

South Shore Charter Public School Board of Trustees Statement

October 19, 2006

Introduction:

As we are all aware, for the past two months there has been a great deal of controversy concerning Mr. Munhall and certain internet postings that he initiated in connection with his avocation as a photographer. Particularly because of the concerns raised by a number of parents, the Board of Trustees designated two of its members, Mr. Frank White and Mr. Ed Hagerty, to act as a subcommittee to investigate the matter and to report back to the full Board, hopefully with a recommended course of action. Over the past several weeks, Mr. White and Mr. Hagerty have viewed all of the internet material which is at issue, and they have spent a significant amount of time meeting with a number of parents and staff members, as well as with Mr. Munhall, receiving their input and reactions concerning this matter. After significant reflection, Mr. White and Mr. Hagerty have reached a consensus and have arrived at a recommendation for the Board. Additionally, I should note that, as Chair, I have met at length with Mr. White and Mr. Hagerty, and I concur with the conclusions that they have reached. Thus, the following should be viewed as a joint statement coming both from me and from the subcommittee.

Findings:

We note at the start that governing a school, as the Board of Trustees must do, and leading and managing a school as a Headmaster such as Mr. Munhall must do, are not easy or simple tasks. A big part of the reason that these tasks are not simple or easy is because there is a wide divergence of opinion concerning how this whole process of education is best carried out. Some parents passionately feel that certain things should occur, while others parents just as passionately feel otherwise. Some faculty members or students feel that certain approaches, curriculum, or methodology should be used, while others feel quite differently. Some people strongly feel that one leadership style is best, while others strongly feel that it is not. This divergence of opinion can be stimulating and constructive, but it also means that it is impossible to make everyone happy. This clearly is one of those moments.

Mr. Munhall has a life outside of this school. One of his life-long interests has been photography, and he is very good at it. He recently began to pursue this interest more seriously by starting a website on which he not only displayed some of his work, but also through which he began to correspond and network with other people in the photography field. Some of this correspondence took place on other websites. Some individuals in our school community, notably some parents and staff members, who have seen Mr. Munhall's website and the other websites on which Mr. Munhall communicated, have taken offense to the content and have registered serious concerns. A number of other parents and staff members, however, have seen the same material and have found it to be noncontroversial. We as Trustees have viewed this material, and we can understand both points of view.

While we believe that Mr. Munhall did nothing illegal, unethical, or immoral, it is our feeling that Mr. Munhall made an error of judgment in this matter. We feel this way not because we think that Mr. Munhall intended to offend anyone, which we are sure that he did not. However, we think that Mr. Munhall should have been much more aware of the likelihood that people involved in this school would see his website, much more aware of the fact that these people might have a wide range of sensibilities and reactions to his material, and much more aware of the fact that these differing reactions, some of them likely to be negative, could lead to a controversy which would be a significant distraction within the school community. This is exactly what has happened.

We think it is important to note that at the first moment that Mr. Munhall realized that some people in this community had taken offense to his website, he removed it. Also, he has been candid and has not tried to deny anything or cover anything up. In fact, the first that most members of this community learned of this situation was from Mr. Munhall himself, who at the start of the school year chose to write a letter to parents explaining what had happened. We know that Mr. Munhall regrets this situation and the distraction it has become, but we are heartened that he has taken ownership of the situation.

Michael Munhall is a fine man, a fine educator, and a fine leader. He took over this school a number of years ago in the midst of great upheaval, and he has led it, and is continuing to lead it, on a path toward excellence. In this process he has necessarily stepped on some toes, and he has made a few mistakes. This situation with the website, for reasons we have explained, may be one of those mistakes. However, this does not mean that Mr. Munhall is not the right man for this job. Moreover, despite the fact that we as Trustees wish that this current controversy had never occurred, it does not mean that we should waiver in our support for, and our faith in, Mr. Munhall. He has earned that support, and he has earned that faith.

Recommendation:

We feel that it is essential for the good of this school to put this matter behind us. Thus, it is our recommendation that no further action be taken in regard to this matter, except that I as Chair meet with Mr. Munhall with a view toward ensuring that this type of situation not occur again. We urge further that all members of this school community reunite and refocus on the business of educating the children who are within our charge.