

Members of State Board of Education Ask Superintendent to Drop Lawsuit

Albert, Freitas, O'Brien, and Walker Submit Letter to Superintendent

INDIANAPOLIS—Today four members of the State Board of Education who have been named as defendants in *Ritz v. Dan Elsner et al.*, requested that the Superintendent of Public Instruction drop her lawsuit against the 10 individuals who serve on the board.

An open letter from Troy Albert, a principal from Henryville; David Freitas, a professor from South Bend; Sarah O'Brien, a first-grade teacher from Avon; and Tony Walker, an attorney from Gary states, "We, the members of the State Board of Education, are teachers, school administrators, professors and professionals in higher education and business. We are bipartisan, and we don't believe politics have any business in education."

The letter goes on to ask the Superintendent to join the board in starting anew. "We ask that you drop this lawsuit, put politics aside, and come to the table ready to put the interests of students, teachers and schools first."

The full text of the letter is below and attached.

October 25, 2013

Dear Superintendent Ritz,

In the interest of transparent dialogue about the future of education in Indiana, we are offering this open letter requesting that you join us in starting anew to work on behalf of the students and schools that we all care about deeply.

We, the members of the State Board of Education, are teachers, school administrators, professors and professionals in higher education and business. We are bipartisan, and we don't believe politics have any business in education. We work every day to give students new opportunities in our own classrooms, schools, institutions of higher education and communities.

We did not run for elected office, but when we were called upon to serve the students, teachers and schools in this state as members of the State Board of Education, we were humbled and honored to answer the call. We would have been happy to work to better education in Indiana in relative obscurity, as we have no higher aspiration than to ensure our state and our children have access to the best education possible.

Now we find ourselves embroiled in a lawsuit. Named individually as defendants and accused of having a secret meeting that never took place. While you have access to in-house representation, we do not.

As you know, the State Board of Education has a statutory responsibility for developing education policy in this state. We appreciate your expression on Thursday of your respect for us as individuals. We

respect your role as the chair of our board and your statutory obligation as the head of the Indiana Department of Education. However, the State Board of Education is a shared governance board, and we ask that you respect our duties as board members as well.

Superintendent, you have said repeatedly that you have worked to communicate openly with us. And yet, we have been continually frustrated by our emails and requests that go unanswered, missed deadlines, and a lack of progress on issues that are critical to the success of our students and our schools. However, in the interest of our students—the future of our state—we are ready to set that aside and start over.

On Thursday in your press conference you stated: “I look forward to continuing to work to improve education for all Indiana students in a fair, transparent and collaborative manner.” We share that goal, but actions speak louder than words. If you truly want to work in a collaborative manner, then we ask that you drop this lawsuit, put politics aside, and come to the table ready to put the interests of students, teachers and schools first.

It is time to get to work. We welcome your assistance on education policy, and we look forward to your response.

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