

June 1, 2017

Chairman Caldwell, Honorable Board Members and Superintendent Hopson:

I wanted to take a few minutes to communicate several concerns to you as a collective body, so that each of you are able to fully and completely gain an accurate understanding of the dire situation at not only Trezevant High School, but at many of the schools across SCS, particularly in the IZone.

Since June of 2016, it has been communicated to me by several employees (who work in the IZone) that when I was asked to take on the leadership at Trezevant, I was being “set up” in efforts to cover up District Leadership’s corrupt, illegal, and unethical activities and to provide a “scapegoat” for the mess that has been created over the past several years. In April of 2016, in my confirmation interview with the Superintendent and IZone Regional Superintendent, it was communicated to me that there was an “adult culture” problem at Trezevant and there was a “financial mess” that needed to be cleaned up. In the following weeks, in two separate phone conversations with the IZone Regional Superintendent, it was urgently communicated to me her deep concerns about the “adult culture” issue that SHE said created this financial mess (which I will elaborate on further below). She stated that an investigation was underway and there will absolutely be charges filed against “someone who needs to be held accountable” for the “thousands and thousands” of dollars missing. I was told that Trezevant would be put on “front street, but I should have no worries”, because SHE and the Superintendent believed my strong leadership could stand up to the controversy. I was told that, as “I had no part in the scandal” from the years before I assumed leadership, I should have “no concerns personally.” In conversations with SCS Board Member Stephanie Love, it was communicated that there were multiple parents reaching out to her with these same concerns about the school and she was very excited for me to take on the leadership in efforts to “get to the bottom of it and hold people accountable.”

I want to provide an outline of many of the situations that have occurred with minimal support from the district or the IZone. There have been multiple incidents where I have uncovered illegal and unethical wrongdoings and was basically told to not comment on it. I will list them in order.

- As we were auditing our senior students’ transcripts, we discovered inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the historical transcripts and report cards. The grades on the report cards did not match the grades on the transcripts. We realized that 121 out of the 142 seniors would not graduate if their grades and schedules stayed the same. We worked endlessly to analyze these transcripts, the credits previously earned, and the credits needed. We created a plan to put them in the correct academic focus so they would graduate. As a result of our transcript analysis, we were able to “fix” over 130 senior schedules and close to 135 seniors were eligible to graduate on time. Also, during this correction process, we came across many students, including high profile athletes (particularly football), that had inconsistent grades on their historical transcripts. We discovered that students received credits for classes they did not pass and numerical grades had been changed in SMS to boost overall GPA’s to compensate for low ACT scores. The situation was turned over to Joris Ray and Bill White, who conducted investigations into the transcript inconsistencies. Bill White discovered that individual student-athlete grades were changed many times and the historical changes showed up in SMS. There was a secretary whose account was being used as we tracked all of the changes. The story broke, parents had to be notified that their child’s grades had been changed and their NCAA eligibility and their TSSAA eligibility were possibly in jeopardy.
- Parents immediately started asking questions, demanded answers, and expressed their frustrations toward me and my administrative team. Parents demanded that I be fired and removed from the school. District leadership stepped forward in attempts to speak to the parents and started painting the picture of me as the “Scapegoat” according to several district personnel when they spoke to parents. It was communicated to parents (by a district level supervisor) that I was “White” and did not “understand the Trezevant kids or its community.” It was just the month of August. If this was an accurate depiction of my leadership within the first month of school, then why was I even sent there with promises of three years to provide financial stability while increasing student achievement.

