

November 14, 2016

To: The Dickinson Public School Board

From: Sarah Ricks, President

RE: Dr. Douglas Sullivan's Formal Evaluation Summary

I am pleased to report that all five board members responded to the request for Dr. Sullivan's evaluation. While most ratings were satisfactory, some respondents rated the superintendent unsatisfactory in some areas. Following are summaries of the board's response and representative comments for each area assessed:

1. Relationship with Students and Parents

Comments:

Board members generally agreed that Dr. Sullivan is present in the schools to interact with students. He makes himself available to meet with parents. He investigates student and parent concerns in a timely manner. Board members were uncertain about rules for the "advancement and classification of students." Some board members expressed concern about ACT scores and about enough interventions being available for students at the elementary level. Issues of communication style were also raised.

"During my short time as a school board member, I have received emails and phone calls from Dr. Sullivan concerning issues occurring in the district. He has informed me of incidents that have occurred and asked for further information that I may be able to supply due to my employment."

"I have no reason to believe Dr. Sullivan's relationship to parents or students is unsatisfactory."

"Superintendent is good at listening to concerns when the chain of command is followed."

"He does act quickly to investigate when he hears a parent or student concern. I know that he is present in the schools and that some students really enjoy seeing him. I was told by one parent that he particularly sought to get to know a difficult student at an elementary school. He is very proud of student achievement and doesn't hesitate to say so. He is willing to meet with anyone who has gone through the appropriate steps. Some parents have expressed that they felt their concern wasn't completely understood or fully considered after meeting with Dr. Sullivan. This may be due, at least in part, to Dr. Sullivan's quiet demeanor. However, parents are impressed that he makes himself available to them."

Recommendations:

Recommendations included suggesting that Dr. Sullivan continue to be an active presence in our community. He was asked to reflect on communication style and how he might better convey to parents that their concern has been heard and thoroughly considered even when the answer he has to give is not what the parents want to hear. Board members suggested looking into ways to improve student achievement at both the elementary and secondary levels. Specifically mentioned were the ideas to allow teachers and principals to use a wider variety of educational interventions in their classrooms and buildings and to look at ways to restructure education at the high school such as using a flex mod schedule. Further, the board suggested getting more input and recommendations from teachers as a means to problem-solve.

2. Recruitment/Retention of Staff (licensed and non-licensed)

Comments:

Board members felt that Dr. Sullivan and his staff were doing a good-job, generally, of recruiting and hiring quality people to work in our school district. Board members acknowledged that recruiting is a difficult job and will likely to continue to be an issue facing all educational entities. Serious concerns were raised about the way the situation with the SLPs was handled last year and what effect that might have on retention of staff. Other issues regarding retention were mentioned. Some board members felt that teachers' concerns were not being heard and that some may even be retiring earlier or leaving as a result.

"While I do agree that we have as a district doing a good job in finding and hiring staff, we did have a big issue in this area last year. Specifically, the issue with our Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) last year did not go well. While it is difficult from our vantage point to know and understand all the circumstances that led to the SLPs ultimately filing a valid grievance with our board, I believe that this could have been handled better by Dr. Sullivan. I believe if Dr. Sullivan had better handled this situation earlier when concerns were first brought forth by the SLPs, the issues could have been resolved prior coming to the school board. At the very least, I believe a

more supportive and understanding attitude earlier in the process would have made for a more collaborative approach in coming up with a solution. It sounded like the SLPs felt like their concerns were being ignored. Recognizing that Dr. Sullivan may not have had the authority to grant the ultimate requested relief, he still had the opportunity to communicate better and set up a collaborative approach to finding a solution. This issue also speaks to retention as teachers and other staff who feel respected and valued are more likely to continue working for the district.”

“Dr. Sullivan has delegated responsibilities, and his trust in those delegated with the responsibility is great. I agree with Dr. Sullivan’s self-reflection on needing to require more updates on the hiring effort. Mr. Reep has done what he could to bring in successful recruits for positions that were in the school district. Mr. Reep and his staff have searched out different alternatives to fill vacancies which all schools in the state have struggled with. Dr. Sullivan has been kept apprised of needed assignment transfers within the school district. In turn he discusses solutions as needed with other administrators. In this area, the superintendent has done well with the assistance of other administrators. Dr. Sullivan has informed the board when there was just cause to release an individual from contract. He followed protocol precisely and, in so doing, the school board was able to recommend proceeding to begin termination findings. Dr. Sullivan is very careful on following the negotiated agreements, and he does recommend changes that benefits all involved when necessary. In addressing the “AREA OF PERFORMANCE: Recruitment/retention of staff”, I know that there have been staff that have left because they felt like their hands were tied when it came to the matter of teaching students the standards. Unfortunately, I do not have a firm grasp on the number of staff that left for that reason, but I believe we may lose more if this problem does not get resolved soon.”

