

February 9, 2022

Mr. Danny Blanton

[REDACTED]
Shelby, NC 28152

Dear Mr. Blanton:

As the chairman of our school board, my objective in this letter is to privately and productively inform you of several concerns that have been brought to me by some of our colleagues on the board, but also citizens in our community. These concerns involve actions you have taken over the past year or so which either violate or otherwise come close to violating our local board policies, or even North Carolina law. Again, I must emphasize that this is a letter from me to you and I have no intention of sharing it with anybody else.

The most frequent complaint I and others have received is that – despite being one of nine elected board members – you have acted, or attempted to act, unilaterally on behalf of the full board on multiple occasions. Unilateral action by an elected board member involving school business violates CCS Board Policy 1010. It is also my understanding that you have tried to take full board matters into your own hands by contacting school staff and central office staff in conducting your own investigations. Also, if you look at the eighteenth and final duty listed within this policy, it states that board members should be an advocate for the school system, employees, and students. Unfortunately, there has been a pattern of you acting in ways that tear down CCS. This sort of behavior only heightens distrust among members of the public regarding our school system. You have even gone so far as to call news reporters to travel from Charlotte to Shelby to report on school related events or issues that you perceive as issues, instead of sharing these issues with your elected colleagues – colleagues who, acting together, have the authority to do something about whatever issue it is that might be bothering you. My hope is that, going forward, you will communicate and collaborate with the other eight board members, including me, when it comes to issues or concerns that you would like to see taken up by our Board.

Secondly, CCS Board Policy 2000 lists operational goals of Board, recognizing the trust and accountability that the Board owes citizens, staff, parents, and students. This sort of trust and accountability will be difficult to achieve if you continue to act in ways that circumvent the Board as a corporate body. This policy also states that Board members should act in accordance with the Code of Ethics, but you have refused to sign the Board's annual code of ethics for several years. Policy 2000 also makes it clear that decisions are to be made with the Board's goals, objectives, and other principles as our guiding focus. Again, this will not be possible to achieve if you continue to work as an individual instead of a corporate member of the full body. While all nine of us likely have our own ideas about what the ideal school system looks like, I believe you would get more accomplished if you engaged as a team member instead of acting on your own.

Revisiting the subject of our Code of Ethics, CCS Board Policy 2020 goes into more detail and was crafted with an eye towards North Carolina law, requiring all of us board members to

commit to a code of ethics. In other words, this commitment is not optional for any of us. I have received reports that you have acted in ways that either directly violate or otherwise blur the lines of ethical propriety when you have contacted our district's human resources department to check up on or otherwise attempt to secure employment for members of your family or friends. Attempting to influence district personnel decisions from an elected position of oversight and power certainly crosses the line and is something we should all refrain from doing. I do believe that serving as a resource for friends and family and pointing them in the right direction for help is perfectly fine. However, I hope you'll agree with me when I say we should all avoid even the appearance of impropriety when it comes to any and all actions we take as elected board members.

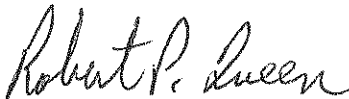
The last thing I'll note for now is CCS Board Policy 2022, which details how Board members are to handle CCS-related complaints. The proper way to do this in accordance with Policy 2022 is to bring the complaint to the superintendent's attention so that he may handle it accordingly. That is a fundamental part of his job as the administrative head of our school system. Without going into great detail about how you have failed to do this on a number of occasions, I will just end by respectfully emphasizing that our school system is set up like this for good reason. If you ever feel that the superintendent is not handling a specific complaint that has come to your attention, please let me and/or the rest of the board know so that we can handle this as a full board.

Though the above-mentioned items are just a sampling of the concerns that have been shared with me, I have put together and enclosed an exhaustive list of concerns that I have received or of which I am otherwise aware as it relates to your CCS-related conduct. Please find this letter enclosed and immediately following this page.

Going forward, I continue to have hope for a productive working relationship between you and other board members. But you must understand that the actions I have listed in this letter make it challenging, at best, to achieve this, and they cannot continue. While it is not fun or pleasant on any level for me to have to send these concerns to you, it is my desire to solve these issues privately so our Board does not have to take this up publicly, which could include a possible public sanction of your actions.

My door (and phone line) remains open to you.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Queen
Chairman

