miller thought this was a great idea as well. One specific question that Mrs. Lichter wanted me to ask Dr. Carpenter was how long it was acceptable to be without a financial oversight committee. Since the prior finance committee had been dissolved a few months earlier, she was concerned that we were operating without sufficient oversight and wanted to know how urgently we needed to form this committee. After this meeting, I did everything I was supposed to do. I obtained training from Dr. Carpenter. I advertised that we were looking for volunteers to join the Financial Oversight Committee, compiled a list of candidates and resumes, distributed this information to the other board members so they could perform their own interviews independently, and I also interviewed all of the candidates that I thought were promising. To the best of my knowledge, I was the only board member who ever performed any interviews. Two very strange things happened before our next board meeting on 10/4/2016. The first was that Mr. Hull specifically told me he did not want me to allow either Erika Donalds (Mr. Donald's wife) or Nich Lichter (Mrs. Lichter's husband) to serve on the committee. Both of them had submitted resumes for consideration, and Mr. Hull told me that he thought they would both cause trouble. I thought it was out of line for Mr. Hull to tell me this, but I let it go. The second odd thing was that late one evening shortly before the 10/4/2016 meeting, Mr. Hull called me at home and told me that he didn't want me to form this committee at all. I told him that I had to form it immediately. I had asked Dr. Carpenter about the urgency of forming this committed, and Dr. Carpenter's response was something like "You must form this committee immediately. Financial oversight is of utmost importance and you cannot go without it for even one day. Oversight can never wait." I told this to Mr. Hull and said "I'm sorry, I need to form this committee." He then requested that I at least delay the formation of the committee. He said something along the lines of "I'm working on something right now, and if you form this committee it's going to cause problems for me." He didn't elaborate much on what it was he was "working on", but I believe he indicated that it had something to do with a lease the school was attempting to sign. I told him that there was no way I could wait. Based on Dr. Carpenter's recommendation I told him it was crucial for us to ensure we had proper financial oversight and the formation of this committee needed to happen immediately. That was the end of the conversation. At the next board meeting on 10/4/2016, we were supposed to vote on the candidates that I had submitted to the other board members for consideration. When this agenda item came up, suddenly and for no apparent reason, Ms. Miller stated that she didn't want the vote to occur. She said that it would be a good idea for us to delay the formation of this committee and re-group to come up with a plan for how to include people without children in the school as part of a "community outreach" effort. Mrs. Lichter agreed with Ms. Miller and refused to allow a vote on any of the members. I explained to them why it was important to form the committee immediately based on Dr. Carpenter's recommendation, but my explanation fell on deaf ears. I explained that financial oversight is important to ensure there is no fraud. At this point, Mr. Marshall joined in the conversation and argued that we already had enough oversight because of our accountants and yearly audit. It was clear that he was also

