

I am writing this statement as a school board member.

For anyone to dedicate nearly 10 years of their life to a volunteer position is an accomplishment. I look back at the journey with a great sense of pride and amazement. I had the honor of working with so many that had the students, staff, and taxpayers as their focus. I know that the vast majority of the professionals working in all capacities in our buildings are dedicated to the success of our students and the efficient workings of our buildings.

When I first joined the Board in May of 2014, Board members rarely asked important questions and simply seemed there to just agree with all the proposals set before them and cast their "Yes" vote. I viewed my role as a Board member from the lens of a person that wanted more than the status quo. Why couldn't the students have access to challenging subject matter? Why were the leaders of the district settling for just grade level goals? Our children deserved and continue to need greater aspirations from their leaders. I wanted to be a Board member that did not settle for anything but the best for our students, staff, and taxpayers.

During the budget seasons of 2012 and 2013, the leadership of the district proposed budgets that cut staff, programs and threatened to close schools. Every year parents, staff and taxpayers filled the board meetings and made speeches pleading for no cuts to specific programs that affected them. There had to be a better way to lead this district and I decided to run for the board to make a difference in any way I could.

I was elected with a great sense of urgency at the forefront of my mind. Every board meeting became an opportunity for positive change and every vote was a chance to show the public that with effort and focus, positive change to the failed education system could be made. For nine years in a row, I pushed for and succeeded in ensuring that there were no tax levy increases to the school budget. My view has always been that the Board needed to monitor the expenditures of the administration so that every year could produce budget surpluses. I'm proud to say that every year, the Newburgh School District had budget surpluses that have enabled the administration to create new programs and supplement existing working programs to help all students succeed. I believe my ideas and voice had a place within the structure of the 9-member board.

Every year, I put your children's future as my priority. Every year, I heard the stories from staff members that had real issues that had to be addressed and I did all that I could to effect positive change. Every year, I heard from the entire community and asked them how I, as a single vote of 9 on this board, could help solve their situations. You were all my focus. I was elected to represent you and make Newburgh the best school district in the State. I put all of my efforts into fulfilling my oath every minute. This dedication was not for personal gain and those of you that know of my story can see that.

Attendance has always been the starting point for any successful student. Without physically being present in front of your teacher, there is no possibility for effective learning. I was discouraged to find out in 2017-2019 how uninterested the leadership of the board and the district were when I and others brought to their attention major attendance issues. Black and Brown students were literally being given waivers for not showing up to class so that they could qualify for varsity team sports. Even the board members that publicly professed their interest in the educational plight of Black and Brown students verbally attacked me for questioning the situation. I was literally told to shut up by the leadership of the board and was removed as chair of the policy committee.

Knowing that the futures of these students were being stolen, I spoke out publicly about the attendance issues and caught the attention of the District Attorney's office. With the efforts of just a few morally honorable people, the District Attorney was able to prove that thousands of students' records had been altered for attendance and grading. I have heard for years that the school to prison pipeline must be addressed and when the time came for the community and district to acknowledge the issue, it was dismissed as nothing. No one was held accountable for altering grades. No outrage from the community. Minor revisions to policy and practices that eventually went away.

New policies were put in place that hurt the educational futures of our students. No longer was attendance a requirement and students could simply get a minimum grade of 55 for doing nothing. The district kept lowering the standards and made it harder for teachers to help students who had fallen behind. Anyone who spoke out on what was happening was quickly put in check. The board simply let the educational system socially promote students that could not read or write. The diplomas being handed out every year seemed to be worth less and less.

After the disastrous end to the previous Superintendents tenure, I had great hope that the new leader would be the change needed to help Newburgh rise above the failures of the past. That hope faded quickly when the same failed policies were doubled down on. The leaders that had proven to cause many of the failures from the past were promoted and honored. The slow deterioration had begun, and the only hope was another school board election.

