

July 9th, 2024

Dear Ms. Heftman,

Thank you for your response to and acknowledgement of the concerns that were brought to the Board of Education's attention ahead of your vote to extend the Superintendent's contract. The points we raised in our letter dated June 25th, 2024 were legitimate and accurate and SEA stands by them. While these facts may be difficult to hear, rebutting them with falsehoods is not going to change the reality of what has been occurring in the SPS under the leadership of our Superintendent. We will now set the record straight, as follows:

July 2, 2024

Mr. John Corcoran President
Stamford Education Association
1177 Summer Street - 4th Floor
Stamford, CT 06905

Dear Mr. Corcoran:

I'm writing regarding your letter to the Board of Education (BOE) dated June 25, 2024. SEA leadership has the right, on behalf of its members, to publicly oppose decisions made by the BOE, the Superintendent, the Superintendent's executive team, and building administrators. However, the SEA does not have the right to perpetuate falsehoods and half-truths to undermine the Superintendent or the work of her administration. Such conduct not only reflects negatively on the SEA as a professional membership organization, but it also diminishes the SEA's standing with the BOE.

ALL RESPONSES OFFERED BELOW BY THE SEA ARE ACCURATE TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE AS OF THE DATE THIS LETTER IS BEING SENT.

Your Letter Stated: "Dr. Lucero is doing the hard work required to move our district forward at a time when the pressures on public education are enormous."

***FACT:** The current Superintendent has demonstrated time and again her tendency to be reactive to any situation, as opposed to being proactive. One example is as follows: The superintendent along with central office administration needed to react to an external audit during 2021-2022 instead of having been proactive. Administrative leadership knew there was a major lack of curriculum and weak test scores were a reflection of that. Teachers were left to work together to support their classroom instruction by searching for curriculum online and, as the audit showed, purchase lesson plans from Teachers Pay Teachers. We need to know that the curriculum is ready to roll-out on day one, with appropriate training having taken place. Additionally, materials need to be ordered and distributed BEFORE the first day of school, which has not been*

the previous practice. One of many examples is that the Language Live! Curriculum for middle school reading intervention classes were not delivered until October 20th, approximately 8 weeks into the school year, leaving teachers scrambling to provide reading materials for instruction, a quarter of the way into the school year.

Your Letter Stated: “Dr. Lucero played a key role in convincing the Board of Finance and the Board of Representatives to support a 5.48% budget increase, which preserved more than 100 jobs across the district, including many SEA member positions.”

***FACT:** The SEA supported the budget, but it was done so in an attempt to preserve positions and programs. It was through that support and the SEA’s active communication with the Board of Finance and especially the Board of Representatives that the SEA contributed to securing the greatest increase in the 2024 - 2025 SPS fiscal budget possible. What did the superintendent do in her budget reallocation and roughly \$3 million in cuts? Approximately \$2.3 million of those cuts were to be taken from SEA staffing positions. See Budget Allocation attachment dated May 10 from Ryan Fealey (SPS CFO) page 1.*

Your Letter Stated: The Board has confidence in the Superintendent’s leadership, and we support her vision for our district. That was the case in 2019, and it remains so today. Consider the following:

- Over the next decade, SPS teachers, staff, and students will be working and learning in at least four brand new school buildings, with remaining buildings receiving significant upgrades in HVAC and other critical systems, as well as safety enhancements.

***FACT:** To this date, we have not seen evidence that this is moving forward. In fact, there was recently an article in the Advocate, dated July 6th, indicating that installation of A/C units continues, however it is expected that 89 of these units will not be installed before the start of the 2024-25 school year. Why are we learning of this through a local news source instead of from our district administration? There have not been recent updates or communications about the status of these projects as is typical of the Superintendent’s approach.*

- **Your Letter Stated:** “The master staffing plan will standardize the number and type of personnel required across buildings at each level, thus ensuring an educational experience that is consistent from building to building. The Superintendent met with staff in every school – including SEA members – to solicit their ideas and feedback for this plan.”

