

Salt Lake School District
Superintendent Elizabeth Grant
Members of the School Board
465 South 400 East, Suite 300
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

January 25, 2024

Via: U.S. Mail and E-Mail

Re: Conflicts of Interest and Ethics Questions

Dear Superintendent Grant and Members of the School Board,

As a united community, we are writing to bring recent revelations to your attention regarding serious conflicts and possible ethical violations in the school closure process. According to the Utah Public Officers' and Employees' Ethics Act ("Ethics Act"), it is unlawful for a school district employee to exploit their official position for personal economic gain or to secure special privileges.

The individual in question, Brian Conley, Chair of the School District's Boundary Options Committee (BOC), has been a prominent figure in the school closure process, overseeing hearings, advising constituents, and directing the BOC's closure recommendations. However, serious conflicts of interest have come to light that raise concerns about the integrity of this process and call into question compliance with the Ethics Act:

- Mr. Conley's spouse serves as the Principal of an elementary school in the District, which he reviewed for closure. Her school was removed from the study list and will remain open.
- Additionally, Mr. Conley's stepchild attends another elementary school in the District. This school was removed from the list of 7 and will remain open.

These circumstances not only create a clear conflict of interest between Mr. Conley's public duties and private interests but also suggest a direct personal economic interest in ensuring the job security of his spouse, all of which undermines public confidence in the District and the school closure process.

Given the existing concerns surrounding transparency, lack of necessary data, withheld emails and records, failure to comply with all the recommendations of the Legislative Audit, disclosure, and equity issues in the closure process, these ethical questions compound the issues. It now appears there was never a fair or level playing field in closing schools. The sense of a lack of transparency so often mentioned now appears to have a source. The credibility of evaluations for all elementary schools involving Mr. Conley is now suspect, if not tainted and questionable. Further, it is now impossible to know if the information upon which the Board made its decision is fair and accurate since that information is tainted by Mr. Conley's public duties conflicting with his private interests on several levels. This newly discovered information would give any reasonable person pause and a legitimate reason to reassess matters.

When there are ethical violations, the entire school closure process is fatally tainted, including compliance with the District's Administrative Policy G-5. Compliance with the duties, requirements, and rules of any administrative policy is predicated on acting ethically. Any school, district, board, or agency cannot in good faith claim compliance with its policies when the alleged compliance is the result, in whole or in part, of ethical violations or conflicts of interest.

In light of these findings, we request the following actions:

1. Revoke the Board's January 9th decision on school closures and stay school closure proceedings immediately.
2. Entrust the school closure process to Superintendent Grant and a new BOC.
3. Mandate a new, transparent school closure process with community input, full disclosure of committee members, conflicts of interest, data used, and scoring process.
4. Direct the District to replicate, not close, high-performing schools in the District.

Furthermore, we urge the District to enforce and comply with the requirements of the Ethics Act and District Policy P-1 when violated by District employees.

Your prompt attention to this matter is appreciated, and we kindly request the revocation and other necessary Board actions to be set as agenda items at the February 6th, 2024 Board meeting.

Respectfully,

Concerned Members of the Hawthorne Elementary Community
Concerned Members of the Mary W Jackson Elementary Community
Concerned Members of the M. Lynn Bennion Elementary Community
Concerned Members of Riley Elementary Community
Concerned Citizens of SLC.