- I was notified by parents that district level leaders privately communicated to them that they were trying to fire me for the transcript scandal, but couldn't because I was being protected by Board Member Stephanie Love.
- I came across Trezevant High School's Head Football Coach attempting to sell donated t-shirts to students for 10 dollars each. This is a direct violation of policy. (Donated items cannot be resold for profit.) I reported this to district operations and no disciplinary action(s) were taken.
- I discovered that the former Head Football Coach reported an inaccurate enrollment number to the TSSAA for classification purposes. When I was reporting the enrollment numbers to the TSSAA this year, the former Head Football Coach asked me what number I was reporting. I informed him that I was reporting our current enrollment numbers in SMS (670), which is the same enrollment we are staffed and funded on. He shrugged his shoulders and said oh, "okay our enrollment must have increased." (*The actual number that had been entered into the TSSAA classification tool was around 400, which is off by nearly 250 students.* Trezevant High School should have been playing in 4A classification rather than 2A.
- An email addressed to Chief of Innovation and the Regional Superintendent (copied to me) and multiple district level leaders listed 131 students that were actively enrolled in 22 different high schools. These students were formerly Trezevant students and were all actively investigated regarding the transcript scandal. The email also states that the district ***will not notify or take any action on*** any of the students who have already "graduated" from Trezevant, meaning there are multiple student-athletes now enrolled in colleges and universities who did not have appropriate credits to graduate or attend college. Their GPA's were inflated along with being provided credits for classes they did not pass. This has HUGE implications for many current and former student-athletes across Shelby County Schools as they have not met all of the criteria to be NCAA eligible.
- Several days later, I received a surprise visit from a senior district level official and it was communicated to me and my Assistant Principal that this grade scandal needed to "go away" and we need to "move forward and put this behind us."
- I reported to my ILD that there were multiple sexual relationships occurring within the school, which eventually led to termination of our Communities-In-Schools Liaison, and resulted in a formal conversation with our Varsity Girls Head Basketball Coach, who was having sexual relations with two different (not his partner) female teachers in the school. Once this first sexual relationship was communicated, our former Campus Monitor communicated to my Assistant Principal that he had a long standing sexual relationship with my direct supervisor. I turned this information over to Labor Relations and of course, it was denied. It was also reported to me by the same campus monitor that "your supervisor did this to the previous Principal last year when he refused sexual advances from her. I see her doing the same thing to you now." The former Principal reported that she made sexual advances to him last year, which he turned down. She also made a sexually suggestive comment to me regarding coming to Nashville while her and her supervisor were there for a conference. (I had three witnesses hear this on speaker phone and they all felt very uncomfortable for me).
- There is a voicemail from my former supervisor to a parent of one of our senior football players who was affected by the grading scandal, encouraging the parent to pursue legal action against me under false pretenses. She told the parent that I was not at the game when I actually was. She encouraged the parent to file a complaint with the SCIAA, when the Department of Risk Management concluded that we followed all procedures and reported the incident within 12 hours. This student athlete was injured at the end of our football game against Douglass High School (we were not the home team). *IZone expectations state that the HOME team administration must be in attendance at all home events (SEE EMAIL).* Douglass High School administrators were not in attendance, however, all three of our administrators were in attendance. It was a Monday night game and I met with Clemson football coach Dan Brooks through the entirety of the game to address concerns about the academic progress of another student-athlete. (*SEE PICTURE*) posted and time stamped on Instagram.

- My administrative team and I scheduled multiple meetings with parents of the senior football players who were impacted by the transcript scandal and we met with each set of parents individually to explain to them 1) the nature of the investigation, 2) the implications of the investigation, and 3) all of the possible outcomes of the investigation. From this point further, we continued to reach out to parents and meet with them individually to review transcripts and academic progress. They started to decline and continually cancelled and rescheduled. My former supervisor rescheduled her own meeting after Board Member Stephanie Love sent the parents (along with District Leadership) an email asking about progress on the scandal. The IZone Regional Superintendent initially said she wanted to schedule a meeting with all of the parties, but then canceled. I was told by my former supervisor that a meeting with one parent was being rescheduled after school. When my administrative team and I showed up to my office to meet with that one parent, there were seven parents wanting to talk to me about being a “White Principal” at a black school. Parents had paper work containing a partial background check and continued to ask my complete legal name. They made slanderous statements regarding my background and qualifications to be a Principal around students. I was later told by three of the same parents that they were encouraged by district officials and my former supervisor to pull a background check on me. (**WHICH SHOWED NOTHING**).
- We discovered several students who came forward and made statements that former Head Football Coach paid families of super-star athletes to attend Trezevant High School regardless of academic situation. We reported this discovery to SCS District Leadership and brought one student in front of SCS General Counsel and Assistant General Counsel. The student (a former football player) confirmed to both Counsels that THS Head Football Coach paid families to keep student athletes enrolled regardless of their academic situation and promised parents to take care of the grades for the students.
- During National Signing Day, in front of several hundred parents, students, visitors and media personnel, THS Head Football Coach became very disrespectful to school personnel, created tension among the parents and student-athletes, and embarrassed the Trezevant community in front of the entire crowd. While this was transpiring, my 2012 suburban was being vandalized on by two senior football players. There were racial slurs painted on the suburban including “white boy bitch ass.” (**SEE PICTURES**) We had several students come forward and state that two teachers had convinced the two senior football players to vandalize my suburban and then provided them with their classroom keys to re-enter the building, black and gold spray paint, and safe passage back into the classroom. The Coach was immediately dismissed and put on leave. This was February 2. He was removed from all duties at Trezevant High School for reasons detrimental to THS mission and vision and conduct unbecoming a tenured Head Football Coach.
- Approximately one week later, I received a phone call from another HS Principal that a senior District Leader contacted him and expressed a desire to get THS former Head Coach “away from Trezevant and away from Ronnie into a better situation” **after** he had already been removed from Trezevant by Labor Relations. This district leader **“colluded with whomever”** and interfered with due process and unfairly created a negative image of my leadership and ability to manage my own personnel. He leveraged his senior position in an attempt to influence the Principal to hire the coach.
- One week later, February 12, my daughter suddenly passed away from an illness and I had to go out on family illness and bereavement leave. I was out of work for 4 weeks, then Spring Break, and then returned for two weeks in late March and early April.
- When I returned, I reiterated to District Leadership, as I had been doing since August, speaking directly or via cell phone to District Leadership (on multiple occasions) that we needed to “rekey” the locks at Trezevant High School because of the large number of master keys that were missing from previous administration’s collection process. I communicated my concerns regarding the security of our building and all inventory contained inside it. A district employee, who works in operations (**SEE EMAIL**), reported to District Leadership that he had connected the break-in back to that same campus monitor employee who claimed his keys were stolen.

