

CCS School Board—Turning hindsight into foresight!!

Original at: [Foothills News Channel](https://foothillsnewschannel.com/2023/12/17/turning-hindsight-into-foresight/)

Editor's Note: Foothills News Channel has been following the goings on in Cleveland County for some time now. Many of you have already read many of their articles. Robert A certainly has and often requests to use and often reprint their work. Permission has always been cordially given. This piece was published today, December 17, 2024 and fits exactly into the heart of the matter here in Cleveland County with the many problems at Cleveland County Schools and their (idiot) majority on the School Board. Folks, this gets a bit long, but the backup evidence that is included is totally both telling and compelling.

From Foothills News Channel:
<https://foothillsnewschannel.com/2023/12/17/turning-hindsight-into-foresight/>

Turning hindsight into foresight
CCBOE – issues and answers
December 17, 2023

As this year comes to a close, it's a good time to look back, make some adjustments, and then move forward. We must first see what needs to be corrected, understand how to correct it, and then begin to make that happen. However, it takes a group effort. To say that the Cleveland County Board of Education has been a shipwreck this past year would be a huge understatement. There is an opportunity just around the corner that will allow the voters of Cleveland County to rearrange the deck chairs on this Titanic of a school board. A change of at least 2 new board members would help, but to have a clean sweep would be a major victory.

As we all know, there are quite a few wrongs that could be made right. Let's look at the major issue that justifies this change to the CCB0E majority.

May 30, 2023 – Cleveland County Schools Administration Building:

There were 8 emails introduced as “evidence” against Danny Blanton and Ronnie Grigg.

3. Called Meeting Item

Action, Discussion: 3.01 Board Member Conduct (Policy 2120)

Chairman Robert Queen stated the rules for conducting the meeting and stated that the discussion is limited to board member conduct and possible violations of the Code of Ethics. The Board attorney will provide a summary of the complaints from employees and members of the community expressing concern regarding board member behavior. The attorney will instruct the Board regarding options for Board action.

Superintendent Dr. Stephen Fisher provided an administrative update on the Burns High School senior prank. Dr. Fisher stated the senior prank turned into something it was not intended, and the Principal cleaned the majority of the building herself. Some cleaning was still needed when staff arrived on Friday morning. Dr. Fisher said due to the inaccuracy of some reports, the misinformation and other unsubstantiated claims, the review of this incident has been a challenge.

Attorney Leigha Sink stated the Cleveland County Board of Education is largely a self-governing body, so the Board is encouraged to govern itself under CCS Policy 2120 "Code of Ethics for School Board Members." Copies of the policy were provided for Board members.

Attorney Leigha Sink said the week before last, a senior prank took place at Burns High School. Since that time, there have been news interviews quoting board members, several articles quoting board members, and multiple Facebook posts which have given cause for concern. Specifically, the concern is over individual board members sharing information with the public on a matter currently under investigation by school administration, concern with individual board members speaking without authorization of the board as a whole - creating confusion as to whether they are representing their personal opinions or the opinion of the board, and concern over individual board members providing opinions publicly regarding personnel matters.

Mrs. Sink said Dr. Fisher received a complaint against Mr. Grigg from a Burns High School employee (email #1), an email expressing concern from another BHS employee (one whose classroom was directly involved in the prank) (email #3), and Mrs. Sink said she received a request for reprimand from a member of the community (email #2). Mrs. Sink said she also received an email from a concerned BHS parent regarding behavior by Mr. Grigg and Mr. Blanton (email #4). Additionally, Mrs. Sink said she received an email from a BHS senior (email #5) and a BHS parent (email #6) with concerns about Mr. Grigg's behavior and information shared with the media. Mrs. Sink said she received an email from a Cleveland Community College Trustee with a complaint against Chairman Queen sending an email to the Board of Trustees in his capacity as a trustee (email #7). Finally, Mrs. Sink said she received an email from the lead custodian at BHS expressing concern about board members who had spoken with the media about the senior prank (email #8). All of the information was provided to Board members for review and consideration, as well as a sampling of the media articles including WSOC, Charlotte Observer, Shelby Star, NewsBreak, and Daily Mail.

