



**J. Michael Clára**  
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District Two

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20 November 2013

**DELIVERED:** United States Postal Service  
The Honorable Rebecca D. Lockhart  
Speaker of the Utah House of Representatives  
1413 S. 1710 E.  
Provo, Utah 84606

**Re: Clara Recommendations**

Dear Speaker Lockhart,

On several occasions this past year, Salt Lake City School District, superintendent Withers has expressed his disdain over the formation and work of the Legislative Education Task Force.<sup>1</sup> I want you to know that I do not share his contempt.

Unlike the superintendent, I applaud the great work that has been done. As a new school board member, I have learned so much about the educational landscape in Utah, by either participating, attending or listening in to each of the Task Force meetings over the past few months.

I have also enjoyed in depth and stimulating conversations with members of the Task Force on ways to improve the educational outcomes of our most vulnerable students.

To that end, I would like to offer the following recommendations for your review and consideration. I will list them below and then elaborate on them under the heading of draft recommendations recently published by the Task Force. I will outline and explain my recommendations in this letter and send you the supporting documentation in a follow up packet.

**Michael Clara Recommendations to the Legislative Education Task Force:**

- I. Require Title I schools to have a fulltime parental outreach worker.**
- II. Require Title I schools to have a fulltime counselor or social worker.**
- III. Require local school boards to allow a committee of parents and staff to participate in the interview and hiring process of a new school principal.**

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

<sup>1</sup> Blog: [Local School Boards Can Make a Difference](#) – "Backroom Reality Therapy" For Senator Niederhauser, 8/4/2013 [MichaelClara.com]

- IV. **Require local school boards to conduct at minimum, an annual standardized evaluation of the superintendent and business administrator.**
- V. **Require local school boards to use the proper and legal geographic terminology on ballots and other material when referring to their elected office.**
- VI. **Prohibit the superintendent and business administrator from withholding information from school board members and require that they must provide accurate and reliable information/data in order for school board members to make informed decisions & votes on behalf of their constituents.**

In proposing these recommendations, I believe that anyone one of them could be tailored to only apply to districts of a certain size. These recommendations stem from my own observations as a member of the Salt Lake City Board of Education.

### **Require Title I Schools to Have a Fulltime Parental Outreach Worker**

DRAFT EDUCATION TASK FORCE REPORT -p 3 (Nov 20, 2013):

Parent outreach - Parent outreach strategies may include: 1) calling or visiting parents of students who are falling behind and eliciting their help; 2) regular weekly or monthly communications or newsletters; and 3) daily access to library books to be read at home.

STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK -Education from the Inside Out:

Local Schools: Commitment to Family Engagement

Addressing at-risk issues with parents and students

I often hear teachers in my neighborhood express their frustration in the lack of parental involvement. I hear parents express their dismay at how unfriendly school staff are towards them.

By way of illustration, when school started this year I had several parents contact me and explain that they had reached several obstacles in registering their child for school. For some of them, I would make a phone call to the school to determine how I could help the parents obtain the needed information. For others, I would call someone else in the school and asked them to help the parents navigate the system. Because of the nature of the excuse given for not registering their child, I asked three different parents (two at one school) to return to the school the following day and ask to speak to the principal. I advised them, when you speak to the principal, say the following: "I spoke to my neighbor Michael Clara about this problem, he told me to come to you and that you would help me get my child registered in school".

Each parent reported to me that there was an immediate change in attitude and that the obstacle to enrollment quickly dissolved. One neighbor was so impressed that she brought me a dozen tamales to express her gratitude. She went on to tell me that it was a very frustrating experience and she did not understand why the people at the school were so short and rude with her. She was nevertheless grateful that her child was now attending school and that the staff was now friendly with her.



Tears well up in my eyes as I relate these incidents to you. It irritates me to no end that my neighbors are treated so roughly by school staff. Then we wonder why there is a lack of parental involvement in some schools?

