



**ROBBINSDALE AREA SCHOOLS  
WORKPLACE CONDUCT INVESTIGATION  
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT**

Date: August 14, 2024

To:

From:

Re: Investigation and Findings – Robbinsdale Area School Board

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This memorandum provides a summary of the external and independent complaint investigation that I conducted on behalf of your client, Robbinsdale Area Schools. This investigation concerns multiple complaints by and among members of the Robbinsdale Area School Board, claiming harassment and discrimination by and among other School Board members. These allegations, if sufficiently proven, could amount to violations of School District policies and directives, including but not limited to the School Board's Statement of Roles, Core Values and Norms and the School District's Discrimination, Harassment and Violence policies.

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## A. BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. Robbinsdale Area Schools serves students from seven cities, including Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Golden Valley, New Hope, Plymouth and Robbinsdale. The following are current members of the Robbinsdale Area School Board:

- ReNae Bowman (Chair)
- Kim Holmes (Vice Chair)
- Dr. Greta Evans-Becker (Clerk)
- John Vento (Treasurer)
- Helen Bassett
- Sharon Brooks
- Caroline Long

The School Board members serve staggered four-year terms. Director Bowman became Chair in January 2024, replacing Director Bassett. Director Holmes, Director Brooks and Director Long were all elected to the School Board in 2022 and are currently serving their first terms; Director Brooks had previously been appointed to the School Board in 2021.

2. On November 6, 2023, the School Board  
School Board  
On May 28, 2024, the
3. The School Board has worked with to address the numerous conflicts detailed in this report, including holding a retreat in November 2023. The School Board has also taken steps to address these conflicts through mediation: The School District entered into a contract with the Mediation Center of Minnesota, in partnership with the Minnesota Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution, in effect from January 29 to June 30, 2024. *See* Exhibit 4. Although sessions were conducted with over the course of February and March 2024, the mediation process became contentious and has effectively been tabled pending the completion of this investigation.
4. On May 10, 2024, issued a letter to the School Board listing the complaints that had been filed by and between School Board members and the statutes and policies implicated by those complaints. *See* Exhibit 11a. letter was circulated to the full School Board on May 11. On May 14, 2024, the School Board held a special meeting which included a closed session to consider letter and recommendations for how to proceed. After returning to open meeting from the closed session, the School Board passed a resolution to identify and retain an independent investigator to investigate the complaints made by School Board members against other School Board members. *See* Exhibit 2e (School Board minutes).
5. On May 21, 2024, Robbinsdale Area Schools retained Red Cedar Consulting, LLC to conduct the investigation pursuant to the School Board's May 14 resolution.  
was provided with and reviewed copies of the complaints filed in this matter, along

with related correspondence, school district policies, and other relevant documents and records.

6. On June 13, 2024, the scope of the investigation was revised to include cross-complaints between Director Vento and Director Brooks regarding an altercation during a meeting of the School Board's policy committee on June 11. *See* Exhibits 10a-10d.
7. On June 18, 2024, this Investigator took voluntary statements from all School Board members, with the exception of Director Evans-Becker.<sup>1</sup> *See* Exhibit 12 (Data Practices advisory forms). During and subsequent to those interviews, School Board members provided this Investigator with copies of additional emails, recordings and other communications, some of which were deemed relevant and made part of the investigative record.
8. Since the completion of the investigative interviews, this Investigator has also been notified of more recent instances of alleged disrespect and/or harassment among School Board members. These instances are not addressed directly in this report but are noted here for context and to recognize that the conflicts among these School Board members are persistent and ongoing.

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<sup>1</sup> Because Director Evans-Becker is not a party to any of the complaints addressed in this report, it was determined that interviewing her would be redundant and unnecessary.

## B. INVESTIGATIVE RECORD

The investigative record in this matter includes the following items, which except as otherwise noted are marked and submitted as exhibits to this report:

This Investigator notes that, in addition to the exhibits itemized above, he has reviewed numerous emails and other communications that reflect the general ongoing hostility and dysfunction among School Board members, but which the Investigator has determined do not fall within the scope of this investigation. For the most part, those communications have not been included in the investigative record.

1. Robbinsdale Area School Board Policies and Directives
  - 1a. Statement of Roles, Core Values, and Norms (adopted Feb. 16, 2016)
  - 1b. School Board Governance Policies (approved and adopted Feb. 18, 2014)
  - 1c. Policy 413: Discrimination, Harassment and Violence (approved Jan. 8, 2014)
  - 1d. Administrative Procedure 413: Discrimination, Harassment and Violence (approved Jan. 8, 2014)
2. Robbinsdale Area School Board Minutes
  - 2a. Jan. 8, 2024 organizational/business meeting
  - 2b. April 6, 2024 special business meeting
  - 2c. April 15, 2024 business meeting
  - 2d. May 6, 2024 business meeting
  - 2e. May 14, 2024 closed session
  - 2f. May 20, 2024 business meeting
3. Robbinsdale Area School Board Webcasts<sup>2</sup>
  - 3a. Jan. 8, 2024 organizational/business meeting<sup>3</sup>
  - 3b. April 2, 2024 business meeting<sup>4</sup>
  - 3c. May 6, 2024 business meeting<sup>5</sup>
  - 3d. May 20, 2024 business meeting<sup>6</sup>
  - 3e. July 22, 2024 business meeting<sup>7</sup>
4. Contract with Mediation Center of Minnesota, Jan. 29 – June 30, 2024 (with attachments)
5. Submitted by Director Kim Holmes
  - 5a. Director Holmes and Director Bassett email thread, Nov. 1, 2023, re: November 6 Agenda for Review

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<sup>2</sup> Because the video files for these Webcasts are voluminous, the hyperlinks below are provided in lieu of copies of the video files.

<sup>3</sup> [Organizational Meeting/Business Meeting \(granicus.com\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Business Meeting, Work Session \(granicus.com\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Business Meeting, Work Session \(granicus.com\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Business Meeting, Work Session, Closed Session \(granicus.com\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Business Meeting, Work Session \(granicus.com\)](#)

- 5b. Director Brooks and Director Holmes email thread, Dec. 28, 2023, re: 281 Board behavior
- 5c. District-wide emails, Nov. 20 and 22, 2023
- 5d. Director Holmes email to \_\_\_\_\_ May 3, 2024, re: Holmes Complaint
- 5e. Chair Bowman email to Director Brooks, May 9, 2024, re: Complaints
- 6. SRO contract and April 8, 2024 police chiefs meeting
  - 6a. Safety & Security Ad Hoc Committee memorandum, March 28, 2024, re: Meeting with Police Chiefs & SRO Update
  - 6b. Director Holmes audio recording of meeting with police chiefs, April 8, 2024
  - 6c. Director Holmes minutes of meeting with police chiefs, April 8, 2024
  - 6d. Director Bassett and Chair Bowman email thread, April 8-9, 2024, re: Complaint
  - 6e. Chair Bowman and Director Brooks email thread, April 8-9, 2024, re: Complaint
  - 6f. Director Brooks emails to Chair Bowman, May 5, 2024, re: School Board Agenda Updates for Monday, May 6, 2024
  - 6g. Director Bassett email to \_\_\_\_\_ May 5, 2024, re: Concern
  - 6h. Director Holmes and \_\_\_\_\_ text thread, May 5, 2024
- 7. Director Sharon Brooks and Director Caroline Long cross-complaints
  - 7a. Director Bassett memorandum, Dec. 10, 2023, re: Lighthouse Planning Committee nominations
  - 7b. Director Brooks email to \_\_\_\_\_ Jan. 3, 2024, re: URGENT!
  - 7c. Director Long email to \_\_\_\_\_ Jan. 29, 2024, re: Written statement from 1/2/24 (with attachment)
  - 7d. Director Long email to Chair Bowman and \_\_\_\_\_ May 5, 2024, re: December meeting!
  - 7e. Director Long email to Chair Bowman, May 6, 2024, re: Continued Bullying
- 8. Director Brooks complaint against Chair Bowman
  - 8a. Director Bassett emails to \_\_\_\_\_ April 23 and 28, 2024, re: CUBE Annual Conference Registration is Open
  - 8b. Director Bassett and Chair Bowman email thread, April 24-25, 2024, re: CUBE conference
  - 8c. Director Brooks email to \_\_\_\_\_ , April 29, 2024, re: Professional Development
- 9. Director Bassett, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ email thread, April 23-24, 2024, re: Complaint Letter
- 10. Director Sharon Brooks and Director John Vento cross-complaints
  - 10a. Director Brooks email to \_\_\_\_\_ June 13, 2024, re: Response to John Vento's angry outburst of 06/11/2024

- 10b. Director Brooks Harassment and Violence Report Form, June 13, 2024
- 10c. Chair Bowman email to Director Brooks, et al., June 13, 2024, re: Response to John Vento's angry outburst of 06/11/2024
- 10d. Chair Bowman and Director Brooks email thread, June 15-17, 2024, re: School Board Agenda Packets for Monday, June 17, 2024
- 10e. Director Bassett editorial, June 22, 2024
- 11. May 14, 2024 closed session with
  - 11a. \_\_\_\_\_ memorandum to School Board, May 10, 2024, re: Board Complaints
  - 11b. Director Brooks email to \_\_\_\_\_, May 11, 2024, re: Special Closed Board Meeting
  - 11c. Director Brooks and Chair Bowman email thread, May 11-12, 2024, re: Special Closed Board Meeting
  - 11d. \_\_\_\_\_ email to \_\_\_\_\_ May 14, 2024, re: Board Complaints (with attachments)
- 12. Signed Data Practices advisory forms, June 18, 2024

## C. POLICIES AND DIRECTIVES

### Robbinsdale Area School Board – Statement of Roles, Core Values, and Norms

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*NORMS:* The following norms are shared and owned by the Board as a whole body and by each individual member. They serve as the foundation for our work together, recognizing that at times, compromise may be necessary.

