

*Stanley Gully
115 Petticoat Lane
Annandale, NJ 08801
stangully@gmail.com*

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Clinton Township Board of Education
Lebanon, NJ 08833

Re: Evaluation and Contract for Kevin Carroll

Dear Board of Education,

I want to thank you for your service to the schools, students, and broader community. Your role on the Board is crucial to our county and schools because either directly or indirectly you influence the future of our children and the economic viability of our county. I realize it is a time-consuming and often thankless job and the fiduciary rewards are limited, to say the least. I genuinely thank you for your involvement in the Board. Also, I want to thank Mr. Carroll for his service to the district even though some of the comments that follow are critical of his performance.

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Stan Gully and I am a tax paying member of the community and a parent of two children in the school district. My wife and I are also members of the faculty at Rutgers University. She and I are experts in the areas of learning motivation, leadership, and recruiting and staffing. We also teach courses on topics such as performance appraisal, training and development, human resource strategy, and team effectiveness. I have won teaching awards in my school the last two years in a row. I mention these facts to highlight that I have background experiences, knowledge, and expertise that relate to the topic at hand. For example, I'm familiar with the impact of educational systems on the quality of students in the university setting, the challenges of providing a stimulating and high quality educational environment, and the importance of developing and supporting a curriculum that cultivates student excellence. I understand how to create and implement effective evaluation systems for performance management and I'm familiar with research on leadership and administrators that relate to effectiveness and efficiency in a wide variety environments.

I understand that Superintendent Kevin Carroll is to be considered for a possible contract renewal on June 27, 2011 and this contract may extend for 3, 4, or 5 years. I also know that failure to act on the contract results in an automatic renewal.¹ I am not a person prone

to political activism and I have no personal issues with Mr. Carroll; in fact, I have enjoyed my conversations with him. I am also not a person who wishes to say anything critical of another person's performance. However, I feel it important as a parent and tax-paying member of the Township to speak up if I see issues that threaten the educational, and therefore, economic viability of our community.

I apologize for the length of this letter but I wanted to be sure to document and detail my concerns fully. I will provide a preview in the beginning and a summary at the end so you can simply go to those sections if you wish to understand my key points. The intervening pages are the documentation and support for the statements and arguments I make. I hope you take time to read this entire letter because I have carefully researched the points made by talking to constituents, looking at NJ administrative code, doing background research on leadership styles that determine superintendent effectiveness, calling the County Superintendent, contacting the NJ School Boards Association, and interviewing those affected by the Board's and Superintendent's decisions. These comments are not knee jerk reactions without foundation.

As a preview of my comments, here is what I wish to state:

1. The Board has a critical responsibility to represent the interests of our children, teachers, administrators, and the broader community. This is a complex task requiring attention to multiple constituencies. The community is losing trust in the Board and it is time to reestablish it.
2. The quality of the educational system influences the ability of our children to realize their full potential and the economic viability of our community through enhanced property values. It also affects the fabric of community life by ensuring that our kids become gainfully employed and/or highly educated graduates. The quality of the educational system also raises average family income.
3. The Superintendent plays a critical role in influencing the quality of the educational system and the quality of his or her leadership has a direct impact on our children.
4. The Board must effectively and rigorously evaluate any Superintendent². The process must be clear and transparent to be perceived as fair³, even if the actual meetings reviewing the Superintendent are private and protected (per administrative code). The goals, metrics, procedures, and overall process regarding the evaluation of the Superintendent should be legally open to the public⁴.
5. The Board does not seem to have evaluated the Superintendent with input from teachers, parents, administrators, and the broader community or it has failed to communicate how this has been done. The Board should evaluate itself to ensure that its process and activities appear fair.

6. Mr. Carroll does not have a clearly defined strategy for elevating our school district, and he has not engaged in collaborative goal creation to drive educational success. Because his leadership style is autocratic and he makes decisions without the input of informed stakeholders, he is a poor fit with our school district.
7. It is inappropriate and irresponsible to award any contract without taking into account input from multiple stakeholders, including the tax-paying public and parents. In fact, as I shall argue later, NOT awarding the contract is the only appropriate decision.

The next section of the letter provides arguments for the positions taken, and where possible, describes supporting evidence for the points made above. The final section summarizes the key points.

Point 1: The Board has a responsibility to represent the interests of all stakeholders and the community is losing trust. It is time to reestablish it.