- I reported to Labor Relations and District Leadership my concern regarding that same former campus monitor providing his “custodial foster child” a set of keys to break into the building to retrieve his phone over spring break. This former employee is the same employee who claimed to have a sexual relationship with my former supervisor, and who was also named by parents as being part of the transcript scandal.
- There are multiple communications from SCS Security leaders and District Leadership regarding the multiple break-ins that occurred at Trezevant over spring break, resulting in close to \$50,000 in theft. These students broke into the school on three different occasions. It is on record from SCS Security that they did not respond to the calls because the alarms were turned off by SCS Security themselves. SCS Security never responded to the alarms. SCS Security Leadership stated that a SCS Security employee made a bad judgment call and “someone would be held accountable” in this situation. SCS Security Leadership also stated they could not possibly respond to every alarm that sounds off. There wasn’t just one incident of sounding alarms, not even two, but *THREE*. The perpetrators were in the building for over three hours. These students had keys, which were also believed to be provided by this former campus monitor. Not only did they have keys, but they knew which keys opened specific doors, including my office. (*SEE PICTURES*) A district operations employee (*SEE EMAIL*) reported to senior District Leadership that he had connected the break-in back to that same former campus monitor employee who claimed his keys were stolen back in September. SCS Communications and District Leadership refused to let me respond to an inaccurate story from Fox News and WMC News that falsely reported that the keys were stolen from my office closet. When I expressed my frustration and concern about the perception this created in the community, my former supervisor told me to not respond because the news can report anything it wants and it doesn’t even have to be true.
- After returning to work for those first two weeks after my daughter’s death, I was summoned to the Board of Education and asked to meet with the Chief of Schools, Assistant Superintendent of Operations, Chief of Communications, Chief Labor Relations Officer, and my former supervisor to discuss my transfer to the SCS Board of Education because of “safety reasons”, so that I could serve students in a different capacity as directed by the Superintendent. I was told by the Chief of Schools that I was being moved due to “concerns for my safety” and would not return to Trezevant High School and it was at that time I communicated to them that there was a possible threat at graduation reported to me and my Assistant Principals. The Chief of Schools asked me “What is your dream job?” and I expressed to her that it was at least High School Principal or higher. I expressed to the group that I had concerns about my salary and if I was being moved because of “safety concerns” my salary should not be impacted. I was not being moved because of performance and believed that I should not be penalized because of the actions of students and parents in the community. It was stated that I was being “moved by the Superintendent to the board to serve students in a different capacity.” (*SEE DISTRICT COMMUNICATION*). I left the SCS Board of Education and drove straight to Trezevant High School. When I walked in to employee entrance, I was greeted by a teacher who asked me if I was fired by the Chief of Schools. I immediately texted the Chief of Schools (*SEE TEXT MESSAGES*) and asked her how the conversation could have been released before I had even gotten back to the school, which is a 10-minute drive. Later that afternoon, teachers from another IZone school were told by their Principal I was being fired and removed from Trezevant. (**THIS IS THE SAME PRINCIPAL WHO HAS NOW BEEN PROMOTED TO BE PRINCIPAL AT TREZEVANT**). The Chief of Schools demanded for me to reveal who told me this information and demanded to know the names of the teachers who were transferring from other schools. I refused to tell her in efforts to protect those teachers who needed jobs regardless of intimidation tactics from the Chief of Schools. She wanted names of schools they were transferring to and from. I did not release that information out of fairness to the teachers.
- The next day, I sent an email (*SEE EMAIL*) that expressed discontent and disagreement regarding my transfer from Trezevant High School. I copied my two AP’s and I expressed that regardless of safety concerns, I wanted to continue to lead Trezevant High School and move forward for the next two years, in alignment with Superintendent and IZone Regional Superintendent’s conversation that guaranteed me three years at Trezevant. (**RESEARCH HAS DICTATED THAT TURNAROUND RESULTS APPEAR IN YEAR 3**).

