

McLean County Unit District No. 5
1809 West Hovey Avenue
Normal, Illinois 61761-4339



Dear Search Committee,

Please accept this letter of support for Dr. James Harden. As stated in the more traditional recommendation letter I wrote for him, James is an experienced academic leader whose work I respect. He is student centered, collaborative, and uses data to make important decisions. The purpose of this letter is to speak of James' character, integrity, and moral values. As the Executive Director of Human Resources, James was tasked with making many tough decisions. Though some of his decisions were not popular, I can strongly contend that his decisions were in the best interest of our students and our organization.

On May 21, 2018, I witnessed two administrative assistants ask James for salary increases. James reminded the employees of the negotiated contract between the board of education and the employee union for the administrative assistants. For reasons unknown to me, the two employees, who were closely tied to a member of the Board of Education, orchestrated a campaign to have James removed from the school district. These employees made allegations against James that were false and then misrepresented by our local media. Without doubt, I know the allegations were not true because I was involved in the conversations that supposedly took place and what was reported is not what happened. Several times Dr. Harden was investigated by the Board of Education and each time the allegations were determined to be "unfounded" and clearly stated that James had not violated any district policies. Further, James filed formal complaints against the employees that were trying to have him removed. The Board of Education chose not to investigate any of the complaints presented by Dr. Harden. Rather than interviewing any of the people regarding the complaints provided by Dr. Harden, the School Board President offered James various settlement packages. Frustrated and not wanting to cause issues for the district, Dr. Harden agreed to a resignation settlement.

Within a few days of reaching this settlement the local media requested information via the FOIA process. The local media did not use all of the information, and their reporting of the story was incomplete and very biased against Dr. Harden. The media reported that James was accused of improper conduct, however, the media failed to report that the allegations were determined to be unfounded. The media also failed to provide Dr. Harden's rebuttal to all of the allegations.

In sum, I know Dr. James Harden to be a man of integrity and honor. I truly miss working with Dr. Harden and I am very disappointed that unfounded allegations could disrupt the career of such a passionate educator. As a witness, his former colleague, and the Deputy Superintendent of Unit 5 School District I am happy to answer any question you have about James' character, professionalism, and potential. Please feel free to contact me by email at repperson@parkviewchristian.net, or by phone at 815-342-2583.

Respectfully submitted,

Ray Epperson

Dr. Ray Epperson, EdD
Incoming Superintendent
Parkview Christian Academy