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January 11, 2021

Dear JCS Staff,

There has been much public dialogue and social media interest regarding recent events in our nation's capital. This dialogue has been marked by strong feelings about personal responsibility, civic duty and the public good. Each of these quarters has different expectations about what those things mean and how to truly be a "good citizen". The single point of broad agreement is that the way to resolve those conflicts is through dialogue rather than violence.

As a public school system, composed of people from every one of those quarters, we strive to be a place in which our children can explore those questions safely and thoughtfully. In order to be that place, we are hyper vigilant in our response to reports of threats, violence, aggression, and any other illegal activities. Any report of any violation of our policy, regardless of the source, is met with the same response. We remove the employee from any access to children, we investigate, and we make a determination about whether or not the violation took place.

On Friday, January 8, 2021, I received such a report that two employees had posted threatening and inflammatory posts on their Facebook pages, had been present at the Electoral protest march on Wednesday that erupted in violence, and had violated our leave policy. As is our practice, affected employees are sent a standard letter notifying them there are allegations, they will continue to be paid while this is an ongoing situation, the potential ramifications should the accusations be proven, and that a meeting will occur for their opportunity to respond to the allegations. This is the same due process we strive to follow in every circumstance especially with allegations concerning potential harm.

In this case, the letters that went to the employees referred to their attendance at any potential illegal activities stemming from the rally and their posts regarding potential defamation and threats against government. I understand that in this hyper-political environment, the letters came across to some as a potential threat of punishment for political beliefs. That was neither true nor the intention. I want to be clear that EVERY employee has EVERY right to the politics and beliefs of their choice, so long as their behavior does not cause harm or is illegal. I am seeking to determine whether these employees violated any policy or laws. The matter is currently under investigation and disciplinary action has not been determined as many have suggested.

As this is a personnel issue, there is nothing further that can be said regarding the matter. I can only reiterate for every citizen and employee of Jefferson County Schools, your politics is your fundamental right, your child's safety is my fundamental responsibility. The best way for me to do that is to be vigilant about ensuring they are cared for by people who do not break laws, violate policies, or engage in harmful behavior.

Bondy Shay Gibson, Ed.D.
Superintendent