Based on current research<sup>2</sup> and best practices that I have observed, I would suggest that the following concepts could be implemented by the parental involvement specialist:

1. **Build on the cultural values of the student's families**
2. **Stress Personal Contact with Parents**
3. **Foster Communication with Parents**
4. **Create a Warm Environment for Parents**
5. **Facilitate Structural Accommodations for Parental Involvement**

The schools in my community that have high parental involvement have a specialist that is devoted to that task (i.e. Mountainview Elementary, Rosepark Elementary, and Glendale Middle). Without question, parental involvement is an important way to serve the needs of both school and children. I can attest to the fact that the vast majority of parents in my community want to assist their children academically and socially and want to strengthen the relationship between home and school. They just need to be taught how. Having a fulltime parental outreach person on campus will go a long way in overcoming the lack of parental involvement and at the same time encourage parental accountability. This person is there to educate school personnel and parents alike on how to engage with each other in positive ways.

I recommend that the Task Force follow the Title I guidelines in insisting that the schools with the most at risk student population have a fulltime outreach person on campus that can teach parents how to connect the school life with the home. I prefer this concept over measure that are more punitive towards parents that have not had the benefit of good parenting role models.

## **Require Title I Schools to Have a Fulltime Counselor or Social Worker**

DRAFT EDUCATIONS TASK FORCE REPORT -p 6 (Nov 20, 2013):

Create an infrastructure to force agencies to work together to address factors outside the classroom that affect student achievement so that a teacher does not have to perform the role of a social worker.

STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK -Education from the Inside Out:

Local Schools: Commitment to Family Engagement

Addressing at-risk issues with parents and students

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<sup>2</sup> Redirecting Reform: Challenges to Popular Assumptions About Teachers and Students by Clark & Astuto (1994)

One of the leading factors of teachers leaving Title I schools in my community is the added burden placed on them to address the out of the class room risk factors that a student brings into the school.

The Salt Lake City School District has demonstrated the value of having a fulltime counselor or social worker on campus that deals with mental and physical health issues and helps coordinate the solving or eliminating the out of the classroom risk factors that a child brings into the school (i.e. Edison Elementary, Mountain view Elementary, Rosepark Elementary).

Same holds true as in the previous explanation, this person can help lighten the burden that a teacher in a Title I schools deals with. This was one of the solutions proposed as a result of the complaint I filed in February of this year with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR).<sup>3</sup>

The article quotes me as stating the following:

After talking to more than 20 educators, Clara said he wants to discuss four solutions:

- Include the community and teachers in interviews with future principals, who have the biggest impact on staffing. This is done at some schools, but not consistently, Clara said.
- Extend the one-year provisional contracts for new teachers to three years, with a provision to dismiss after two years.
- Hire earlier in the spring, to be in sync rather than behind other districts.
- **To help support teachers, provide low-income schools with additional counselors and family-involvement specialists.**

Having this additional staff person (councilor, family specialist etc...) on hand to deal with these factors will go a long way in unburdening teachers in Title I schools. This in turn will provided the much needed adult stability that is currently lacking in many of the schools in my community.

I recommend that the Task Force endorse the concept of a fulltime counselor at Title I schools so that the out of the classrooms factors does not fall to academic teachers.

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<sup>3</sup> Salt Lake Tribune: School Board Member Blasted for Calling Teachers Ineffective, 03/14/2013



## Require Local School Boards to Allow a Committee of Parents and Staff to Participate in the Interview and Hiring Process of a New School Principal

DRAFT EDUCATIONS TASK FORCE REPORT -p 3 (Nov 20, 2013):

School principal - An effective principal is instrumental in creating a culture where all students are expected to succeed. An effective principal puts systems in place that create accountability for teachers and students and, to the extent possible, make parents accountable for their children's learning. Those systems involve an extensive sharing of data.

STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK -Education from the Inside Out:

Local Schools: Highly Trained and Empowered Principals  
Commitment to Family Engagement

On February 26, 2013, I filed a complaint with the OCR expressing my concern about the high rate of teacher turnover that was occurring in Title I schools in my community.<sup>4</sup> In that complaint I stated the following:

*"Equal educational opportunity requires that the quality of schooling provided to students be similar across schools. In particular, it would require that students in high poverty schools have access to teachers and principals of similar quality to those in schools serving more advantaged students."*

I am including a photograph of me standing with a group of parents at a recent School Community Council meeting<sup>5</sup>. I am not going to mention the school name because I want to say that many of the students that attend this school are about as poor as one can be in Salt Lake City.

