

Statement from Board President Max McComb  
Regarding Complaint Made to PAC by Board Member Ken Keefe

August 19, 2019

I have some disappointing news to report tonight.

We found out last week that an Open Meetings Act complaint was filed against the Board of Education with the Illinois Attorney General's office. Unfortunately, the way we found out was when we received a decision on August 13, 2019 from the Attorney General denying the complaint. It turns out that the complaint was filed way back on June 17, 2019 and accused the Board of literally dozens of Open Meeting violations, going back more than two years. We never knew that anything had been filed.

Now, the good news is that the Attorney General denied this complaint entirely.

But what surprises me, and really disappoints me, is that this complaint was filed by Mr. Keefe, and that Mr. Keefe never made any effort to discuss any of these issues about filing the complaint with anyone here at the District, never even shared with the entire board or the superintendent that he was planning to file this complaint. And the complaint is 15 pages long, and in the very first sentence of the complaint he identifies himself as a member of this Board, and the complaint lists out dozens of allegations, broken out into multiple sections, with time-stamps from Board meeting tapes all the way through.

In other words, Mr. Keefe put a lot, lot, lot of time into this complaint, which he filed after he had joined the Board, and he even invoked his status as a Board member when he filed his complaint. And he is entitled to do all of those things. And honestly, if Mr. Keefe or anyone else has concerns I hope that you raise those concerns. But what disappoints me is that Mr. Keefe did it all in complete secrecy. There was no transparency from Mr. Keefe, no openness from Mr. Keefe, no attempt by Mr. Keefe to let us know he had filed this complaint. And that is really disappointing as we attempt to establish positive relationships and work together. That is what our meeting on August 5 was all about.

Another disappointing fact is that in the May 20, 2019 Board of Education meeting, some of these concerns about the Open Meetings Act were expressed by Mr. Keefe and several other board members. After that time and moving ahead, these issues were and have been addressed, and the board is committed to making the improvements that are needed. As one example, it was brought to the attention of the board of education by Mr. Keefe that the minutes of our closed session meetings were too general and too vague. We immediately addressed this moving forward and in fact went back and revise the minutes of several past meetings. In terms of audio recordings failing, we were not aware that had happened, and therefore couldn't address it immediately.

So, here is what I would like to suggest.

First, we will post Mr. Keefe's complaint and the Attorney General's denial on our website. It's unfortunate that all of this originally happened in secret, but now that we know about it, it's important to be completely transparent about it.

Second, I want to encourage everyone on the Board to keep your Open Meetings Act training up to date. And while you're only required to take it once, when you come onto the Board, it's a good area for some refresher training, especially if you've been on the Board for a bit.

Third, I want to encourage everyone to raise concerns they have – whatever those are, whether it's Open Meetings, or a personnel matter, or anything else – with me or the superintendent. The system that we have works best when we are all open with one another. That is not currently happening.

And finally, I want to recommend that the Board consider bringing in an IASB rep for further Board training. We did this on August 5, and it is clear we have more work to do.

In closing, I think this is a good opportunity for the Board to focus on working together, on openness, and on the transparency that was talked about so much in the election. We are committed to being transparent and accountable to our stakeholders, but I think it's also important for Board members to be accountable and transparent to one another. I'm disappointed that no one told us about this complaint, I'm certainly happy that it was denied, but I'm mostly concerned about this Board working together and moving ahead so that the district can continue its excellence, so we can effectively serve our families and students, and so we can and also continue to grow and improve. All of this takes leadership from the top of the organization—that is us, and we need to decide and commit to working together.