

**MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 7, 2025
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
WASHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

January 7, 2025

1. Opening Items

1.01 CALL TO ORDER

The special meeting of the Board of Trustees was called to order at 1:12 p.m. in Room 403 of the Joe Crowley Student Union at the University of Nevada, Reno, located at 1664 North Virginia Street in Reno, Nevada.

1.02 ROLL CALL

President Beth Smith and Trustees Christine Hull, Adam Mayberry, Diane Nicolet, Colleen Westlake, and Alex Woodley were present. Superintendent Joe Ernst, Student Representative Annie Batavia, and staff were also present.

1.03 PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Dr. Jeff Thompson, University of Nevada, Reno Executive Vice President and Provost, led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance.

1.04 LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

President Smith read the land acknowledgement.

2. Items for Presentation, Discussion, Information and/or Action

3.01 REVIEW AND DISCUSSION BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES REGARDING THE APPLICATIONS RECEIVED TO FILL THE VACANCY ON THE BOARD IN DISTRICT C CREATED BY THE RESIGNATION OF TRUSTEE JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ WHO WAS ELECTED TO THE SPARKS CITY COUNCIL; AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO SELECT UP TO FIVE CANDIDATES TO BE INTERVIEWED BY THE BOARD FROM AMONG THE FOLLOWING LEGALLY-QUALIFIED APPLICANTS: JASON BUSHEY, FELIPE ESCAMILLA, MARCUS HODGES, MONICA LEHMANN, TAMARA OSWALD, BRUCE PARKS, JAMES PHOENIX, TRACEY THOMAS, AND TIMOTHY ZYSK; THE CHARACTER, COMPETENCE, AND MISCONDUCT OF ANY APPLICANT MAY BE CONSIDERED BY THE BOARD PER NEVADA

REVISED STATUTE (NRS) 241.033 AND ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION MAY BE TAKEN AGAINST ANY APPLICANT PER NRS 241.034

President Smith reviewed the process the Board would follow to select the candidates to interview from those who had applied for the vacancy in District C. She noted Ms. Tracey Thomas had voluntarily withdrawn from consideration after the agenda was posted. Each applicant would be provided up to 5 minutes to speak to the Board about why they were interested in serving. The speaking order would be determined by random draw. Public comment would be heard after the applicants and then the Board would deliberate. The Trustees would rank their top three candidates, and the rankings tallied by staff. Additional rounds of rankings or a motion could then be made to select up to five candidates to participate in the interview process on January 14.

Monica Lehmann explained why she was interested in serving on the Board of Trustees. She indicated she had been a resident of the area for over 10 years and was interested in ensuring equal opportunities for all students. She wanted to make sure students were equipped with the skills they needed to succeed in life by providing a quality education that was intended to shape the leaders of tomorrow. She believed to make that happen, school districts needed to address the concerning situation of education in Nevada by improving academic standards; address the on-going teacher shortage in Nevada by ensuring teachers received the supports they needed; returning to the basic core of academics, including reading, writing, and mathematics; increasing transparency and fiscal responsibility to show every dollar spent by the Washoe County School District; and ensuring education met the unique needs of each student by supporting policies that encouraged the holistic development of children.

Bruce Parks remarked that he had been an outspoken critic of the Washoe County School District and Board of Trustees in the past because he cared and had the best interest of the district and students at heart. He believed it was incumbent for him, as a citizen, to bring issues and concerns to the Board. He explained that he was interested in serving on the Board because he wanted to work with the Board on the challenges the district faced, including improving academic standards or chronic absenteeism. He felt it was important for the Board to look for solutions to problems, wherever those solutions might come from. He wanted to help equip students for the future they chose and provide businesses with the work force they needed. He emphasized that the Board had an obligation to provide for the future of the country and that he looked forward to serving.

