

From: [Deb Fitzgerald](#)
To: [Deanna R. Reed](#)
Subject: questionable interaction between a Council Member and HCPS employee
Date: Friday, November 10, 2023 5:09:15 PM

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Dear Mayor Reed;

I'm writing with a concern about a recent interaction a sitting Council Member had with an HCPS staff member that has come to the attention of the Superintendent, who then brought it to me.

This conversation concerned an issue the Council Member has been having with his child in the school system. He phoned the Superintendent, who was in Boston at a conference, presenting a paper with HHS media students. In Dr. Richard's absence, he was then connected to Sal Romero, Chief of Staff. This conversation was somewhat less than cordial, highly political, and included comments referring to the amount of City funding HCPS receives every year.

Elected officials are, by definition, in political positions and are expected to hear and respond to highly politicized language from many different sources. City Managers and Division Superintendents, along with employees in positions like the HCPS Chief of Staff, also expect to hear and respond to this language on occasion.

However, a city resident who is both a parent and a Council Member has a special responsibility to understand the power dynamics between themselves and any teacher or administrator in the school system, particularly with issues concerning their child, and to govern themselves accordingly.

A meeting was set up with this Council Member and a division-level Director to discuss his concerns. By all accounts, the actual issue was resolved. At the conclusion, the Director asked the Council Member if he had any other questions. He responded by, among other comments, a) referring to Dr. Michael Richards – who is an employee of the Harrisonburg School Board, not the Harrisonburg City Council – as “my superintendent,” b) accusing the Director of working within a division that does not support black and brown children, and c) bringing up council funding of HCPS (funding that “he gives”) in a way that appeared to be somewhat threatening, a bullying remark he also voiced with Mr. Romero.

HCPS employees deserve better.

I bring this to you because, as Mayor of Harrisonburg, you are head of City Council, a body which governs its own ethics.

I am available to discuss this if you feel the need to address the issue further.

Sincerely,

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Deb Fitzgerald

Chair Harrisonburg City School Board

Board Liaison, Park and Recreation Advisory Commission

Member, HCPS Legislative Committee

Member, MTC Exec Board

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