Just when everyone thought that we had at least 5 good, honorable people that would bring reformation and rebuilding, the bubble burst in a matter of a week. The last few months have been filled with abuse and attacks on my character. The public and private attacks are documented in the three (3) filings that I have sent to the Commissioner of Education. They can all be Foiled by requesting all filings made by Darren Stridiron for SED Appeal No. 22003. <https://www.nysed.gov/form/submit-foil-request>

The constant abuse, lies, deceit and attacks were all coordinated and designed by the current board majority and the administration. I have been physically threatened and recently threatened by the Superintendent via an email filled with complete lies against

me. The charges filed by and approved by the majority 5 of the board are complete fabrications designed to humiliate me and destroy my reputation.

Just imagine the position that I am in here as a volunteer Board member. I joined this board to help the educational system, but the policies proposed by the Superintendent would prevent me from entering a school to view the programs. I have personally been denied entry into a school and 2 other board members in the minority have been denied by the Superintendent in writing twice. At the same time, the 5 board members that have publicly sided with the Superintendent get personal invitations to the schools. The current policy of the district states that the Superintendent has no authority to deny a Board member school visit. This is not a functioning school board, and everyone knows it.

For those of you that have not followed the minute-by-minute action of the school board, you need to know that many of the duties of the school board members involve oversight of the Superintendent. That oversight requires that we as Board members are informed about all the aspects of the district. We need to be current on the details of the finances, educational programs, buildings, and grounds, etc. Whenever one of the 4 board members in the minority asks questions via email or at board meetings, the Superintendent refuses to answer the questions. With the majority 5 of the board allowing this, they are literally preventing us all from our oversight of the Superintendent.

Many of the duties of the Board President have been overtaken by the Superintendent with the approval of the majority 5 board members. I have added items to the agenda only to have them removed. I have worked with the Board attorney and Vice President to organize our first Board retreat only to find out that the Superintendent organized one herself and invited all the building administrators. Plans were being made to rent a party venue and have it catered. All of this without the Board's knowledge or permission. This was supposed to be a Board retreat. It happened again just a few months later.

The narrative spun by the leadership of the administration has been designed to make the public think that I have overstepped my authority and hindered the day-to-day duties of the Superintendent. That lie has been laid bare in my filings with the Commissioner and all those documents are open to the public to be read. Full transparency has always been important to me and vital to the public knowing the truth. You need to read it for yourself to know that you have been misled for months about what has been happening here. The Board attorney has made it clear that no matter what the Superintendent says publicly or privately, the district will cover any legal costs caused by her words. The Superintendent has full immunity to defame or slander anyone and with the current majority 5, there appears to be no limits.

The constant abusive language, threats, public statements full of lies, emails designed to impugn my character have made it impossible to accomplish the goals of making positive change for our students, staff, and taxpayers. Without accurate information

regarding the finances, I cannot possibly make the important decisions regarding the upcoming budget. Board members can be held liable for the district finances regardless of the lack of information provided by the Administration. The majority 5 and the Superintendent have made it impossible for me to perform my basic duties as a board member. I continue to have a full measure of positive energy for my role as a board member after all these years. The fact is that the current majority 5 and the administrative leadership will not allow me to function in my capacity as a board member.

The one great part about the last few months is the knowledge that I have been part of a great team of 4 board members. Renee Greene, Ryan Lamar, and Deb Bouley are honorable, intelligent, and excellent people who have laid their own interests aside to help Newburgh succeed. Some of them have also been the targets of relentless attacks by the majority 5 and the leadership of the administration for simply attempting to perform their duties as board members. The public needs to know that we have all tried to do what is best for all students and have been met with constant attacks on our character and prevented from making any progress.

Therefore, at 11am on Friday, February 2, 2024, I will be submitting my resignation from the Board of Education of the Newburgh Enlarged City School District. It has been my pleasure to serve my community with everything I have. You are all worth every bit of what I gave and more.

All the best.

Darren Stridiron