

Date: October 30, 2021

By: Tami Rubino

Re: Response to WHO13 inquiry regarding emails written to the Waukee School Board

As I write this, I am gutted by an overwhelming sense of grief over the loss of so many things these past few months: loved ones, time with my family, my privacy, my trust in the foundational institutions of our country like the government and our public schools – and at really low points like now, my faith in humanity itself. At the same time, however, I feel immeasurably blessed by the support of thousands of newfound relationships in my community and beyond, but most of all, my unshakeable faith in God who guides my actions and guards my heart every step of the way.

In early September, my husband – along with three other Waukee parents who connected over their concerns about policies recently passed by the school board - decided to run for the four open seats in the Waukee district. Since my experience was in marketing and operations, I volunteered to run a joint campaign on their behalf in order to save time and money. On August 30, 2021, I setup a political action committee called Warriors & Wolved United with the Iowa Ethics & Campaign Disclosure Board and got to work.

Yesterday, I learned that another parent from our school district obtained copies of emails that I had written to the Waukee School Board and Administration under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). That parent shared those emails with a number of people in our community as well as local news outlets, which I found out when a journalist from WHO13 contacted me about a story she was working on. The journalist said WHO13 was publishing my emails because *“a concerned parent reached out to me about four candidates running for school board, Vin Thaker, Jeff Rubino, Morgan Hughes and Andrea Lawrence. This parent is concerned about the candidates because they are supported by Warriors and Wolves United for Waukee. This parent feels uneasy about their children’s safety in the school district if any [of these candidates are] voted onto the board...and the tone of your emails supports this parent’s fears.”*

I wasn’t sure how my emails to the school board and administrators could possibly be newsworthy or how they could be connected—at all—to Vin, Morgan, Andrea and Jeff’s candidacy for school board...until I put the pieces together about the group of people who have been ferociously attempting to destroy our campaign since day one. This wasn’t going to be a news story about a concerned parent...it was just another dirty, political tactic to bully people like me and the WWU school board candidates off the public service stage.

Initially, I planned to speak with the WHO13 reporter and share my side of the story. Due to a family medical emergency, I did not think I would be able to do an in-person interview so I asked her to send questions via email. She obliged and sent the following:

1. In August, you sent a letter to the board about Equity Standards. You seem to have strong emotions about the district educating students about equity and inclusion. Why do you feel so strongly about it? (Please clarify what you meant by the letter)
2. In your e-mail about the Special Meeting on Masks, the tone in your e-mail sounded angry. What would you like to see happen in the district when it comes to masking?
3. Does your husband, who is running for the district's, feel as strongly as you think about the district's equity standards and mask requirements?

Upon reading the reporter's questions, I became even more perplexed by this whole situation and very wary of the opportunity to "*clarify the tone of my emails and explain myself*" in a 3-minute news broadcast. Why was I being pressured to tell my side of the story in the first place? I honestly believed my personal written communications to the Superintendent and the Board were protected from FOIA by Iowa Code 22.7(18) regarding confidentiality, which specifically excludes: "communications not required by law, rule, procedure, or contract that are made to a government body or to any of its employees by identified persons outside of government, to the extent that the government body receiving those communications from such persons outside of government could reasonably believe that those persons would be discouraged from making them to that government body if they were available for general public examination." The expectation for confidentiality was further acknowledged in an exchange with Superintendent Buck where he stated, "*You have asked that I not share this as you're concerned about how individual snippets may be experienced. I would ask the same.*"

Since I have no idea what parts of my email communication was released to this concerned parent and subsequently sent to local news and media outlets, the next thought that rolled through my head was, "wait a minute—if anyone is going to tell *MY* story, it's going to be me." After all, I have nothing to hide and no reason to be ashamed. So **HERE** are links to the full copies of the four emails I sent to the Waukee board members and Superintendent Buck between July 29, 2021 and October 8, 2021.

With regard to answering the WHO13 reporter's questions, you can read my emails for yourself, but I do believe I explained—very thoroughly—why I have such "strong emotions" about Waukee's Equity Standards. Some people do not agree with my viewpoints and that's okay, but it is not justification for them to use my family's personal tragedies and struggles as weapons to try and win a school board election.

In terms of the reporter asking why the tone of my email about mandatory masking "sounded angry," I respectfully disagree with her characterization. My email isn't "angry

sounding.” It’s passionate because I know too many children on both sides of the spectrum who are being gravely harmed by this issue. I’m also writing passionately because I’m frustrated that the current board President isn’t willing to listen to both sides. She voted again recently to require masks for our youngest learners, she never answers my direct email inquiries with anything substantive and she manipulates school board meetings to silence the voices that she doesn’t want to hear from.

The reporter’s last question about whether my husband feels as strongly as I do about the Equity Standards and mask requirements is not one that I can answer. First, it’s completely subjective and impossible to measure how strongly one person feels versus another. Number two, the reason my husband and I have been happily married for over 20 years and can run a business together is because we respect one another’s individual sovereignty. I do know he would be more than willing to answer those questions for himself if the person asking is genuinely interested in hearing what he has to say.

I’ll end by saying I’m still baffled by what this parent is trying to accomplish by distributing my personal emails to the general public. Whatever the motive is, I am happy to share my thoughts with anyone who is willing to have a conversation. If asked, I would have gladly provided my emails to this parent directly, without forcing it through a FOIA request. I’m proud of my ability to communicate effectively and anyone who reads my emails with an open mind will be hard pressed to classify them as anything but thoughtful, caring and sincere. I’m seasoned enough to know that the only reason people get hostile, vengeful and defensive is when they have something to hide—and that is not something I ever need to worry about.