***FACT:** Those meetings which the SEA President and CEA Uniserv stopped attending, were strictly a public relations facade designed to cover up the fact that communication with the Superintendent had broken down. The Superintendent was making unilateral decisions and simply informing the SEA. Being informed of decisions is not the hallmark of collaboration.*

- **Your Letter Stated:** “The curriculum development work is being led by a team that includes more than 250 SEA member educators, because Dr. Lucero recognizes that our teachers are content area experts who are best equipped to determine the scope and sequence of what is being taught in our classrooms.”

FACT: This speaks to the dedication and professionalism of our teachers who have always taken the initiative to ensure that the curriculum reflects the highest standards to benefit our students, not to the Superintendent’s desire to collaborate with educators.

- **Your Letter Stated:** “SPS collaborated with the SEA and the Stamford Administrative Unit (SAU) this year to develop a Professional Growth, Development, and Evaluation Plan as mandated by state law.”

FACT: SPS did not collaborate with SEA. The SEA co-chair was treated by the SAU co-chair more as an assistant than having an equal say in the process, and further chastised by the Board attorney to such an extent that the SEA had to reach out to the Board attorney to request an apology. For example, at the initial Steering Committee meeting, the committee voted to make edits to only the parts of the plan that needed edits to align to the state, as outlined by the SEA co-chair. Even so, the administrators ultimately rewrote their entire portion of the plan, and then rewrote the teacher plan too.

Your Letter Stated: “Your letter makes several false statements, many of which have been addressed previously by the BOE, the Superintendent, or members of her leadership team. Given that your letter has undoubtedly been circulated widely, as Board President I will correct the record here. “

FACT: Sadly, your “corrections” are inaccurate as we have addressed. The SEA President’s letter of June 25, 2024 was shared with the nine SPS Board of Education Members, the city mayor, the CEA Uniserv director and a few members of the SEA board. Unfortunately, it is SEA’s understanding that your letter dated July 2, 2024, which was riddled with inaccuracies, was sent via email blind copy to building and central office administrators and all teachers. It is the BOE’s credibility and integrity that will now be in question.

Your Letter Stated: “*SEA Assertion:* During this past school year (2023-2024), teachers from our three high schools and two middle schools announced a vote of “no confidence” against the Superintendent in response to her unilateral imposition of schedule changes that did not take into consideration the impact on instruction.”

The Superintendent did not unilaterally impose schedule changes, but rather proposed schedule changes that were the subject of negotiation. Significantly, your letter omits the key fact that the Board and the SEA reached agreement in April on the impact of the new schedules for the coming year through those negotiations. As to the no- confidence votes that were based on that false premise, the BOE publicly responded in March, stating, in part, “... *anonymous votes of no confidence put into the public discourse as an expression of teacher sentiment are neither constructive, nor are they a substitute for stable, pragmatic governance.... (T)he Board will continue to discuss with the SEA the impact of the new schedule on high school teachers through procedures established under the Teacher Negotiation Act.*”

FACT: *Under the current SEA/BOE contract, Article 16, F., the BOE has the right to change the “schedule” and the SEA has the right to bargain its impact per the TNA. The SEA does not accept the statement “Significantly, your letter omits the key fact that the Board and the SEA reached agreement in April on the impact of the new schedules for the coming year through those negotiations”. The superintendent did make the unilateral changes to the schedules at both the high schools and middle schools. SEA could not stop that change from occurring. Although SEA offered several different changes to the schedule that would have no additional cost to the district, the superintendent decided to move forward with their schedule changes. As far as the votes of no confidence at the two middle schools and three high schools, the SEA would like clarification on the statement they were “based on that false premise”. There were no “false premises”, only truths. Teachers will have increased instructional time, less self directed time, and larger class sizes that will ultimately have a negative impact on student success. Furthermore, under the new schedule, the middle school students lose 20% of their instructional time in their core subjects. These are additional reasons why there is “no confidence” in the current Superintendent.*

To continue with the votes of no-confidence, in a March 14, 2024 article which appeared in the Stamford Advocate, the district spokesperson stated, “The BOE and the superintendent are aware of the symbolic votes of no confidence, but right now they are focused on rallying support for the BOE’s proposed 2024-25 operating budget as it moves to the Board of Finance and Representatives for approval”. As of this date, and prior to the July 2nd letter, besides indirect mention in the Advocate, the BOE has not addressed the votes of no confidence, leaving the teachers feeling that their voices and opinions are not valued.