Yet these parents care about their children's education. This particular principal goes to great strides to ensure that there is active parental participation. Back-to-school night was standing room only at this particular school.

I rode the bus to this meeting. As the bus was traveling down the street, I saw parents walking hand in hand with their children, on bikes, scooters, skate board, taxi, bus etc... This particular principal has created the type of school climate where parental engagement is welcomed, taught and expected.

I left that meeting and walked over to a neighboring school and there were hardly any parents in attendance. Same neighborhood, same demographics, just a different principal with a different attitude that sets the tone for the other adults in the school and the surrounding community.

Current law is designed to give a community power over their public schools and how and who operates them. We have "bastardized" the current system to the point that it is so dysfunctional that it is almost void of public influence. The current bureaucracy in my district seems disconnected from the lives of teachers and students, uniformed about what is going on in their own system and reluctant to accept any responsibility for the current dismal situation.

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<sup>4</sup> Letter: Disparities In Instructional Resources, 02/26/2013

<sup>5</sup> School Community Council Meeting in SLC, 2013

At the July 9, 2013, Salt Lake City School Board meeting, I challenged the superintendent because he was hiring school principals without bringing the names to the school board for final approval. I explained to the superintendent that state law required board approval. <sup>6</sup> Superintendent Wither's replied "*as a board member that is not your role*". <sup>7</sup>

Other school board members, averaging a decade of service jumped in and agreed with his false conclusion. The board president stated that we would refer the matter to our school board attorney, John Robson who was not in attendance.

At our August 6, 2013, School Board meeting, attorney Robson stated in no uncertain terms that it is the authority of the school board to approve all those hired in the district.

There has been a pervasive pattern and practice in our district where the superintendent has placed poor performing principals in the schools within my community. This immediately causes the exodus of the most experienced teachers from schools that need them the most.

We currently have a principal that tells the teachers he/she does not want to be in a "poor school" etc. These teachers in turn tell the parents who then come and tell me.

We have another principal that decided he/she did not like the professional development that they and the school had to participate in. This principal gets the superintendent to transfer them to another westside school.

Yet another principal who expresses a desire to not be in a westside school has turned the school culture upside down, this particular school and everyone in it are in a downward spiral. Just this past Saturday, I had two parents come to my home and report that at this particular school, children of color are not allowed to check out books from the school library because they have demonstrated that they "do not know how to take care of things", yet Caucasian students are allowed to check out books. The parents reported to me that they have tested the practice of this policy and are certain that it is in place based on what their children and neighboring children have reported. At this point I do not know how real or perceived this report is.

The superintendent is indifferent to the concerns expressed by me, teachers and parents alike. In schools that have an active and vocal parent group, the superintendent allows for the formation of a committee consisting of parents, community members, and staff. They will actually interview principal candidates that have submitted an application. Over a series of several meetings which include interviewing the candidates they will then send three finalist to the superintendent for his approval. The final step would then be approval by the board of education.

I recommend that the Task Force support some form of this process for all schools. At the very least it ensures that Title I Schools are receiving a principal that wants to be there, not one that is forced. Moreover, the process I just described allows for the highest order of site based decision making to occur from the local level all the way up to the elected officials in the local school system.

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<sup>6</sup> Utah Code 53A-3-411

<sup>7</sup> Salt Lake City School District: Board Meeting Audio --July 9, 2013



## Require Local School Boards to Conduct at Minimum, an Annual Standardized Evaluation of the Superintendent and Business Administrator

DRAFT EDUCATIONS TASK FORCE REPORT -p 5 (Nov 20, 2013):

Governance: Concern was expressed that local school boards, and Utah School Board Association training for local school board members, discourage individual local school board members from vigorously advocating for a local school board member's constituency.

