

Written by Ghazey Aleck

This is my opinion on Clare Public Schools' administration and why www.clareschoolsexposed.com was started.

This website came into existence because I decided to get involved. The reason that I decided to get involved was a gradual process that led to activation in March of 2009. In March 2009, I had decided that Clare Public Schools should be more accountable to students and parents. In April, I wrote to the school board and asked them to post their check register online. I went to the board of education meeting in April and asked that it be posted online. I felt ignored so I wrote a letter to the editor.

The Clare Sentinel jumped on the band wagon and wrote an editorial endorsing the idea. I went again in May to the board of education meeting and personally requested it again only this time I told them if they did not post it online, I would post it online myself and they may not like the way that I posted it. Again, I felt ignored. I then sent a Freedom of Information Act request to the school and when I received the documents, I posted the materials online in this website. Then the Mackinaw Center joined me in requesting that it get posted online. Finally in June, Clare Schools announce plans to post it by July 21, 2009. It was finally posted in August of 2009. Seemed like an awful lot of ignoring goes on at the schools. It certainly took a lot of pressure for them to do a very simple thing.

I got lots of positive feedback to this project. People called to personally thank me for making Clare Public Schools more transparent in their activities. I advocated during my endeavors that posting the register online would inspire more confidence in the school from the public and I still think that is true. But, the way they dragged their feet and tried to ignore me was disconcerting.

In my opinion, Clare Public Schools were resistant to the idea. It is very easy to do. I found their delay to be without excuse. I should not have had to put so much public pressure on them to do such an easy thing. It was my intention to take down my website once they posted the check register online. But during the delay, I was able to add significantly to the website so I decided to make it permanent. I hope to nudge them along on a number of other issues that they have stuck their heads in the sand over. But I need your help if you want better schools.

Now, let me tell you the longer version how I got to the point of asking for the check register be put online.

I am a 1979 graduate of Clare High School and I am a local attorney in the law firm of Aleck and Jenkins. I raised both of my children in the Clare School District. My daughter Brianna graduated from Clare High School in 2007 with a 3.92 GPA and is now attending the

University of Michigan; and my son Ghazey will graduate in 2010 presently holding a 3.94 GPA and plans on going to a good college.

I have been satisfied in many respects with Clare Public School but I repeatedly found that the treatment of students to be unusually harsh or irrational. I watched and heard many horror stories over the years. I felt lucky that my children were well liked by the teachers, good students who stayed out of trouble. But even then, my children could not avoid being caught in some irrational or harsh act of some administrator at the schools. I found this incredible. If good kids could get caught up in this nonsense, I shuttered at the thought of what some parents with needy children were going through. Luckily, the things my children got caught up were manageable for us but nonetheless, I found the school's conduct to be outright stupid.

Whenever my children were caught up in the situations, I went to the school immediately and tried to deal with the situations from two standpoints. First, I wanted the schools to make sense and put the children first (not the convenience of the school) and secondly, I wanted my children to have information to avoid the situations in the future

When my children were young, I discovered that children in the elementary school were being punished as a whole. For example, during lunch periods a few children would be unruly or not clean up after themselves. The school's responses was to make all the children stay seated until all of them finished eating then supervise clean-up at every table before they could go outside and play. They were punished for unruly behavior by having all the children go out and sit under the basketball hoops until lunch period concluded prohibiting all from playing. My children were readily acknowledged as good, well-disciplined students, but included in the punishment even though they were not part of the problem.

I went to the school and was treated respectfully but was told by the principal that this was appropriate discipline. I felt that the offenders should be held accountable as it unfairly punished good children and this was inappropriate for young children at an impressionable age as it served to hurt them for no good reason. Good children in my estimation should not get punished but should be rewarded for their good behavior. I just wanted the school to reinforce the values I taught at home because I rewarded my children for good behavior and did not want my young children to feel that being good was useless because they were going to get punished anyway for what other kids did wrong.

It was only after disagreeing with the principal and going to then Superintendent Dr. Moline that things seem to change. Dr. Moline did not want to undermine his principal but seemed to agree in principle that group punishments were not effective. This en masse punishment issue did not come up again while my children were in the elementary but I strongly suspect it may have crept back under the so-called "leadership" of now Superintendent Greg McMillan.

You should know that I was pleased with the quality of the teachers my children had in elementary school. Every teacher they had was caring and worked hard to teach the child. Ms. Arlene DeBoer (now retired), however, was a standout and deserves extra praise.