The Board serves a critical role in overseeing the Superintendent and associated goals and strategies. It also oversees curriculum, personnel, and financial/budgetary decisions. There are many stakeholders represented by the Board, including children, teachers, administrators, parents, tax payers, and other members of the community. Obviously, it isn't possible to keep all stakeholders happy but it is possible to ensure that all voices are heard. The Board is the only body in a position to represent all of these varied interests. Thus, it is critical that the Board not simply go along with decisions as they are made or to go with the status quo. Instead, the Board must play a critical, evaluative function regarding all decisions that are made.

We are nearing an important inflection point regarding Superintendent Carroll. I place an important part of the responsibility for negative dynamics unfolding in the school district directly on his shoulders. I have spoken with many people, including teachers (not those of my children), administrators, parents, and others in the Township about the educational system, Board, and Superintendent Carroll. There are serious concerns that have gone unaddressed.

Some members of the public have communicated their strong negative opinions. For example, on April 22, 2011, Nick Corcodilos at ExMayor.com⁵ stated: “Historically, the CTSD Board of Education (BOE) has demonstrated that it is far more concerned with getting budgets passed than ensuring your tax dollars are spent on teachers, on instruction and in the classroom. The problem is not just how much money the BOE wants — but with how the BOE spends that money.”

He goes on to state:

“Yet in 10 years our students have never had adequate textbooks to bring home. Kids at North all have books. Our kids get handouts. Meanwhile, the textbook budget is lower than last year. “

And:

“...everything seems more important to the BOE than our teachers, who’ve worked without a contract for over 10 months. But the board just tried to renew Superintendent Kevin Carroll’s contract months before it was due, offering the lame rationalization that they “need him” to implement “the plan” over the next several years. The real reason for extending Carroll’s contract was obvious to the audience of irate parents: To avoid the possibility that new members of the BOE might vote against renewing his contract altogether.”

Believe me, the comments expressed on the blog are far from unique. I’ve heard similar comments from various quarters numerous times. And I have similar concerns. How can we not have textbooks? Why did the Board push for an early contract renewal? Why was a 4% raise offered by Mr. Carroll when teachers and other staff were working without contracts?

I have heard repeatedly from parents and people working within the school district that they have been unhappy with Mr. Carroll’s leadership. I will articulate details about why I think this is the case later.

The community has sent repeated and clear messages about their confidence in the Board and in Superintendent Carroll. Numerous budgets have failed to pass. When I have listened to reasons that people have voted down previous budgets it is clear that it hasn’t been just because of economic hardship, although that does figure into the vote. What is most clear is that the Board and Superintendent Carroll have lost the trust of the community. I remember in winter listening to a parent I had never met attacking the unethical practices of the Board and the Superintendent. At the time, I was shocked by the vitriol because I knew almost nothing about the underlying issues that caused her anger. She mentioned favoritism in salary decisions, financial waste, lack of concern for child safety, and nasty insider politics. She stated that she couldn’t wait until the next budget vote so that she could vote it down. I believe these issues are also part of the reason that incumbent members of the Board are being voted out and that people are anxious to replace them when any open seat becomes available. It has gotten bad enough that parents felt compelled to form an external committee to communicate their concerns to the Board entitled “Concerned Parents of the Clinton Township School District.”

I realize that Mr. Carroll may wish to take credit for having the recent budget passed. I would disagree with this assessment. Having spoken with both parents and non-parents in the Township, it is my belief that the recent budget passed only because of the clear and dedicated activism of some of the new Board members.

My questions to the Board are: What is it going to take for the members to get the message that the community has lost trust in the Superintendent and the Board? What will it take for all of us to recognize that things need to change or budgets will be voted down again, incumbent Board members will be voted out at every chance, and parents and taxpayers will clamor for change that never comes? In the meantime, our educational

system will continue a downward spiral, and our children will pay for our indecision or poor decisions.

Point 2: The quality of the educational system affects tax-payers with and without children in the district. It affects the very quality of life in our community and influences the future of our children.

The Board must ensure that the educational system in Clinton Township remains strong because of the large economic and social impact it has. The quality of schools in our area affects all aspects of our community. If students don't receive a proper education then they will have fewer opportunities for advanced education or for high quality gainful employment. The education of kids from K through 8 lays the foundation for a life-long passion for learning and establishes the fundamentals for future advanced learning.