opposed to the formation of this committee and lobbying with Mr. Hull against this committee. I pointed out to them that we could still vote on members at this meeting and add more members over the next few months if they wanted to initiate a community outreach effort. There was no reason to delay, but no amount of discussion made any difference. Ms. Miller and Mrs. Lichter were steadfast in their refusal to bring this to a vote, so the formation of the committee died in that meeting. It was clear that Mr. Hull had called Ms. Miller and Mrs. Lichter just like he called me. He told them to block the formation of the committee and they did. They did it knowing that doing so exposed the school to unnecessary risk of misuse of government money. They knew that it was entirely inappropriate for Mr. Marshall and Mr. Hull to lobby against the formation of this committee (after all, Mr. Hull and Mr. Marshall are the two primary people that the committee would be overseeing). I also believe that the reasons given for delaying the vote were untrue - this is clear from the fact that no such committee has been formed since that time, and no "community outreach" initiative was ever undertaken to my knowledge. The formation of the committee whose purpose was to oversee the financial practices of Mr. Hull and Mr. Marshall was blocked by Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller at the request of those two individuals. To this day the school operates without any financial oversight committee, and I have seen no mention of it in the meeting minutes after the meeting on 10/4/2016. I should also point out that Mr. Donalds also objected to the way I was being treated in this meeting. He pointed out that Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller were not giving me the tools I needed to confidently execute my duties. It was clear that he was not a part of the conspiracy between Mr. Hull, Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller. Unfortunately with only a four member board, Mr. Donalds and I could not overrule Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller. He even called me after my resignation and asked me to reconsider because he thought it was important to have someone on the board who was willing to stand up to the other members and to Mr. Hull. Complaint #2 ---------- The second complaint is that Mr. Hull, Mr. Marshall, Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller were not satisfied with blocking the formation of the Financial Oversight committee, they went so far as to block the Treasurer's access to the information that was required in the routine and normal duties of a Treasurer. In particular, I was seeking to ensure that the school was not receiving too much funding from the district, and they knowingly and with full knowledge of what they were doing prevented me from carrying out this duty. They were even willing to put my children's financial security at risk in order to accomplish this. At the board meeting on 10/4/2016, I raised a question about how I could prove that I had done my due diligence in ensuring that the enrollment numbers we submit to the district every month were accurate. I don't recall the name of the form, but there is a document that the Treasurer is supposed to sign on a monthly basis which reports the number of students enrolled in the school to the district. This determines the amount of funding that the school receives. Dr. Carpenter had pointed out in my training that it was my responsibility not only to ensure that this number was accurate, but that I also needed to be able to prove I had done my due diligence in this regard. He taught me that if I failed in this area, I could be held personally liable for damages if it was ever discovered that the school had been overpaid as a result of my negligence. There was evidently precedence for this as he sighted a couple of examples of Treasures of charter school boards who had been found liable for amounts in excess of 1 million dollars due to this very issue. Dr. Carpenter recommended the following practice in order to ensure the accuracy of the enrollment counts that we were reporting and to protect myself against future allegations of neglect. He said I should ask for a student roster at the beginning of the school year. After that, he said I should request on a monthly basis the names of any new student who had enrolled, and the names of any students who had withdrawn. Based on this information, I could perform my own calculations of the enrollment count and it should match the number on this document that Mr. Hull's staff prepared for me to sign. I had been warned by Mrs. Lichter when I was elected that I was only permitted very limited access to Mr. Hull's staff while doing my routine duties. She made it clear that I was permitted to request some information from Mrs. Turner, the business manager, while preparing my monthly reports to the board, but she also made it clear that Mr. Hull was very sensitive about being micro-managed and she told me that I should be very careful about requesting too much information. She said that Mr. Hull gets upset and accuses the board of micro-managing and placing undue burdens on his staff if the board asks too much from him. Because she had told me this, I asked her whether she thought it was an undue burden for me to request a student roster at the beginning of each year and monthly changes for the rest of the year in order follow Dr. Carpenter's recommended practice. She said she thought that was a matter for the board to decide whether we would require this information to be provided, and that I should bring it up as a topic of discussion at the next board meeting. I thought that was a good idea - after all - if the board voted that Mr. Hull was required to provide this information to me, then he could not complain about being micro-managed, and because this information was required in order for me to do my job, I thought it best if this were handled by the board rather than simply asking Mr. Hull to provide this information. At this board meeting on 10/4/2016, I brought up all of the above points. I asked the board whether we could require the principal to provide an annual student roster and a monthly list of new enrollments and withdrawals as a mechanism to ensure that we were correctly reporting enrollment numbers to the district. Mrs. Lichter asked Mr. Hull whether he thought this was a reasonable request. Mr. Hull stated very strongly that this type of request was micromanaging. He said