Attorney Sink discussed sections of the Board Member Code of Ethics which have points of concern to be considered in this discussion. Specific items include #4 model civility, #20 fulfill requirements in a professional manner, #5 individual members of the Board have no authority outside the meetings of the Board to represent the Board, #6 confidentiality of information, #7 delegate authority for the administration of the schools to the Superintendent, #14 direct complainants to follow the Board's complaint or grievance process to resolve concerns, #19 the conduct of school business shall be left to the employed Superintendent, #16 take no action that will compromise the Board or administration.

Mrs. Sink said a breach of the Code of Ethics by any Board member may result in disciplinary action. This action may result in sanction(s) as approved by the majority of the Cleveland County Board of Education consistent with legal standards: Option #1 No Action; Option #2 Resolution by the Board (General resolution highlighting a renewed expectation of strict adherence to the Board Member Code of Ethics); Option #3 Sanction via Censure (Censure of specific board member(s): public statement itemizing violations. Note: a censure does not remove a member from their office. He or she retains their title, stature, and power to vote. There are also no legal consequences that come with a reprimand or censure); Option #4 Sanction via Loss of Privilege - can't formally participate in graduation ceremonies, suspension from committee activities for a set period of time (ex: 3 months).

Chairman Robert Queen stated that if the Board puts forth a motion and a second, board members will have three minutes each to speak.

Greg Taylor made a motion to adopt Option #2 Resolution by the Board. Ron Humphries seconded the motion.

Danny Blanton, Ronnie Grigg, and Walter Spurling each spoke for the allotted times.

Chairman Robert Queen reminded the audience to remain quiet so board members could hear the discussion. Chairman Queen called for a vote on the motion on the floor, to adopt Option #2 Resolution by the Board. The vote carried 8 to 1, with Danny Blanton dissenting.

Rodney Fitch made a motion to combine Option #3 and Option #4 to sanction Mr. Grigg and Mr. Blanton via censure and via the loss of privilege of being able to formally participate in this year's graduations and suspension from participating in committee meetings until September 2023. Walter Spurling seconded the motion.

Aaron Bridges, Danny Blanton, Walter Spurling, Ronnie Grigg, Joel Shores, Ron Humphries, and Robert Queen spoke during their allotted times.

Chairman Robert Queen called for the vote on the motion on the floor: to combine Option #3 Sanction via Censure and Option #4 Sanction via Loss of Privilege to sanction Ronnie Grigg and Danny Blanton.

The motion carried 6 to 3, with Aaron Bridges, Danny Blanton, and Ronnie Grigg dissenting.

Danny Blanton made a motion to sanction Chairman Robert Queen. Chairman Queen deferred to Vice Chair Joel Shores to conduct the meeting. Vice Chair Joel Shores asked for clarification of the motion. Danny Blanton said he was referring to the Cleveland Community College Trustee Kenneth Ledford's email complaint about Mr. Queen emailing the Trustees, the President, and the Chief of Staff regarding the senior prank at Burns High School.

Danny Blanton made a motion to sanction Chairman Robert Queen with Option #3 and Option #4. Ronnie Grigg seconded the motion.

Ron Humphries, Danny Blanton, Walter Spurling, and Robert Queen each spoke during their allotted times. Vice Chair Joel Shores asked attorney Leigha Sink to return to the podium, and asked if there is a violation of the Code of Ethics or Policy. Leigha Sink stated there is no violation based on the information received from Mr. Ledford.

Vice Chair Joel Shores called for the vote on the motion on the floor: to sanction Chairman Robert Queen with Option #3 and Option #4.

The vote failed 3 to 6 with Aaron Bridges, Danny Blanton, and Ronnie Grigg voting in favor of the motion, and Robert Queen, Ron Humphries, Greg Taylor, Rodney Fitch, Walter Spurling, and Joel Shores voting against the motion.

At 7:08 pm, Chairman Queen asked if there was any other business. There was none.