DRAFT EDUCATIONS TASK FORCE REPORT -p 6 (Nov 20, 2013):

Recommendations: Consider legislation to clarify the role of local school board members as advocates for their constituents

STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK -Education from the Inside Out:

Local Schools: Meaningful Teacher Evaluation

School Specific Professional Development of Teachers and Administrators

Execution and Input of Standards and Benchmarks

Three days prior to the October 15, 2013, School Board meeting I received notification that the meeting was starting earlier than its usual time. I sent an email to the board president asking why the meeting was starting earlier. The board president replied, "Because we are evaluating the superintendent".

I objected to the evaluation occurring without prior notice.<sup>8</sup> I stated the following in a letter to the board president:

*This letter is to inform you that I will be voting against going into closed session this afternoon for the purposes of evaluating the superintendent. I was only made aware this past Saturday that the evaluation would take place this afternoon.*

*Moreover, the superintendent is in breach of his contract, as it clearly states: "Annually, at least 30 days prior to the time for his evaluation, SUPERINTENDENT shall advise the BOARD of its obligation to evaluate him no later than October 31"*

While I am prohibited from discussing what did occur in our closed door session on that day, I will state that in response to my question as to the evaluation process, the board president informed me of the following via email (prior to the meeting):

*"I was going to request that each board member bring with them ...two things both Janet and McKell do well and two things which need improvement. Then we narrow down from the fourteen into commonalities"*

Are you kidding me!!!! I must confess, that this is one of the few times in my life that I thought I was going to blow a gasket. I was stunned when I read the email.

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<sup>8</sup> Letter: Breach of Contract, 10/15/2013



I thought to myself: Why not evaluate teachers and principals in this same fashion? I submit that the mentality that allows this type of evaluation has its roots in the indoctrination that USBA gives to all school board members.<sup>9</sup> In the school board orientation training, the PowerPoint slides state the following in reference to how school board members should treat the superintendent:

- Know your job and don't interfere with the administration's
- Understand that the superintendent is practicing a career-a highly complex one for which he or she has prepared with formal training and in most cases, years of progressive experience
- Communicate disagreements in private. If you wish to discuss an action of the superintendent that think was improper, do so in private
- Support the superintendent. If someone complains to you about the superintendent, listen but don't agree
- **Know your superintendent. Be sensitive to the superintendent's likes and dislikes, what the superintendent expects of you and the rest of the board, and what the superintendent needs**

I recommend that the state of Utah follow the lead of states like Massachusetts and include superintendents in the state mandated educator's evaluation process.<sup>10</sup>

I submit, it is somewhat hypocritical to standardize evaluations for teachers and principals and not require standardized accountability of our superintendents and business administrators.<sup>11</sup>

The manner in which the Salt Lake City School Board conducted the superintendent's evaluation last month, was in my opinion a betrayal of the public trust.

The superintendent is hired by the board to run the district, and the board is elected by the community to see that the district runs well. More than just another district employee, the superintendent represents to the board the sum total of the organization, so system accountability comes with the title. The school board, for its part, is positioned between the community and its schools to provide that accountability function.

I am convinced that a fair, comprehensive, well-implemented superintendent evaluation can improve the quality of the schools and the success of the students. Accountability in the form of superintendent evaluation is arguably the board's most important function.

I respectfully urge the Task Force to add superintendents and business administrators to Utah's educator's evaluation process. This will go a long way in helping school boards meet their responsibility to their communities, who expect the board to exercise appropriate oversight.

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<sup>9</sup> Blog: [Local School Boards Can Make a Difference](#) –What Really Happen at the December 1, 2012 –USBA Orientation? [MichaelClara.com].

<sup>10</sup> Massachusetts: Educator Evaluation Regulation, 603 CMR 35.00 see Part IIIA Rubric for Superintendent Evaluation

<sup>11</sup> SB 64 (2012 Session)

## Require Local School Boards to Use the Proper and Legal Geographic Terminology on Voting Ballots and Other Material When Referring to Their Elected Office

### DRAFT EDUCATIONS TASK FORCE REPORT -p 5 (Nov 20, 2013):

Governance: Concern was expressed that local school boards, and Utah School Board Association training for local school board members, discourage individual local school board members from vigorously advocating for a local school board member's constituency.