something to the effect of "I'm being peppered with all this 'munitia' of stupid and useless requests for information. It's all stuff you don't need and you're just getting in my way and placing undue reporting burdens on me and my staff." I reminded everyone of the importance of making sure that the numbers we report to the district are accurate, and I reminded them that it was my job as Treasurer to do so. Mr. Marshall joined the conversation and started arguing that there was no way that the numbers could be wrong because of the system they used to calculate the number. Mr. Marshall made a comment to the effect of "If that number is wrong, then we have bigger problems. There is no way that number is wrong, so you don't need to worry." It was clear that Mr. Hull and Mr. Marshall had no intention of giving me any visibility into the student enrollment numbers. I even went so far as to request access to their student information system so that I could do my own research without burdening any of the staff with the additional work of sending these reports to me. I don't recall the exact response I received when I asked for this, but I do remember that Mr. Hull and Mr. Marshall made it clear he would never give me access to their information system. I am convinced that their real goal was to prevent me from having visibility into their financial dealings. They simply wanted me to rubber stamp the document they put in front of me without any independent verification. Because of Mr. Hull and Mr. Marshall's extreme and vocal opposition, Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller decided they would not require this information from the principal. Ms. Miller said something to the effect of "This really is munitia. This is being way too picky. We really don't need this information. It's ridiculous to ask for this." Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller had for the second time prevented me from establishing a practice that was directly recommended by Dr. Carpenter whom they had both recommended to me for training. It was clear that Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller were taking their voting instructions from Mr. Hull. He is the one who is really running the board. At this point I realized I was getting nowhere, so I appealed to their nobler side. Because I was personal friends with all of them, I thought I could get through to them by reminding them of the personal liability I was exposed to without this information. I reminded them of the real world cases that Mr. Carpenter used in his training of Treasurers who had been financially ruined due to their negligence. When I brought this up, Mr. Hull and Mr. Marshall's tones changed. They took on an obviously derogatory and mocking demeanor. Mr. Hull began rolling his eyes when I spoke. He and I believe also Chuck laughed mockingly at me for raising these points. They questioned the accuracy of the examples I used - suggesting that these stories about treasurers being ruined financially were untrue or exaggerated. In desperation, I finally said something like "Look, please. Please understand that I need this information in order to protect my family. If I lose my house because I didn't verify these numbers, my children will be living on the streets." This forced Mrs. Lichter into a corner. She either had to agree to protect my children or to agree along with Mr. Hull, Mr. Marshall, and Ms. Miller that it was acceptable to risk my children's financial security in order to prevent me from having access to the information that was required in order for me to fulfill my fiduciary responsibilities as Treasurer of an organization that is funded with taxpayer dollars. Instead of doing the right thing, Mrs. Lichter said that Mr. Hull and I should meet in private in the coming days to see if we could reach an agreement. In other words, she took a matter which was properly the board's responsibility to decide and sent it back to the principal (who is the subject of my oversight) to resolve. This empowered Mr. Hull to be even more outrageous. I contacted Mr. Hull shortly after this board meeting and requested a meeting with him to discuss the issue of my need to independently verify the enrollment numbers we were reporting to the district. He refused to meet with me. I don't recall his reasons, but he was clearly angry with me and was unwilling to meet with me. I told Mrs. Lichter of Mr. Hull's refusal, and her response was something like "right now Mr. Hull just needs to know we have his back." I was appalled. I could not believe that she was willing to sacrifice my children's financial security in order to keep Mr. Hull satisfied. These are the same children that MCA is responsible for teaching, nurturing, instilling virtue, loving and caring for. When I realized what I was up against, I decided to resign. There was no way I could fight all of them, and if they cared so little for me and my family, why should I bother? Addendum to Complaints #1 and #2 ---------- In my email exchange with Dr. Carpenter during my training, he told me that MCA would need to pay for additional training from him. He gave a certain amount of time to me for free, but as an independent consultant he needed to be compensated for additional time spent on our training. He proposed a package that would have allowed him to provide additional training to all of our board members for a fixed price - somewhere in the neighborhood of $6,000. This was provided to me in an email exchange, so it should be possible to verify this by a review of MCA's email system. I no longer have access to that account. In any case, I mentioned to Mrs. Lichter the possibility of obtaining additional training for the entire board, and she seemed excited, she thought it was a good idea, and told me to bring it up for discussion at the next board meeting. This occurred in between the board meetings on 9/6/2016 and 10/4/2016. Also during this same time period (I don't recall whether this occurred before or after my discussion with Mrs. Lichter), I was having a semi-friendly chat with Mr. Hull at a cross country meet in Marco Island. I say it was semi-friendly because Mr. Hull had already realized that I was starting to dig into the schools financial activity, and there was already some tension between us as a result. I mentioned to him that I was thinking about the possibility of additional training from Dr. Carpenter, and he became visibly agitated at the suggestion. He immediately replied with something