1. *We will speak with one voice.* We will hear each opinion, but ultimately act as one. We will speak candidly and courteously to each other and listen to dissenting or different viewpoints with an open mind. Even when our ideas conflict, we must treat each other with respect and courtesy and agree not to take disagreements personally. We will help each other to “depersonalize” disagreements. Once we reach a decision or compromise as a Board, we will each support the decision in word and deed.

....

4. *We will build trusting and respectful relationships with staff, fellow Board members, and all persons presenting to the Board.* We will encourage open and honest dialogue that is inclusive and respectful of everyone’s time. We will prepare ourselves for and support each other in making difficult decisions or taking risks by maintaining a strong foundation for our actions in research and data, developing a clear understanding of the risks and benefits of each action, and sustaining a climate of trust and respect.

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See Exhibit 1a.

### Robbinsdale Area Schools – School Board Governance Policies

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#### 1.3 GOVERNING STYLE

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The Board will:

....

5. Encourage and respect diverse viewpoints and collective decision-making within the board. Work toward consensus on important matters.
6. Cultivate a sense of collaboration and respect for diverse viewpoints among all stakeholders.

....

#### 1.4 BOARD MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT



The Board commits itself and its members to ethical, businesslike, and lawful conduct, including proper use of authority and appropriate decorum when acting as Board members.

As a member of the Robbinsdale Area School Board, I shall do my utmost to represent the public interest in education by adhering to the following commitments:

....

8. Encourage and respect the rights of others to hold and express opinions.

See Exhibit 1b.

### **Policy 413 – Discrimination, Harassment and Violence**

- I. *PURPOSE:* The purpose of this policy is to articulate the school board’s commitment to fostering learning and working environments that are free from discrimination, harassment, and violence on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, familial status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, or disability (Protected Class).

#### *II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY*

- A. The school district prohibits any form of discrimination, harassment, or violence on the basis of a person’s protected class. Any student or school district personnel who discriminates against and/or harasses an individual or group of students or school district personnel based on the individual or group’s Protected Class is in violation of this policy.
- B. Any student or school district personnel who inflicts, threatens to inflict or attempts to inflict violence upon an individual or group of students or school district personnel based on the individual or group’s Protected Class is in violation of this policy.

....

See Exhibit 1c.

### **Administrative Procedure 413 – Discrimination, Harassment and Violence**

- I. *PURPOSE:* The purpose of this administrative procedure is to implement Policy 413 and foster learning and working environments free from discrimination, harassment and violence on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, familial status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, or disability (Protected Class).

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#### *III. DEFINITIONS*

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- F. "Discrimination" means treating people differently due to their membership or perceived membership in a protected class, in a manner that is prejudicial, in violation of Policy 413 or this Procedure, and/or illegal. . . .
- G. "Harassment" consists of physical or verbal conduct . . . related to an individual's or group of individuals' protected status when the conduct:
1. has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or academic environment;
  2. has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work or academic performance; or
  3. otherwise adversely affects an individual's employment or academic opportunities.
- . . . .
- P. "Violence" is a physical act of aggression or assault upon another or group of individuals because of, or in a manner reasonably related to, an individual's Protected Class.

*See* Exhibit 1d.

## D. FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS

### 1. *Director Holmes Complaint v. Director Bassett and Director Brooks* *Director Brooks Complaint v. Director Holmes*

#### SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE<sup>8</sup>

- a. During her investigative interview, Director Holmes described a pattern of conduct by Director Bassett from approximately January 2023 to March 2024 that Director Holmes claims created a hostile work environment and contributed to her eventually filing a formal complaint. Director Bassett's alleged conduct has included:
  - i. In or about January 2023, Director Bassett called Director Holmes to ask why she had voted for Director Evans-Becker as Chair and recommended that the School Board hold a special meeting to rescind that vote.
  - ii. After replacing Director Evans-Becker as Chair in August 2023, Director Bassett controlled agenda-setting meetings by demeaning, interrupting and intimidating other members (e.g., *"the Chair is the Chair is the Chair"*) and shutting down further discussion.
  - iii. Then-Chair Bassett took control of the search for a new Superintendent, including by setting a meeting with a search firm (Baker Tilly) before a request for proposal (RFP) had been issued and without prior approval of the expenditure, as well by not sharing information about responses to the RFP with the rest of the School Board.
  - iv. On November 1, 2023, a last-minute meeting was held to review the agenda for the November 6 School Board meeting. After she was unable to dial in to attend the November 1 meeting, Director Holmes emailed the board and  
*I am experiencing similar challenges, as I did with the previous Chair, at agenda setting sessions. These challenges include not prioritizing agenda items based on the will of the Board, lack of consultation/information sharing with the Board as well as adding the meeting today causing a schedule burden. . . . As Vice Chair I use my focus to bring items to Agenda Setting that I have heard mentioned by fellow directors or and am dismissed regularly or put in my place because the Chair is the Chair. We need to discuss this at the table as soon as possible. . . ."*  
Then-Chair Bassett responded, *"These allegations are unfounded. . . ."* See Exhibit 5a.
  - v. During a discussion about school safety at the School Board retreat with  
then-Chair Bassett called Director Holmes a racist and repeatedly corrected her use of language. and the other School Board members were all present when then-Chair Bassett made those comments.
  - vi. Following the retreat, on November 20, 2023, the School Board collectively sent a district-wide email about the response to recent incidents of violence in the schools.

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<sup>8</sup> The "Summary of Evidence" heading is used throughout this report to indicate relevant pieces of information gleaned from documentary evidence and/or from interviews with School Board members.

After pushback from the public, then-Chair Bassett unilaterally drafted and sent a reply email without consulting the rest of the School Board. *See* Exhibit 5c.

- vii. On November 21, 2023, then-Chair Bassett proposed to delegate reference checks for the Superintendent candidates to the

But when Director Holmes raised concerns and asserted that she wanted to listen in on the reference check calls and report back to the full School Board, then-Chair Bassett responded that she wanted to listen in on the reference check calls as well.

- b. At the School Board’s January 8, 2024 business meeting, Director Holmes and Director Bassett nominated then-Director Bowman and Director Brooks, respectively, to become the new Chair. *See* Exhibit 2a (School Board minutes). In support of her nomination, Director Holmes spoke critically of Director Bassett’s record as Chair in numerous areas, including agenda-setting, communications with stakeholders and maintaining accountability. *See* Exhibit 3a (School Board Webcast) at 14:15. (Notably, Director Holmes had also been strongly critical of Director Evans-Becker when she had served as Chair prior to Director Bassett.) Both Director Bassett and Director Brooks abstained from the vote for Vice Chair, for which Director Holmes was the only candidate. *Id.* at 31:30.
- c. A provision of the Omnibus Bill signed by Governor Walz in May 2023 prevented School Resources Officers (SROs) from using certain types of holds and restraint techniques on students. In response, some police departments – including departments from some of the cities within the Robbinsdale Area School District – withdrew their officers from SRO positions and discontinued providing SRO services. On March 14, 2024, Governor Walz signed a new bill into law (effective January 15, 2025) that mandates training for SROs and clarifies the authority that SROs have to restrain students. Minn. Stat. §§ 121A.58, 121A.582.
- d. The Robbinsdale Area School Board maintains an Ad Hoc Safety & Security Committee, of which Director Holmes was Chair at that time. The Ad Hoc Committee meets regularly and reports its activities to the full board. On March 27, 2024 – following the enactment of the new SRO law -- the Ad Hoc Committee, along with \_\_\_\_\_, met with the police chiefs from \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss the recommendation that SROs be reinstated to Robbinsdale Area schools. A memorandum summarizing that meeting was circulated to the full School Board on March 28, including that “*next steps will be discussed in greater detail during Tuesday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>’s Board work session.*” *See* Exhibit 6a.
- e. During the April 2, 2024 work session, the School Board spent approximately 40 minutes discussing the Ad Hoc Committee’s March 27 meeting with the police chiefs and their SRO proposal. A dispute arose as to whether the full School Board would meet with the police chiefs before voting on the reinstatement of the SROs. *See* Exhibit 3b (School Board Webcast). In her investigative interview, Director Brooks reported that Director Holmes scheduled another meeting with the police chiefs to be held after the new SRO