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### STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK -Education from the Inside Out:

Local Schools: Commitment to Family Engagement

When I ran for school board during the 2012 election cycle, confusion arose when the sample ballots were published as they had me listed as a candidate for Precinct 2 as opposed to being the candidate for **District 2**.

As you are aware, redistricting had just occurred and all voters were now in new voting precincts. The numbering system in Salt Lake City starts off with the single digit precincts in Salt Lake City's westside. While campaigning for school board, many residents erroneously concluded they could not vote for me because they were not in voting Precinct 2.

Voting Precinct 2 is one of 11 voting precincts in my 'school board district'.

After speaking to Carol Leer at USOE, Mark Thomas at the Lt. Governors Office, SLC City Attorney, SL County Attorney etc.. I was able to determine that according to state law, the ballot should have me listed as the candidate for **District 2**.<sup>12</sup>

The Salt Lake County Clerk would not change the ballots because she said that she was following the instructions of the superintendent. The superintendent and school board president were unsympathetic to the confusion that the misuse of the terminology was causing in my community.

The Lt. Governor's office stated that although the geographic area on the ballot was incorrect, this was nevertheless a local issue and they could not compel compliance.

Current state law reads as follows:

#### **20A-14-201. Boards of education -- School board districts -- Creation -- Reapportionment.**

*(1) (a) The county legislative body, for local school districts whose boundaries encompass more than a single municipality, and the municipal legislative body, for school districts contained completely within a municipality, **shall divide the local school district into local school board districts** as required under Subsection 20A-14-202(1)(a).*

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<sup>12</sup> Utah Code 20A-14-201

Current election code reads as follows:

**20A-5-303.** *Establishing, dividing, abolishing, and changing voting precincts -- Common polling places -- Combined voting precincts.*

- (1) (a) *After receiving recommendations from the county clerk, the county legislative body may establish, divide, abolish, and change **voting precincts**.*
- (2) (a) *The county legislative body shall alter or divide voting precincts so that each **voting precinct contains not more than 1,250 active voters**.*

I was able to determine that the geographic area for a school board member was referred to as a PRECINCT for many years.

In 1994 HB 84 was passed and changed the terminology to what we read in current Utah code. Specifically that several “voting precincts” comprise a “district” that an elected official represents.

The superintendent and school board president refused to change the terminology to comport themselves to current state law and at the same time clear up confusion with voters in my community. They stated in so many words that there was no penalty for not following the current law.

It defies reason why school districts are okay with promoting voter confusion and suffer no penalty for ignoring current Utah code.

To that end, during the 2013 legislative session, Representative Brian King was kind enough to open a bill file on this issue in an effort to bring clarity to the voters. I had a couple of discussions with legislative research and it was determined that it would be difficult to create a law stating that you have to follow another law.

It was decided that a resolution would be the best course of action. It was titled: **Geographic Divisions of School Districts** and later changed to **Local School Board Members’ District**. We ran out of time in the 2013 general session for this resolution to be considered.

I spoke to Representative King earlier this week and he expressed his support and willingness to propose this resolution in the 2014 general session.

I would ask that the Task Force review the merits of this resolution and encourage its advancement and ultimate passage.



**Prohibit the Superintendent and Business Administrator From Withholding Information from School Board Members and Require That They Must Provide Accurate and Reliable Information/Data in Order for School Board Members to Make Informed Decisions & Votes on Behalf of their Constituents**

DRAFT EDUCATIONS TASK FORCE REPORT -p 5 (Nov 20, 2013):

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STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK -Education from the Inside Out:

Local Schools: School-Specific Professional Development of Teachers and Administrators

Commitment to Family Engagement

Addressing At-Risk Issues with Parents and Students

I believe that the proper application of local school board power would change the face of education in the communities that they serve. This would happen through the positive and appropriate policymaking, equitable and targeted resource allocation and transparent accountability for all stakeholders.

I have been serving on the Salt Lake City School Board for a little under a year. During that period of time I have witnessed the district bureaucracy play a shell game of policy deception with members of the board of education. The bureaucracy is allowed to consistently set the stage for the degradation of civic discourse and at the same time erode the capacity for collective critical thinking on the part of members of the school board.