like: "No, no. We don't want that. We don't need that. We just want to keep it simple. Keep it simple." I was shocked. I couldn't believe that the principal of MCA had just told the sitting Treasurer that he didn't want the MCA board to receive any additional training from Dr. Carpenter. At the MCA board meeting on 10/4/2016, I brought up the possibility of obtaining additional training for the board from Dr. Carpenter. Predictably, Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller immediately objected very strenuously and completely shut down the possibility of any further conversation. I have an email dated 10/6 that proves that the board blocked my continued training with Dr. Carpenter. I also have an email that proves I reported Mr. Hull's desire to prevent my continued training to Mrs. Lichter. Again, it was clear that Mr. Hull had contacted both Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller and instructed them to stop any further board member training. The amount of influence and control that Mr. Hull has over the board of directors is staggering. Complaint #3 ---------- The third complaint is against Mrs. Lichter. She is fully aware of the manner in which Mr. Hull blocked my access to some employee expense reports and did nothing about it. I had requested copies of all expense reports for a period of two months for review. One of these expense reports was for a check that was made payable to Mr. Hull (the amount was small, but because it was payable to Mr. Hull I thought it warranted a little extra scrutiny). Mrs. Turner sent me copies of these reports as scanned images by email. This was obviously an attempt to give the appearance of complying with my requests while in reality continuing to stonewall me in my efforts to perform my duties as treasurer. The copies of the reports obscured many important details, receipts covered up names of the person filing the report, receipts were stacked one on top of the other so those in the back were hidden, etc. I sent all of these copies along with a detailed description of what was wrong with each one to Mrs. Lichter in email on 10/7/2016 - the day after I resigned. I have proof that she received and read this email because she replied to it and stated that she was going to discuss this with Mr. Hull and Mrs. Turner. I have copies of these emails if anyone cares to see them. To the best of my knowledge, she never held Mr. Hull accountable for any of this. She allowed him to deliberately prevent the Treasurer from inspecting expense reports - including his own. This leads me to believe that Mr. Hull is able to write checks to himself and others and not even the Treasurer is allowed to scrutinize these transactions if Mr. Hull decides he doesn't want the scrutiny. This happens on Mrs. Lichter's watch and with her knowledge and consent. I also have an email dated 10/6/2016 (the date I resigned from the board) from someone who is very close to the events I described in the above complaints which provides additional credibility to the truth of my claims. I wish to keep the identity of this person confidential unless there is sufficient reason to do otherwise. I would be happy to share the identity and provide proof of the existence of this email if requested. Complaint #4 ---------- I believe there are a significant number of Sunshine Law violations at MCA. My complaints are aimed at Mrs. Lichter, Ms. Miller, and Mr. Hull; although Mr. Longenecker, the current Treasurer, may be involved as well. I do not know Mr. Longenecker at all, but I believe he is a close personal friend of Mr. Hull. When I first joined the board, I was told that board members could not discuss MCA business outside of public board meetings. However, I was also told by both Mr. Hull and Mrs. Lichter that I could discuss anything I wanted with Mr. Hull. It was made clear to me by one of them (I don't recall which one) that EVERY board member was allowed to discuss all business matters with Mr. Hull. Since he was not a board member, there was no violation of Sunshine Law in discussing the school's business with him. It has become pretty clear to me that Mr. Hull is the conduit by which board members communicate with each other regarding school business in private and outside of public board meetings. All three board members are close personal friends with Mr. Hull. As is clear from the prior complaints, Mrs. Lichter and Ms. Miller clearly take their direction from Mr. Hull. They both discuss issues with Mr. Hull and then come to board meetings knowing how the other will vote and with many matters already resolved so there is no need to discuss much of the school business in view of the public. With Mr. Hull as the conduit, there is no need for them to communicate directly with each other. The close personal relationship of Mr. Hull with all of the the board members makes this very easy. This concern is further substantiated by the fact that when I joined the board Mr. Hull told me that he would prefer that board members submit their officer reports in writing to each other prior to the meeting in order to avoid the necessity of officers making oral reports during the meeting. He told me that he wanted to keep as much information from being shared with the public as possible in order prevent the public from being able to question the school's management practices and board member activities. Mrs. Lichter went along with this and changed the format of the meetings. Again, I don't know why the principal has this much control over the board, but he does. This change in practice and the timing of it is easy to verify. Anyone who looks at the meeting minutes from past MCA meetings on the school's website should be able to easily verify that prior to 9/6/2016, all board members presented their reports orally and the reports were included in the meeting minutes - in full view of the public. Beginning on 9/6/2016, board members and the principal began submitting their reports in writing prior to the meeting (or making no report at all), and these reports are not discussed in the meeting. These reports are not included in the meeting minutes and not made visible to the public. Another point that may escape notice about the board meeting minutes, which also suggests that much communication between board members occurs outside of board meetings, is that prior to instituting the practice of using private written reports instead of publicly visible oral reports in board meetings, board meetings