- contracts were signed, but Director Brooks made it clear that she wanted to hear from the police chiefs before approving the SRO contracts and otherwise would not approve the contracts. Similarly, Director Bassett reports that it had been her understanding that the police chiefs would meet with the full School Board; when Director Holmes said that there was no need for this, because the Ad Hoc Committee had met with the chiefs and had reached a decision regarding the SROs, Director Bassett pushed back and insisted on an additional meeting with the chiefs to obtain more information, particularly in regard to violence prevention, prior to a vote on the SRO contracts.
- f. Director Bassett adds that she has been doing violence prevention work since 1998, when her stepson was killed. She had planned a workshop in 2019, which was delayed due to the COVID pandemic; the workshop was eventually held in November 2022 and included police chiefs and other law enforcement leaders. Director Bassett wanted to draw on her relationships with these law enforcement leaders to meet regarding the SRO issue.
- g. According to a later email from Chair Bowman, Director Bassett spoke with \_\_\_\_\_ after the April 2, 2024 work session and continued to press for an additional meeting with the police chiefs regarding the SROs. The following day, some of the police chiefs asked \_\_\_\_\_ if they could contact Director Bassett directly to find out what information she needed to support the reinstatement of the SROs. Chair Bowman gave \_\_\_\_\_ permission to proceed with arranging another meeting with the police chiefs. (Chair Bowman acknowledged that this had been a mistake, and that scheduling meetings among School Board members in this manner and without public notice was a “*governance issue*” that needed to be addressed through the School Board’s policy process.) *See* Exhibit 6e.
- h. Director Bassett arranged a meeting on April 8, 2024, at the Crystal Police Station, that also included Director Holmes, \_\_\_\_\_, and other School District officials, along with the police chiefs from Plymouth, Robbinsdale, New Hope and Crystal. (Director Holmes reports that she was invited \_\_\_\_\_ Director Bassett asserted during the May 6 School Board meeting that it had been her idea to invite Director Holmes, *see* Exhibit 3c at 2:46:10, while Director Brooks reports that Director Holmes was invited out of respect for her role on the Ad Hoc Safety & Security Committee.) During her investigative interview, Chair Bowman asserted that in arranging the April 8 meeting (and excluding Chair Bowman), Director Bassett and Director Brooks had improperly ignored the School Board’s committee process and the limitations on the powers of individual School Board members. Conversely, Director Brooks asserts that the April 8 meeting had been a private meeting, not an official one, which is why there had been no public notice of the meeting.
- i. Director Holmes recorded the April 8 meeting and drafted minutes based on the recording. *See* Exhibits 6b (recording), 6c (minutes). Director Holmes did not inform others at the meeting that she was recording (although Director Bassett suspected that she may have been). It was Director Holmes’ belief that even though no public notice of the meeting had been posted, it was still an official meeting that required recording and minutes. (Director Holmes adds that Director Evans-Becker made a complaint regarding

the lack of public notice for the April 8 meeting.) Director Holmes' minutes were posted on the school district website.

- j. Director Bassett asserts that Director Holmes "took over" the April 8 meeting, changing the agenda and frequently interrupting the proceedings. Later the same day, Director Bassett emailed

*"As I looked at my notes, I spoke openly at the work session of my interest in meeting with the chiefs. I also spoke of my disappointment in having that plan changed. I felt blindsided and said so. I did not demonize anyone. I proactively spoke with you as the*

*Discussing with*

*You selected and invited your team. I am disappointed with how the meeting today is mis-characterized. In fact I spoke openly at the last work session of my interest in talking with the chiefs. Any director can meet with whomever they choose to discuss issues they care about. The Committee work is a subset of the board. Their work is appreciated but it does not supersede any director's ability to seek additional information.*

*volunteered to pull together the meeting. asked me who else to invite. I suggested Vice Chair Holmes in deference to her work on the Ad Hoc I preferred to have do so. I stated my desire to support the SRO contract, and felt moved to seek [to] meet with the chiefs as was initially proposed, and later changed. Directors have a duty to seek information. I am not interested in non-factual assertions, from anyone. I will make myself available to discuss misinformation or misperceptions."*

See Exhibit 6d.

- k. At a regularly scheduled business meeting on April 15, 2024, the School Board passed a motion approving the new SRO contracts for the 2024-2025 school year. See Exhibit 2c (School Board minutes).
- l. On May 3, 2024, Director Holmes submitted formal complaints against Director Bassett and Director Brooks:

*"As I have stated numerous times, both on and off camera, I have been on the receiving end of repeated intimidating and pervasive verbal attacks by both Director Bassett and Director Brooks, during professional development sessions, agenda setting meetings, business meetings as well as work sessions. In addition to my own experiences, I am often cc'd by other Directors in my role as Vice Chair on the Board of Education, and have seen the same abuse of other Directors. As a result I continue to experience hostile, abusive and intimidating language use by Director Bassett and Director Brooks. These email exchanges, at times, also appear to violate the open meeting law. This repeated harassment has impacted my ability to effectively do my job as a member of the Board without feeling intimidated. Every meeting feels hostile. No reasonable individual would agree to work under these circumstances. Please let me know what I need to move forward with complaints against Director Bassett and Director Brooks. I am able to supply supporting documentation if deemed necessary."*

See Exhibit 5d.

- m. Later on May 3, 2024, [REDACTED] emailed the School Board members informing them that the agendas for the May 6 business meeting and work session had been published on the school district’s website. Director Holmes’ minutes from the April 8 meeting with the police chiefs were attached and referenced in the business meeting agenda. Director Brooks wrote back: *“Who authored the April 8, 2024 Police Chiefs meeting minutes that is published for our May 6, 2024 Board Meeting agenda? It is not on Robbinsdale Area Schools letterhead nor is it signed. The fact that it is grossly inaccurate and conspicuously inconsistent with our Board and District’s norms is an understatement. I request that you remove that ‘note’ from the public’s view and also from our agenda.”* See Exhibit 6f.
- n. On May 5, 2024, Director Bassett emailed [REDACTED] *“I am very concerned by the update published regarding the Ad Hoc Safety Committee. These meeting notes are unauthorized and inaccurate. It is insulting. I am very disappointed. Please remove it from under the Ad Hoc Safety Committee immediately. I am not sure who authorized posting these, especially inaccurately and sharing some personal information that I shared in that group. I am almost speechless. To post public information about me and my family, without even the courtesy of sharing it with me for review or approval is very disappointing. Who wrote these notes? Unauthorized notes are a total surprise. Please remove this information immediately.”* See Exhibit 6g. In her investigative interview, Director Bassett explained that the April 8 meeting had been a private meeting, and that Director Holmes had not been authorized to post minutes from the meeting. Director Bassett asserts that Director Holmes’ action was *“insulting,”* and that she failed to recognize the grace that Director Bassett had shown in including her in the meeting.
- o. Later on May 5, 2024, Director Holmes texted [REDACTED] *“Evening two complaints regarding my meeting minutes from the police chief meeting. I’m honestly fearful of attending the meeting tomorrow night now. I stand by my account of the meeting and have a recording. With that being said, do they need to be removed?”* [REDACTED] agreed to have [REDACTED] remove Director Holmes’ April 8 notes from the website; at that point, the minutes had been posted on the site for about two days. [REDACTED] advised Director Holmes to hold onto the recording and to document Director Brooks’ and Director Bassett’s request for removal of the notes, which Director Holmes agreed to do. See Exhibit 6h.
- p. During the committee report section of the School Board’s May 6, 2024 business meeting, Director Brooks criticized the temporary posting of minutes from the April 8 meeting, calling them *“inaccurate and inconsistent”* and containing large gaps. Director Bassett asserted that the April 8 meeting had not been an official school district meeting – rather, that she and Director Brooks had exercised their right as citizens to meet with the police chiefs and discuss their plans for violence prevention prior to the vote on the SRO contracts. Director Bassett also criticized Director Holmes for including personal information and *“erroneous statements”* in the minutes that had been posted on the website. Director Holmes acknowledged that she had drafted the minutes and requested clarification as to the status of the April 8 meeting and how such meetings should be planned and publicized going forward. See Exhibit 3c (School Board Webcast) at 2:42:00.

