



SALT LAKE BRANCH NAACP

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Jeanetta Williams
President

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Legislative staffer for Education Interim Committee:

I am writing as President of the NAACP Salt Lake Branch and NAACP Tri-State Conference of Idaho, Nevada and Utah with concerns about the Salt Lake City School Board. We realize that School boards face challenges today and higher scrutiny from parent groups than they have ever faced. However, we support strong and transparent participation of the public with local school boards—parents are the teacher’s most important partner in assuring their child succeeds in their education. Unfortunately, as school boards have faced this increased scrutiny, they have retreated from transparency and open dialogue. Too often, school board members are moving challenging topics to closed workshop sessions, when they communicate with each other they copy the board attorney in emails and texts in order to avoid GRAMMA requests, and they treat concerned communities on the right and the left as us vs them rather than as collaborators in improving how schools work. It is high time that school boards engage publicly and transparently in all they do, that they refocus their work on decisions that impact student learning rather than being driven by politics and territorial actions, and that they quit spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on outside lawyers to protect themselves rather than spending that money in the classroom, where our students need it most.

The board hired the law firm of Kirton & McConkie to investigate Dr. Gadson and found nothing, in other words, “the investigation came out clean. There was nothing to support what they were claiming.”

In 2014, Kristi Swett was the Board Chair when Uintah Elementary School cafeteria employee was told to take food trays from students and throw out because of negative account balances, making national news. The board decided to officially hire Squire & Co. to conduct an external audit of district procedures and financial issues related to the incident. The board also decided to issue a request for proposals for companies to look into the personnel side of the issue after representatives from Squire said they aren't able to conduct that side of the investigation. Board president Kristi Swett said the Squire audits might cost between \$5,000 and \$7,000. This was done with having an RFP. This was a waste of funds that could have been used better.

Kristi Swett, would always find ways to defend then Superintendent McKell Withers, unlike that with the present Superintendent Dr. Timothy Gadson.

Acts of Discrimination that the NAACP found disturbing were:

- Board members coordinate efforts with district directors to find negative issues with Black administrators.

- Board members work in collaboration with school administrators to file complaints against Black administrators.
- Board members work in collaboration with district attorney, Kristina Kendal to coordinate and file complaints against Black administrators.
- Different consequences for White administrators vs. Black administrators.
- Board members retaliate against administrators of color if anything is questioned.
- Breach of confidentiality from committee members in hiring practices. They only question when hiring Black administrators.

Board Member Kennedy actively interfered with staff in a situation with a principal not complying with policy. She basically was saying (in violation of Policy G-18) that everyone could come directly to the Board. In addition to Board members using their positions to interfere and micromanage staff. The focus is not to have quality education for students but to always seek opportunities to micromanage staff.

In as much as Katherine Kennedy no longer resides within the 3rd Precinct, the NAACP Salt Lake Branch, requested to the Board President, Melissa Ford that Katherine Kennedy be asked to immediately resign her position as a member of the Salt Lake City School Board. It is very clear that this board seat is vacant and should be declared as such and filled by the process outlined by state statute. We requested that this issue is immediately reviewed and acted upon by the Board President and the Salt Lake City School District Board. The State Statute UCA 20A-14-202(3), reads:

(3) A member of a local school board shall:

(a) be and remain a registered voter in the local school board district from which the member is elected or appointed; and

(b) maintain the member's primary residence within the local school board district from which the member is elected or appointed during the member's term of office.

An outside law firm was hired to see how Katherine Kennedy could break the law and maintain her board position, Yet, another abuse of tax payers' money. Funds that could have been used toward students. This is yet another issue where the Salt Lake School Board disregards policy and state statute and do what they feel privileged to do. For these and other reasons, Utah School Boards need to be more accountable with transparency. High achievement for all students must be a priority.

Sincerely,



Jeanetta Williams
President