had substantially more items on their agenda and substantially more details in the meeting minutes. Up until my election, there had been 5 board members, and 3 of these members (Mr. Donalds, Mr. Lane, Mr. Matthias) had an adversarial relationship with Mr. Hull. They held him accountable for his actions and Mr. Hull could not control the board the way he appears to be able to control the board today. After Mr. Donalds and I resigned and Mr. Longenecker was elected to replace me as Treasurer, Mr. Hull gained full control of the board and the amount of information publicly available regarding board meetings has steadily declined. Indeed, many meetings have no reports from any officers. How is it possible for a school to function when officers make no reports to each other unless there is substantial communication outside of the board meetings? I attended the board meeting on 5/29/2018 and it lasted 18 minutes. There were no officer reports. Approximately 5 of these minutes were used by a parent (Mrs. Libia Zuluaga) who was voicing a complaint about the way her daughter had been verbally and emotionally abused and maltreated by Mr. Hull in retaliation for the fact that her daughter was dating Mr. Hull's son against Mr. Hull's wishes. If you subtract those 5 minutes from the total meeting length, the entire meeting lasted only 13 minutes. Again, I don't see how it is possible for a board to conduct all of its business in 13 minutes with no reports and very little discussion of anything unless there is substantial communication occurring outside of these meetings. --------- An additional point of concern is that according to the meeting minutes on 12/14/2016 the board passed a motion to approve the 2017 board meeting calendar with monthly reports submitted by the principal, treasurer and president that will be attached to the meeting minutes. In many cases no reports at all are being filed, and I cannot find a single instance in which these reports are attached to the meeting minutes. Here is the exact language from the meeting minutes on 12/14/2016: Motion to Approve 2017 Board Meeting Calendar With Continued Monthly Reports from President, Treasurer And Principal submitted by the Second Tuesday of Each Month: (Secretary will attach reports to the following meeting minutes.) ---------- So it appears that the MCA board is not abiding by its own rules. Please note the timeline and the number of reports filed by officers since 11/1/2017 (I obtained this information simply by reviewing the meeting minutes published on MCA's website): Timeline: 11/1/2016 - Mr. Longenecker elected to the board. President and principal make very brief reports with very little information. 12/14/2016 - No reports from any officers 1/10/2017 - (date is wrong on minutes - it actually states that the date of the meeting was August 2016) - No report from treasurer or secretary. Written reports submitted by principal and president. No reports attached to meeting minutes. 1/12/2017 - Mr. Longenecker absent. No reports from any officers or principal. 1/25/2017 - No reports from any officers or principal. 3/24/2017 - No reports by president or secretary. Treasurer and principal reports submitted in writing, but not attached to meeting minutes. 5/31/2017 - (date is wrong on minutes - it actually states that the date of the meeting was 3/24/2016) No reports by president or secretary. Treasurer and principal reports submitted in writing, but not attached to meeting minutes. 6/29/2017 - No reports from any officers or principal. 8/25/2017 - No reports from any officers. Report submitted in writing from principal, but not attached to meeting minutes. 10/6/2017 - No reports from any officers. Report submitted in writing from principal, but not attached to meeting minutes. 10/19/2017 - No reports from any officers or principal. 11/8/2017 - No reports from any officers or principal. 1/26/2018 - Very brief reports were given by president and principal and included in the meeting minutes. No report from the treasurer, but there was a note indicating that he would have a report the following month (the next meeting wasn't until 4/20/2018 - 3 months later). No report from the secretary. As of 6/4/2018 (the date this is being written), no additional meeting minutes are available on the website after the 1/26/2018 meeting. I can also attest to the fact that Mr. Hull and Mrs. Lichter both wanted to eliminate as many board meetings as possible. It seemed that the more meetings they had the more information the public would have access to, and they wanted to keep that to a minimum. Since December 2016, there have been no meetings in the following months: Feb 2017 April 2017 July 2017 Sept 2017 Dec 2017 Feb 2018 Mar 2018 After reviewing the information above and seeing that there are very few officers reports and very little actual information being shared at public board meetings, I think it is reasonable to ask "How is it possible for the school to operate unless there are substantial amounts of information being shared among board members outside of public board meetings?" Closing Points - Additional Supporting Information ---------- The information included in this section is included primarily for the sake of completeness and because I do not know which information is relevant and which is not. I believe it to be useful in helping someone understand the dynamics of the board's relationship with Mr. Hull and Mr. Marshall. Point 1 ---------- In the board meeting on 10/4/2016, I filed a written report to the board stating that I was unable to complete my monthly report because of Mr. Hull's refusal to provide adequate information in response to questions I had asked. When this topic came up in the board meeting, I asked Mr. Hull why he had not responded to my requests for information. His exact response was: "When is it going to stop?". He then proceeded to accuse me of micromanaging and asking way too many questions. Again, he called my requests for information "munitia" in order to make it look like I was asking a lot of useless pointless questions that served no purpose. The board never did anything to hold him accountable for this behavior. Point 2 ---------- One area of concern that I discovered early on was the schools practice of purchasing Amazon gift cards and in turn using those cards to purchase school supplies. I was