While I can cite multiple examples, I will present three by way of illustration.

In the spring of this year the school district started the budget process that would culminate in the school board voting on a budget in June and then voting to raise taxes in August of this year.

In the August school board meeting I voted against raising taxes, Salt Lake Tribune reporter Ray Parker who was present at the meeting, reported the following:

**“I am voting against the proposed tax increase ... in large part because there was never any clear reason presented to require an increase,”** Clara wrote in an open letter, which he passed out during Tuesday’s meeting.

**“The information presented by the business administrator was contradictory and inconsistent throughout the budget process. The business administrator either refused or was unable to answer budget questions with any amount of clarity.”**

Clara gave an example involving a program called Enhancement for Accelerated Students. In his letter, Clara wrote district officials said the program lost \$255,676 and would need to be made up in the tax increase.

Clara disagreed.

“In the previous budget cycle, the state gave the Salt Lake City School District \$204,620 for the Enhancement for Accelerated Students program,” Clara wrote. “In the current budget cycle, the state is giving the district \$205,638, which is as you can see, an increase from the previous year. Not a ‘shortfall’ as we have been led to believe.

**“Yet, our business administrator is telling us that this program is \$255,676 short this year because of the Legislature’s failure to ‘fully fund growth’ and a ‘WPU [weighted pupil unit] shortfall.’”**

Clara had another issue. In a postscript, Clara wrote: “I am also troubled by the fact that this year, the school board awarded a 6 percent increase to the superintendent and voted to give our employees a meager 1 percent increase. In an effort to rectify this disparity, I proposed an amended [sic] to the budget in our June meeting that was voted down.”

After Clara mentioned the 6 percent increase at the meeting, Superintendent McKell Withers said, “That is not true.”

Clara wanted to debate the point but was cut off when member Laurel Heath Young “called for the question,” and all debate was stopped, and the vote taken.<sup>13</sup>

Not only were we misinformed and misdirected throughout this budget process, in this particular meeting the superintendent actually ordered the board president to cut off all discussion when I was explaining my NO VOTE on raising taxes. When I objected and asserted a **“point of order”** to the board president, the business administrator was trying to get the police officer to escort me out of the board meeting.

I am of the opinion that the superintendent and the business administrator should not have that much power. Nor should they be able to exercise any type of authority over school board members. Yet they control members of the board by withholding information about district finances and student and teacher data.

More recently, we had an RDA issue come before the school board and again I was denied requested financial information that I needed in order to make an informed vote on behalf of my neighbors.

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<sup>13</sup> Salt Lake Tribune: Salt Lake City School District Board Votes to Increase Taxes, 8/6/2013



I sent a letter to the board president declaring that I would VOTE NO on the RDA issue due to the fact that the business administrator refused to answer my questions about district finances surrounding this issue. <sup>14</sup>

I stated the following in that letter, which bears repeating:

***As a school board member I am entitled to the information that I ask for in order to fulfill my fiduciary responsibilities to my community. I would betray the trust that my neighbors placed in me, if I vote to divert school property tax dollars in order to receive pass through funding that I have not been clearly told how that is being spent.***

***It also concerns me that during this past budget cycle we were told that the district could not meet our budget due to the “legislature’s failure to fully fund growth” and a “WPU shortfall”.***

*Yet I find that our district seems to be awash in cash. We recently discovered that the district had half a million dollars to pay a matching grant. We were recently told that there is money to hire a full-time attorney. Now I am being told that we receive close to five million dollars from Salt Lake City RDA.*

*As I mentioned in a previous meeting, it is like pulling teeth to obtain information on the budget and direct questions about finances are consistently sidestepped. **It seems that the only way to learn about the school budget is to stumble upon it. This is unacceptable!***

*My neighbors have given me the power to act on their behalf by virtue of the November 2012, election. The state legislature has given me the authority over district finances by virtue of state law, yet I am regularly denied or delayed requested information. **Denying me financial information of the district is an insult to my community and I would submit, contrary to state law.***

The final example that I will cite has to do with the iSchool program. On August 2, 2013, the Salt Lake Tribune ran a story about Newman Elementary in the Salt Lake City School District, being awarded a technology grant that would require the Salt Lake City School District to pay close to half a million dollars to participate in the program. <sup>15</sup>

Several neighbors called me to inquire how the district could afford this program after the district declared that taxes had to be raised just to keep existing programs. I also received calls from other educators asking why this particular school was chosen over others etc...

