

MITCH JENSEN

September 28, 2014

East Valley School District, #361
3830 N Sullivan Road, Building 1
Spokane Valley, WA 99216

Board Chair and Interim Superintendent,

In November 2013, three new Board Directors were sworn in at East Valley. My hope was that the new members would embrace the rigors and responsibilities of being a School Board Director. Although a volunteer, community position, being a School Board Director includes so much more than occupying a seat behind a nameplate every other Tuesday night. Decisions must be made only after study, research, and due diligence. Personal agendas are checked at the door and the needs of all students are considered before voting on items presented. This is not something that is learned in a few short weeks. Successful board directors understand that there is a steep learning curve and take advantage of extensive training and professional development before attempting to direct a school district instead of jumping head first into the deep water.

My hope was that the new members of the Board would rise above the “adult issues” that permeated the election and look closely to ferret out the misinformation and outright lies that were being spread, sadly by seated board members who were feeding this misinformation to candidates for their mailers.

I also hoped that the new members would have honesty and integrity as two of their guiding principles.

Although hope springs eternal, these hopes were never to be realized.

Decorum has been the buzzword of the month. Let us be clear that decorum also includes allowing board members the opportunity to state opinions, ask questions and make comments without being mocked by mimicking hand gestures and eye rolling, or shut down by outright interruptions.

The previous board has been blamed for ‘ruining’ the district. The only things the previous board did were increase the graduation rate, provide a new model that would positively change the culture of our district, increase attendance and decrease discipline issues in grades K-8, increase AP and College prep classes at the high school, provide and increase ALE options for kids of all ages and abilities, and establish and maintain fiscal responsibility. The previous board proved that their paramount duty was to the students of East Valley by ensuring quality instruction where teachers and staff were unencumbered by the worry of RIFs and cutbacks. The previous board and Superintendent always found a way to keep staff pay whole even when the state made deep cuts in salaries. They actively and successfully sought out ways to increase East Valley’s FTE which in turn increased revenue which in turn was put before kids by way of programs and staff. The previous board had poised East Valley on the forefront of innovative educational opportunity that made other districts stand up and take notice. The current board cannot claim any such successes.

The previous board worked for hundreds of hours to formulate a plan to transition the district and put it on a path that was presented by community members who invested thousands of hours. That board worked for over five years to make the gradual change to K-8. Five years of brainstorming, work sessions, planning, considering consequences of decisions, more community discussions and even more planning. Within eight weeks, 56 days, of being sworn into office, not only had the new board shut out the Superintendent, they made the ill-thought-out decision to reverse the K-8 by the start of the upcoming school year, a mere six months away. There was no study, no research, no work sessions and certainly no due diligence. The program had not even completed its first year of

full implementation when the decision was made. It eludes me that any entity would scrap a promising program that had not been given the time to prove itself. The newly elected board members are very clear about the fact that their votes are made to placate the vocal few who “put them in office” – not for the benefit of all students. The public perception is that they were elected to do those two things, that they’ve done them both, and now they are ambivalent to the success of East Valley kids.

It is also disturbing to me when, during a meeting, it is clear that a particular board member is confused about an issue on the table and I have witnessed another board member instruct him on how to vote by using subtle nods or shakes of the head.

This board has gone rogue in every sense of the word. They are often in violation of the Open Public Meetings Act. Decisions are made before board meetings, evidenced by text messages I have from January 2014 in which the Board Chair refers to the previous Superintendent as a “lame duck Superintendent” – two weeks before any mention was made about a separation between the Superintendent and the district. I also have a text that indicates the board chair and another member came to a separation agreement with the Superintendent before the board ever had a chance to discuss possible separation. Protocols and procedures are adhered to on a whim and when it suits their agenda. These rules are blatantly ignored the majority of the time. This was made painfully evident by the hijacking of the district’s personnel procedures when a staffing change was forcibly made mid-year at the high school with no regard to input from the HR Director or Superintendent.

Because of the aforementioned, and the fact that I am no longer given the due consideration of a sitting member of the East Valley School Board, I am tendering my resignation effective October 14, 2014. I am not giving in, I am not giving up, I have simply had enough. I will continue to be involved in the district that I have given my time, energy, and effort to for the past seven years. I am the proud parent of a Knight and will turn my energies to being involved solely as a parent. Distancing my family and myself from the toxicity that surrounds this board is my only option.

Mitch Jensen