Count them. Eight (8) emails. Signed, sealed, delivered and convicted. The first time I'd ever witnessed jackasses conducting a kangaroo court. There was no rebuttal allowed, except a few minutes for the defendants to plead their case, with a panel who had already decided the outcome. That was their intent and they had it their way.

There would have been as much or more in support of these two board members, had the controlled opposition allowed it. But

as proven here in this instance, emails from these people really, really mattered. These emails were the catalyst for the discipline and suspension for these two members. Except that it wasn't. It was an excuse to do their dirty deed and thinking it would be a mask to hide the reality of what was actually happening. Transparency, they claim. Sure, people can see right through them!

Now, here's another case of emails and how it has played out thus far. On February 17, 2023, someone submitted a Public Records Request from a website called Sunshine Request, located in Asheville, NC. This website is like a clearing house for public requests, etc. and offered as a free service. The submission was sent to the Cleveland County Board of Education and it was related to bullying. As you can see, by going to the website and reading the exchanges that have taken place since February 17, 2023, you will see how this same board handles this request, and how the same lawyer shows a great disconnect from the laws and statutes in regard to FOIA and Public Records Requests. (and the math isn't exactly admirable) Also, the request was only for the period between 01/02/23 – 02/09/23, yet they admitted there were more than 3,200 emails related to bullying.

(an example of an exchange below)

from: Sunshine Request

to: Greg Shull

cc:hggilmore@clevelandcountyschools.org,

jswampler@clevelandcountyschools.org

date: PR 7, 2023, 5:12 PM

subject: Re: Records Request: (February 2023) Request for Cleveland County, NC Schools: All electronic communications related to "bullies", "bullying", "fights", or "violence". From 01/02/23 – 02/09/23.

Hi Greg (and others CCed),

Happy Friday!

This is my fourth attempt since February 17th to follow up on my previous emails. I have not heard back.

Can you please provide an anticipated date for completion of my public records request? First sent to your offices on February 17, 2023:

(February 2023) Request for Cleveland County, NC Schools: All electronic communications related to "bullies", "bullying", "fights", or "violence". From 01/02/23 – 02/09/23.

FYI. I have still been continuing to receive additional requests for similar information via my website. However, in order to avoid duplicating any staff time or creating confusion processing multiple similar requests – I have been declining to send any new requests to Cleveland County Schools, until I can get some resolution to the request above.

I will make one more attempt to follow up next week, if I have not heard anything else before then.

Thank you!

The Sunshine Request Team

Status: Follow up

The same neglect and ignore has continued pretty much since then. The replies have been minimal without any substance. And there appears to be lots of confusion from Greg Shull and also the board attorney.

from: Sunshine Request

to: Greg Shull

cc: hggilmore@clevelandcountyschools.org,
jswampler@clevelandcountyschools.org,
dapless@clevelandcountyschools.org, lsink@sinkmediations.com

date: May 8, 2023, 12:51 PM

subject: Re: Records Request: (February 2023) Request for Cleveland County, NC Schools: All electronic communications

related to "bullies", "bullying", "fights", or "violence".
From 01/02/23 – 02/09/23.

Good Afternoon Greg (and Leigha CCed),

I received the following message today from Leigha Sink:

from: Leigha Sink

to: records@sunshinerequest.com

date: May 8, 2023, 12:04 PM

subject: Records Request re: All electronic communications
related to "bullies", "bullying", "fights", or "violence".
From 01/02/23 – 02/09/23.

To Whom It May Concern,

We are in receipt of the below public records request.
However, the search has produced a result of over 3200 emails.
Reviewing this much correspondence to ensure PII is not
mistakenly shared would be a very time-consuming and
burdensome process. Could anyone at the Sunshine Request Team
assist in narrowing the scope of this request while still
accomplishing the goal of the requestor?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Leigha Sink

Attorney for Cleveland County Board of Education

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From: Sunshine Request

Date: Fri, Feb 17, 2023 at 1:53 PM

Subject: Records Request: (February 2023) Request for
Cleveland County, NC Schools: All electronic communications
related to "bullies", "bullying", "fights", or "violence".
From 01/02/23 – 02/09/23.