concerned about the potential for fraud because gift cards are much more difficult to trace than a credit or debit card. I was told that the school could not obtain a credit card, so they had to make all of their purchases with a debit card. In fact this was something I had heard at board meetings for years before I actually joined the board, so this was not news to me. The problem with using a debit card to make purchases is that the daily limit is very low, so there is a substantial burden placed on the business manager when it comes to purchasing. Instead of purchasing several thousand dollars of supplies in one transaction, Mrs. Turner was required to make several smaller purchases over the course of several days in order to avoid going over the daily debit card limit. To work around this, they found a way to purchase thousands of dollars in Amazon gift cards in one transaction, and these cards were then used to purchase the required school supplies. I called Mrs. Turner and told her that I wanted to explore other options instead of using gift cards. I explained to her my concerns and asked her if they had a way to ensure that there was no misuse or theft of these cards. I asked if they had a system in place that would allow them to know if a card ever went missing or was used by someone else. I don't recall the details of the ensuing conversations, but it was clear to me that the process of reconciling the gift cards and ensuring they were all used for official school business was very complex and error prone. My worries that there was significant risk of misuse as a result of this practice were never addressed. I told her this so that she and Mr. Marshall would have some time to brainstorm and come to the next board meeting prepared to discuss alternative ways of purchasing supplies that didn't involve gift cards, or at least prepared to discuss a strategy for mitigating the risk of theft with these cards. I asked Mr. Hull if he knew why the school couldn't obtain a credit card, and his response was that it was due to lack of collateral. This seemed strange to me because most credit cards are unsecured, and the school was beginning its third year in operation so I saw no reason why the school should have trouble obtaining a credit card. I called Valley National Bank (this is the bank used by MCA) and inquired about the possibility of obtaining a credit card. If I recall correctly, I was told by the Valley National Bank representative that they do not offer a secured credit card. She then told me that because MCA carries significant balances with them, it should be very easy for us to obtain a credit card. I was never able to follow up on this because I decided to resign. One particular point of concern surrounding this practice of purchasing gift cards was that Mr. Hull complained that Mrs. Turner had spent over three hours answering questions I had asked about the school financial records, and that the reporting burden I had placed on her was unreasonable. When I looked at the work that she had done, most of her time had been spent justifying or attempting to explain how the gift card purchases worked. It seemed like an inordinate amount of work to undertake when I had made it clear that I just wanted to talk about alternative practices. It seemed like the kind of behaviour one would expect from someone who is trying to hide something. Because I resigned, I was never able to pursue any of this further, but I was left wondering why there was so much effort involved in justifying a practice that I think everyone would agree leaves the school open to theft. It just didn't sit right with me. Point 3 ---------- I called an attorney who has a very close knowledge of the school operations to consult with before filing these complaints. After I relayed most of the information above, my attorney responded by saying (paraphrased) "You don't know the half of it. Everything you told me is just the beginning. It doesn't even scratch the surface. There is so much more going on in that school that you have no idea about. My office has received hundreds of calls about MCA." Most of this attorney's knowledge about the school is firsthand and not obtained through reports from disgruntled parents or staff. Point 4 ---------- When I was elected I was warned to be careful of Mr. Marshall by a very credible source with in depth knowledge of the school's operations. I will not name this person publicly for fear of retaliation, but I will share this person's identity with authorities should the need arise. I was told the following about Mr. Marshall (paraphrased to the best of my recollection): "You've got to watch Mr. Marshall. He tries to slip things past the board unnoticed. He manipulates the budget. He will make a series of small transfers from one account to another in order to avoid making a large transfer that would require board approval. The aggregate result of his transfers can sometimes add up to a large amount. If you aren't paying attention he'll fool you. He also attempted to install security cameras in the bathrooms, but he needed board approval for the purchase of the equipment. He tried to slip that past the board without telling them what the equipment was for. When pressed, he attempted to dodge the question and obtain board approval without disclosing the purpose of the equipment." Fortunately, some board members weren't fooled and found out the real purpose of the equipment and put a stop to the effort. Point 5 ---------- Mr. Hull controls the makeup of the board. During the months leading up to my election, Mr. Hull told me on several occasions that he wanted a 3 person board. He thought five members was too many. In retrospect, 3 members are easier to control and manipulate than 5. After he lobbied to get me elected to the board, I resigned and unsurprisingly his close friend Mr. Longenecker was elected to replace me. Mr. Longenecker lives in Sarasota Florida - a two hour drive north of Naples where MCA is located. Mr. Longenecker attends most board meetings by phone, and almost never makes any reports to the board. In fact, since his election on 11/1/2016 he has only made 3 reports to the board as of 6/4/2018 according to the meeting minutes posted on MCA's website. On 6/4/2018, the most recent minutes available on MCA's website is for the 1/26/2018 meeting. There were also meetings on 4/20/2018, 4/26/2018 and 5/29/2018, but those meeting minutes have not

