

Hi Elise,

All the facts *will* eventually come out. We are simply trying to do it in a way that the right people are held accountable for any misadministration, obfuscation, or other missteps, BUT the names/reputations of hardworking, volunteer Board of Trustees (who may have been unknowingly involved until it was too late) are not harmed. Needed information is still being collected and checked. We know some things for certain while other things (that need to be explained) are still unclear because the parties most involved have failed to provide plausible explanations that fit the facts we can see in the actual data. Being familiar enough with many of our Board of Trustee members (and believing in their full integrity), Melissa and I believe the possibility exists that all of the hard/soft costs to implement the iPad program were not provided to the full Board of Trustees at the proper time and put through the proper approval processes. Perhaps at some point trustees became aware of significant “issues” but by the time they were discovered, members were already between a rock and a hard place (i.e. trustees were left with only very bad choices: fear accusations that they didn’t properly oversee Matthews/Bagley to ensure wise spending of our public funds –OR--try to make the best of a big mess because the proverbial ‘bell couldn’t be unrung’ given the amount of spending/spending commitments that had already occurred). As we heard from one person close to the situation, “...*the baby had already been born and there was no choice but to raise it.*” We might have done the very same thing if we were in their position. Perhaps if they were able to talk openly about this mess (without worry that their words might get twisted up and used against them later), they could provide a clear, compelling explanation to all of us for why things happened the way they did, or why the facts don’t add up and look incriminating when they can be fully explained in a way that puts everyone’s mind at ease.

Given the situation, the public is left to ponder: If the Board of Trustees governing during the timeframe in question is (to a large extent) the same group of folks that are now in charge of governing the accountability process for Matthews’ actions and behaviors as our top district officials, can we as a public reasonably expect that our current Board of Trustees can do their duty to ask needed hard questions and demand accountability—possibly even resignations—if doing so could put either still seated or former Trustees in the crossfire and possibly do them harm? In the end, we hope this process can happen in such a way that the responsible parties are held accountable but the public doesn’t walk away with the impression that “no good deed goes unpunished” in agreeing to take on difficult but important public service roles. The worst possible alternative, which will happen soon if we can’t get to needed transparency and a reasonable resolution, is that the real truth will be forced out when everyone ‘lawyers up’ and is deposed under oath in response to a class action lawsuit filed on behalf of parent donors who want to claw back all of their donations for the last 3 years because they were given based on the false financial picture provided by our top district officials.

The bottom line is that the truth will come out one way or another. And, no matter what the final facts show, we are ALL to blame to some degree for not being more involved

in helping our elected school board leaders (well-intentioned, hard-working, smart volunteers) execute the hugely complex job of ensuring the best decisions for our kids within the limited public funds available. When we finally do get through the accountability stage, and move on to the rebuilding stage, lessons hard learned will be many.

Two very important lessons are already apparent:

Lesson 1: As parents, we can expect negative outcomes if we are asleep at the switch and relinquished too much control to too few players by not:

a) Demanding that we hear information from all sides (this requires both our inclination and a means – right now, one guy controls far too much of the microphone time and he is a master at ‘spin’).

b) Executing our active, full participation in helping our elected leaders (again, well-intentioned, hard-working volunteer Board of Trustee members in this case) execute the huge and complex job of ensuring the best educational decisions for our kids within the limited public funds available. How many of us show up at school board meetings and regularly participate in these important debates, ask needed questions, offer trustees much needed ideas and alternative viewpoints, or hear our teachers’ express their concerns/recommendations? Let us be the first to admit that we didn’t participate fully enough—our bad—and we will correct that bad starting now.

Matthews, in his explanations given to the public thus far, once again attempts to use ‘spin’ to paint this issue as being driven by a group of non-progressive people against technology. We could all ‘Monday-morning-quarterback’ whether or not the correct technology decisions were made (given the many choices outlined and presented by the technology committee) but the issue at hand is NOT whether our district made the right choices for a badly needed a technology refresh (we would all agree it did!). The issue is whether the public received truth and honesty from our district’s leaders before, during and after that decision. One teacher we communicated with last week made the point quite excellently:

(“I was a bit frustrated by some comments that were clearly anti-technology as opposed to mismanagement. I agree no tool should supplant a teacher but the right tool in the hands of a good teacher can be a tremendous asset.”)

We agree with this smart, dedicated, passionate teacher. We intend to make it abundantly clear to Matthews that technology is NOT the issue at hand--technology just happened to be where the public funds in question were spent! The \$1M “mistake” could have been related to anything and the same result would occur. When public funds are being spent, Matthews needs to make his case to BOTH the Board of Trustees and the public in the full open light of day – rather than by claiming publicly that no money would come from Fund 1 and then using what now ends up looking like underhanded accounting maneuvers to hide less than adequate forecasting and disclosures about the true costs associated with the technology refresh approach he so strongly recommended (it is not the issue—but we’ve learned this past week that he pushed for the most expensive of several technology refresh options that the technology

committee outlined as a possible choices to meet our district's needs—and, at a time when our district officials were crying for public donations and communicating at various points that we were dipping into our reserves to the tune of almost \$2M to balance our budget).