Our students and kids face a globally competitive environment and we have to give them the skills and capabilities to succeed. As I mentioned, I teach at Rutgers University and more and more I see international students scoring at the top end of the standardized tests. They are almost always multilingual and they have more knowledge than many of our domestic students about math, science, and global politics. In conversations they have told me that our domestic elementary school students are learning material that is 2 to 3 years behind what they learned in their home country. Getting high scores on the SAT and ACT is easy for them because it is material that they cover in middle school. How are we to compete with these global pressures without creating an educational system that instills a passion for learning? Providing a foundation for quality education is not only important to our students and community, it is critical to the future success of our country.

Perhaps less obvious is the potential impact of a high quality educational system on the local economy and property values. Areas with good schools tend to be more affluent and see fewer foreclosures.⁶ In a down economy, real estate values remain stronger in areas with high quality schools than those in weaker educational districts.⁷ As an example of the type of impact the Board and Superintendent have on the economics and real estate values of a community, a study by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis⁸ showed that the price premium for a house in an area associated with a better school increases as school quality increases, even after controlling for other neighborhood characteristics and demographics. The real estate effect was a curvilinear premium ranging from 9% to nearly 16%, with a constant premium of about 11%. There are about 4,000 households with a median value of \$430,000. Multiplying it out, the quality of the school district can have an impact of \$189 million on real estate values. Even if my numbers are not exactly on the mark, they highlight the potential impact. And this doesn't even address the employment implications for students, tax returns, value of having higher income families in the area, etc.

Because a solid educational foundation is so critical to the students, community, and country, it is incumbent on the Board to carefully select, develop, and evaluate the Superintendent of the district because he or she can have a profound effect on educational

quality. In fact, this is the duty of the Board as detailed in N.J. Administrative Code, stated by the County Superintendent⁹, and the New Jersey School Boards Association¹⁰.

Point 3: The Superintendent has a potent influence on the quality of the educational system and his or her leadership has a direct impact on our children.

The Superintendent and Board have a powerful influence on the quality of our educational system. In particular, the nature of the Superintendent's leadership is a key factor that drives educational success or failure. Research has shown that Superintendents can have a significant impact on the quality of an educational district.¹¹ In particular, district leaders can establish common goals that will improve overall student achievement, while maintaining teachers' stylistic freedom, creating a coherent and positive culture that supports teacher involvement and success.

This statement is not simply based on opinion, it is based on sound research.

For example, one study investigated determinants of school district efficiency (efficient use of school funds, cost per student, etc.) and effectiveness (e.g., student standardized test scores, student confidence, student satisfaction, etc.).¹² This study included surveys sent to 364 secondary schools, 14,227 teachers, and 24,874 students.

The conclusion reached was that factors that drive efficiency are distinct from those that drive effectiveness. Focusing on structure, control, and external factors drives efficiency. Yet, a focus on efficiency alone can diminish trust, morale, and engagement. In contrast, focusing on internal, person-oriented processes and flexibility drives effectiveness. Balancing these factors yields organizations that are both efficient and effective. The organizations that effectively met all sets of goals had clear structure and direction combined with a positive work culture and climate that supported administrators, teachers, and students. In a related study involving 298 schools and 13,808 teachers¹³, it was found that aggregate teacher satisfaction and attitudes were significantly related to school performance. These studies clearly show that school culture and teacher attitudes matter, and that administrator leadership can influence teacher attitudes and student performance.

Based on conversations, my assessment is that teacher morale has not been moving in the positive direction under Mr. Carroll's leadership. I have been told by a number of people that teacher morale has never been so low.

Is there empirical evidence that Superintendents have a direct impact on educational quality through their leadership? A study was conducted using meta-analysis to combine the results of 27 separate studies, with 2,714 districts, 4,434 ratings of superintendent leadership, and 3.4 million student achievement scores¹⁴. They found district leadership was significantly correlated with student achievement such that a 1 standard deviation rise in superintendent leadership scores corresponded to a change in average student achievement from the 50th percentile to nearly the 60th percentile. In particular, they found collaborative goal-setting that involves all relevant stakeholders, including office

staff, building level administrators, and board members in establishing goals for their districts was critical for success. They also found commitment to those goals was critical and monitoring both achievement and instruction was an important part of the process for excellence. Effective superintendents worked with the Board to align efforts and support district goals. Finally, the superintendent had to make choices to focus and use resources to support the attainment of the specified goals, even if it meant cutting initiatives that were not aligned with the district goals.

