

East Haddam Board of Education
Regular Meeting Audience of Citizens Transcription
February 13, 2023

1. Thank you, good evening, I'm Irene Haines, First Selectman here in East Haddam and also a taxpayer. I'm coming tonight to the board of education meeting to clear something up. So, everyone assembled here as well as the folks who are listening remotely and to all the future viewers of this meeting, I want to make something crystal clear. At no time did I or the town treasurer ask the Board of Ed or the administration of the East Haddam schools to divulge any student information. I repeat we did not ask for any student information. I want to make that crystal clear. When the treasurer approached me with her concerns about her electronic signature being used on blank checks particularly on those of tens of thousands of dollars, or hundreds of thousands of dollars, I shared her concern. As elected officials by the citizens of this town, we all, all of us have a fiduciary responsibility to be good stewards of the taxpayers' dollars. Checks and balances have been in place for years, hence dual signatures, in the town's case triple signatures. Each signer has the opportunity to review the backup paperwork which is bills, receipts or invoices and to question money spent. In the Board of Ed's case however they are given the authority to spend the allocation of the town's money given to them by the board of finance as they see fit. However, the process and best accounting procedures that should be there to backup provider - for at least the signers. Again, that backup is payee information and dates so that the checks and the invoices match. That is all. No student info needed. To reiterate, that is what best practice says. And we should follow best practice for the good of the taxpayer dollar which we all have a fiduciary responsibility for. This current check signing policy is an egregious example of the culture of the opacity that is installed by the current leadership of this board. It's your responsibility to the citizens, the taxpayers of East Haddam and I implore you to change that today. Thank you very much.

Thank you First Selectwoman Haines for your comments and we appreciate you taking the time to come and speak to the board.

To your comment that at no time did you or the town treasurer ask the Board of Education or administration of the schools to divulge student information. That would be a contradiction to what the Town Attorney sent to the board on your behalf.

In your attorney letter it states: The First Selectman and the Town Treasurer would like backup documentation. It was discussed that backup documentation would/could be an invoice that connected a student to a service and could expose the students' PII (personal identifying information). If you listened to the whole meeting the same day, you would have also heard a reference to the potential of seeing student information.

I believe as the First Selectman, since you used that in your comments to identify yourself first, your opacity towards board leadership goes back to the incorrect information you provided to the taxpayers at a Board of Selectman meeting with regards to your hiring of the HR position and blaming the Board of Education for bailing, leaving you to hire someone for a 15 hour a week, work from home, after hours position at \$100ph when you had clearly been told during that process that type of hire would not work for the Board. Is this what you mean when you reference an egregious example of the culture of opacity? Is that what you mean by being a good steward of taxpayers' dollars? Or is all of this only applicable in your opinion when it's in regards to the Board of Education spending?

The Board of Education has always used best practices and will continue to. The Board of Education currently has people and processes in place to assure that. This can be seen through successful yearly state audits and with a strong working relationship of the previous Finance Director, staff and Town Treasurer. Do we believe that can also be the case again with the Boards Business Manager and current Town Treasurer, most certainly! But with an accusatory comment of "egregious example of the culture of opacity by Board Leadership", my response would be, being the First Selectman and State Representative covering East Haddam, if you felt these state audits were not thorough enough, and you felt something was awry and that "WE ALL" have a fiduciary responsibility as taxpayers, WHY didn't you contact the SDE to request an independent audit? Make a complaint? If you believed something was being hidden, or not being done correctly, WHY didn't you take action? The friction between the Board of Education and the Town Treasurer has only been exacerbated by your actions. Fact in point, back on December 6th, 2022 in your email to the Town Treasurer you were told, "Their collective belief is that the checks are educational documents protected by FERPA." So you knew, but yet continued as if you didn't, again is this what you mean when you reference an egregious example of the culture of opacity?

2. Hi, my name is Debby Langdon, a parent of East Haddam, I'm on the board of Assessment Appeals and I just wanted to urge the leadership to follow reasonable standards that are in place in other towns to allow the treasurer to sign a non-disclosure. I think that's reasonable and my concern is that the very beneficiaries of the funds might be at risks of having the funds put on hold until a reasonable solution is arrived at. So, I urge you to move forward on this quickly. Thank you.

Thank you Ms. Langdon for your comments and we appreciate you taking the time to come and speak to the board.

We are working to resolve this matter quickly and it should be resolved shortly to prevent any delays.

3. Alright, good evening, everybody. My name is Karen Blaschik.
Thank you for offering me this opportunity to speak.
My question is to everyone on this Board: "Why did you want to sit in these seats?
Really think about this question.....
It has become obvious what your answers are by the actions and words used in these meetings, on social media and in a private conversation with me.
Personal agendas have absolutely no place on this Board.
Being a member of this Board is not about YOU as an individual. A Board seat does not give you the opportunity to use it as a sounding board to pursue your personal agenda and to win praise from others. This behavior is self-centered.
Continuing to spread false information is detrimental to this Board. When using phrases on social media like "we desperately need some disinfectant on the Board of Ed. The Board leadership continues to try to keep things hidden, and allowing people to hide to whom large checks are written" limits the way the Board needs to operate and do so in a positive manner.
Unfortunately, these words and actions are clouding your vision to obtain the ultimate goal of this school district. "To provide ALL our students, each and every one, with the best education, guiding them to be well rounded, responsible, independent adult citizens."
These personal agendas are allowing you to take your eyes off the prize....OUR STUDENTS!
We have a district filled with awesome administrators, teachers, and paras! These people give their all to educating our students and they love what they do. Keep your focus on accomplishing what is started in pre-K and finished upon graduation, and that is STUDENT SUCCESS.
Don't let your personal agendas keep you from this vision.
And finally, I will answer the question that was asked on social media by a Board member and I quote "How many children would you needlessly punish for the sins of grown adults who are betraying their trust with all this nonsense?"
My answer... just look in the mirror.

Thank you Ms. Blaschik for your comments and we appreciate you taking the time to come and speak to the board.

The Boards number one goal will always to be to be the strongest advocates we can for students first! To provide a safe setting and promote a positive learning environment where each student has an opportunity to strive and succeed. An education that prepares them to be successful at each level or education and to take transferable skills out into the world and workforce. To be good citizens!

I do understand as of recently it would appear that the focus seems to be off that goal at board meetings, but our students are our main priority!