Your Letter Stated: “Budget cuts also impacted the district’s art program, leading to the elimination of 2 positions and additional loss of staff. Many teachers also recently learned that they would not be offered full-time positions next year, but rather reduced schedules or involuntary transfers.”

As your fact stated: The district employs more SEA member educators today than it did when Dr. Lucero became Superintendent. For the 2024-25 school year, Stamford Public Schools has budgeted for 1,572.4 FTE certified educator positions up from to 1,509.3 FTE in 2018-19. It’s worth noting that overall student enrollment has remained flat.

After completing the first three steps of the SEA member hiring process, the SPS HR team communicated to SEA members on June 12 that the projected SEA member reduction in force (RIF) was 22.3 full time equivalents (FTE) across 11 content areas. At the suggestion of HR specialist Melissa Wills, and in collaboration with the SEA, SPS offered teachers in those content areas alternate employment options that ultimately decreased the final RIF to 8 non-tenured teachers (7.5 FTE) across only 3 content areas. In addition, 4 non-tenured teachers in the same content areas had their FTEs reduced below 1.0 for 2024-25. For 2024-25, 53.8 FTE art educator positions remain in the budget.

In a year when SPS faced a fiscal cliff due to the expiration of federal ESSER funds, it is nothing

short of miraculous that only 8 full-time teachers were laid off.

FACT: *Due to ongoing collaboration and transparent conversations with the Senior Human Resources Generalist, we were, in fact, able to minimize teacher reductions and FTEs. This demonstrates what can be accomplished when there is mutual agreement and cooperation between the SEA and the SPS. Please refer to page 2 of the Supplementary Budget sent to the BOE by Ryan Fealey, CFO on May 14th, 2024.*

Your Letter Stated: The result was the loss of additional staff as teachers chose to resign and seek employment in other districts.

As your fact stated: Resignations by SEA member educators are at their lowest level since before the pandemic. In 2023-24, only 57 SEA member employees resigned, down from 83 in 2022-23 and 108 in 2021-22.

FACTS: *The following numbers were provided from HR: These numbers do not count interim-contracts.*

*21/22 - 158 SEA members either resigned or retired (48 retirees, 110 resignations)
22/23 - 113 SEA members either resigned or retired (29 retirees, 84 resignations)
23/24 - 86 SEA members either resigned or retired (23 retirees, 63 resignations) as of this letter. History tells us that there will be more resignations that occur before the first day of school and a few after.*

Had the SPS conducted exit surveys, they would have realized the number of early retirements and reasons for resignations. Until we address the reasons that people are leaving, we will not have a school system that attracts and retains the talent that would best serve our students.

Your Letter Stated: The Superintendent's most recent budget also stands to have a negative impact on our EL (English Learner) students by cutting staff and reallocating responsibilities. Details outlined in a May 22nd article in the Stamford Advocate indicate that this was done to save \$3 million at the expense of EL students by eliminating 25 teachers, including an EL Coordinator.

As your fact stated: The actual SEA member RIF for FY25 was reduced to 8 non-tenured teachers (7.5 FTE), only one of which is a teacher of English as a second language (TESOL). The elimination of the EL Coordinator position – which was an SAU-eligible position in the central office – is part of strategic restructuring of the Teaching & Learning Department

FACT: *At the time that the May 22nd article was published, 25 teachers faced the prospect of elimination. As previously stated, it has been a result of the ongoing collaboration between the SEA and the Senior HR Generalist that so many jobs were saved.*

SEA Letter Stated: Most recently, as the school year came to a close, over 30 SEA job changes were introduced late in the game, surpassing the June 15th deadline for teachers being informed

of their upcoming job assignments for the 2024-2025 school year. There were no extenuating circumstances necessitating this delay but rather the elimination of current positions which resulted in combining previously existing positions into one, increasing staff workloads for no additional compensation.