My observations suggest Mr. Carroll's leadership is inconsistent with recommendations drawn from the findings of these and other studies. Repeatedly I have heard or observed situations in which Mr. Carroll has attempted to implement changes without working collaboratively with the Board, teachers, administrators, and parents in the district.

Mr. Carroll's attempt last summer to reconfigure the Middle School away from the embedded team teaching model without input from the community threatened the quality of the curriculum and education quality in that school. The team teaching approach has the strong support of teachers, students, and the broader community. The lack of transparency while he tried to make these changes also greatly undermined the trust of teachers and parents in his leadership. It is important that a Superintendent partner with teachers, parents, and the community and not try to make decisions without communicating and collaborating with them.

Mr. Carroll's willingness to engage in oral contracts without Board involvement of all members, implement new curriculum and teaching structures without teacher or parent input, purchase unneeded or inappropriate instructional materials, and push through technology expenditures despite Board, teacher, and public concerns highlight his lack of collaborative goal setting and leadership. By the way, I'm all for technology in the schools. It is just that we need to have clear goals and strategies for its implementation in the district.

Last night's discussion about the ARRA funds is indicative of the lack of leadership. Mr. Carroll and the Board have had 2 years to consider the use of the nearly \$400,000 in funds and how they might be used to achieve district goals. Now that the funds are nearly depleted, we are finally talking about connecting the use of those funds to district goals and strategies. As one Board member noted, he has been trying to talk about these issues for more than a year and half.

I'm pleased to know that previous expenditures have helped teachers and students. I'm sure that any expenditures for any teacher or student in the district could help them, so this is not surprise. The surprise is the process used to determine the how to spend the money. Mr. Carroll's initial response to the provision of ARRA funds was to create a wish list with input from a limited number of stakeholders. But this is a start, not an end point. Mr. Carroll has had two years to expand the vision for the use of those funds beyond a wish list.

A wish list is not a strategy. A wish list does not define district goals. A wish list does not create compelling and sustainable change. I will freely admit that in the end it is possible the exact same decisions would have been made regarding the use of those funds after discussing opportunities to invest them with the Board, teachers, and administrators. I doubt that would be the outcome, but it is possible. But the outcome is not the process. If one involves multiple stakeholders and perspectives and connects the open and transparent process to district goals and strategies, then the communication is clear, the process feels fair, and you can be sure that you have made the best possible use of the funds available. Instead we have an echo of the concerns expressed about Mr. Carroll that we have repeatedly heard about the lack of collaboration and information seeking in the decision-making process.

Point 4: The Board must effectively and rigorously evaluate any Superintendent and the process must be clear and transparent.

The Board must effectively and rigorously evaluate any Superintendent¹⁵. As you know, it is a legal requirement of the Administrative Code for the Board to review the Superintendent annually. The board is supposed to annually review and revise, as necessary, an evaluative instrument used in the evaluation of the CSA, based on the goals and objectives of the district (N.J.A.C. 18A:17-20.3). What is the evaluative instrument?

The goals, metric, process, and opportunities for input must be clear and transparent to be perceived as fair.¹⁶ The system for evaluation is a matter of public interest and it is reasonable for the public to request information on the process from the Board¹⁷, even if the actual evaluation meetings with the Superintendent are private and protected (per administrative code).

Has the Board undertaken any effort to connect the methods of evaluation to the research based findings of superintendent leadership effectiveness? Has the Board collaborated with administrators, teachers, parents, and the broader public in identifying and establishing the methods of Superintendent evaluation? Has the Board made public the details of procedures and metrics used to evaluate the Superintendent? This is in the public interest.

If the Board is evaluating Superintendent performance only on the basis of student achievement, then the public should know. If it is evaluating the performance only on the basis of per student cost, then the public should know that. If it is both, then the weighting of each as input should be stated. If it is broader, and includes administrator, teacher and student reactions, then we should know that. What are the metrics? If you do a survey, who is surveyed? What are they asked? I would like to see this information and if the Board is reluctant to share information on procedures it seems discoverable under OPRA.

Point 5: The Board has not included the perspective of all stakeholders in the evaluation process of the Superintendent or it has failed to communicate the process. The Board should engage in self-evaluation.