Timothy Zysk provided background information on himself. He mentioned that he had been a bus driver and substitute teacher in the Washoe County School District so understood the challenges schools and students faced. He explained he was interested in completing former Trustee Joe Rodriguez's term and, if selected, would meet with Trustee Rodriguez to discuss his priorities and unfinished goals. He indicated he was

interested in focusing on classroom safety and security for students and teachers, as well as reducing classroom sizes. He believed he would be a good fit because he was a calm, thoughtful person who did his research on topics before making decisions. He was interested in focusing on the needs of District C before looking into other areas of the school district.

James (JJ) Phoenix introduced himself in Paiute to honor his ancestors. He was a member of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe and lived on the reservation, which was part of District C. He provided background information on himself and his education. He was interested in serving on the Board of Trustees because he was educated by the Washoe County School District, was native to the area, and raised his family in the area. He wanted to give back to the Washoe County School District by being a voice for parents and students. He believed he would be able to connect with the people of District C to learn their needs and then create a call to action to address those needs by collaborating with the Board, district, students, and families. He looked forward to ensuring the policies of the district were aligned with Nevada Revised Statutes and Nevada Administrative Codes, then utilizing a balanced governance approach to make revisions as needed. He explained how he would work with others to make good, sound decisions.

Jason Bushey was born and raised in Reno. He spoke of his military service to the country and being discharged due to injuries he received in combat. He was interested in serving on the Board of Trustees because of his desire to serve the community and help address the unique challenges schools were facing. He believed responsible leadership and informed decision making were crucial to nurturing the potential of the youth in the community. He indicated he was committed to listening to the diverse needs of the community and fostering positive change. He felt he offered a unique perspective because he had been in public schools, charter schools, and home schooled.

Marcus Hodges explained he had been a member of the community for 35 years and raised his family in the area. He spoke of the opportunities presented to his children and how he had learned what the schools and school district had to offer students and families because of his children. He believed it was important to provide options for students and families who had challenges, so they knew what was available to them. He mentioned that as a police investigator, he learned that when walking into a room he did not know everything and that it was important to learn and rely on others. He knew it was important for Trustees to educate themselves and learn about issues from different angles.

Felipe Escamilla spoke about his background in investigative journalism and in education. He knew the importance of education and how it helped to foster a love of learning and instilling a growth mindset. He told a story about how excited a student in

Florida was when she scored high enough on the ACT to graduate. He knew the importance of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, having participated in such a program while in high school. He wanted to be part of the process to develop lifelong learners who were able to thrive in their communities. He spoke of wanting to provide equal and equitable opportunities to students throughout the district, including his daughter. He explained it was important for the Board of Trustees and Superintendent to have a collaborative relationship to fulfill the requirements of Nevada Revised Statutes. He knew it was critical to support teachers and provide them with the resources to excel.

Tamara Oswald was a parent and grandparent of students who had attended school in the Washoe County School District, as well as a former special education teacher. She spoke of how she decided to open a preschool in the area to help capture children at the start of their education. She wanted to instill the same love of learning she had to others. She indicated she was able to effectively communicate and navigate conversations when there was conflict, which she believed was important when dealing with the public. She expressed her support for the teachers and wanting to continue to provide them with the resources they needed to succeed. She wanted to encourage families to participate in the learning process.

President Smith opened the meeting to public comment.

Todd Bailey believed it was time for new leadership on the Washoe County School District Board of Trustees. He indicated he had researched each candidate and wanted to provide the Trustees with a list of who he believed should be selected as part of the finalists who would be invited to participate in an interview and why: Jason Bushey, Monica Lehmann, Tamara Oswald, Bruce Parks, and James Phoenix. He believed all of the candidates named were qualified to serve on the Board of Trustees and would represent the community with integrity.

John Eppolito mentioned he had been coming to Board meetings for close to 15 years and the votes were almost always unanimous. He felt it was important for the Board to select someone who thought differently than everyone else and was willing to speak up. He indicated that the current Board was made up of people who tended to say the same thing whenever they spoke. He expressed his support for Bruce Parks to fill the vacancy in District C.