- q. On May 11, 2024, Director Brooks emailed (copied to Director Bassett and Chair Bowman), referring to a “*complaint against Kim Holmes for writing and publishing to the entire world everywhere through our website, an erroneous letter concerning misinformation involving me and our cities’ Police Chiefs. . . .*” According to Director Brooks’ email, she had previously made this complaint via email on May 5 and verbally during the May 6 School Board meeting. *See Exhibit 11b.*
- r. During their investigative interviews, both Director Brooks and Director Bassett were asked in what ways Director Holmes’ minutes from the April 8 meeting, *see Exhibit 6c.* were inaccurate. Director Brooks responded that there were quotes from \_\_\_\_\_ and Interim Superintendent Voight that were omitted from the minutes. The minutes also leave out the “*love and camaraderie*” that was shown at the meeting and make Director Brooks appear harsh and like an “*angry Black*”. Director Brooks also believes that she is misquoted in the minutes, *e.g.*, rather than saying that “*two schools have been identified in Rdale to get teachers due to the threshold of 40% of black students,*” she named the specific schools. Director Bassett denies that she used the term “*Murderopolis,*” as referenced in the minutes. She also contends that the minutes misconstrue her comments about Sandy Hook Promise – she supports that program but was advocating for a “*holistic approach*” to school violence.
- s. Director Brooks and Director Bassett both point out that when the Safety & Security Committee meets, there are no notes or minutes posted on the school district website. In Director Brooks’ opinion, the handling of the April 8 meeting arranged by Director Bassett was an anomaly.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

- a. Many of Director Holmes’ allegations against Director Bassett pertain to Director Bassett’s effectiveness and leadership style when she served as Chair from August to December 2023, *e.g.*, how then-Chair Bassett led agenda-setting meetings and her sending a district-wide email without consulting the other School Board members. These allegations are somewhat outdated and, even if proven, do not rise to the level of policy violations.
- b. Director Holmes alleges that she was subjected to attacks after she nominated then-Director Bowman for Chair at the School Board’s January 8, 2024 meeting. This Investigator notes that while Director Bassett and Director Brooks both abstained from the vote for Vice Chair, the webcast of that meeting contains no other evidence of any such attacks. *See Exhibit 3a.*
- c. This Investigator finds that, following the Ad Hoc Committee’s March 27, 2024 meeting with the police chiefs, Director Bassett and Director Brooks had good-faith reasons to want to engage further with the law enforcement leaders before voting on the new SRO contracts. This Investigator further notes that because there was no quorum of the School Board present at the April 8 meeting with the police chiefs, the meeting was not “*required or permitted by law to transact public business*” and therefore did not fall under the requirements



of the Open Meeting Law. Minn. Stat. § 13D.01, Subd. 1. This Investigator otherwise makes no findings as to whether Director Bassett and Director Brooks were within their authority to schedule the April 8 meeting.

- d. According to Director Holmes, she believed that even though no formal public notice of the April 8 meeting had been posted, it was still an official meeting that required a recording and the drafting of minutes. For several reasons, this Investigator finds Director Holmes' handling of the recording and minutes highly unusual and out of step with the "respect and courtesy" and "sense of collaboration" articulated in the School Board's core values (see below):
  - i. The recording apparently was made without the knowledge of others at the meeting. See Exhibit 6b.
  - ii. Unlike the minutes of actual School Board meetings, the minutes drafted by Director Holmes following the April 8 meeting were posted on the school district website without being circulated, reviewed or voted upon by the participants. See Exhibit 6c.
  - iii. It appears that Director Bassett and Director Brooks are correct that following meetings of the Ad Hoc Safety & Security Committee – a formally designated committee of the School Board – there are no minutes posted on the website; it is unclear why Director Holmes thought that it was necessary or proper to handle the documentation of the April 8 meeting differently.
- e. Although the minutes drafted by Director Holmes are a summary and not a verbatim record of the April 8 meeting, this Investigator has not identified any significant inaccuracies in the minutes. See Exhibit 6c. There is no evidence indicating that Director Holmes deliberately misstated or mischaracterized statements made or opinions shared during the April 8 meeting. This Investigator also notes that because the minutes were posted on the website for two days or less before being removed, the impact, if any, was minimal.

## CONCLUSIONS

- a. Director Holmes' allegations against Director Brooks and Director Bassett are **not sustained**.
- b. The School Board's Statement of Roles, Core Values and Norms provides: "*We will speak candidly and courteously to each other and listen to dissenting or different viewpoints with an open mind. Even when our ideas conflict, we must treat each other with respect and courtesy and agree not to take disagreements personally. We will help each other to 'depersonalize' our disagreements. . . . We will encourage open and honest dialogue that is inclusive and respectful of everyone's time.*" See Exhibit 1a. Similarly, the School Board Governance Policies require board members to "encourage and respect diverse viewpoints and collective decision-making," to "cultivate a sense of collaboration and respect for diverse viewpoints among all stakeholders," and to "encourage and respect the rights of others to hold and express opinions". See Exhibit 1b. Director Holmes did not comport with these core values and policies in connection with the April 8, 2024 meeting with the police chiefs.

c. Director Brooks' allegations against Director Holmes are otherwise **not sustained**.

2. ***Director Long Complaint v. Director Brooks***  
***Director Brooks Complaint v. Director Long***

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

- a. Director Long reports that in December 2022, after her election to the School Board, she met with Director Brooks at Director Brooks' invitation. \_\_\_\_\_ was also present. Director Brooks told Director Long that she should vote for Director Bassett as Chair because of "*all she's done for POC kids*". Director Long disagreed based on her experience as a parent. (Director Long had an adult daughter in the school district's transition program who tried to talk to Director Bassett about her experience of being targeted during her time at Cooper High School; according to Director Long, Director Bassett told her to "*tell your daughter to stay in a child's place*". When Director Long later interviewed for an open position on the School Board – the position eventually filled by Director Brooks -- she heard that Director Bassett opposed her appointment.) Director Long reports that after she declined to support Director Bassett for Chair, Director Brooks stood over her and berated her. Director Long responded that she would not "*just go along*" and would not be pressured by Director Brooks and Director Bassett. Director Long adds that she later had breakfast with Director Bassett to clear the air and to establish a professional relationship.
- b. A recurring theme in the problematic relationship between Director Brooks and Director Long has been Director Long's racial identification:
  - i. Director Brooks reports that during the 2022 School Board campaign, Director Long identified as part Black. Director Brooks took this at face value and invited Director Long to events for people of color. Director Brooks and Director Long became friendly and built a working relationship. However, after both were elected to the School Board, Director Brooks reports that Director Long became "*better friends*" with the White women on the School Board (Director Bowman, Director Holmes and Director Evans-Becker). Director Long remained cordial but distanced herself from Director Brooks. After Director Long's December 15, 2023 email (see below), Director Brooks began doubting Director Long's racial identification and thought that Director Long could be "*passing*" as Black.
  - ii. Director Long – whose skin is significantly lighter than Director Brooks' -- believes that Director Brooks has engaged in "*colorism*" by repeatedly including racial overtones in her emails. This includes Director Brooks' December 27, 2023 email to Director Long, in which she referred to herself as "*a Black Woman with larger societal issues I face every day that you can't even begin to imagine*"; as well as Director Brooks' January 3, 2024 email, in which she accused Director Long of, among other things, "*racial hatred toward Black and Native people*" (see below). See Exhibit 11d.
  - iii. The National School Boards Association's Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE) conference will be held in Las Vegas on October 28-30, 2024. On April 23, 2024, Director Bassett sent an email requesting that her attendance at the CUBE conference be included on the consent agenda for the next School Board meeting;

Director Bassett withdrew that request on April 28. *See* Exhibit 8a. Also on April 28, Director Brooks requested to be registered for the CUBE conference. *See* Exhibit 8c.