To my knowledge, the Board has evaluated the Superintendent without clear input from all teachers, parents, and broader community. I have spoken with numerous people who should be involved in the evaluation process, none of whom can confirm that data collection or anonymous surveys of any type were conducted to evaluate Mr. Carroll's performance.

I am not aware of any data gathering, fact finding, or evaluation with the public in preparation for the upcoming vote on his contract. No one with whom I have spoken can confirm data or information collection. If the Board has engaged in a thorough evaluation using metrics and data from multiple sources, including public input, then it has managed to cloak its procedures and efforts in a veil of secrecy that would have made the people working in Area 51 envious. Either the Board has completely failed to communicate its activities in these areas or it has completely failed to engage in them.

Furthermore, there has been limited opportunity to discuss Mr. Carroll's performance at the Board meetings. I was told that the public would have a chance to speak to Mr. Carroll's performance on June 27th, the same day as the decision to renew or not renew his contract was to be rendered. Why did we have a special meeting on solar energy and not one on Mr. Carroll's goals, visions, and accomplishments just before contract renewal? Why was an Executive Session added to the end of the June 13th meeting on solar energy to discuss Mr. Carroll's evaluation prior to actively seeking public input?

When I heard that public comments were to be made on the same night as the contract decision would be made, I was upset because the public perspective must be given weight as input into the process, and this takes time (not a few hours). The notion that tax payers would have their say the same night as the contract decision is made suggests that our input is neither valued nor taken seriously.

Any reasonable organization undertakes a thorough evaluation before awarding expensive long-term contracts. Nearly 30 years ago the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) stated that "informal evaluations cannot provide the board with a complete picture of superintendent's effectiveness in carrying out her (his) complex job. Regular, formal evaluations offer boards the best means of assessing their chief school administrator's total performance."¹⁸ In 1993 a commission for the AASA stated that all superintendents should be held accountable for 8 professional standards, including leadership and district culture, policy and governance, communications and community relations, organizational management, curriculum planning and development, instructional management, human resources management, and values and ethics of leadership.¹⁹

How has the Board undertaken assessment on these or any other standards? Have parents been surveyed for their perspective on Mr. Carroll? Teachers? Principals? Administrative staff? Tax payers? Do we have metrics showing that we are making gains academically? Are students learning more or more engaged? The Board plays a critical role in overseeing the effectiveness of the quality of education in the district but my impression

is that limited information has been gathered about reactions to Mr. Carroll's leadership (or lack thereof). If the Board has been effectively evaluating Mr. Carroll, it has not clearly communicated the process in advance of the impending contract renewal.

The Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) is the Department of Education's monitoring and evaluation system for public school districts.²⁰ Under "Communication" in the district performance review form for governance it is stated:

"The school board or advisory board provides accurate information and, together with fellow board members, interprets to the staff the aspirations of the community for its school. (N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(g))"

How can you do that without input?

It also states:

"The school board or advisory board has developed and implements a policy for obtaining citizen input in policy development and implementation."

We should have an opportunity to influence policy around the evaluation process for the superintendent. We should have an opportunity to express our aspirations and thoughts about the superintendent's performance.

We should have an opportunity to hear from Mr. Carroll about his excellence, achievements, goals, strategies, plans, and challenges.

When I attended the last BOE meeting on May 24th, I was stunned at the lack of meaningful content in Mr. Carroll's report. Mr. Carroll had a wonderful opportunity to share with us his goals, strategies, and accomplishments for the school district. I know if I were a superintendent coming up for contract renewal that I would take the opportunity to highlight my previous successes and to convey my enthusiasm for the future by going over plans and opportunities.

Here is what the May 24th agenda listed for Mr. Carroll:
Mr. Carroll will present the following to the Board of Education:

1. Enrollment
2. Suspension Reports
3. Strategic Plan
 - a. Student Achievement
 - b. Productive Citizens
 - c. Supportive Environment
 - d. Community Partnerships
4. Budget

Instead of highlighting his contributions and accomplishments to the public prior to coming up for reappointment, we heard about enrollment numbers (briefly), two

suspensions, and then Mr. Carroll had some students do a presentation on their active promotion of recycling projects. The kids were great, to be sure, but substituting them for an important part of Mr. Carroll's report is not clear, engaging, collaborative, and transparent leadership. What are his goals for the rest of the school year, summer, and next academic year? What progress has been made on any current goals he is pursuing? What are the challenges? Where are the opportunities? I was genuinely floored at this missed opportunity to communicate anything meaningful during this most public of communication opportunities.