Roger Edwards was a long-time Washoe County resident and the parent of former students in the Washoe County School District. He believed all the candidates were fine; however, he was concerned that none of them spoke to the school district's national rating. He felt the number one reason all the candidates should be interested in serving on the Board was to pull the school district from 50th in the nation. He

indicated he wanted to see a focus on improving academic achievement and raising how others in the country looked at Washoe County.

The Board received emails from the following:

- K. Werning
- Jackie Shelton
- Bruce Foster
- Jamie Vaughn
- Joanne Bergamini
- Gaye McCollum-Nickles

President Smith thanked all the applicants and provided comments on the candidates. She noted that out of all the applicants, there were four military veterans, two of which were bronze star recipients, three school district educators, two spouses of educators, two small business owners, one Emmy award winner, one former tribal chairman, and one current law enforcement officer. She offered feedback to each candidate on their application packets and prepared remarks.

Trustee Mayberry thanked the candidates for their interest in serving on the Board of Trustees. He believed any of the applicants could do the job and wanted to hear about their vision for the district.

Trustee Westlake expressed her appreciation to all the applicants because of their willingness to put themselves under public scrutiny because it was hard. She provided feedback for some of the candidates and was impressed with their knowledge of what was occurring in the district.

Trustee Nicolet agreed with the comments made by other Trustees. She explained her thought process in reviewing the applications and hearing their comments and what she was looking for when making the decision who should move forward.

Trustee Woodley thanked everyone for their interest in serving. He provided his thought process and what he was looking for when making the decision, including experience in serving and supporting school district employees.

Trustee Hull agreed with the prior remarks. She was impressed with all the applicants' willingness to put themselves out there in a desire to serve their community. She spoke of what she was looking for in the candidates.

President Smith reviewed the ranking process for the Trustees and community. Each Trustee would select their top three candidates and rank them, with the top candidate using number three, then two, and one. The rankings would be tallied, and individual

rankings read aloud. It would then be up to the Trustees to determine if they wanted to proceed forward with those who ranked highest with a motion.

President Smith recessed the meeting for 17 minutes.

The individual Trustee rankings were as follows:

Trustee Hull

James Phoenix – 3
Felipe Escamilla – 2
Marcus Hodges – 1

Trustee Mayberry

Marcus Hodges – 3
Felipe Escamilla – 2
Jason Bushey – 1

Trustee Nicolet

James Phoenix – 3
Jason Bushey – 2
Monica Lehmann – 1

President Smith

Felipe Escamilla – 3
James Phoenix – 2
Jason Bushey – 1

Trustee Westlake

Jason Bushey – 3
Felipe Escamilla – 2
Marcus Hodges – 1

Trustee Woodley

James Phoenix – 3
Felipe Escamilla – 2
Tamara Oswald – 1

The totals were as follows:

Felipe Escamilla – 11
James Phoenix – 11
Jason Bushey – 7
Marcus Hodges – 5
Monica Lehmann – 1
Tamara Oswald – 1

It was moved by Trustee Nicolet and seconded by Trustee Woodley that **the Board of Trustees selects the following candidates to participate in interviews for the vacancy in District C: Jason Bushey, Felipe Escamilla, Marcus Hodges, and James Phoenix.** The result of the vote was Unanimous: (Yea: Christine Hull, Adam Mayberry, Diane Nicolet, Beth Smith, Colleen Westlake, and Alex Woodley.) Final Resolution: Motion Carries.

President Smith reviewed the next steps in the process, which would be public interviews to be conducted on January 14. She noted the Board could take action to appoint one of the finalists to fill the vacancy at a special meeting and that person would then participate in the regular meeting to be held later that day. She urged all finalists to prepare for that regular meeting by reviewing the packet once it had posted.

3. Closing Items

3.01 PUBLIC COMMENT

Todd Bailey remarked that if the Board was going to implement a cell phone policy for classrooms, then they should follow a similar policy themselves or risk violating Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS). He claimed the agendas were intimidating to members of the public who wanted to speak because of the language related to NRS. He issued a public records request to determine the number of people arrested or cited for violating NRS 241 and 203 during the past 20 years. He indicated he was only aware of one, which resulted in a \$10,000 payment from the Washoe County School District, the dismissal of the police chief, and one of the reasons the district's former lawyer was forced out. He claimed various changes were coming to NRS related to public comment periods based on how 30 students were treated at the December meeting of the Washoe County School District Board of Trustees.

