



J. Michael Clára
Salt Lake City School Board
District Two

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31 January 2015

Delivered Via USPS & District Interoffice Mail

Ms. Heather Bennett, Board President
% Salt Lake City Board of Education
440 East 100 South
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111



Re: SMEAR CAMPAIGN ¹ in the name of the SALT LAKE CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Dear President Bennett,

As you are now aware, I had several teachers forward me a letter ² you wrote to the current Salt Lake Teacher Association (SLTA) President which was distributed to SLTA members on Friday (01/30/15).

In our phone conversation of Friday (01/30/15) afternoon you verbally apologized for writing and sending the letter to the SLTA president, yet you refused to send a written apology and retract statements about me, that you now acknowledge were false.

In the absence of a written retraction from you, I feel compelled to make some attempts to correct the misinformation you are peddling, as your Board letter received a wide distribution.

I must confess, in light of our conversation of last Wednesday night and subsequent email exchanges ³ about "*a hope for a better future*", I am disheartened that you continue to launch written, public attacks against me, this is the second one this week.

¹ Wikipedia: A **smear campaign** is an intentional, premeditated effort to undermine an individual...reputation, credibility, and character... Smear tactics differ from normal discourse or debate in that they do not bear upon the issues or arguments in question. A smear is a simple attempt to malign...an individual with the aim of undermining their credibility. Smears often consist of ad hominem attacks in the form of unverifiable rumors and distortions, half-truths, or even outright lies...Even when the facts behind a smear campaign are demonstrated to lack proper foundation, the tactic is often effective because the target's reputation is tarnished before the truth is known. Smears are also effective in diverting attention away from the matter in question and onto the specific individual... The target of the smear typically must focus on correcting the false information rather than on the original issue. Smear tactics are considered by many to be a low, disingenuous form of discourse; they are nevertheless very common.

² Salt Lake City Board of Education Letter signed by the current and past president to SLTA President dated 01/26/15

³ Michael Clara email to the Board President dated 01/29/15

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

Señor Florez -Deseret News

IN THE NAME OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Moreover, I am troubled by the fact that these types of letters,⁴ are sent out under the auspices of the Board; giving recipients the false impression that their contents are a reflection of the will of the Board.

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The reality being, that the Board had no knowledge that letters attacking one of their own, was being written and distributed in their name. Equally execrable; copies of these letters were never sent to me, although I was portrayed by you as the villain in both of them. How do you justify sending vitriolic correspondence in the name of the Board without that body's approval?⁵

In last weeks letter to the Planning Commission you stated "*As I am sure you know, the powers of the board are vested in the board as a whole, and not in the individual board members.*" I would respectfully point out that the same is true for you, when it comes to yielding "*the powers of the Board*".

I do believe you have abused the powers of the Board by using its name as a weapon against one particular member of that body, your predecessor was no different. If you want to call out a fellow Board member, then do so under your name. If you want to do it in the name of the Board, then first, obtain their approval.

I would ask that the use of correspondence utilizing the letterhead of the Board of Education be placed on the agenda of our next Board meeting, so that we can decide if we are going to enforce our current policy,⁶ or allow you to continue on your present course.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

When viewing the Board letter to the SLTA president, through the lens of the **Ethical Standards**,⁷ I see nothing that "*represents the board with dignity and integrity*".⁸ Can you honestly tell me that this Board letter is "*treat[ing] [a] fellow board member...with respect and consideration, through civil discourse, exhibiting both honesty and decorum...*"?⁹

HONESTY

As discussed in our Friday phone conversation, the words attributed to me from the report¹⁰ that you quoted in the Board letter, did not come out of my mouth. I don't even know what "*negotiated bumping rights*" are, nor would I ever use the term "*poor side of town*".

I was shocked to hear you say, you were aware that Principal Ken Grover¹¹ and Principal Rachel Nance¹² (who were also quoted in the report) were misquoted. The shock comes in that I was not extended the opportunity to confirm that the words attributed to me, were my own.

⁴ Salt Lake City Board of Education Letter signed by Heather Bennett to the Salt Lake City Planning division dated 01/21/15

⁵ Board Policy B-1: Board of Education Legal Status, Responsibilities, and Ethics: I will function as part of a policymaking body, recognizing that authority rests with the board in open session, not with individual members of the board.

⁶ **Board Leadership Responsibilities:** Sign ...correspondence...on behalf of the Board as required by law, policy, or vote of the Board. See Board of Education Handbook pg. 7

⁷ Board Policy B-1: Board of Education Legal Status, Responsibilities, and Ethics

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Collective Bargaining in Utah Schools: Labor Pains in a Right-to-Work State

¹¹ *Ibid* pg 11

¹² *Ibid* pg 23

If three people from the Salt Lake City School District were quoted in the report and you knew that two of them were misquoted, why would you think the third one was accurately quoted? This goes back to what I said at the beginning of this letter, had you sought Board approval, to write a letter in their name, about one of their own; clarity would have replaced assumptions.