In middle school, I was confronted again with this en masse punishment when at the end of my child's 8th grade year, a few kids had a food fight at lunch and even though my child was outside when the food fight occurred, everyone was rounded up and brought back in and told to help in the clean-up. In addition, the principal had an assembly and wanted kids to come forward and tell on the offenders. When no one stepped forward, he cancelled 8th grade graduation punishing the entire class. Keep in mind that the school had paid adult lunch room monitors in the cafeteria when the food fight started but they could not identify the perpetrators. Did these adult lunch monitors lose their paychecks for that week or otherwise get punished? No, just the students did. The entire class punished for the actions of a few.

Though there were many other incidents involving other children that I had heard about, the food fight is where I saw that the treatment of students had taken a decidedly turn for the worse. I fully expected Superintendent Greg McMillan, who once served as a Clare Middle School principal, to step in and do the right thing regarding 8th grade graduation.

When Greg McMillan was the Middle School principal, he clearly looked at situations for what they were and did what was fair. He genuinely cared about the children and would find a way to make things right regardless of the effort involved. He was not afraid to admit when he was wrong and would readily apologize. Greg McMillan was such a fine Middle School principal that I made it known that I wholeheartedly support him being hired as Superintendent. I knew that this man of honor would lead so that his management style would be followed by everyone below him. But that has not come to pass, and frankly, I think I was wrong about Greg McMillan.

How did Greg McMillan resolve this situation? Despite the action of the principal being clearly over the top, he chose to support his principal. He told me that it was one of the events that he had some of the worse feelings from as being a tough situation. This statement can take two meanings, that he supported the principal because he was right in a tough situation or that the principal was wrong and he toughed it out to try to maintain the authority of the principal. In any event, it became clear to me that Greg McMillan may not be the man he was when he was a middle school principal. It looked like he had morphed into the bureaucrat he had refused to be years ago. He apparently sees his job to maintain the authority of his administrators whether they are right or not. Greg McMillan supported the principal's irrational choice to cancel 8th grade graduation.

I felt that it had become increasingly difficult to reconcile the school's response to the food fight (and other actions of the administrators) with my children at home. I felt strongly that people in authority must manage that authority wisely and treat people with respect before they

can expect respect in return. As a parent, I treated my children with respect and honored their dignity. I rewarded good behavior and reasonably discouraged bad behavior with appropriate discipline. When I made a mistake, I admitted it like an adult and apologized to my children. I knew that I was a parent with authority over my children and I wanted them to grow up and develop good character. I did not believe in the old adage, “do as I say but not as I do.” I feel that the only way to raise my children right was to provide a role model with good character for them to follow.

So when school personnel, acted irrationally over the food fight, it was discussed in detail at home. The only way to reconcile the poor behavior of the administrators at the school was to teach my children to learn from their mistakes. I pointed out that the administrators actions did not cause people to respect their authority but rather diminish people’s respect. The authority that administrators were so protective of, was being eroded by their own misdeeds. Sometimes the actions people take, creates exactly the opposite of what was intended. I inevitably was put in a position to teach my children that the administrators were wrong and that they could not see it because they were too concerned with their image. This, I explained was a flaw of character.

Thus I had to acknowledge to my children that the middle school principal and superintendent did wrong, eroded the very respect they desired, and misused their authority; and were afraid to acknowledge that they over reacted—that they were deathly afraid to have to apologize. Had they acknowledge that they over reacted and apologized, they would have been perceived as men of quality, men of honor but they missed out on that due to their own shortsightedness.

But my dismay did not stop here.

One day I got a frantic call from one of my former secretaries who had moved on in her education and had become a registered nurse. She explained that her daughter was beaten on the playground in front of many witnesses including adults. She also told me that her daughter, fearful of being suspended from middle school, took the beating and did not defend herself. The bully had previously been reported to the school but they failed to act. My former secretary asked me to come to the school on the spot to defend her daughter!

Luckily, I was free and went directly to the school. The middle school principal, knowing the fact that this girl did not defend herself, was going to suspend both the bully and the beaten child for fighting. I could not believe my ears. Then the superintendent happened to walk in and was surprised to see me and my client there. It was my impression that his appearance was purely accidental. Greg McMillan talked to the principal and reduced the beaten child’s original three day suspension to two days of in house suspension. The old Greg McMillan would have refused to punish a child who stood by and took a beating. The new bureaucrat McMillan wanted to save face for his wayward principal.