I began to run the bureaucratic school district gantlet in an effort to obtain the answers to the questions that were directed towards me.

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<sup>14</sup> Clara Letter: RDA –West Capitol Hill 10/15/13

<sup>15</sup> Tribune: Three More Utah schools Find Cash For Tech Makeover, 08/2/2013



In the mean time I was able to discover that this matching grant stemmed from SB 284- Educational Technology Amendment. I noted the following language in the law:

***“a school within a school district,  
with approval of the local school board...  
may submit an application to the State Board of Education  
to participate in the program”<sup>16</sup>***

When I asked the business administrator via email to tell me when did our school board approve the district’s participation in this program? I received the following reply:

***“It was anticipated that approval by our school board would happen when the approval for funds were included in the purchasing report”***

Wow! She is saying that this was going to come to the school board on a purchasing report on the consent agenda. Never mind the fact that the law clearly states that school board approval must be obtained BEFORE an application is even submitted.

I eventually had to submit two GRAMA requests in order to ascertain how this decision was made and where the funds were coming from.

Business administrator, Janet Roberts advised me via email that I would not receive the requested information prior to the next school board meeting (two weeks away) as requested because *“a need for an expedited response has not been demonstrated”*.

While I support the concept of whole-school technology deployment. I cannot, however, abide a bureaucracy that consistently exhibits a disdain for the powers and authority of the duly elected institution of the local school board.

If the problem in the Salt Lake City public school system (at the highest levels of management) was just incompetence, we would be immeasurably better off.

Local school district governance is unique to America. Nowhere else in the world is education governed by locally elected school boards. Indeed school boards are **“the crucible of democracy”**. Local school elections in America provide the closest example of democracy for the American people.

One researcher stated: *“..Boards are so disconnected from the schoolhouse and citizen involvement in board elections so minimal that they have become obsolete mechanisms of democracy and have little, if any influence on student achievement”<sup>17</sup>* If this statement is true, I submit that it occurred because local school board have allowed the school bureaucracy to nibble away their authority and purpose of existence.

I would recommend that the Task Force seriously consider a way to bolster the authority of school board members so that they are not at the mercy of an out of control school bureaucracy. I am convinced that local school boards can make more effective use of education dollars if appropriately informed on the particulars of school finances.

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<sup>16</sup> SB 284 –See line 92 (2013 Session)

<sup>17</sup> School in Conflict: The Politics of Education by Wirt & Kirst

In closing, I want to reiterate that local school boards are agents of the state and derive their authority from the state government. Therefore it is in my opinion appropriate that the state legislature would implement laws to help local school boards make course corrections in public education.

Not only do state legislatures have the authority to address a wide range of problems, both inside and outside the schools, but new and innovative measures, such as stronger accountability systems almost always emanate from them.

Moreover, legislatures have enjoyed some notable success. During the 1990's, Texas and North Carolina were generally recognized as the states that had done most to improve student achievement among poor and ethnic minority students. Lawsuits, court-ordered remedies, and significantly increased spending had little or nothing to do with their success. Instead, the credit was largely due to accountability and other innovative measures originating in the state legislatures.<sup>18</sup>

I continue to have a growing sense that real, long-lasting change in our education system is urgent, indispensable and possible!

Shalom,



J. Michael Clára  
Board Member, District 2

P.S. *"In Education, the time we waste today, is a lifetime wasted tomorrow (LBJ)"*

- cc: President Niederhauser
- Senator Reid
- Senator Stephenson
- Senator Osmond
- Senator Urquhart
- Representative Hughes
- Representative King

**Enclosures**



<sup>18</sup> Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas by Grissmer & Flanagan