Over the last week, we've learned that the technology committee presented several less expensive option to refresh our technology (like updating existing elementary computer labs with new computers—and these new computers didn't have to be expensive Apple products to do the job of readying us for Common Core testing. We didn't have to choose 1:1 iPad program at MBMS). We are guilty of Monday-morning-quarterbacking in even raising these points because we should have been more participatory in the many meetings that went into this decision. But these points now need to be raised in seeking whether or not we are getting full truth and transparency. As PTA board members at the time, we believe our 'PTA's' could have engaged in more dialog with our teachers (there is a 'T' in PTA) to ask needed questions before bending to administration's pressure to write checks for all the funds used by the district to buy iPads. We have been told Meadows' PTA did not write the same checks back in 2011/2012 and we applaud you for your clear thinking if that is correct. And, in full fairness to Melissa, who served as Treasurer of Pennekamp's PTA board at the time discussions were occurring about writing such checks, let me add that she was the lone voice on our school's PTA board advocating to Matthews that we need *not* buy Apple iPads and should consider other alternatives before the votes were cast to write checks.

Discussions we've had this past week make clear that parents and our educational leaders (PTA's, Board, and district officials alike) need to work a lot harder to take off our ear muffs and listen to the voice of our teachers. All of us need to question and fully explore biases we might have about teachers' efforts to unite because they have limited other choices to be effective in getting basic things they deserve. When we hear phrases like, "...the only intention of the union is...", or top leaders referring to our teachers as "labor" in discussions, we aren't acting in the best interests of our kids. Teachers stand where the rubber meets the road. Lisa Taylor smartly pointed this out in saying that our kids spend 7 hours a day, five days a week with teachers. We can **all** give a stronger effort to better oil to the lever that matters most to education quality for our kids before continually asking them to give so much and then give a little more. Are there some bad teachers? Sure. But what profession doesn't have that problem? Interestingly, one highly respected teacher told us that while all teachers appreciate the kind things parents do for them—gifts, lunches, parent volunteerism, etc., "...these things can't trump not having a real voice in the critical decisions that are left to be implemented in our classrooms." This person expressed that what they really need from parents is to demand and fight for greater equality and diversity at the decision-making table. That isn't too much to ask if we want their best. Perhaps we need to have a teacher on our school board (they can always recuse themselves from meetings/votes related to salary negotiations)? Why not *one* teacher on MBEF's board when teachers are continually asked to push parents for contributions and are so effective in helping to persuade parents to donate? MBEF funds now represents at least 10% of our district's

overall budget! It is a great organization and it has a lot of power to demand the needed changes at the top levels of our administration.

Lesson #2 (the reason Kim went on record calling for Matthews' resignation): Parents, Teachers, and Board of Trustee members MUST be able to count on honest, transparent, fully accountable leadership from our top district officials.

Our schools operate under an 'indirect system of democracy' (i.e. five member voluntary Board of Trustees elected to oversee that the wishes of the *public* are carried out by our Superintendent). Without absolute integrity and trust here, the whole system breaks down. The attached e-mail makes clear that our top official was told long ago that these "accounting errors" existed and he chose to do nothing (actually much worse than nothing when you look at the full picture). It was *his* job to look into it right then, alert the Board, and go fix it. Did that happen? Why did Mr. Geczi even have to be put in the position of escalating the question/issue to Ms. Bordokas (who is a *volunteer* with a very busy professional career which does not involve being paid to do our superintendent's job!)? The answer: Because Mr. Geczi's ultimate boss didn't do *his* job. Can teachers honestly now be expected to trust and respect him as their ultimate boss if they are telling him a significant problem exists and he ignores them and doesn't respond? Is that the kind of leadership we want for MBUSD?

You are entitled to your opinion for sure but if that opinion was based on ignorance of simple facts that could have been gathered before expressing it so publicly, we caution you to be more thoughtful in the future. What any of us *personally* believe right now doesn't matter. Only asking the right questions that help get to the *facts* will move us forward on the path to ensuring accountability and rebuilding trust. As concerned parents, our job should be to push for the transparency needed to fully understand what really happened here (while ensuring the wrong people don't get caught in the crossfire). Teachers can't and shouldn't have to do this job alone! *Our teachers* may turn out to have been the *only ones* fully *informed* and fighting for what best serves kids—transparency of finances and much needed changes at the top to ensure everyone can trust the person ultimately responsible—their boss. Yes, their fight might lead to a small pay raise but that is *fair* and *just* given a **fact we all now know**--our district officials negotiated our teachers' last contract under a false financial picture. Are some teachers at the end of their ropes and darn angry by all that they've endured to reach this point? Yes! And, it is likely that all of us would feel similarly under the same set of circumstances.

For the record, Melissa and I share in our own *personal* beliefs on this issue (after lots of actual research): It looks abundantly and disturbingly like our top leader has had a lot more concern with his own *self* service and resume enhancement than with *public* service these past few years. Time will tell.