As your fact stated: Article 16 of the current agreement between the SEA and BOE addresses unit member assignments as follows:

“Assignments shall be made only after every reasonable effort has been made to meet the reasonable requests and desires of any unit member concerned.” and

“Unit members shall be notified of their programs for the coming school year, including the schools to which they will be assigned, the grades and/or subjects that they will teach and any special or unusual assignments that they will have, and any extra pay assignments they shall be responsible for, as soon as practicable, and under normal circumstances not later than June 15th.”

The Superintendent and her leadership team outlined several proposed job changes during the BOE’s May 7 budget reallocation workshop. New teacher leader positions were introduced that align with the Master Staffing Plan to ensure consistency across schools at each level (elementary, middle, high school).

The process of posting and filling open positions can begin only after the BOE budget is finalized. The final determination of the rosters and associated vacancy lists are guided not just by the budget, but also enrollment and course selection for a given year. The SPS HR team followed the same process it does every year, which is supported by all city and school union leadership, including SEA.

The budget reallocation vote was originally scheduled to take place on May 14 but had to be delayed for a week due, in part, to SEA members’ opposition to the elimination of the SAU-eligible EL Coordinator position in the Central Office. The BOE voted to approve the budget allocation on May 21.

Job assignments were pushed back to give the SPS HR Department additional time to minimize the projected RIF, a plan the SEA supported. You added your name to the memo about this plan and the resulting shift in the job assignment timeline that was sent by SPS HR on June 12.

Fact: *Letters have only just been received on July 8th and lack required information as per Article 16 B.*

The SEA and its President, while working in conjunction with Melissa Wills, agreed to add the President's name to a joint letter. Due to an excessive staffing change throughout our schools, there was unnecessary delay in the staffing process. Subsequently, after receiving many phone calls, texts, and emails, the joint letter was done to help alleviate the calls both HR and SEA were receiving. At the same time, the SEA President advised the HR Director that although the letter was a joint one to the teachers, grievances would still be filed for not meeting the June 15th

deadline of notifying SEA members about their upcoming job assignments and salary classifications. Said grievances were filed on June 17th.

Your letter stated: SEA Assertion: Although the SEA expressed their concerns about this ongoing problem directly to the Superintendent, to date, she has still not responded; no explanation or apology have been offered by the Superintendent to the staff or students that were affected, or to the students' families whose children attend Turn of River Middle School and face regular disruptions to their learning experience.

As your fact stated: Dr. Lucero was informed about the June 7 incident at TOR shortly after it occurred. Within hours, a short-term response plan was in place for the last week of school, the details of which Dr. Rhodes shared with the SEA via email on Sunday, June 9 at the Superintendent's request. Similarly, on June 18, Dr. Rhodes responded on the Superintendent's behalf to a subsequent SEA email about TOR dated June 14. In the June 18 email, Dr. Rhodes outlined a 15-point plan of action to improve the work environment at TOR. In addition, Dr. Lucero, Dr. Rhodes, and BOE members attended a Town Hall with TOR families on June 18, and Dr. Lucero addressed the challenges publicly in a message to all SPS families and staff on June 24.

As part of the district's 15-point plan of action, a committee composed of 13 SEA members will begin meeting with TOR administrators and District officials next week to codify policies and procedures to improve school climate.