It continues.

Then my son wanted to test out of geography at the beginning of his junior year. They told him no. I called the counselor and she said that school policy says that he cannot test out unless he fills out a request in May of his sophomore year. I pointed out that this violated Michigan Law.

I then went to see Mr. Lee Turner, high school principal. I told him what I wanted and he rudely said no. I asked if it was open to discussion and he said no. He did not care that this violated Michigan Law that says that a student can test out at any time even while in the class itself.

I called Greg McMillan and he was slow to call me back. When he did, he offered a compromise that he attributed as the principal's idea. I fully intended to sue the school to compel them to allow my son to test out. My son, being typical of most kids his age, just wanted to get through school and told me that he would just take the class and be done with it. I felt terrible for my son and the other kids at Clare High School. The administration cared more about getting out of work and saving face than they did about advancing a child's education.

When I say that in Clare Public Schools that even a good kid can't catch a break, I mean it.

Then in March of 2009, Clare Public Schools pushed me one step too far. As you can tell, I had been having a difficult time stomaching the way kids are routinely treated. In March of 2009, my son made some signs to support a friend of his who played basketball. His friend often sat the bench and my son's signs found creative ways to promote his friend being played. My wife, who is a teacher in Harrison, and I supervised the content of the signs and they were respectful and appropriate showing of spirit for his friend and the team.

My son went to the game, paid the entrance, went in and displayed the signs and they were taken from him by the Athletic Director Mike Schubert. My son called me and I went down to the game and found Mr. Schubert and asked him what was wrong with the signs. His only explanation was that he was not going to have some kid telling the coach who to play. This guy was rude too. My son was allowed to take one sign back in and that sign supported the team as a whole.

I could not believe how petty Clare Public Schools had become. So on Monday after the weekend game, I called Superintendent Greg McMillan who refused to get on the phone with me. Now keep in mind, my son is never in trouble, he is a star athlete in cross country and track, maintains a 3.94 GPA, I am an attorney, my wife is a teacher who once coached with Greg McMillan and he won't return the call. How do parents of average or needy kids get treated? What about parents with less status? I am not advocating that I get treated better than anyone else but when I can't get anywhere, does anybody get anywhere with these petty little people?

So I figured if parents and children are going to be treated harshly and irrationally, I am going to hold the school accountable. My first action was to challenge the traffic signage at the High School. I contacted the Chief of Police and demanded that any signs that regulated city street traffic be removed as illegal--in particular the no left turn sign out of the High School. This got their attention and I got a call for a meeting.

Instead of Greg McMillan (I now call the Wizard of Oz), the principal, Lee Turner, who already clearly demonstrated to me his rudeness and closed mindedness called me to set up the appointment with me. This meeting included me, the Chief of Police, Superintendent, Principal and Athletic Director.

During that meeting, everyone agreed that my son was a stellar, well behaved student. The athletic director Michael Schubert told me that my son was not in trouble then and not in trouble now. He actually told me that he didn't know who I was when I showed up at the game. In other words, he knew I was Ghazey Aleck's father, but he did not know I was an attorney. I was floored. How did that matter? What he basically told me in that statement was that he would have been more respectful had he known I was somebody. I was angry for all of the other parents of students at Clare High School because it should not matter who I was—all parents deserved to be treated the same--with respect.

I asked for my son to get an apology. They said that they would talk to my son. They didn't ever talk to my son and an apology, though due, was never going to be imparted by these low men of character.

Recently, I discovered that another very good, well behaved student got detention for driving his mother's car to school while his was in the shop. I emailed Superintendent Greg McMillan who blew it off—AGAIN. The Greg McMillan I once knew is no more. He is the worst kind of superintendent. Greg McMillan used to make fun of superintendents who hid in their office, refusing to answer the phone, refusing to do what was right, and who just played on their computer/email. Well guess what? Now I hold Greg McMillan in disdain and make fun of him as being exactly what he used to make fun of.

The bottom line is that the school administration, from the top down, doesn't always put the education of our children first. They don't use common sense and make petty and stupid rules. The Board of Education wants to trust these wayward administrative dimwits but that is the last thing they should do. We need common sense, involved leadership that puts kids first.

Until Clare Public Schools changes its policies and procedures and becomes very responsive to parent and student concerns, I will continue to expand this website indefinitely.