been published yet. I attended the meeting on 5/29/2018 and saw firsthand that there were no officer reports. I suspect that Mr. Longenecker was placed on the board at Mr. Hull's request, and Mr. Longenecker isn't doing the job of a Treasurer because he is Mr. Hull's personal friend and Mr. Hull doesn't want anyone looking into the financial operations of the school. In fact, prior to Mr. Longenecker's election to the board, Mr. Hull's wife confided to my wife that Mr. Hull loved having Mr. Longenecker as a friend because Mr. Longenecker is also the principal of a private school in Sarasota, so he is very sympathetic to Mr. Hull. The treatment Mr. Hull gave to me during my brief time on the board along with Mr. Hull's statement that board members just need to show up and vote should be sufficient to substantiate my claims. Mr. Hull certainly appears to have chosen a Treasurer who does nothing except attend meetings and vote. I think it would also be worth asking why Mr. Longenecker is on the board at all. He is an absentee board member. Is it not possible to find another board member closer to the school in Naples? Why do they need to got to Sarasota to find their third member? Point 6 ---------- In further support of a conspiracy between Mr. Hull and Mrs. Lichter to elect me to the board, I will relate a strange conversation that I had with Mr. Marshall. In the spring of 2016, after Mrs. Lichter had failed to get me elected to the board in January but before she succeeded in August, the school drama club put on a performance of the play "Little Women". My son was performing in the play, so I was there to watch. I bumped into Mr. Marshall while waiting in line to be admitted to the play. The conversation between us went like this (paraphrased): Mr. Marshall: We're looking forward to having you serve on the board. Me: I'm afraid that won't happen. You have four board members, and two of them will never vote for me. Mr. Marshall: "Well - We're working on it. We're going to do something about that." I do not know what Mr. Marshall was referring to, but it is clear that he was part of an effort to get me elected to the board. Point # 7 ---------- The claims and statements in this complaint have been for the most part limited to my experiences specifically related to my dealings with the board of directors and Mr. Hull. I can also tell you that there are hundreds of parents, teachers, staff and students with complaints against Mr. Hull related to verbal, psychological and emotional abuse, professional misconduct, threatening and intimidating behavior, dishonesty and manipulation. Their voice is not being heard by the board. Because I don't have direct experience with most of this, I have chosen to keep this complaint focused on the practices of the board. However, I can relate a specific example in which Mr. Hull personally used threats and intimidation against my wife to achieve his goal of driving her into submission. In January 2018, we withdrew our daughter who was a senior at MCA. The primary reason we withdrew her was because we thought Mr. Hull was taking the school in the wrong direction, and we were continually hearing reports from our children about Mr. Hull yelling at students, bringing the senior class to tears on a regular basis, calling teachers incompetent in front of the class, threatening teachers with their jobs, etc. It was clear that Mr. Hull's behavior was taking a severe toll on my daughter, so we withdrew her from the school (I still had 8 children enrolled at the school after withdrawing my eldest daughter). We attempted to raise our concerns delicately with Mr. Hull, and his response was to send an email to all of my children's teachers informing them that my wife and I were not happy with the job the teachers were doing. This was problematic because our complaint was not against the teachers, and we feared that this report from Mr. Hull would upset and hurt many teachers whom we had no complaints against. My wife went to meet with Mr. Hull privately to discuss this matter. During this meeting, she mentioned two things to him: 1. My eldest son was also not happy at the school. 2. She attempted to discuss with Mr. Hull some concerns she had regarding one of the books - Crime and Punishment - that my daughter's class was reading when she withdrew. Mr. Hull showed us clearly that he does not value the truth and he is willing to use dishonesty, manipulation and intimidation in order to achieve domination by what he did next. First, he simply denied that my son is unhappy. He informed my wife that my son is happy at the school and that the real problem was her perception. He offered to take my wife out to the playground to observe him playing in order to prove that my son is happy. He essentially was saying that he knows the level of my son's happiness better than my wife and I do. It was clear that he did not care about the truth - he simply wanted to contradict my wife. Second, he flatly denied that my daughter's class was reading Crime and Punishment. He stated that it was impossible for my daughter to be reading it because the class didn't start reading it until after she left. This was completely untrue, and Mr. Hull knew it. No amount of discussion would convince him that my son was unhappy or that my daughter had begun reading Crime and Punishment before she left. When my wife realized that further conversation was useless, she simply asked Mr. Hull to retract the email he had sent to teachers blaming them for our dissatisfaction. Mr. Hull refused. He stated (paraphrased): "I can't retract that email because you're still unhappy with the school." It was clear to my wife that Mr. Hull was using this email as leverage to drive her into submission. He wanted her to agree that our son was happy and that my daughter was not reading Crime and Punishment when she withdrew. Eventually she told Mr. Hull (again paraphrased): "Ok you're right. My son is happy and my daughter was not reading Crime and Punishment. I'm sorry that I complained." After that, Mr. Hull agreed to retract the email and their meeting ended. Mr. Hull won the argument, and that was all that mattered to him. He was willing to use lies, intimidation, threats and manipulation to accomplish this. I have heard similar stories from many parents, students and teachers. Their voice is not being heard. It is my hope that this report will shed

