

MEMORANDUM

TO: Media Representatives

FROM: Dr. Constance S. Hall

DATE: February 17, 2016

RE: Request for Comment

Over the past week, a series of text messages I exchanged last fall with a staff member have become the central focus of attention for this school district and for me as a Duval County School Board member. I regret that this has become such a great distraction, impeding our ability to address our sole and most important responsibility – the academic excellence of Duval County students.

There is no greater honor that can be bestowed upon a citizen than being elected to serve other citizens. My constituents in District 5 have entrusted me with the enormous responsibility of overseeing the quality of the education their children receive. I have been provided this opportunity and do not take for granted the established duties of this office—supporting constituent needs; setting policy; establishing district goals; determining budget priorities; analyzing operations and processes; and leading the recruitment, selection and evaluation of our sole employee – the superintendent;

With increasing demands for educational excellence and fiscal accountability, school boards must develop and maintain skills and knowledge to positively impact and influence student and district success.

As we face an onslaught of failing schools just released this past Friday, 21 Duval schools received an “F” grade; more than 50 percent of them (11) are located in my district. These poor outcomes fuel my continued frustration with the lack of leadership, respect, and collaboration exhibited by our Superintendent.

While my text message comments were an expression intended for a single colleague, they do illustrate the level of frustration and increased concerns I have about the superintendent and the state of academic achievement for all students. I sincerely apologize that the reference I used to describe his deliberate acts of disrespect was offensive. That was not at all my intent nor does it reflect my commitment to and demonstrated support of services that help all students reach their full potential. It is this same mission that Board members seek to create for the Superintendent.

There is no secret that I, as a Board member, recognize that the superintendent lacks the leadership skills exhibited by successful superintendents that lead successful districts. I have worked for and with 6 Duval County superintendents, worked collaboratively with state leaders as accreditation team members charged with evaluating the effectiveness of districts across the southeastern region of the United States. I campaigned on the belief

that while we celebrate pockets of success across this school district, it is time for the successes to permeate across this entire school district.

As a first-time superintendent, just like any other first time CEO, there is a lot to learn about the work environment, communities and stakeholders, and efforts that build trust, teamwork and efficiency. In fact, as part of the Superintendent's professional development plan, the Board hired a Coach several months ago to support him and strengthen his growth and development as a leader. Based on an egregious act of disrespect exhibited by the superintendent a few months ago, I and two other Board members issued a letter, addressing his inappropriate behavior. These are efforts that demonstrate an ongoing mission to help him succeed. Yet, what has he demonstrated?

The colleagues I serve with on the Duval County School Board are Jacksonville natives – born, raised, educated, and employed in this city for decades. We each have a commitment to make our school district better. Our constituents elected us to do so, requiring us to hold Dr. Vitti and any superintendent accountable for the academic excellence of students.

I commit to efforts that contribute to a conducive environment and look forward to learning more about how Superintendent Vitti will improve our schools in this latest round of poor academic outcomes. My tough questions will continue; my expectations will remain high; and my commitment to the students and constituents of District 5 will grow stronger.