



J. Michael Clára
Salt Lake City School Board
District Two

801-521-3223 • donMiguelSLC@gmail.com
974 S. 1400 W. • Salt Lake City • Utah • USA

1 September 2013

DELIVERED VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Mr. McKell Withers, Superintendent
Salt Lake City School District
440 East 100 South
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111-1891

Re: School Grades and Accountability Website

Dear Dr. Withers,

I wanted to expressed my opposition to the current tone and format of the proposed **School Grades and Accountability** link on the school district's web site, that you referenced in your August 30, 2013- Weekly Board Memorandum.

As a member of the Salt Lake City Board of Education, I am opposed to school district resources being used to express personal political views. I would remind you that both of us have taken an oath of office to uphold the Constitution of the Unites States and the State of Utah.

The new grading system has the force of law because it is the law, it was passed by the Utah House of Representatives and the Utah Senate and signed by the Governor of the state of Utah. I believe the district is exceeding its authority when it attempts to belittle and dismiss the new law as the creation of "some in the Utah legislature..."

The Utah State School Board Association's, **Board Member Code of Ethics, #2** states:

I will uphold and enforce all laws, state board rules and regulations and court orders pertaining to schools.

Desired change should be brought about only through legal and ethical procedures.

It is within that context, that I believe that the launching of a link on the school district's web page, in order to express opposition to the law, in the guise of "information to parents", is unethical and I would strongly urge you to reconsider the tone and content of the proposed link.

"Local school boards are the bedrock of our society, yet they are invisible to the public"

Señor Florez -Deseret News

I am not by any means stating that we should not oppose laws that we feel are unjust or could be improved upon. I am merely stating that I believe we do a disservice to the parents in our district by hijacking an informational web page in order to peddle our own political points of view. There are other venues and forums where those oppositional voices can be expressed, this is not and should not be one of them.

As to the format of the proposed link, I find it to be the least user friendly one could imagine. I would expect more from an institution of education. As to content, it is poorly written, there are misspellings. i.e. comprehensive, required, legislature etc...

It is peppered with innuendos and assumptions, any useful information to parents is buried in the triviality of putting down the legislature and the new grading system. The link as written is repetitive, confusing, and provides little information for parents to understand the new school grading system.

If launched in its current form, I predict that it will only serve to confuse parents because it speaks more of what the new school grading system does not do and then sends parents on a wild goose chase throughout the internet.

I would instead, recommend the site bullet point the "highlights" of the elements contained in the new grading system. I offer the following example of a tone and substance that I believe will better resonate with parents in our district:

What Other Information is Available?

As we often tell parents, an academic grade is based on multiple measures taken over time and the letter grade is a "snap shot" of those measures. If you would like to better understand what the grade of your children's school means for your child, you can find additional information at the following locations:

- *Visit the website of your children's school and review the School Improvement Plan*
- *Contact the school principal, teacher and/or School Community Council*
- *Attend parent teacher conferences and/or back to school night*

These are ways in which you can better understand what assessed proficiency and growth mean, as well as, get information about other measures, such as: student engagement, school climate, progression toward graduation, concurrent enrollment, additional content areas of performance and growth not included in the elements of the new grading system.

What Are We Doing To Address School Grades?

As a school district, we are committed to working with the principal, faculty and community to provide the best educational opportunities possible to insure every Salt Lake City School District student is receiving an education that prepares them for advancement and college or career readiness. We will be reviewing the individual school grade, with the principal at each school, and working with the administration, faculty and community to insure the School Improvement Plans are sufficiently addressing any areas identified to be addressed with more focus.

In the interest of time and space, I share that small example of the tone and content that I would recommend you use if your intent is to truly help parents navigate the new grading system.

In closing, you have done nothing more than given the response that the Senate President predicted when he said: *"those who are opposed to reform"* will have trouble with this.

Might I suggest, that instead of using these 11th hour tactics to oppose the new law, we put our time and energy into embracing it. I seriously doubt that the school grades will reveal anything about our schools that we don't already know. We can then work with the legislature in the coming legislative sessions to fine tune this system.

I much prefer to take responsibility for the assigned grade and put our time and energy into working with our schools to provide them the resources needed in order to achieve student success.

Based on your past practice, I harbor no illusion whatsoever, that you will take my point of view seriously. I have therefore in the interest of transparency, taken the liberty of sending a copy of this letter to the leadership of the Utah legislature and the two daily local newspapers.

Shalom,



J. Michael Clára
Board Member, District 2

Enclosures (2)

cc: Senator Niederhauser, Senate President
Representative Lockhart, Speaker of the House
Ray Parker, Salt Lake Tribune
Benjamin Woods, Deseret News