some light on the problems with the board and administration at MCA and get the attention of someone who can do something about it.

Complaint Confirmed	yes

Keele, Melissa

From: Joe Baird <jbaird123@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, June 08, 2018 2:49 PM
To: OIG
Subject: Additional info for complaint id 926

I discovered some additional information that may be relevant to complaint 926 regarding Mason Classical Academy's board of directors and principal.

The president of the board, Mrs. Kelly Lichter is a business partner to the principal, Mr. David Hull. They are both named as agents of CLASSICAL CHARTER MANAGEMENT GROUP, LLC. The information can be verified here:

http://search.sunbiz.org/Inquiry/CorporationSearch/SearchResultDetail?inquirytype=OfficerRegisteredAgentName&directionType=Initial&searchNameOrder=LICHTERKELLYE%20L170001976410&aggregateId=flal-l17000197641-5622c25f-c664-423e-9f28-f4cea3a4d996&searchTerm=lichter%20kelly&listNameOrder=LICHTERKELLY%20N120000065710

Also of note, Mrs. Gena Smith who is another agent for CLASSICAL CHARTER MANAGEMENT GROUP, LLC is an employee of Mr. Hull as is Mrs. Smith's husband Fred Smith and their daughter (I don't know the name of the daughter).

Please don't hesitate to let me know if you have further questions.

Joe

Detail by Officer/Registered Agent Name

Florida Limited Liability Company
CLASSICAL CHARTER MANAGEMENT GROUP, LLC

Filing Information

Document Number	L17000197641
FEI/EIN Number	NONE
Date Filed	09/25/2017
Effective Date	09/29/2017
State	FL
Status	ACTIVE

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