

### **An Open Letter to Residents of the Buckeye Community**

During the past seven years, I have responded to different questions that come through the board office or emails, and worked through those questions or problems as best I can. A situation has arisen in the district that I feel needs objective clarification in order to make sure that the credibility of both citizen groups and the school administration can be entirely gauged.

Recently, I have had a series of letters directed to me, as president of the board, sent from a citizen named Dave Mueller. Mr. Mueller and John Sikora have appointed themselves as a two person "Buckeye Audit Committee," and they have given themselves the honorable task to identify any improvements that the district can make financially and structurally. Over the past few weeks they have requested hundreds of documents in order to conduct audits of school practices.

This is a wonderful mission, as the school does not have the resources to complete analyses like they hopefully will. We have always cooperated with legal requests and will continue to do that throughout the administration office for the committee and all citizens. With that being said I am very concerned with the questionable processes and poor results that Mr. Mueller and Mr. Sikora have had thus far.

In a letter sent to me from Dave Mueller on Sept 14th, he stated that he had what he "believes" to be "audio recordings of executive session board meetings, including confidential discussions between school board members." Two days later, after speaking to *The Post* Newspapers and before any direct communication between the committee and the board had occurred, I received another letter stating "it is not necessary to listen to the complete audio to determine that the recording is from the school boards (sic) August 10<sup>th</sup> executive session". The letter later goes on to ask that the board assess accountability for the release of this information and proudly mentions its role in "identifying both waste (Comdoc copier transaction) and mismanagement (breach of confidential information) in just our first two months as a committee."

The problem with these accusations is that the breach of confidentiality never occurred, as Mr. Mueller and Mr. Sikora misunderstood the procedures of the board meeting. They believed that the board should have not recorded the information they heard on the tape. However, what they heard were open-session discussions and they were incorrect to believe the board should have been in executive session.

Without simply calling to discuss this question with the administration, Mr. Mueller posted this letter on his website in a public domain. I can understand the committee's inexperience with school matters, but posting these false claims to the public without clarification is troubling, when its sole mission is transparency and accountability.

I called Mr. Mueller on the afternoon of Sept 17th and explained how he was mistaken. I asked him to take down the accusing letters, as well as offer an apology for not checking his facts and clarifying the standard procedures for the school board meetings. Mr.

Mueller has left the initial letter of Sept 14th on the website, stating in the final paragraph that "It is a clear violation of Buckeye school policies;" referring to what he incorrectly believed was a breach of confidentiality.

On Sunday, Sept 26th, an article appeared in *The Post* newspapers, again quoting Dave Mueller in an interview talking about the "breach of confidentiality"—this story was published nine days after Mr. Mueller was notified of his mistake. *The Post* was asked if anyone tried to contact them to correct the information and the reporter said no one had made a call or even sent an email.

The "identified waste" referred to in the September 16<sup>th</sup> letter concerned a copier contract awarded to Mr. Sikora and his company after the board revised a state bid contract. The savings to the district in accepting Mr. Sikora's bid is still to be realized, as this is a service contract and depends largely on the quality and level of service the district receives. It was a board decision to review the procedure and make the change: the Buckeye Audit Committee had no role in this decision, as they were not in existence until almost a month after the contract was approved. I do thank Mr. Sikora for what I hope to be a mutually beneficial contract for him and the district, but his actions as a salesperson should not be touted as an accomplishment of a committee that did not exist when the contract was awarded.

I offer this information to clarify the integrity of the board and actions that were taken in providing public information to the committee. Their claims were false and their actions to disclose those claims undermined their objective of accountability. The mission of this committee is something that everyone in the community can believe in, but if that mission is merely an empty promise it will divide the district rather than bring us together. I look forward to being able to continue to work towards a more perfect school district and hope that any further actions taken by the committee will be warranted with well-researched facts and open communication with the administration.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. The interest you show for the betterment of the community will allow our children to grow around a concerned and informed citizenry. While we may often disagree on how best to achieve the ends of well-educated children, we can all agree that we aim for what is best for them.

Please feel free to contact the board for any questions concerning this or any school issues that you feel are of importance.

Respectfully,

Gary Horton  
President, Buckeye School Board