Roger Edwards remarked that he had been attending Board meetings longer than anyone serving on the current Board and that he had been continually asking for items related to the quality of education to be placed on agendas. He did not believe there was anything more important than the quality of education to attract companies with high paying jobs to the area. He mentioned he did not want to see anyone bullied, but that the focus needed to be on reading, writing, math, science, and social studies.

John Eppolito spoke of how the meetings had changed since he started attending them about 14 years ago. He mentioned the attorney did not use to sit at the table with the Board but that once that started, things changed for the worse. He claimed the community was being silenced because the Board did not include an initial public comment period at the beginning of the meeting since people did not know when the meeting would end. He was also frustrated over the size of the Board room because he

believed it was not large enough to fit the number of people interested in attending the meetings.

Bruce Parks commented that he did not believe he had much of a chance of being selected to move forward to the interview process because the Board wanted to silence those who spoke against them. He felt there were so many things that needed to be addressed and that a voice of contention could be what was needed in the meetings to provide a different perspective. He claimed to have solutions that could address issues, such as chronic absenteeism, ramped drug usage by students, discipline problems, and academic achievement, but the Board was not interested in hearing them.

Pablo Nava Duran believed the Board should bring back the general public comment period at the beginning of the meetings. He was also interested in seeing the start time of the meeting changed to 4:00 p.m. to allow more people to attend.

Drew Ribar remarked that the Board could not silence anyone during public comment. He stressed that it was his 3 minutes to speak and that when the Board interrupted people or cut them off that they were violating peoples' constitutional rights. He wondered why the school district was not teaching the Constitution to students so they would know what their rights were and how government was meant to serve them. He stated he was a very litigious person and that he would be willing to go after the Board if they violated his right to speak.

Cynthia Cooper wished the Board luck in selecting the person to appoint to the vacant seat because they had a lot of good candidates to choose from. She believed even one student doing drugs was too much and that the Board should consider having police officers speak to students about the impacts of drugs and addiction so they had a realistic view of what could occur if they even experimented with anything.

Ursula Burnett felt the vote tally showed the Board was not interested in having an opposing voice join them but wanted someone who agreed with them. She believed education fell on the superintendent because he was the one who hired the teachers, set up the curriculum, and set up the discipline system. She did not believe the schools were doing enough to discipline students because they were doing whatever they wanted. She urged the district to teach cursive and the Constitution so they would know their rights and be protected. She wondered if the Board did not want to teach the Constitution because then the students would come and complain. She urged everyone to do better for the students because the community was not accepting what was currently happening in the schools.

3.02 ADJOURN MEETING

There being no further business to come before the members of the Board, President Smith declared the meeting adjourned at 3:23 p.m.

Elizabeth Smith, President

Adam Mayberry, Vice President

From: Kar Werning
Sent: Sunday, January 5, 2025 10:00 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] School board

⚠ External Email: This email originated outside of WCSD. Please exercise caution. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.


We must have open-minded, reasonable, intelligent people making decisions affecting the children of Washoe County. Please do not cave to loud voices looking to push their own agenda, to the detriment of our kids' wellbeing.

K. Werning

Reno

Sent from my iPhone

From: Jackie Shelton
Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 1:04 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] School Board Vacancy

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Good morning,

While I don't envy your task in choosing the right person for this important role, I know you're up for the challenge. :)

I have reviewed the resumes and believe that Felipe Escamilla is the best person for this position. He has demonstrated an ability to build consensus, he values diversity and equality and he has a child in the public school system.

Thank you for all you're doing to make our community a better place.


Jackie

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Jackie Shelton

Pronouns: she/her

From: BRUCE FOSTER
Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 2:07 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Board of Trustees Special Meeting - 1/7/2025

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

In light of the special meeting of the WCSD Board of Trustees for the express purpose of reviewing applicants for the vacant position of District C, I would like to be assured that they would be vetted thoroughly per NRS.