Furthermore, I know that you are aware that I never said that “60 to 70% of our teachers are ineffective”, it’s a matter of public record that I did not use the phrase “ineffective teachers” as a verb and I was instead asking a question about data. ¹³

Truly, the “deliberate twisting” of the facts surrounding my use of the word “ineffective teachers” in February 2013, is a product of the “shoulder to shoulder” working together between you, your predecessor, the superintendent and the current SLTA President. ¹⁴

Moreover, I find it ironic that you would attempt to demonize me in the eyes of the teachers. My record speaks for itself. You will recall that while serving my first year on the Board, I made a motion in the June 2013, meeting, to amend the budget, in order to provide our teachers with a 3 % COLA increase. I stated that I wanted to “rectify the disparity” of giving the Superintendent a 6% increase while giving our teachers a meager 1%.¹⁵

That “atmosphere of trust and collaboration” between the administration and SLTA leadership held strong and the teachers received a 1% in the shadow of the superintendent’s 6% that year. I renewed that same request in 2014. ¹⁶

I trust this letter will serve to remedy the false witness you brought against me, under the guise of the Salt Lake City Board of Education.

Shalom,



J. Michael Clára
Board Member, District 2

Enclosures (Not all documentation referenced in the footnotes is included)

cc: Salt Lake City Board of Education
Salt Lake Teacher’s Association Leadership
Salt Lake Teacher’s Association Representatives

P.S. I want to apologize for any problems I might have caused in your home on Friday. After your husband interrupted our phone conversation, I gathered you did not have his permission to be on the phone as there are certain prescribed times for phone usage in your home, I can and want to respect those parameters. Before your husband hung up the phone on me, I tried to apologize and explain that you called me, not the other way around. For future reference, there are no such restrictions in my home, you are free to call me at anytime,

¹³ Tribune: Salt Lake City Board Member Blasted for Calling Teachers Ineffective 03/14/13

¹⁴ Email exchange between Principal Green, Superintendent Withers, Board President Swett – 02/27/13

¹⁵ Board Minutes: 08/06/2013 –Truth in Taxation Letter by Michael Clara

¹⁶ Board Minutes: 04/25/14 – School District Budget Priorities Letter by Michael Clara





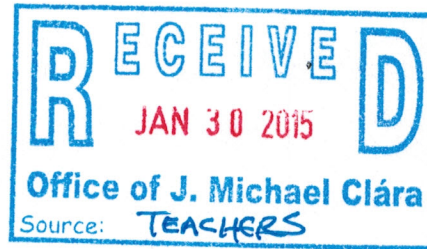
BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

January 26, 2015

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Susan McFarland, SLTA President
5150 South 900 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84117



Dear Susan,

Recently, Parents for Choice In Education published a report addressing collective bargaining in particular and teachers unions in general. In the context of the report, current board member, Michael Clara, was quoted. His statement about union negotiations has prompted us to reach out today: "...the union negotiated bumping rights that give senior teachers preference when it comes to choice of jobs at the better schools. It probably also has something to do with union negotiated contract provisions that make it difficult to fire bad teachers. If they can't get rid of them, do they just dump them on the poor side of town?" Mr. Clara's remarks are inflammatory and inaccurate both in their description of Salt Lake School District's practice in teacher placement and in his interpretation of our contract with the Salt Lake Teachers Association (SLTA).

As the immediate past president and current president of the Board of Education, we want to assure you Mr. Clara acted on his own, without the knowledge of board leadership, past or present. His charge that "60 to 70% of our teachers are ineffective" is untrue and based on his own deliberate twisting of our growth model. As you are aware, he has shared this view in multiple public meetings and media outlets.

Over the past eight years, we have worked to repair and strengthen our relationship with SLTA to create an atmosphere of trust and collaboration. Your leadership as president of the association allowed the board—and Dr. Withers—to work shoulder to shoulder with you, to strategize together on tough issues around student achievement, and to provide opportunities for our teachers to be successful and valued in our district.

Recognizing we have had our challenges, our progress certainly overshadows the negativity and reminds us that we need to continue to celebrate our successes and stay focused on the young people for whom we all seek success in the classroom and in our communities.

Thank you for your leadership, your commitment to advocate for our public school teachers, and for the great opportunities you have given us to work collaboratively.

Warm regards,

Kristi Swett
Immediate Past Board President

Heather Bennett
Board President