- iv. At the School Board's May 20, 2024 meeting, Director Long was one of five board members (along with Chair Bowman, Director Vento, Director Holmes and Director Evans-Becker) who spoke in opposition to the request, citing the large budget cuts that the school district had recently had to make. Director Brooks commented that *"it's no surprise that the White people on this board have decided that knowing about urban education, which is primarily focused on Black people, is not relevant enough to be paid for"*. *See* Exhibit 3d (School Board Webcast) at 1:29:15. Later in the meeting, Director Long stated, *"I find the comments that Director Brooks made today very insulting, because I am a Black woman, and just because I don't agree with you on something doesn't mean that I'm White."* *Id.* at 1:46:30. In the course of this investigation, multiple witnesses pointed to Director Brooks' January 3, 2024 email (discussed below) as evidence that Director Brooks was already aware that Director Long identifies as Black.
- v. Most recently, at a July 22, 2024 School Board meeting, a community member reportedly spoke about two Black women on the School Board (presumably referring to Director Brooks and Director Bassett); when Director Holmes attempted to correct the speaker by stating that there are three Black women serving on the School Board, Director Brooks responded by emphasizing that Director Long *"identifies as Black"* and distinguishing her from the other Black women on the School Board.
- c. Director Long reports that in or about May 2023, the School Board had a work session with a group of Native families to discuss and receive feedback on a proposed land acknowledgment. During that session, Director Brooks questioned how to *"protect White kids"* and not make them feel blamed; Director Long interrupted to tell Director Brooks that she was *"causing harm"*. Later, members of the Native group complained that they had been disrespected, including by Director Brooks' comment. Director Long notes that there had been two other meetings on this topic, so that Director Brooks should have been aware of the Native families' concerns. When this issue was brought up during the School Board's work with \_\_\_\_\_, Director Brooks became upset and left the room. Director Long adds that following Director Brooks' comment about the land acknowledgment, Native leaders declined to participate in a healing circle.
- d. The School Board Directors of Color and Indigenous (MNSBDOCI) Fellowship was founded in 2016 by Director Bassett, who remains the Managing Director of the group. The Xiong Award is a leadership award given annually by the MNSBDOCI Fellowship. On December 15, 2023, Director Long emailed Director Brooks: *"I am asking for you to remove your name as a nominee from the Xiong Award because of the harm you cause to the American Indian Education team and the American Indian Advisory Committee."* *See* Exhibit 11d. Director Brooks reports that this email marked the beginning of the problems between herself and Director Long; she asserts that she does not know why Director Long made that request, but that it may have been related to a land acknowledgment issue.

- e. On December 27, 2023, Director Brooks emailed Director Long (copied to Director Bassett):

*“Take a look in the mirror and judge Caroline and truly determine who you are consistently harming with the obvious position you’ve taken. The MN SBDOCI Fellowship (and other Black and POCI organizations I’m a member of) is doing fine without your newly founded negative opinions of this Black Woman, but it is noted. Furthermore, for the purpose of this brief conversation, my relationship with the Native Americans is fantastic, but actually, that’s really none of your business. As a Black Woman with larger societal issues I face every day that you can’t even begin to imagine, I don’t have time to listen to you try to berate me on my honorable nomination. If you have something else to say, use my private number.”*

See Exhibit 11d.

- f. Director Long contends that following her dispute with Director Brooks over the Xiong award, she was removed from the MNSBDOCI Fellowship, but both Director Bassett and Director Brooks dispute this. Director Bassett asserts that the group is “self-selecting,” with no official membership – Director Long never said she was interested in getting involved, nor did Director Bassett ever tell her that she could not attend meetings or take any steps to remove or exclude Director Long from the group. Similarly, according to Director Brooks, Director Long had been welcomed into the group but had never attended any meetings.
- g. Director Brooks and Director Long are both employees of the Minneapolis School District – Director Brooks as a Special Education Assistant, Director Long as a Special Education Teacher. On January 2, 2024, Director Brooks and Director Long had an interaction in an elevator at the Davis Education Service Center in Minneapolis – this was their first interaction since the December 2023 email thread.
- i. According to Director Brooks, inside the elevator, she asked Director Long, “Do you have anything to say?” Director Long replied, “No”. After riding the elevator for two floors, Director Long got off. As she was leaving the elevator, Director Long told Director Brooks, “You’re disgusting,” or words to that effect; Director Brooks said something similar back to Director Long. Director Brooks denies following or stalking Director Long and considers those allegations to be defaming.
- ii. Director Holmes reports that Director Long called her after the incident in the Davis Center elevator and appeared “shaken”.
- iii. Later on January 2, 2024, Director Long emailed Director Brooks (copied to all members of the School Board):

*“I will not be attending the MSBA Recognition Luncheon for MSBA. . . . I ask that other Robbinsdale School Board members not attend this luncheon until the harm has been repaired. I would also like the board to know that the bullying behavior we have witnessed continued today at work for me, when I was followed by Sharon Brooks, while she made negative comments about me for others to hear. Our work as school board members is hard, but it becomes even harder and harmful when teaming with a*

*mendacious person. We need to put the students, staff, and district before our own accolades.”*

See Exhibit 11d.

- iv. On January 3, 2024, Director Brooks emailed then-Chair Bassett and Director Vento (copied to

*“With a liar’s tongue, Director Long has made accusations towards me that are malicious, utterly untrue and seemingly rooted in some form of racial hatred towards Black and Native people. Her positioned fixation on ‘White supremacy,’ her often near-violent cry at the Board table to be recognized as Black, and now her written demand that I not accept being nominated in honor of my consistent positive work ethics by the MN School Board Directors of Color & Indigenous fellowship (MN SBDOCI) at the upcoming MSBA Luncheon, all point towards some delusional form of jealous racism by Caroline Long against people of color. She has even requested that you boycott the respected annual MSBA event because of her unfounded personal vendetta against me (and perhaps her own unfounded personal vendetta against the MN SBDOCI as well). This is quite unsettling since Director Long has been my invited guest at a few local events, and most recently just several weeks ago, a welcomed guest in my home for a birthday celebration. With her current actions, however, Carloine Long is showing NO consideration or our students or community who have endured MUCH in recent times and who need no further self-antagonistic moves from the Board at all. This cannot be tolerated. Director Long’s willingness to spew lies on a fellow colleague and her decision to actively promote division on our School Board and our relationship with the MSBA, goes against the mission, culture and policies of District 281. Director Caroline Long must be censored.”<sup>9</sup>*

See Exhibit 11d.

- v. Also on January 3, 2024, Director Brooks emailed \_\_\_\_\_ an employee of the Minneapolis School District:

*“I have been targeted by a fellow employee of our district as an enemy. Her name is Caroline Long. While almost all of her anger towards me is based on her personal racist point of views [sic], she has now resorted to lying about being followed throughout the MPS Davis Center building by me. Caroline’s most recent bizarre story supposedly happened yesterday, between 11 am – 1 pm, when by chance we took the elevator together on the 5<sup>th</sup> fl. A brief conversation occurred, she exited on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, insulting me, I finished my reply to her then I continued on to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. This was our only encounter of the day. MPS Employee Caroline Long has since emailed her fabricated story of being ‘bullied’ and ‘I followed her throughout the building’ to the Robbinsdale Area School Board where we both serve as school board directors. They have been alerted of*

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<sup>9</sup> Director Brooks concludes her email with the word “censored”. See Exhibit 11d. On information and belief, the intended word is “censured,” i.e., subject to a formal statement of disapproval by the board.

*her delusional tirade. I am requesting proof, via district camera footage, that her accusation never happened. I am also seeking a censure be placed on Caroline Long's vulgar reports concerning activities at the MPS Davis Center involving me that have never occurred. Her defamation of character attempts are quite threatening and I want it to stop."*

See Exhibit 7b.

- vi. Director Brooks reports that, in addition to her January 3 complaint to Robbinsdale Area Schools, she also made complaints against Director Long to the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis School District's Office of Equality and Civil Rights (OECR). On February 7, 2024, the OECR informed Director Brooks that the matter was outside their jurisdiction.
- vii. On January 29, 2024, Director Long provided a written statement regarding the January 2 incident at the request of one of her Minneapolis School District

*"I was in the vestibule to the elevators on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor. I was going to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor to use the restroom. It was around 11:30 a.m. Sharon Brooks saw me in the vestibule and entered that area. Sharon walked close to me and said, 'fancy meeting you here'. I said, 'well we both work here so why wouldn't you see me here.' Sharon said, 'Do you want to talk to me about something?' I said, 'No'. The elevator doors opened and I walked into the elevator and pressed 4. Sharon walked into the elevator and then pressed 1. The doors closed and Sharon said, 'don't you have anything to say to me. I am here in front of you. You had stuff to say in your email. Don't you have anything to say now. I'm here, in your face. I would think you would have something to say to me.' I said, 'I'm disappointed.' The elevator doors opened. I stepped out and headed to use my card to get access to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. I felt like Sharon followed me because I could hear Sharon behind me saying, 'I am disappointed in you Caroline. Caroline I am disappointed in your actions. Caroline everyone is disappointed in you. Caroline everyone is disappointed in your actions.' Sharon repeated these statements. I kept walking, got access to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and continued walking."*

See Exhibit 7c.

- viii. In addition to her Minneapolis School District supervisors, Director Long had multiple conversations about the January 2, 2024 incident with Minneapolis School District. At her investigative interview, Director Long gave a description of the incident that largely mirrored the written statement above.
- ix. Director Long reports that both she and Director Brooks have been directed not to discuss Robbinsdale Area School Board matters while they are at work for the Minneapolis School District. Since the January 2, 2024 incident, Director Long has avoided being in the same spaces with Director Brooks.
- x. Director Long reports that Minneapolis School District presented her and Director Brooks with several options to resolve their conflict.

