

Friends,

I have already heard from many people about last night's school board meeting. I did not want the meeting to end that way, but felt that given the circumstances there was no other good option. Also, I did not stay in the board room because, once the meeting was adjourned, I was concerned that being present with other board members would result in violating the open meetings act by discussing board business with a quorum present outside of an official meeting.

I had planned to share this statement during board commentary. Because we did not make it to that item on the agenda, I am sharing my thoughts below:

I want to share a few thoughts about our board's equity work and the recent coverage of that work in the media and comments about it at our board meetings.

There are a number of fundamental values that I hold, and that I have found I share with my fellow board members, in the work that we do daily on behalf of our students and our community. Chief among these are an unwavering commitment to provide safe, supportive, and caring learning environments--free from harassment and discrimination--for every one of our students, and the same character of working environments for every one of our staff. Sometimes, adhering to these values means making difficult decisions and balancing competing interests as best I can in the face of difficult circumstances. And sometimes, as is always the case when the board make decisions on matters of personnel, I have to do this under circumstances that do not permit me to fully reveal all the facts or the reasoning that informs my decision to the public. That does not mean that I, or any of my fellow board members, have acted to "shield an employee from public scrutiny," or thwart public scrutiny of our own actions. It does mean that we are acting in accordance with the law in a manner that upholds our values as they relate to how we support both our students and our staff.

Nor do I shy away from making difficult decisions as a board member. In truth, it would be far easier to turn a blind eye to the harm that systemic racism has done and continues to do to the futures of our students of color. Instead, I, and in my experience the board members I have served with, have wholeheartedly embraced the challenge of confronting systemic racism in our schools and made a lasting commitment to dismantling it within our district. I am firmly committed to protecting student safety, and I fully support our policies of anti-harassment, anti-bullying, and anti-discrimination, whether we are talking about students of color, LGBTQT students, students who are members of a religious minority, or any other student for that matter.

We have been roundly criticized for not responding in the moment to criticisms of our equity work at previous board meetings. Being deliberative and fully informed is also an important value for me in my work as a board member. I have not responded because I have felt it necessary to listen, process, and investigate the criticisms that have been made. Moreover, I recognize that given the level of emotion and anger directed at the board, no response in that moment would be satisfying or helpful. What I want to share now is that I will continue to support our district's equity efforts, I will continue to make decisions that I feel best support and protect our students and our staff, and I will continue to work very hard to ensure that our public schools fulfill our district's mission of Learning for All.

Thank you.

Shannon Kimball
Lawrence Board of Education