

November 13, 2012

## **Statement**

Our district is faced with one lawsuit and two claims which contend that the sexual abuse of students in the 1990s could have been prevented by the district. There has been a great deal written about this and about our district's response to them. And, while we are limited in what we can say about pending legal matters, there are some things we wish to make clear tonight.

First, we want to say that our district and our board are deeply sorry for what happened to the students in our care over a decade ago. These children were entrusted to us and were sexually abused by our employees.

We are not only board members and administrators, we are parents. Knowing that children were subjected to sexual abuse within our district is very painful and very distressing. We want to offer our sincere apology on behalf of the district to the children — now adults --who suffered abuse, to their families and to all of the families in our district.

Every one of us wishes this abuse had been prevented. We cannot, of course, undo what has happened. But we are committed to making sure it does not and cannot happen again. That is why we continue to examine the past actions of our district and try to learn all we can from this painful process. We want to understand what went wrong, and how we can fix whatever was broken in our policies or our practices.

Later on tonight's agenda, we will hear from our Student Safety Committee, which is playing a vital role in making sure our district is a place where students continue to receive an excellent education in a safe environment. We owe the men and women of this committee, and the many community partners who have assisted and supported them, our gratitude.

Please understand our work on this issue is not concluded with the issuance of the Student Safety Committee report or even with the conclusion of the litigation. Ensuring the safety of our children will be a cornerstone of all the work we do as long as we are a district. As a board, we will keep this issue on our agenda for the foreseeable future, assuring that our community is kept informed and has an opportunity to provide input.

At the same time, we must respond to the legal claims that face our district. We are doing that now through our attorneys and through the channels and processes that are part of the court system. In our initial response to one lawsuit, we made a terrible mistake by including a defense that was entirely inappropriate.

We want to again apologize to Ms. Cunnane and to all victims of sexual abuse for including in our initial response to the lawsuit two defenses which have now been removed.

We have never believed that the victims in these cases bear any responsibility

for the abuse they suffered. No child is to blame for his or her own abuse. Sexual abuse is not the fault of any victim and certainly not the fault of a child victim. We are truly sorry that our filing obscured this important truth and we are deeply sorry for the pain it caused victims of sexual abuse.

Finally, we want to report what we hope will be a positive development in these cases. Each of the parties involved, including our district, has agreed to mediate the claims and hopefully reach a resolution satisfactory to all.

Our district's insurance company will participate in the mediation. While there is no guarantee mediation will achieve a resolution, our district intends to enter into it with optimism and a spirit of cooperation.

Throughout this mediation, there will be questions we can't answer, as the process is a confidential one. We will, however, do the best we can to keep our community informed.

Thank you for your attention and thank you for helping us to continue building a district in which our children receive an excellent education in a safe environment.