I am concerned that a sitting Trustee, Alex Woodley, would be in participation in these proceedings (see below) and I would hope that the individual filling this seat would be of good character and integrity. All this having the very best interest and high standards/ expectations in mind for the students along with, more importantly, being an honorable example.

Respectfully,

B. Foster

Sparks

Mr. Woodley,

We are writing today to invite and encourage you to resign from WCSD Board of Trustees. In light of the recent information and news reports, your sexting indiscretions demand that you step down. You have lost your status and credibility as a role model for our Washoe County school children. In fact, to the contrary, you are exactly what the kids DON'T need to look up to. Your apparent refusal to resign is a disgusting display of arrogance and an insult to this community.

You are a Marine. Honor, Courage, Commitment and Integrity are the guiding principles of a Marine. Do you think your fellow Marines would be pleased with your actions? You have violated these principles.

You are a father. Your newly graduated daughter must be mortified.

You are a husband. What must your wife, with a new baby be feeling?

You are a grandson. Is this how your grandmother raised you, to be persistent in your indulgences to the detriment of your community?

You are hurting your wife and children, the school district, and this community.

You can do this the easy way, or you can spend your future time, name, and platform on a no-win stakes for your political future.

It's clear you were hiding this issue from your wife by using your public servant, taxpayer cell phone instead of your personal cell so somewhere in the deep recesses of your soul, you know it is wrong.

You have a choice to make. Resign or put your family, our community, and Washoe County students through more shame and humiliation. You've done enough damage already. The only way to avoid further damage is to step down from the WCSD board.

School children are now aware that you, a governing board member, are sexting and the rumors are running wild. They are laughing and making fun of you as you pompously sit in that trustee seat (or shall we call it the trustless seat). They should instead be getting the message that you are fired, that there are consequences when public officials use public taxpayer funds for such shenanigans. The kids were told, in last Tuesday's meeting, not to entertain themselves on their cell phones in class, but there

was Alex Woodley 'entertaining' himself on his phone... during the school board meeting. Are you getting the picture?

This is starting to blow up in the media. Here's the most recent article after last Tuesday's meeting.

<https://evrimagaci.org/tpg/washoe-county-school-trustee-faces-pressure-amid-sexting-scandal-59343>

Reno Discloses Sexting from Former City Code Enforcer, Current Trustee Alex Woodley's Official Phone — Our Town Reno

WCSD Trustee Alex Woodley, board members ignore recent sexting scandal

Alex Woodley Resigns from City of Reno Amid Allegations of 'Sexting' On City-Issued Cell Phone - Nevada Globe

The board must hold its members to a higher standard.

You thought you had a pass, but you've seen the latest articles, the tidal wave is yet to come. We will continue and persist in making the community aware of your years of indiscretions, going back to 2017, or does it go back further? And your fellow board members are complicit if they don't insist on your resignation. Resign today.

Extremely Concerned moms, dads, and grandparents of Washoe County


<https://evrimagaci.org/tpg/washoe-county-school-trustee-faces-pressure-amid-sexting-scandal-59343>

Reno Discloses Sexting from Former City Code Enforcer, Current Trustee Alex Woodley's Official Phone — Our Town Reno

WCSD Trustee Alex Woodley, board members ignore recent sexting scandal

Alex Woodley Resigns from City of Reno Amid Allegations of 'Sexting' On City-Issued Cell Phone - Nevada Globe

From: Jamie Vaughn
Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 10:42 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] District C Trustee Choice

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Attention Trustees:

Regarding: District C Trustee Choice

As a concerned citizen and retired educator, I am writing to urge you to support Felipe Escamilla for the District C trustee position. I believe an effective School Board Trustee should possess certain qualities: the ability to foster consensus and work collaboratively, a commitment to diversity and equity in decision-making, and the experience of having a child in the public school system. After looking over all the resumes, Felipe Escamilla truly stands out to me.