I want to have an opportunity to hear input from the public about Mr. Carroll's performance. The Board has not actively engaged with the public and teachers to learn how those affected by Mr. Carroll's decisions have reacted to his leadership. This includes parents and tax-paying members of the community. Why haven't we had a chance to share our thoughts about Mr. Carroll to date?

I cannot believe that the Board will undertake no discussion or decision making regarding the reappointment of Mr. Carroll prior to the June 27th meeting if the decision to renew or not renew his contract takes place on that date. If the Board is interested in the public's opinion then it would actively seek it out prior to the date of the contract decision because it must deliberate on, fact check, support, or rebut comments that are made. This process takes time. You cannot act on our input, other than as a knee-jerk acceptance or flat out refusal to consider it if you solicit the complex information we have to share on the same day you have to decide the contract. How can the Board decide to affirm or deny a contract and consider the length of the contract without having researched and considered input from all sources? The Board cannot consider such input in one night. It requires follow up and research. So either the Board is remiss in its responsibilities to represent the interests of administrators, teachers, students, parents and the tax-paying community, because it takes time to effectively and properly consider and represent those interests or the Board is actively moving on decisions without considering input from all key stakeholders. Which is it?

The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) recommends that a comprehensive evaluation of a superintendent has three parts²¹:

- Progress towards district goals and objectives;
- Demonstration of executive skills; and
- The board's evaluation of its own performance.

The QSAC form states:²²

“The school board or advisory board annually undertakes a self-evaluation process which reflects that highest priority is given to student achievement.”

I believe that members of the public, the teachers, and the administrators have a right to know how the Board will evaluate its own performance.

Point 6: Mr. Carroll has unclear or poorly executed goals and strategies and he makes decisions without the full range input of informed stakeholders. Thus, he is a poor fit with our school district.

In order to be an effective administrator and leader of our educational system, Mr. Carroll has to be transparent, collaborative, communicative, and always interested in the well-being of our children, teachers, and schools. He must have clear goals, visions, and strategies and a plan for assessing progress. Has he been such a leader?

Based on my conversations with others, I believe Mr. Carroll's leadership style is autocratic and he is thus a poor fit with our school district. He appears to make decisions without the input of informed stakeholders, including many members of the Board. His communications are incomplete or misleading. For example, Mr. Carroll appeared to enroll the district in the School Choice program with limited input. He stated repeatedly that class sizes would not go up. But based on my first grade math, it is clear that adding more students without adding more teachers or classes will increase class size and student/teacher ratios. He may have meant that we wouldn't exceed state limits. Or perhaps he meant that the average class size is shrinking because of smaller enrollments so adding more won't change anything. But the statement that class sizes won't go up when adding students is clearly false or misleading. Also, it is interesting to note that Clinton Township appears to be on the high end of class sizes already.

Similarly, when he receives the input from the Board (e.g., ARRA funds, hiring part-time teachers instead of full-time teachers) he appears to not act on it or fails to communicate how the input was considered. Mr. Carroll supported the purchase of nearly \$80,000 worth of instructional materials that I have heard from three different sources does not meet the needs of our children and community. I have heard in numerous meetings members of the public express dissatisfaction with how the environmental concerns at Patrick McGaheran were handled. Even if nothing is ever found, it is not the outcome that matters, it is the process. The lack of action on potential threats to the health and safety of children and staff in our school district does not speak to supportive and person-oriented leadership.

Based on these issues and those detailed above, Mr. Carroll is a poor fit with our school district. Our district deserves a Superintendent who works as a collaborative partner and who leverages the full resources of our schools and community to make the most informed and responsible decisions for the sake of our community and children.

Point 7: It is inappropriate and irresponsible to award any contract without taking into account the perspective of multiple stakeholders. As a result, given the timeframe available, the only appropriate decision is NOT to renew the contract.

Given the above commentary, it is clear that it is inappropriate and irresponsible to award any contract without taking into account input from all stakeholders. We pay the salary for the Superintendent. The tax payers pay for the resources used to run the educational system. We should have input into the decision-making process. Failure to consider our input means that the Board is not effectively representing our interests. More importantly, it may harm our children, the quality of the educational system, and thus, the economic viability of our community.

