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June 16, 2005

Address to the ACPS School Board

Good Evening. My name is Jim Boissonnault and I am here to speak on behalf of Alexandria's children.

Over the past year, the Superintendent and the School Board have repeated the mantra, "This Board is about the children."

Unfortunately, the record demonstrates this Superintendent and this Board refuse to be truly "about the children" unless threatened with legal action.

Case 1:

This year, parents of an autistic child at Lyles-Crouch sought implementation of an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) for their child. These parents sought to work with the principal and Central Administration to meet this goal, even after the child was insulted and teased by the principal. When the parents became too vocal about their concerns, ACPS sent Social Services to their home in what can only be viewed as an attempt to intimidate the parents into silence. Upon arrival at the home, the Social Worker was surprised—because there was clearly no reason to be there. Only after the parents sought legal counsel did ACPS finally take action to implement the IEP and provide the services to which the child is *entitled* by law.

Case 2:

For three months this past year, the entire group of mildly mentally retarded, or MMR, students at Lyles-Crouch was without a permanent certified teacher. ACPS received Federal Funds for these kids, but failed to meet the legal requirement of providing them a certified teacher for nearly a third of the school year. A series of substitute teachers filed through the class, some falling asleep; one even had to be physically ejected from the premises. Note: these children are low-income and African American. Once a

community member advocated for the children and ACPS was again threatened with legal action, a certified MMR teacher was suddenly hired.

The Superintendent and the majority of the School Board display a consistent pattern of behavior when faced with a serious issue:

1. Deny anything is wrong.
2. If the issue is too "hot", acknowledge the issue and make empty promises to take action.
3. If the parent raising the issue persists, seek to marginalize the parent.
4. If the parent continues to persist, seek to intimidate, as was the case when Social Services was sent to the home of the autistic child.

We are again in a situation where a serious issue is being ignored by the Superintendent and the Board. I am referring to concerns about Transportation Director, David Rose.

Case 3:

David Rose currently faces lawsuits alleging illegal behavior in his previous district, behavior no parent would accept from the Director of Transportation of a public school system. At least three local individuals have informed the Superintendent and Chairman Wilkoff that David Rose has continued a pattern of abusive and discriminatory behavior. One bus driver told this to Channel 7 two weeks ago. Another community member tried to address the Board in March, but was told by Rebecca Perry and Mark Wilkoff she would not be allowed to speak about David Rose at a public meeting. Another ACPS bus driver has sought action from the Board for several months to correct David Rose's abusive behavior. More importantly, this same driver has raised serious safety concerns, including a State Code violation: the training and certification of ACPS bus drivers by non-certified.

I ask that you deal with current issue openly, directly and immediately; our children are at risk.

I suspect, however, that you will do the right thing only when a lawsuit is filed or something happens to our children.

I believe the Superintendent and the majority of the Board have repeatedly failed in the stewardship of our most precious community members, our children. I believe the best way to be "about the children" would be for the Superintendent and the majority of this Board to step down.