**List of Concerns Voiced to CCS Board Chairman
re: Danny Blanton's CCS-Related Conduct**

General Complaints

1. Mr. Blanton called [REDACTED] on 10-27-21 asking about the counselor that was hired at [REDACTED] Elementary. He wanted to know if she was licensed/qualified/where she currently worked. He told Mr. [REDACTED] that he called because his [REDACTED] had applied for the job but did not get it.
2. On Monday November 1st, [REDACTED] (AP at [REDACTED] ES) reported that Mr. Blanton had called him that morning to talk about the principal [REDACTED] and discussed concerns he had heard from [REDACTED] staff members.
 - o A Cleveland County Commissioner reported to Mr. [REDACTED] that Mr. Blanton and discussed the same issues at [REDACTED] with the commissioner.
3. Also on November 1st, Mr. Queen reported that Mr. Blanton had talked with Mr. [REDACTED] regarding the fact that his [REDACTED] was not hired for the counselor position at [REDACTED] ES. Mr. Blanton claims that the superintendent told him to have his [REDACTED] apply for the job and Mr. Blanton further claims that it was implied that Mr. Blanton's [REDACTED] was supposed to get it. Mr. Blanton further stated that the last seven employees hired at [REDACTED] were black. Personnel records indicate that this is not true.
4. Mr. Blanton called [REDACTED] during the [REDACTED] ES counselor interviews wanting his [REDACTED] hired. Mr. Blanton said he wanted everything done fair but was asking about qualifications of other candidates. Mr. Blanton asked "What flavor is she?" in reference to the race of the applicant that was hired.
5. Mr. Blanton has been seen at [REDACTED] ES taking a picture (or perhaps pictures) of the driveway area.
6. Mr. Blanton has allowed or caused false and misleading information to be circulated in the public about the potential for school closures. Mr. Blanton was in the committee meetings where these ideas were discussed, so he should clearly understand what the committee's recommendations were going to be. The false information in the community has caused much angst and further distrust of the school board.

Policy 1010 - Board Authority and Duties

- The Board is a corporate body. Mr. Blanton does not understand this and tries to take matters into his own hands. He contacts school staff and central office staff to conduct his own investigations. This policy lists 18 duties of board members. Instead of regularly and actively participating as a corporate member of the board, Mr. Blanton's actions are routinely individual actions. Duty 18 within Policy 1010 states that board members should be an advocate for the school system, employees, and students. Instead, Mr. Blanton constantly tears down CCS and creates distrust in the public regarding CCS.

Policy 2000 - Operational Goals of the Board

- This policy recognizes the trust and accountability that the board owes citizens, staff, parents, and students. Mr. Blanton violates this trust and accountability by continually trying to circumvent the Board as a corporate body.
- This policy states that Board members should act in accordance with the Code of Ethics. Mr. Blanton has refused to sign the annual code of ethics for several years.
- Decisions are to be made with the Board's goals, objectives, and other principles as the guiding focus. Mr. Blanton fails to do this because he continues to work as an individual instead of a corporate member.

Policy 2120 - Code of Ethics for School Board Members

- Board members must adhere to a code of ethics as required by N.C.S.S. 160A-86 and N.C.G.S. 115C-47(57). Each member shall commit to the code set forth in this policy.
- Board members are to avoid impropriety and should try to avoid the appearance of impropriety. Mr. Blanton has failed in this area by trying to influence hiring decisions throughout the district. He has advocated for friends and family as it relates to hiring decisions.
- Board members are to perform duties faithfully. Mr. Blanton has failed in this regard because he continues to spread false information and acts individually.
- Board members are to conduct affairs in an open and public manner. Mr. Blanton has failed to do this by investigating matters behind the scenes and does not immediately bring such matters/complaints to the superintendent.
- Specific commitments:
 - Mr. Blanton is rarely prepared for discussion of issues at board meetings. Many times he has complained immediately before a meeting starts that he was not provided certain information. However, Mr. Blanton simply has not looked at BoardDocs or responded to emails to obtain the information needed.
 - It is believed that Mr. Blanton has surrendered some of his judgement to individuals or special interest groups. He does not appear to be making decisions independently.
 - Mr. Blanton does not model civility to anyone in his interactions with school personnel and other board members. Mr. Blanton does not appreciate the free expression of ideas from other board members. He tries to control discussion as much as possible and becomes angry when others don't agree with him.
 - As mentioned above, Mr. Blanton doesn't understand he has no individual authority. He continues to operate on his own.
 - Mr. Blanton does not respect the confidentiality of information. While we are not aware that he has disseminated confidential information such as personnel information, Mr. Blanton has disseminated business-sensitive information. By releasing information improperly, it undermines the board's ability to negotiate with vendors and act in the best interest of the school system.
 - Mr. Blanton does not effectively communicate with other board members.
 - We have not seen evidence that Mr. Blanton has completed the required board member training and ethics training.

- Mr. Blanton does not support the employment of those best qualified for a position. He has made phone calls on multiple occasions trying to influence hiring decisions for family and friends.
- Mr. Blanton does not refrain from investigating complaints that he receives personally. This is probably his more frequently committed inappropriate act.
- Mr. Blanton does not avoid conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest. He has made calls to vendors to get quotes for services and materials. He has talked to vendors about HVAC equipment, architectural firms regarding their services, and subcontractors regarding individual work projects.
- Mr. Blanton continuously takes actions that compromise the board's wellbeing.
- We have been told that Mr. Blanton has asked for and received discounts at local stores in exchange for a promise of getting that person an interview with CCS.
- Mr. Blanton has refused to sign the CCS Board's Code of Ethics for several years.

Policy 2122 - Role of Board Members in Handling Complaints

- Mr. Blanton continuously fails to follow this policy by personally investigating complaints instead of turning them over to the superintendent for investigation.