

Superintendent Richard Ross  
Ohio Department of Education  
20 South Front Street  
Columbus, OH 43215

August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

Dear Dr. Ross,

We are taking a beating in the media, and we deserve it.

Our collective failure to properly oversee the administration and employees of ODE allowed the improper ratings of charter school sponsors. Unless we do a full and thorough investigation of ODE, matters could get much worse. You may believe that the evaluation incident was an isolated one, but we would be negligent in the performance of our duties if we accepted that as truth without looking further into ODE practices.

Unfortunately, the proposal to bring in three outsiders to determine how the sponsor evaluation should be completed falls far short of what is required for the public to regain confidence in ODE. Like it or not, you are a prime suspect in what has occurred. Mr. Hansen may have taken the fall, but you were his boss. Whether by mismanagement, or deliberate instruction to Mr. Hansen, you are culpable as well. We need more than an evaluation of how we move forward. We need an investigation into ODE practices that allowed this to happen. We cannot correct the mistakes of the past if we refuse to examine those mistakes, determine what they are, determine how they occurred, evaluate how to prevent them from occurring in the future, and taking the corrective action to assure this does not happen again.

We need to look at more than the evaluation issue. We need to look at how and why we have failed to investigate complaints brought to our attention. Our practice of having sponsors investigate their schools is a huge conflict of interest that results in an entirely unreliable and incredible investigative outcome.

If we are serious about our credibility, the board, not you, must engage an independent firm to investigate you and the Department of Education to determine compliance with the laws and administrative rules of the State of Ohio, the laws and administrative rules of the United States, and the policies and procedures of the Ohio Department of Education all as applied to the oversight, operation and licensure of community schools in the State of Ohio. The firm or individuals selected must be experienced in conducting similar investigations, have no vested interest in the outcome, and reflect the bipartisan nature of our board. The investigation should have a deadline and all appropriate information gathered should be available to the public as soon as possible (so long as it does not interfere with the gathering of information as part of the investigation).

Such investigation must include a determination of the role you and ODE played in formation of “The Youngstown Plan.” It is important to determine how that plan has bypassed Article VI Section 3 of the Constitution of the State of Ohio which states, “Provision shall be made by law for the organization, administration and control of the public school system of the state supported by public funds: provided, that each school district embraced wholly or in part within any city shall have the power by referendum vote to determine for itself the number of members and the organization of the district board of education, and provision shall be made by law for the exercise of this power by such school districts.” The faulty sponsor evaluations ignored the law. Are we now participants in ignoring Ohio’s Constitution?

Such investigation must include an audit of all contracts between the Ohio Department of Education and sponsors of community schools and all contracts between community schools and their sponsors to determine compliance. As the State Auditor has recently reported, he investigates financial issues. It falls on us to investigate legal matters to assure there is no area of law being ignored by community schools or their sponsors. Community school contracts are subject to many rules and laws. Given that ODE has overlooked the law on one known occasion creates the need to assure there are no other violations of the law being overlooked. If there are any violations, we must then determine if ODE had any part in those violations.

Such investigation must determine the accuracy of investigations conducted by sponsors of their sponsored schools at the request of the Department of Education and must further determine if complaints made to you and/or ODE have been set aside, ignored or otherwise not investigated.

We look forward to working with you to implement the recommendations listed above as we work to restore the public’s confidence in the Ohio Department of Education.

Very truly yours,

Pat Bruns  
Member, District 4

Michael Collins  
Member, District 6

Stephanie Dodd  
Member, District 9

Ann Jacobs  
Member, District 1

Mary Rose Oakar  
Member, District 11

Roslyn Painter-Goffi  
Member, District 5

A.J. Wagner  
Member, District 3