Fact: *The inappropriate behaviors of the students at TOR and the concern for the safety of staff and students were brought to the attention of building and district administrators as early as in the Fall of 2023. Parents also expressed their concerns in February and March. This disappointing lack of response by district administrators and their failure to adhere to Board adopted policies and state statute led to the unfortunate incidents that occurred between May 30th and June 7th that have been written about in local newspapers and previously outlined in a letter to the Superintendent on June 14th.*

These verbal and physical assaults against staff members by students were permitted to continue throughout the 2023-2024 school year at TOR. These were meticulously documented by the SEA and shared with the Superintendent, the Associate Superintendent, the Executive Director of HR, and the building principal, with a cc going to the BOE President and the BOE Labor Chair on June 14th, and with a reminder of these issues to the Board on June 25th. The 15-point response we received from one of the Superintendent's many Assistants in the growing administrative hierarchy contained a plan for what will be done going forward, ignoring the fact that Board adopted policies and state statutes already in existence were ignored at all levels. This issue was noticeably relegated to the end of your letter dated July 2nd where you stated that "a committee composed of 13 SEA members will BEGIN meeting with TOR administrators and District officials next week to codify policies and procedures to improve school climate". Where was the oversight to ensure that these EXISTING policies and procedures were being enforced? Why was TOR one of many schools that did not have a School Climate Committee in place as per Board policy? Students cannot be successful if they do not feel safe and are not provided with an environment

that is conducive to learning.

The SEA has the right to express its views on district operations, including the actions of the Superintendent. However, as described above, the numerous inaccuracies in your letter are grossly unfair to the Board and the Superintendent and undermine the credibility of the SEA.

Jackie Heftman

Jackie Heftman
President,
Stamford Board of Education

In the past, your views as a school board trustee reflected a concern for the overall well being and success of our students. Yet, what's been allowed to continue under our current superintendent with regard to student behavior and academic apathy is a sign of failure that contradicts your own statements given over the years:

What is the most important responsibility of this Board?

“The most important responsibility of this Board is to make sure that the mission and vision of the Stamford Public Schools reflect the belief that all children can be successful lifelong learners, and have the skills necessary to be productive, contributing members of society. *We must then hold the superintendent accountable for meeting that goal.*”

~Interview response given to the League of Women Voters of Stamford (toward the end of your third term)

<https://www.stamfordelections.com/candidates/59dbdd10c3ec6f001223ba5c>

More recently, in the Fall of 2023 in an interview with the Patch, you seemed to echo the same sentiments:

Please complete this statement: The single most pressing issue facing my constituents is _____, and this is what I intend to do about it.

“Fulfilling our mission to provide an education that cultivates productive habits of mind, body and heart in every student. I will support policies and initiatives which further that end.”

<https://patch.com/connecticut/stamford/2023-stamford-election-profile-jackie-heftman-board-education>

Based on your prior statements, the SEA had actually anticipated a much different response to our letter of June 25th, as the issues of concern raised about the Superintendent’s contract extension are factual and directly impact “an education that cultivates productive habits of mind, body and heart in every student”.

Again, we implore the Board of Education to reconsider the concerns raised by the SEA, and the

impact that extending the Superintendent’s contract will have on the social-emotional well-being and academic success of the students of the Stamford community.

The Stamford Education Association shares goals similar to the Board’s as our workplace conditions are our students’ learning conditions. We too want well-resourced classrooms and safe, healthy schools in order to attract and retain the best teachers. Our staff and students deserve no less since these factors impact the quality of education offered in our district. With this said, we see no reason why your letter of July 2nd should be an admonishment of our concerns resulting in a “diminishment of SEA’s standing with the BOE”. We look forward to an improved collaborative relationship to benefit all students and staff members of the Stamford Public Schools.

Sincerely, the SEA Executive Board

John Corcoran, SEA President
Bonita Maddox, VP Elementary K-2
Nancy Mould, VP Elementary 3-5
Sheila Bragg, VP Middle School
Ruth-Terry Walden, VP High School
Stefanie Kousoulas., Secretary
Sean O’Connell, Treasurer
Kate Tobin, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer
Bettina Vaccaro, Director
Marilyn Schlosser, Director
Peter Hadley, Director
Michelle Pusser, Director
Erin Spata, Director
Caitlen Sheeran, Director
Suzanne Rixon, Director