To: Greg Shull

Leigha B. Sink

Attorney at Law and NC DRC Certified Mediator

Sink Law PLLC and Sink Mediations

704.458.9374 (mobile)

www.sinklawpllc.com

The following public records request was sent to your offices on Feb 17, 2023, 1:52 PM. All communications exchanged about this request to-date have been posted at the following URL. Or, you can see them via the request's email thread above:

(February 2023) Request for Cleveland County, NC Schools: All electronic communications related to "bullies", "bullying", "fights", or "violence". From 01/02/23 – 02/09/23.

The records requested are as is, as was submitted in February: ... "ALL electronic communications [Text Messages, Emails, Voicemails, etc.], sent to, sent from, or sent between the Superintendent of Cleveland County Schools, any and all Principals of Cleveland County Schools, any and all Administrative personnel, and any and all members of the Cleveland County School Board. During the time period of 01/02/2023 through 02/09/2023. Specifically, as relates to "bullies", "bullying", "fights", or "violence" at Cleveland County Schools. I am explicitly asking that you DO NOT provide me with sensitive or personally identifying information about specific students and their data. Sunshine Request will not publish this type of information on their website."

I do not wish to provide any further clarification about this request, and I would not like to "narrow" its scope. As I stated in the original request: **If you are unable to fulfill any or all parts of this request, please specifically cite where a reason for denial is justified under NC Public Records Law. **

It's unclear to me whether Leigha is saying you'd just prefer not to have to review so many records, or, if there's an actual limitation to the # of hours / records that can be performed by your office. Can you please be more specific about why (if at all) the request has to be narrowed? I'm unaware of any law that spells out a specific limitation on the number of results yielded for a public records request, or the time it takes you to review confidential information. As you may know, under NC Public Records Law you may not charge fees for the staff time required to redact or separate confidential from non-confidential information in public

records – That cost burden is yours to bear.

Do you mean that the request is “too vague” or something is “unclear” about it as written currently, and it is therefore impossible to fulfill? If so, then it would be helpful if you can please explain how it should be narrowed to meet any specific limitations, or what the specific issue is.

This is my 6th attempt to follow up with Greg since February 17th when he indicated that he “already forwarded [my] email along”, and that the request was being processed. To learn now, almost 3 months after submitting the request, that you’ve just determined there are 3,200 results and feel the request is “burdensome” ... is not acceptable, in my opinion. This could have been identified much earlier on in the process. As a member of a small team myself, I do understand certain school employees have other work responsibilities in addition to processing records requests. However, under NC Public Records Law, Cleveland County Schools is required to process all records requests “promptly”.

With this in mind, I want to highlight the court case referenced in item #6 of the following article, posted on the NC Press Association website. In this instance: “The trial court held that an unjustified one-month delay in production of records was tantamount to a denial”.
<http://www.ncpress.com/stories/a-bakers-dozen-for-2022nc-public-records-law,2390>

Thank you.

~ The Sunshine Request Team

So, as can be seen, the school board does indeed have an agenda, and their interests do not include the students or the citizens. They are self-serving. They are there to maintain the fallacy of a good reputation and a great school that is always successful, and to run interference for one another (the chair +5) and the superintendent.

There will be a time in the near future when Cleveland County can right this wrong. Everyone sees now that you cannot put perfume on a hog!

Editor's Note # 2: Righting this wrong" is called an Election. The majority of the CCS School Board, Robert Queen, Joel Shores, Ron Humphries, Rodney Fitch and Greg Taylor are running for re-election in 2024. There are eight Republican candidates running against them. They, the incumbents mentioned above, can ALL can be easily defeated in the 2024 Republican School Board Primary Elections. Let's all of US citizens and voters make this happen. Our only concern now is picking the best five from the eight challengers. Stay tuned for those recommendations as soon as possible.

Also, in this 2024 Elections help select the best three Commissioner Candidates. Robert A being one of them.

Robert A for Commissioner Chairman!!!