Director Long elected for her and Director Brooks to meet along with their supervisors to formulate a plan, but Director Brooks rejected this idea – in Director Long’s opinion, this was because Director Brooks wanted to keep attacking her.

- xi. On May 5, 2024, Director Long emailed Chair Bowman, Director Holmes and [redacted] (“After this email was sent [referring to Director Brooks’ January 3 email], I was verbally informed by Kim, ReNae, and [redacted] had started an investigation on Sharon for attacks against a protected class. I am now seeing that it was not followed up on. I am requesting a formal investigation of Sharon Brooks and her bullying behavior. . . .” See Exhibit 7d. The following day, May 6, 2024, Director Long emailed Chair Bowman: “During the business meeting, Sharon Brooks brought up her bullying that happened at our workplace. This is the second time she had done so in a public [forum]. I would like her targeting of me to stop. Do I need to file another complaint?” See Exhibit 7e.
- xii. In her May 11, 2024 email to [redacted] (previously cited), Director Brooks referenced her January 3 email regarding her allegations against Director Long. Director Brooks asserted that she had made a “complaint against Caroline Long for attempting to label me as a ‘stalker’ or some other lowly character, in writing, to the board, your cabinet and other members of the community.” See Exhibit 11d.
- xiii. Director Long reports that at the School Board’s May 14, 2024 closed session with [redacted], Director Brooks called her a “baby” and told her to “grow up”.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

- a. This Investigator makes no findings as to whether Director Brooks acted inappropriately or caused “harm” to the Native community during the discussion about a land acknowledgment. Nor does this Investigator make any findings as to whether Director Long was improperly excluded from the MNSBODCI Fellowship.
- b. This Investigator finds that by asking Director Brooks to remove herself from consideration for the Xiong Award and by asking other School Board members to boycott the MSBA luncheon, Director Long “personalized” her disagreement with Director Brooks.
- c. Director Brooks and Director Long have asserted claims against each other based on their interaction during and immediately after meeting in the elevator in the Davis Center on January 2, 2024. Director Brooks and Director Long have provided sharply conflicting descriptions of that incident – particularly as to whether Director Brooks followed Director Long out of the elevator, and the specific words that both women used during that exchange. There is no evidence in the record to resolve this conflict or to indicate which version of the January 2 incident is more credible. Accordingly, this Investigator is unable to conclude that either Director Brooks or Director Long engaged in bullying or harassment or otherwise violated School District policy during that incident.
- d. This Investigator finds that in her December 27, 2023 and January 3, 2024 emails, Director Brooks escalated the personal nature of the dispute and was highly discourteous and disrespectful toward Director Long. Moreover, as described above, while Director Long



identifies as Black, Director Brooks has historically been either reluctant or unwilling to acknowledge Director Long's racial identification. This issue came to a head in Director Brooks' December 27 and January 3 emails:

*"As a Black Woman with larger societal issues I face every day that you can't even begin to imagine. . . ."*

*". . . seemingly rooted in some form of racial hatred towards Black and Native people."*

*". . . her often near-violent cry at the Board table to be recognized as Black. . . ."*

*". . . some delusional form of jealous racism by Caroline Long against people of color."*

See Exhibit 11d.

## CONCLUSIONS

- a. Director Brooks' and Director Long's cross-complaints specifically regarding their January 2, 2024 interaction in the Davis Center elevator are **not sustained**.
- b. The School Board's Statement of Roles, Core Values and Norms provides in part: ". . . *We will speak candidly and courteously to each other and listen to dissenting or different viewpoints with an open mind. Even when our ideas conflict, we must treat each other with respect and courtesy and agree not to take disagreements personally. We will help each other to 'depersonalize' disagreements. . . . We will encourage open and honest dialogue that is inclusive and respectful of everyone's time.*" See Exhibit 1a. Similarly, the School Board Governance Policies require board members to "encourage and respect diverse viewpoints and collective decision-making," to "cultivate a sense of collaboration and respect for diverse viewpoints among all stakeholders," and to "encourage and respect the rights of others to hold and express opinions". See Exhibit 1b.
  - i. Insofar as Director Brooks alleges that Director Long violated these core values and policies by asking her to remove herself from consideration for the Xiong Award and by asking other School Board members to boycott the MSBA luncheon, those allegations are **sustained**.
  - ii. Insofar as Director Long alleges that Director Brooks violated these core values and policies in her communications both prior to and after the January 2, 2024 incident, those allegations are **sustained**.
- c. Policy 413 (Discrimination, Harassment and Violence) and the corresponding Administrative Procedure prohibit "verbal conduct . . . related to an individual's protected status" with the "purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment." See Exhibits 1c, 1d. Insofar as Director Long alleges that that Director Brooks violated this policy in her communications both prior to and after the January 2, 2024 incident, those allegations are **sustained**.

### 3. *Director Brooks Complaint v. Chair Bowman*

#### SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

a. As already explained, Director Brooks requested that the School Board approve funding for her attendance at the October 28-30, 2024 CUBE conference in Las Vegas, following Director Bassett's withdrawal of a similar request. See Exhibits 8a, 8c. Chair Bowman reports that this request was received too late to include it on the agenda for the School Board's May 6 business meeting. On April 29, Chair Bowman and Director Brooks had the following email exchange:

i. Chair Bowman:

*"It will be on the May 15<sup>th</sup> agenda. We will discuss and vote for both you and Director Bassett regarding Board member travel during a time of \$20 million worth of cuts and a moratorium on out of state, professional development travel for staff. Happy to put that on the agenda"*

ii. Director Brooks:

*"Don't conflate the two issues or we will need to discuss the many concerns occurring in RAS during your tenure as Chair. Such as the millions & millions & millions of dollars allocated to our district and the low, low, low academic scores as the outcome; or maybe we will discuss the minimum moratorium on out of state PD travel for staff vs the large amount of approved administrative travel cost that is still conducted. But not right now. My request for PD travel is simple, it's in accordance with our policy and I am following procedure. If you ever want to talk logic, professionally or just conversationally, let's set it up like we tried to do in 2021 after I was appointed to the board. Otherwise, my request for Professional Development travel does not require a single other response from you except the one you gave about placing it on the agenda, for that I say thank you. Lastly, please do not include another board member's request with your response to mine, especially since that particular board member has asked you to remove their request for that travel altogether (refer to your email from Director Bassett dated yesterday 04/28/2024). I look forward to our board's discussion on May 15<sup>th</sup> about PD at NSBA/CUBE."*

iii. Chair Bowman:

*"Why do you threaten me in your opening paragraph? What do you plan to do to me? You gonna start a gaslight campaign against me? You gonna call me names? Why are you threatening me and the work I am doing? As stated in my previous email, I am placing the item on the May 15<sup>th</sup> work session agenda. Additionally, I am noting your threats, attempting to intimidate fellow board members is not one of our core norms."*

See Exhibit 8c.

b. Later on April 29, 2024, Director Brooks forwarded the above email thread to  
Director Brooks wrote, "Today, I am making a formal complaint against [Chair Bowman] for her undue disrespectful derogatory statement against me suggesting board intimidation." See Exhibit 8c. According to subsequent emails in the

record, Director Brooks had a conversation with [REDACTED] on May 9, 2024, regarding her complaint against Chair Bowman. See Exhibit 11d.

- c. Chair Bowman reports that at the School Board's closed session with [REDACTED] on May 14, 2024, Director Brooks stated that she would drop her complaint if Chair Bowman would admit to "*threatening her threat*". Director Brooks confirms that she felt threatened by Chair Bowman's declaration that she was "*making a list of threats*," which Director Brooks raised at the May 14 closed session. According to Director Brooks, Chair Bowman interprets any pushback as a "*threatening tone*".
- d. As already mentioned, at its regular business meeting on May 20, 2024, the School Board denied the motion to approve funding for Director Brooks to attend the CUBE conference. See Exhibit 2f (School Board minutes).

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

- a. This Investigator finds that, even if Chair Bowman did not support the request for funding to attend the CUBE conference, her initial email to Director Brooks on April 29, 2024 was needlessly sarcastic and antagonistic.
- b. Director Brooks' complaint focuses primarily on Chair Bowman's statement that "*I am noting your threats [and] attempting to intimidate fellow board members*" – what Director Brooks characterizes as "*threatening her threat*". This Investigator finds that as the tone of this email exchange escalated – beginning with Chair Bowman's sarcastic email (see above) -- both parties were reasonably understood to be "*threatening*" to take action against each other: Director Brooks by bringing up alleged fiscal mismanagement and other problems during Chair Bowman's tenure, and Chair Bowman responding by "*noting your threats*". However, these were verbal disagreements and not threats of physical violence or any other type of threat that would rise to the level of a policy violation.