- I received a verbally aggressive text message from the Chief of Schools expressing that I was directed to not communicate to anyone regarding being moved. I responded to her that my two Assistant Principals deserved to know so they would have time to either re-interview for their jobs or look for a different position.
- I applied for multiple jobs (**PRINCIPAL AND ABOVE**) and received an email that I was not “moving forward in the application process at this time.” If I was to be promoted or transferred into my “**DREAM JOB**” at the HS Principal level or above, why did I not even get an interview?
- Several weeks ago, in the third week of May, several parents reached out to me, my Assistant Principals, and my former Family Specialist to communicate their discontent regarding the former Head Football Coach’s promise to pay their bills and to change their kids grades in efforts to keep the most talented student-athletes at Trezevant High School.
- Parents reached out to me and my AP stating that they had specific conversations with the (former) Head Football Coach regarding unsatisfactory academic progress of their student-athletes. The parents stated that the coach explicitly communicated that they would “take care of the grade situation” and the best place for the student-athlete was at Trezevant. 5 out of the 6 highest profile student-athletes had GPA’s below 2.2 and did not qualify academically for NCAA standards after transcripts were corrected.
- The week after I reported to the Board of Education, one of my Assistant Principals discovered three staff members stealing money and falsifying a receipt book and was immediately reported to Labor Relations. Two of these teachers were also the same two teachers who were implicated in the vandalism of my suburban. During the first week of May, I was personally called into the Department of Auditing to be questioned regarding the missing money, most of which was already missing from last year. I was told by Chief Labor Relations Officer that I was being investigated for missing money and I very emphatically and quickly explained to her that I had never even handled, counted, or deposited any amount of money at any time during the school year. I also told her that they were absolutely not going to try and involve me in a financial scandal when it existed before I even arrived. I had not even been in the building but for only two weeks since February 10, the Friday before my daughter passed away. I was not aware of the money being stolen and conducted an interview with auditing adamantly expressing that I was not even in the building. These same teachers, who were suspended and investigated for stealing student funds, returned to Trezevant High School today to participate in interviews for teaching positions next year. I cannot understand how they were not terminated and charged with felony theft, being that more than \$4,000 was stolen. These are the major concerns I have come across in just 10 months as Principal at Trezevant High School.

*There are also multiple concerns across SCS that have come to my attention:*

- I **CAN NOT** and **WILL NOT** continue to work in an environment that promotes dishonesty, fraud, and misrepresentations of academic progress in order to promote athletic success.
- I **CAN NOT** and **WILL NOT** continue to work in an environment that promotes fraternity and sorority connections rather than actual experience and track record, which also discriminates against more qualified candidates who do not share similar characteristics.
- I **CAN NOT** and **WILL NOT** continue to work in an environment that gives Senior Level Executives severance packages for having multiple extra marital affairs (with fellow Cabinet Members) who he supervises, instead of terminating him for violating supervisory duties and responsibilities as outlined by SCS and TDOE policy.
- I **CAN NOT** and **WILL NOT** continue to work in an environment that covers up gross negligence among multiple Principals and Senior and Junior District Level supervisors who participate in sexual relationships with teachers/employees/support staff whom they supervise, which directly violates Tennessee law and requires revocation of their license and termination from supervisory positions. This is a common and accepted practice.
- I **CAN NOT** and **WILL NOT** continue to work in an environment that allows District Leadership to collude, interfere, and influence DUE PROCESS in order to protect employees tied by long standing acquaintance, sexual relationships, and fraternal/sorority affiliations from being disciplined fairly and according to policy.