“I agree in part and disagree in part with Dr. Sullivan’s self-assessment. I agree that generally we have been successful in finding great people to work in our school district. I think the interview process is thorough and good and that Dr. Sullivan has helped to ensure that the district stays competitive in attracting teachers and support staff. Staffing patterns and district needs are carefully considered and brought to the board. I am always impressed with the detail and forward looking perspective of the staffing recommendations. I agree that we need to continue to look at alternate ways of recruiting as teachers and other school personnel become more difficult to find. I am glad that Dr. Sullivan identified the grievance last Spring as something to improve upon. I disagree with the assessment that he couldn’t address the grievance. While he may not have been able to directly provide the solution that the board ended up delivering, I believe he had other options and at the very least could have communicated with the grievants in a more productive way.”

“Recruiting in this current market is an on-going issue with all employers. Recognizing the fact that other recruitment avenues need to be explored is a good start. I am guessing that recruitment will be a major concern for all schools in the area over the next few years.”

Recommendations:

The board provided a number of recommendations in this area. Several board members recommended that communication with staff be improved. Specifically, it was suggested that Dr. Sullivan work on an outward attitude of understanding and collaboration. Board members would like to see policy, regulation or procedure outlining what to do in future situations when the district is short-staffed in a given area. The board recommended a study of the current culture including surveys of staff. Specific areas of concern and tension were also mentioned for careful study such as superblock and curriculum. Some board members also suggested that the administration consider giving more autonomy in some respects to teachers and principals to allow for creativity and innovation in our buildings. Finally, the board encouraged Dr. Sullivan to continue to explore alternative avenues for recruitment as finding educational professionals may become more difficult.

3. Financial Management Skills (including budget development and implementation)

Comments:

Board members generally felt that this was an area of strength for Dr. Sullivan. Comments reflect that the board finds the district to be financially healthy and that Dr. Sullivan maintains good financial records and practices.

“Dr. Sullivan is correct that the external audits of the school district have been positive, and we will continue to look forward to that. The reports can be found in Central Office or online when it is presented to the board after the audit is performed. Dr. Sullivan is correct that the district, up until now, has done well with the financial status, information on the financial status can be found monthly under financial reports. He kept us up to date with the decision to not hire a few teacher replacements due to the unknown student population. That decision served the district well. I do look forward to hearing of his thoughts for the future, based on current enrollment

and moving into the middle school. Dr. Sullivan, to my knowledge, has other individuals purchasing books, materials, and supplies. We can always look at the itemized listing of expenditures whenever we desire under financial reports each month. As a board we don't really get into daily expenditures, though I do look forward to the district becoming paperless. Dr. Sullivan brings to the whole board, after presenting to the budget committee, any needed large expenditures. He also brings details of the expenditures, such as: why it is needed, who it supports, what it is and the purpose, how we will be able to pay for the item(s)."

"I agree with Dr. Sullivan that he has worked hard in concert with Mr. Reep to place this district in a good financial position even during these difficult economic times. Dr. Sullivan is conscientious about informing the board of changing financial landscapes. The financial records are meticulously kept and thoroughly checked. This area is a great strength of Dr. Sullivan's and of the administration in general."

"The budget planning and expenditures I have seen appear to me to support Dr. Sullivan's view of current budget needs and future expectations."

"I do believe Dr. Sullivan has done a good job in this area. Our district appears to be in good financial shape."

"At this time the district is in good financial shape. Dr. Sullivan and Mr. Reep are proactive in anticipating the district's financial needs."

Recommendations:

The board recommended that Dr. Sullivan keep an eye on the resources we will need moving forward with respect to opening the new middle school and needing more administrative support in the district. Board members encouraged the administration to continue to be wise with our finances as we move into some potentially lean times. Finally, it was suggested that Dr. Sullivan consider how budgetary matters might be aligned with the strategic plan as a matter for future discussion.