Thank you,
Jamie Vaughn
Reno, NV

From: Bergamini
Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 2:26 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Trustee Position Representing District C

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Hello


My name is Joanne Bergamini. I've lived in Washoe County for 40 years, both my kids went through the public schools here. I'm very concerned about the direction of public education, and when I saw that there is an open position for a new trustee position on the Board, I decide to read the candidate's applications.

I felt that the standout candidate is Tamara Oswald. She has shown a lifelong interest in public education, professionally and personally. The other candidates spoke mostly about their business and military experience, or that they have children who attended Washoe County schools. I don't think that's enough. Public education is the lifeblood of a healthy community, and this isn't the time to have inexperienced people trying to learn as they go.

Thank you for your time,

Joanne Bergamini

From: Gaye McCollum-Nickles
Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 11:21 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] District C board member replacement

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I attend almost all of the WCSD Board meetings virtually. And I have watched just how important it is to have members who can play well together even though there may be differences of opinions. I've watched public comments that were treated with more respect than the public commenters may have deserved. I have also noted that there have been BoT members themselves who have engendered rancor in and outside of the meetings.

I've read the resumes. There are two or three candidates who will not bring with them an agenda meant to alarm or enrage; however, there is one candidate that stands out to me. Felipe Escamilla's resume shows that he is able to listen and to collaborate, to build consensus while valuing diversity and equity in our district. Those criteria will help build a better system that responds to all of our children. The more cooperative and cohesive our board, the less noise and nonsense.


Gaye McCollum-Nickles

Reno, NV. 89509

"No history is mute. No matter how much they own it, break it, and lie about it, human history refuses to shut its mouth. Despite deafness and ignorance, the time that was continues to tick inside the time that is."

— Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan journalist

From: Alanna Fitzgerald
Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 12:20 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Candidate for District C - public comment

 External Email: This email originated outside of WCSD. Please exercise caution. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello, my name is Alanna Fitzgerald and I am a constituent of District D. The following is intended at public comment for the January 7, 2025 Trustee Special Meeting in regard to filling the opening in District C: I encourage you to carefully consider Felipe Escamilla for the opening. After reviewing the comments submitted by and resumes of all applicants I believe he would be an effective trustee. It appears that he has many of the characteristics needed for a high-functioning Board member such as the ability to work collaboratively and build consensus. It appears that he also has well developed awareness about issues related to diversity and equity.


Thank you for considering this input about the candidate for District C.

Respectfully,

Alanna Fitzgerald

Batchelder, Jennifer

From: Susan Thompson
Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 7:14 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Candidates for Trustee Position

 External Email: This email originated outside of WCSD. Please exercise caution. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear WCSB Trustees,

As the parent of a student who recently graduated from a Washoe County high school and as a Washoe County resident who wishes to live in a community alongside well-educated fellow citizens equipped to positively contribute to our community and economy, I am writing to support the selection of qualified candidates to interview for the trustee position vacated by Joe Rodriguez.

Attributes I believe are important in the consideration of candidates for the Washoe County School board include ability and desire to collaborate, build consensus, and find solutions that reflect the diversity of our community, while being good stewards of our tax dollars. Of the candidates up for consideration who appear to possess these qualities I support Felipe Escamilla, Jason Bushey, James Phoenix, and Tamara Oswald.

Washoe County needs now, more than ever, leaders who are truly invested in our community and not those who prioritize sowing division for political gain. I say this as a citizen who, this past year, served as a juror in a criminal trial and also volunteered to be a poll worker on November 5 helping people vote. I considered both to be an honor and civic duty working with my fellow citizens to support our community, irrespective of our diverse backgrounds and political beliefs. I hope the next trustee will embody this same sense of civic duty and support the development of rich curricula which includes art, theater, music, foreign language, government/civics, and be a strong advocate for access to a diverse selection of culturally relevant books in our school libraries that help our children become creative, fair-minded, well-adjusted, and collaborative members of our community.

Sincerely,

Susan Thompson