- I **CAN NOT** and **WILL NOT** continue to work in an environment that disregards communications regarding testing irregularities and cheating in order to boost certain school achievement scores. Content level teachers from multiple High Schools have reported to School Administrators that colleagues preview “Test in Hand,” only to be told to “disregard their concerns and do not report them.”
- I **CAN NOT** and **WILL NOT** continue to work in an environment where it is common knowledge that certain schools have cheated to attain “other than normal” achievement gains.
- I **CAN NOT** and **WILL NOT** continue to work in an environment where district level supervisors are not only allowed to bully and harass school level Principals, Teachers, and Support Staff, they are encouraged. My former supervisor has a history of bullying educators and has been reported to Senior District Level leaders of her behavior in many of the schools she supervises.
- I **CAN NOT** and **WILL NOT** continue to work in an environment that allows Board Members and Senior Level Administrators to receive thousands of dollars in “kickbacks” from GCA to maintain contracts, despite multiple years of unsatisfactory performance. There is detailed and documented evidence (*SEE CERITA BUTLER’S PROGRESS REPORTS*) that express serious concerns about GCA and their extremely poor performance over the past several years. I believe there are two former senior GCA managers who have communicated these concerns in public forums.
- I **CAN NOT** and **WILL NOT** continue to work in an environment where students are the last priority, where district level officials not only encourage expulsion, but assist in the process.

It is with all of the major issues above and my deepest concerns and lack of trust regarding our senior level leaders that I must officially submit my 30-day notice of resignation, effective July 1, 2017. I have spent the last 19 years in several leadership positions SUCCESSFULLY fulfilling the obligations and duties of my job. I have documented success in closing the achievement gap by increasing student achievement, reducing student suspensions, empowering teachers and leaders, and speaking around the country as an advocate for at-risk children. Each year I have received exceptionally high evaluation scores, with student growth and achievement data supporting it (refer to prior evaluation scores). This year, I received the lowest evaluation scores in my professional career and told that I was “White”, “Culturally Incompetent”, and did not understand the kids and community of Trezevant High School, which is the lowest performing HS in Tennessee, according to the state priority school rankings. I was even “personally recruited and hired” by former IZone Regional Superintendent and current Chief of Schools who promised me three years in order to improve Trezevant’s academic performance and student achievement. I have dedicated the majority of my adult life working with at-risk, impoverished, minority, and below grade-level students in efforts to close the achievement gap. However, poverty, lack of parenting, lack of community support, and rigorous tests are not our students’ biggest obstacles. It is the pure lack of concern for our kids by adults in our district. It is our District Leadership who stand up in front of the political and philanthropic communities and make demands for increased funding, which gets passed onto senior level leaders in severance packages and bonuses when they should be terminated. SCS students are put last. The crime in our city is at an all-time high. Kids are pushing back. Kids are expressing discontent. Teachers are leaving at an alarming rate, just watch the news. It is time for me to leave this field which I deeply care about and have given my last twenty years. I was hung out to dry in an attempt to cover up the illegal and immoral actions of those who were before me. I was directed by District Leadership throughout the entire school year to not respond to the media, or to the transcript scandal, or to the bomb threat, or to the parent boycott in front of THS, or to the firing of THS Football Coach, or to the student walk-out, or to all of the former Coach’s comments in the media. (He was allowed to do interviews and respond to situations that painted himself as the hero, make negative comments about my leadership and personal beliefs, rather than be held accountable for his actions. By the way, he is still sitting at his house being paid). I believe that I was subjected discrimination/libel/slander/unfair and unethical treatment as a result of years of community frustration and believe I handled it with dignity and respect. Everything I mention in this letter of resignation is true and can be substantiated with evidence. It is my hope that these concerns are investigated to the fullest extent possible so that we can get back to putting students first. It is also my intent to cooperate with whoever necessary to assist in holding the right people accountable for these situations listed above. I am thankful for being able to serve the students in our city and look forward to moving on to my next endeavor, whatever it may be.

Ronnie Mackin