### CONCLUSIONS

- a. The School Board's Statement of Roles, Core Values and Norms provides: "*We will speak candidly and courteously to each other and listen to dissenting or different viewpoints with an open mind. Even when our ideas conflict, we must treat each other with respect and courtesy and agree not to take disagreements personally. We will help each other to 'depersonalize' our disagreements. . . . We will encourage open and honest dialogue that is inclusive and respectful of everyone's time.*" Chair Bowman did not conform to those core values and norms.
- b. Director Brooks' allegations regarding a "*threat*" by Chair Bowman are otherwise **not sustained**.

#### 4. *Director Bassett Complaint v. Director Bowman*

##### SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

- a. On April 6, 2024, the School Board held a special business meeting to discuss the first round of interviews with candidates for Superintendent. The meeting was open to the public.<sup>10</sup> Director Bassett asserts that Chair Bowman made a disparaging comment about one of the candidates, calling them a “has been” and identifying that candidate by name.
- b. On April 23, 2024, Director Bassett emailed \_\_\_\_\_ (copied to

*“Hi Marti, I am sending you my letter attached, requesting that you and I confer with our legal counsel. As director, I am uncertain of the protocol and wanted to wait until you had an opportunity to confer with legal counsel. The full board is accountable for our response to breaches, however in this instance I was unsure of what action might be best. I leave to you and Ms. Goering to determine who might need to be involved in determining next steps.”*

See Exhibit 9.

- c. Director Bassett’s allegations against Chair Bowman following the April 6 School Board meeting were included in the list of complaints in \_\_\_\_\_ May 10 memorandum.

##### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The Minnesota Open Meeting Law (Minn. Stat. § 13D.05, Subd. 1(a)) provides that “*data that are not public data may be discussed at a meeting subject to this chapter without liability or penalty, if the disclosure relates to a matter within the scope of the public body’s authority and is reasonably necessary to conduct the business or agenda item before the public body.*” Even assuming that Chair Bowman identified one of the Superintendent candidates by name and commented unfavorably on that candidate during the April 6 meeting, as reported by Director Bassett, that appears to have related to a matter within the scope of the School Board’s authority, *i.e.*, the Superintendent selection process. While Chair Bowman’s comment may have been unprofessional, there is no evidence that she violated any policy or law by making that comment.

##### CONCLUSION

Director Bassett’s allegations are **not sustained**.

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<sup>10</sup> The webcast of the April 6, 2024 meeting is not available on the School District website.

5. *Director Vento Complaint v. Director Brooks*  
*Director Brooks Complaint v. Director Vento*

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

- a. The School Board’s policy committee includes Chair Bowman, Director Brooks and Director Vento. On June 11, 2024, the committee held a meeting with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. At that meeting, Director Brooks questioned why the new version of Policy 598 (Early Entrance to Kindergarten) – which had been updated by the School Board on May 20, 2024 – had not yet been posted to the school district’s website.
- b. In their investigative interviews, Director Vento, Director Brooks and Chair Bowman have provided the following accounts of the altercation that took place during the June 11 policy committee meeting and the surrounding circumstances:

Director Vento:

- i. Director Vento reports that Director Brooks had been advocating on behalf of a School District staff member whose child had failed the assessment for early entrance to kindergarten and who questioned the equity of the assessment process then in effect. At the June 11 meeting, Director Brooks and Director Vento were one or two seats apart at the table. Director Brooks repeatedly asked why the new policy had not been posted on the website, and why the new Administrative Procedure had not been completed. When Director Brooks asked Director Vento if he was frustrated, Director Vento responded, *“Yes, I’m fucking frustrated.”* Director Brooks told Director Vento that she did not appreciate his language; Director Vento apologized but reiterated that he was frustrated.
- ii. Director Brooks then stated, *“I am not your child, your cat, your dog or your slave.”* Director Vento reports that he became angry and was *“seeing red”* because he understood that by using the word *“slave,”* Director Brooks was comparing him to a slave master. Director Vento slammed his computer down and put it in his bag. He told Director Brooks, *“Don’t use that word.”* Director Brooks replied, *“What word?”* Director Vento answered, *“You know what you said.”* Director Vento acknowledges that he may have raised his voice. He then left the room and may have used foul language again on his way out (*“I don’t fucking believe you said that,”* or words to that effect).
- iii. As context for this incident, Director Vento adds that the School Board meeting on May 20, 2024 where the updates to Policy 598 had been approved was the same meeting where Director Brooks’ request for funding to attend the CUBE conference had been denied, and where Director Brooks had commented that *“White people on this board”* were unwilling to pay for *“urban education, which is primarily focused on Black people”*. See Exhibit 2f (School Board Webcast) at 1:29:15. Director Vento asserts that Director Brooks uses this kind of language to provoke.
- iv. Later on June 11 – after he had left the policy committee meeting – Director Vento received a phone call from Chair Bowman and

Director Vento agreed with their narrative of what had taken place at the meeting and Chair Bowman's plan to file a complaint against Director Brooks.

Director Brooks:

- i. When accepting Director Bassett's nomination for Chair at the January 8, 2024 School Board meeting, Director Brooks had quoted Director Vento's *See Exhibit 3a (School Board Webcast) at 13:30*. Director Vento had been insulted by this and had used it as a reason to vote for Chair Bowman over Director Bassett. Since then, Director Brooks' relationship with Director Vento has deteriorated, and Director Vento has consistently voted with Chair Bowman and against Director Brooks and Director Bassett.
- ii. Director Brooks confirms that the School Board had voted to adopt the new Policy 598 regarding early entry to kindergarten about two weeks before the June 11, 2024 policy committee meeting. Director Brooks believed that the school district was out of compliance with state law by not having the new policy posted on the website and by not having the new administrative procedure in place. She and Director Vento went back and forth on these issues; *See Exhibit 3a (School Board Webcast) at 13:30*; was not engaged.
- iii. Director Vento (who at this point was still seated) began yelling and used the word "fucking" toward Director Brooks multiple times. Director Brooks told Director Vento to watch his language. Director Vento responded that he was "fucking frustrated". Director Brooks told Director Vento, "I'm not your child, your dog or your slave," and that he should watch how he talked to her – Director Brooks explains that she was making a point by giving a list of submissive roles, and that Director Vento had no grounds to be offended.
- iv. Director Vento was one seat over and "kitty corner" from Director Brooks at the corner of the table. He gathered his belongings, stood up and was standing over Director Brooks. Director Vento said, "Don't ever say that fucking word to me again." Director Vento slammed his computer shut. Director Brooks told Director Vento that she did not know what word he meant; Director Vento replied, "Yes, you fucking do." Director Brooks stated again that she did not. Director Vento then left the room.
- v. Director Brooks believed that Director Vento's conduct and words were a physical threat – at the time, she did not know what would happen or if she might even be killed.

Chair Bowman:

- i. Chair Bowman cites the notes that she referred to in her June 15 email to Director Brooks (see below). Chair Bowman confirms that at the June 11 policy committee meeting, Director Brooks repeatedly asked why the updated early entry policy had not been posted. Director Vento explained that the policy was in effect even though it was not on the website yet, but Director Brooks kept pushing. Director Vento said loudly, "This is fucking frustrating". Director Brooks told Director Vento not to use that language; Director Vento apologized but reiterated that he was "fucking frustrated".

- ii. Chair Bowman confirms that Director Brooks told Director Vento, “I am not your child, your slave, your cat or your dog.” Director Vento slammed his computer down and left the room. In Chair Bowman’s view, Director Vento was angry but not aggressive or dangerous. Chair Bowman adds that Director Brooks always attributes disagreements to racial motives.
  - iii. After Director Vento and Director Brooks had left, Chair Bowman and \_\_\_\_\_ secured the building, then went to \_\_\_\_\_ office to discuss what had happened. They called Director Vento to ask if he was okay.
  - iv. Chair Bowman and \_\_\_\_\_ called \_\_\_\_\_ the following day, at which time the incident during the policy committee meeting was added to this investigation. Chair Bowman describes Director Brooks’ conduct during that meeting as “overt and disturbing”.
- c. Director Brooks reports that she waited two days for an apology from Director Vento. On June 13, 2024, Director Brooks submitted a formal complaint using the Robbinsdale Area Schools Harassment and Violence Report Form:

*“During a discussion regarding posting of a policy at our school board’s regular policy committee meeting, John Vento became irate and began using explicit profanity towards me. I asked him to ‘watch his language’. He became more furious and stated he was fu\*\*\*kn frustrated. I asked him again to ‘watch his language’; I also said ‘the discussion wasn’t anything to be frustrated about’. John Vento hollered ‘This is fu\*\*kn pissing me off!’ I then said, ‘Listen, I am not your child, I am not your dog, and I am not your slave – watch how you are talking to me!’ John Vento began hastily gathering his things, abruptly stood up (right over me because of where I was sitting) and loudly roared ‘Don’t you ever say that fu\*\*\*kn word to me again in your life Sharon!’ He was quite frightening, but I still softly said, ‘I don’t know what word you’re talking about John.’ John Vento viciously slammed his laptop shut and said, ‘Yes you do.’ I replied, ‘No I don’t.’ He then very angrily stomped off and exited the room. One of the previously silent onlookers, ReNae Bowman, looked at me and said ‘Yes you do.’ I stated to her ‘I was not talking to you.’ She then mumbled under her breath ‘so disrespectful’. No other witness said anything but began leaving the room. I left the room and exited the building.”*

See Exhibit 10b. In her email to \_\_\_\_\_ with the formal complaint attached, Director Brooks wrote:

*‘It has been nearly 48 hours since you, Renae Bowman and \_\_\_\_\_ witnessed the hostile vulgar language towards me from Director John Vento and his ultimate furious outburst following my response to his harassment of me during our policy committee meeting Tuesday. All of my protected classes felt targeted during his rampage (my gender, my race, my age, etc.) This is against our District’s Harassment Policy 413. Attached is my formal complaint. Please process expeditiously. Also, I am requesting that John Vento be moved to a different setting or location or on an administrative leave away from me until this calamity is resolved to discourage any kind of sudden inflammatory angry outburst against me involving vulgar crude profanity and/or his display of fear-invoking actions (slamming laptops, etc.), like I experienced 06/11/2024. I am*

*afraid that, due to the nature of our business, it is quite likely that during the course of regular board discussions, John Vento may disagree with my opinion again and may behave even more irrational than before.”*

See Exhibit 10a.

- d. Later on June 13, 2024, Chair Bowman emailed Director Brooks:

*“A complaint was made on Wednesday morning regarding behaviors during Tuesday night's Policy meeting. The lawyer and the investigator have been notified and Director Vento was added to the list of Board members to be interviewed on June 18. You already have an appointment with the investigator and should bring your complaint with to your interview. I will do what I can regarding seating arrangements at Monday's Board meeting. . . .”*

See Exhibit 10c.

- e. On June 14, 2024, Director Brooks emailed \_\_\_\_\_ and the full School Board: *“I am glad that Policy 598 was just posted for everyone to publicly view on our website! This was the action that I spoke in favor of doing in our Tuesday Policy Committee Meeting and John Vento was vehemently against it, unnecessarily cursing me in his argument to wait for AP 598 to be completed. . . .”* In response, Chair Bowman emailed Director Brooks on June 15 (copied to Director Vento and

*“You write to me to make a request for action, but I do not understand your continued talk about the actions of other board members, it feels like gaslighting. You have sent an email to the entire board which you know is in violation of the open meeting laws regarding the Policy Committee meeting. Do you have a specific ask or is it your intent to just disparage other board members through blind copy emails? It appears you are insistent on making your communication more about Director Vento and not your ask, let me add my eye-witness account regarding Director Vento and you at the Policy Committee Meeting on June 11th. Director Vento was trying to re-explain to you what \_\_\_\_\_ explained regarding why the policy was not IMMEDIATELY posted to the website. She explained they just had not had the time to get it posted. Most of the staff time allotted for board business is now consumed by data requests from Board Directors so other work must take its place in line. There are only so many hours in the day and it is the end of the school year. You refused to accept \_\_\_\_\_ reasonable reason and you became argumentative about why it was not yet posted, you started asking the same question over and over. Director Vento tried explaining to you that the policy was in place because it was approved through a vote and not based on when it is posted on the website. Again, you became very argumentative, refusing to accept the truth of the statements, you wanted to argue. We were all very frustrated. You held the vantage point, you had the power to calm things down, but you escalated it. It did not have to happen the way it happened and you have responsibility for these outcomes. So in the words of our \_\_\_\_\_  
Please, just stop!!”. I suggest we focus on getting real work done and let the investigation bring some conclusion to this issue. . . .”*

- f. Director Brooks reports that Chair Bowman’s email made her more afraid in the wake of the incident at the June 11 policy committee meeting. Later on June 15, Director Brooks responded to Chair Bowman’s email:



*“I must admit your ‘eye-witness’ account of Tuesday’s Policy Committee meeting is no surprise. I am somewhat shocked that you’ve added a blatant lie on . She and I did not debate the timing of the completion of AP 598, said they were working on it and that was that. The only constant reference to AP 598 was from John Vento who wanted to risk our district staying out of compliance by not posting Policy 598 and wait for the AP 598 to be completed. He became far too combative over that very stance and began cursing at me, dropping the f\*bomb at will! However, if you’re sticking to your story, live with it. I am far less interested in your perspective than I am of John Vento’s. What happened that evening is something No Woman should have to endure, especially in a professional meeting. Totally unacceptable. There was nothing in my character or actions that deserved such abuse from that Man and I resent you, ReNae, saying ‘You had the power to calm things down, but you escalated it. It did not have to happen the way it happened and you have responsibility for these outcomes.’ Your statement is an affront to Women & Girls everywhere. In fact, there are millions of other people who disagree with you including the Police, the Court system, the World Health Organization, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the NAACP, ACLU, Rotary International, MDE, my Family & Friends and many many many others.”*

See Exhibit 10d.

- g. On information and belief, Director Brooks has contacted the New Hope Police Department multiple times to request that criminal charges be brought against Director Vento for his conduct at the June 11, 2024 committee meeting. The has declined to bring criminal charges against Director Vento. Multiple School Board members have also reported that at a recent professional development session, Director Brooks expressed her fear and concern over the June 11 incident with Director Vento.
- h. The record includes an editorial drafted by Director Bassett regarding the June 11, 2024 altercation between Director Brooks and Director Vento. Director Bassett had not been present at the time of that altercation. See Exhibit 10e.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

- a. While there are some discrepancies between the witness’ descriptions of what took place during the June 11, 2024 policy committee meeting, the record is conclusive that Director Brooks told Director Vento, “*I am not your slave*”. The record is also clear that both before and after that comment, Director Vento raised his voice and used vulgar language directed at Director Brooks.
- b. Regarding the context of Director Brooks’ comment (“*I am not your slave*”) and Director Vento’s reaction to that comment, Director Brooks’ documented history of invoking race in response to disagreements with other School Board members is relevant to the analysis of these cross-complaints.
- c. There is conflicting evidence as to Director Vento’s position relative to Director Brooks when he stood up and directed vulgarities at her in a raised voice: Director Brooks reports that Director Vento was standing directly over her, while Director Vento recalls that they were one or more seats apart at the table. This Investigator is unable to conclude that Director Vento’s

conduct was an act violence within the meaning of Policy 413 (*i.e.*, “*a physical act of aggression or assault*”). *See* Exhibit 1c.

- d. Even assuming that Director Vento’s conduct amounted to a physical act of aggression, for the reasons stated above, the record does not support the conclusion that that act was based on or related to Director Brooks’ protected class status (race, gender or age). Although Director Vento’s raised voice and use of vulgar language were inappropriate, this Investigator finds that there is insufficient evidence to conclude that that conduct was related to Director Brooks’ protected class status.

## CONCLUSIONS

- a. Director Brooks’ allegations of discrimination and/or harassment under Policy 413 (Discrimination, Harassment and Violence) are **not sustained**. *See* Exhibits 1c, 1d.
- b. The School Board’s Statement of Roles, Core Values and Norms provides: “*We will speak candidly and courteously to each other and listen to dissenting or different viewpoints with an open mind. Even when our ideas conflict, we must treat each other with respect and courtesy and agree not to take disagreements personally. We will help each other to ‘depersonalize’ our disagreements. . . . We will encourage open and honest dialogue that is inclusive and respectful of everyone’s time.*” *See* Exhibit 1a. Similarly, the School Board Governance Policies require board members to “*encourage and respect diverse viewpoints and collective decision-making,*” to “*cultivate a sense of collaboration and respect for diverse viewpoints among all stakeholders,*” and to “*encourage and respect the rights of others to hold and express opinions*”. *See* Exhibit 1b. Insofar as Director Brooks and Director Vento allege violations of these core values and policies in their conduct toward each other at the June 11 committee meeting, those allegations are **sustained**.

The proper roles of School Board members, pursuant to the Statement of Roles, Core Values and Norms, include acting as stewards of the school system's resources and trustees of the system's mission, goals and core values. In summary, this Investigator finds that the personal disputes among School Board members detailed in this report have prevented them from serving those roles effectively. The result has been a high level of dysfunction and animosity in the School Board's operations. All School Board members (with the possible exception of Director Evans-Becker) have contributed to this dysfunction in their behavior toward one another.

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I am closing my file at this time but remain available to respond to questions or to provide further input.

Regards,

Manager & Lead Investigator  
**Red Cedar Consulting, LLC**

24-18