The Board has created a situation in which it is impossible to award the contract without continued loss of trust in the Superintendent and the Board. If you award the contract, teachers, parents and members of the tax-paying public will not believe the decision was well-supported, carefully evaluated, and fair. This is also unfair to Mr. Carroll because he should be able to operate with the full trust of the teachers and public.

I suggest NOT awarding the contract and opening the position to be filled. Mr. Carroll can be invited to reapply. I have checked with the Hunterdon County Superintendent of Schools and the New Jersey School Boards Association. It is within the Board's prerogative to pursue this approach. Mr. Carroll is paid at the top end of the salary range for a superintendent in a school district our size. This means that logically Mr. Carroll should be a top quality administrator if the Board believes in paying for performance.

If it turns out that Mr. Carroll is an effective leader, the top among the field, and he has a staunch group of supporters, then he easily should rise to the top in the application process. He will stand out as the administrator of best fit for our district.

Why would he go through that process? Because if he genuinely cares about our schools, our community, and our children then he would understand that the contract outcome was a result of a failure to communicate his wonderful contributions, not a blight upon his record, and he would want to remain a part of the system. He would know that he needs to reestablish trust with the community and this is the clearest path to regaining that trust. He would know that he is the administrator of best fit for our district and he could be comfortable in the outcome of the open hiring process. Plus, if he is an excellent leader, then perhaps we can find ways to provide an even more attractive contract.

In this case, the correct decision would be not to award the contract because:

1. It will demonstrate Mr. Carroll's commitment to the district.
2. It will provide an opportunity to show the public the ways in which his leadership demonstrates excellence on all fronts, enhancing an appreciation for his accomplishments.
3. It will give the Board a chance to provide the most compelling contract possible.
4. It reestablishes trust in the Board's procedures and in Mr. Carroll, clearing the way for a healthy relationship with the public, teachers, and administrators. This will allow him to accomplish more, with more support than he has had to date.

However, if the concerns of the parents and public are accurate, then you will have made the correct decision by not renewing the contract.

Either way, the Board makes the correct decision by not renewing the contract. You cannot say “yes” because the downside is too great if you are wrong. In contrast, the downside of saying “no” if you are wrong is actually a set of positives resulting in the reestablishment of trust and a better working relationship for Mr. Carroll.

The ONLY possible correct decision is to not award the contract. Failure to act on the contract is not a solution because the contract automatically renews on July 1st. Thus, no action is still a renewal of the contract. The Board must take action on June 27th, and as elected representatives of our community, the answer must be no.

Summary

The quality of the educational system has a profound impact on a community. All tax payers, not only those with kids in the district, should care about the quality of the educational system because its quality affects the economic and social fabric of our lives. The Board and Superintendent have meaningful influence on the actual achievement of our teachers and students. Open, collaborative leadership is critical to educational success. Members of the public have expressed repeated concerns about the quality and nature of the current leadership but the Board has been slow to accept and consider this input. It is incumbent on the Board to consider input from all important stakeholders prior to engaging in decision-making on critical topics that affect the educational system. It is also important for the Board to communicate the procedures and metrics used to evaluate the Superintendent. There has been a lack of transparency and opportunity to provide public input regarding the evaluation of Mr. Carroll and the decision about his contract. Failure to act results in a contract renewal. Given the concerns expressed in this letter, the only correct decision on June 27th would be NOT to award a new contract and invite him to reapply. This is the correct decision whether or not Mr. Carroll is an excellent superintendent. If the concerns expressed by the public are real, then you have made the correct decision. If the concerns are unfounded then Mr. Carroll can be rehired with a clear communication of his positive accomplishments, with an enhanced contract, and with a reestablishment of trust with the community. Again, you will have made the correct decision. You cannot wait because the contract renews on July 1st, 2011 if you fail to act.

The public wants to be heard, both in favor of and against renewing the contract for Mr. Carroll. Please listen.

Thank you for your kind attention,

Stan Gully
stangully@gmail.com

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- ¹ Scott, J. (2011, June 13). Executive School Business Administrator for Hunterdon County. Personal communication.
- ² New Jersey Administrative Code. 6A:32-4.3 Evaluation of tenured and nontenured chief school administrators.
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