

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



Dear Board of Education,


I write this letter of support for Dr. James Harden. Dr. Harden served as the Executive of Human Resources and Student Services for McLean County Unit 5 School District for two years. During his time in the district Dr. Harden served as a strong advocate for the students, families and staff. His positive "can-do" attitude was infectious and he was always the ultimate team-player.

As you may be aware, in May 2018, Dr. Harden was accused of harassing two administrative assistants. Dr. Harden was placed on administrative leave pending the results of a lengthy investigation. Throughout the investigation, Dr. Harden repeatedly proclaimed his innocence while remaining a consummate professional. After six weeks, it was concluded that Dr. Harden had not violated any laws and/or district policies for harassment.

In December 2018, it was brought to the attention of some board members that Dr. Harden filed a formal complaint citing incidents in which he felt discriminated against. Two weeks later, Dr. Harden was again subject to a "formal investigation." Again, an outside firm investigated Harden and again the conclusion was all new allegations had not violated any laws and/or district policies for harassment.

In March 2019, Dr. Harden emphasized that his December complaint was never acknowledged. A week following his renewed complaint, and unbeknownst to the entire Board of Education, Dr. Harden was then asked to leave the district and was offered a settlement agreement. In the agreement, both sides agreed to not speak negatively of the other. A local media outlet learned of the agreement and requested information via the FOIA process. Unfortunately, the media outlet then misrepresented some factual information and wrote a story that painted Dr. Harden in a very negative light.

In compliance to the agreement with the Board, Dr. Harden has remained silent, even as untruths were printed in the media. I feel it is important that I provide a truthful narrative and a true perspective on who Dr. Harden really is. Much like any organizational board, we have our issues and sometimes breakdowns in communication; however, when these breakdowns negatively impact good people and their livelihoods, I am compelled to make things right! Regretfully, I cannot influence the past, however, I can work to make things right in this moment and in the future.

Without any reservation, I contend that Dr. Harden is a passionate educator who cares for students and their families. In the face of this storm, he has remained upbeat, energetic and positive. Dr. Harden will be an asset to your district and your leadership team and I sincerely hope you will consider him for a position in your district. I have no doubt he will be a role model and mentor for his students. This letter is but a small portion of my recommendation. If you require additional information, please feel free to contact me via phone at 309-.

Respectfully,  
Mrs. Taunia Leffler  
McLean County Unit 5  
Member of the Board of Education