

6/27/23 - Meeting
Handout by Brad Benson
Citizen Input - Green (#23-1512 Expulsion)

Ron DeSantis, Governor
Office of the Governor, State of Florida
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

June 20, 2023

Reply Attn: Team America, LLC
14391 Spring Hill Drive #289
Spring Hill, FL 34609

Dear Governor DeSantis:

Please reference official reports and media coverage of the March 24, 2023, incident at Fox Chapel Middle School in Spring Hill, FL. For your convenience, a brief synopsis follows.

A transgender teacher made threats against his students, which were reported to the Hernando County Sheriff's Office (HCSO). HCSO issued a Risk Protection Order (RPO), which cited the teacher, and three firearms were confiscated. Despite these warnings, Superintendent John Stratton and Board Chair Gus Guadagnino authorized this teacher to reenter both the school and the classroom on the next regular school day, without alerting the parents of the children potentially at risk. In an era of frequent school shootings, this decision is unfathomable and unforgiveable.

They also neglected to inform two new school board members, whom they had reason to fear might interfere with their plans to quietly reinsert the teacher back into the classroom. Since that time, Messrs. Stratton and Guadagnino have sought to divert attention from their **criminal negligence** and turn the matter into a very public attack upon one of these school board members, Ms. Shannon Rodriguez.

Enclosed is a request for a criminal investigation into this matter, which has been forwarded to 5th District State Attorney, Bill Gladson. This courtesy copy is being forwarded to you with a request for your personal interest and intervention as required. (A prior complaint for **violations of Florida Statute 827.03, Child Abuse in the Aggregate** has gone unaddressed for more than a year and is included as part of this Enclosure.)

To be clear, the incident at Fox Chapel Middle School is not about transgender teachers, pornographic books, gay pride or "attacks on teachers". These issues have been created to divert attention away from the only issue in this case, which is that **Messrs. Stratton and Guadagnino willfully put the students and staff of Fox Chapel Middle School at mortal risk and failed to provide adequate warnings of the potential danger to multiple stakeholders.**

Superintendent Stratton's public claim that he did not understand the import of an RPO is **not** plausible. That being said, accepting this assertion at face value only adds "ignorance" to "negligence" as grounds for his removal. Mr. Stratton has also claimed to have levied disciplinary actions in regard to this matter. Upon whom and with what justification? **The decision was his! Where does the buck stop?**

The John Stratton era began with scandal and has been marred by conflicts-of-interest, arrogance, self-promotion, unlawful decisions and the “Woke” Agenda ever since. These inherent deficiencies have only increased since Mr. Guadagnino took over as Board Chair. Therefore, their continuing tenure poses a risk to the health, safety and well-being not only of the district’s **school children but also to all of the citizens of Hernando County**.

Accordingly, I respectfully request that you take the necessary actions to remove Messrs. Stratton and Guadagnino, by Executive Order, as a matter of public safety.

Thank you for your leadership in this important matter.

Sincerely,

Brad Benson
Team America, LLC

Enclosure

cc via Email:

Ashley Moody, Attorney General
Mike Blackburn, FLDOE Inspector General

Hernando County, FL, Board of County Commissioners
John Allocco
Steve Champion
Brian Hawkins
Beth Narverud
Gerry Campbell

Hernando County, FL, School Board
Mark Johnson
Shannon Rodriguez

State Attorney for the 5th District
Bill Gladson

Hernando County Sheriff’s Office
Al Nienhuis

cc:

Ashley Moody, Attorney General
State of Florida
PL-01 the Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1050

Mike Blackburn, Inspector General
Florida Department of Education
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1201
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

Hernando County, FL, Board of County Commissioners
John Allocco
Steve Champion
Brian Hawkins
Beth Narverud
Gerry Campbell

Hernando County, FL, School Board
Mark Johnson
Shannon Rodriguez

Ashley Moody, Attorney General
Office of the Florida Attorney General
PL-01 the Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1050

June 20, 2023

Reply Attn: Team America, LLC
14391 Spring Hill Drive #289
Spring Hill, FL 34609

Dear Ms. Moody:

Attached is a copy of a letter, dated June 20, 2023, which has been forwarded to Governor DeSantis regarding ongoing issues in the Hernando County School District. This matter has been forwarded to the State Attorney for the 5th District, Mr. Bill Gladson, with a request for a criminal investigation.

Thank you very much for your assistance. Should you have any questions or desire further information, please contact me at 352-232-9292.

Sincerely,



Brad Benson
Team America, LLC

Attachment

Mike Blackburn, Inspector General
Florida Department of Education
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1201
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

June 20, 2023

Reply Attn: Team America, LLC
14391 Spring Hill Drive #289
Spring Hill, FL 34609

Dear Mr. Blackburn:

Attached is a copy of a letter, dated June 20, 2023, which has been forwarded to Governor DeSantis regarding ongoing issues in the Hernando County School District. This matter has been forwarded to the State Attorney for the 5th District, Mr. Bill Gladson, with a request for a criminal investigation.

Thank you very much for your assistance. Should you have any questions or desire further information, please contact me at 352-232-9292.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'B Benson'.

Brad Benson
Team America, LLC

Attachment

Bill Gladson, State Attorney for the 5th Judicial District
Office of the State Attorney
Marion County Judicial Center
110 NW 1 Avenue, Suite 5000
Ocala, FL 34475

June 22, 2023

Reply Attn: Team America, LLC
14391 Spring Hill Drive #289
Spring Hill, FL 34609

Dear Mr. Gladson:

Attached is a copy of a complaint and request for criminal investigation, dated June 13, 2023. This complaint was hand delivered to your branch office in Brooksville. However, this office attempted to reject our documents with the advice that you do not work at that location. We left the documents anyway; advised the two receptionists present that they work for the Office of the State Attorney for the 5th Judicial District; and requested that they develop a method to receive and process interoffice mail.

Perhaps these organizational issues also explain the lack of appropriate action in regard to our previous complaint, dated June 14, 2022, for violations of Florida Statute 827.03, Child Abuse in the Aggregate. Accordingly, a second copy of this complaint is included as part of the attachment and we respectfully reiterate our request that you investigate both matters and prosecute the perpetrators to the full extent of the law.

This is an ongoing matter affecting public safety. Thank you very much for your prompt assistance. Should you have any questions or desire further information, please contact me at 352-232-9292.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B Benson', with a stylized 'S' in the middle.

Brad Benson
Team America, LLC

Attachment

ENCLOSURE

To DeSantis Letter, dated June 19, 2023

Mr. Bill Gladson
State Attorney, 5th Judicial District
Office of the State Attorney
Hernando County Courthouse
20 North Main Street
Brooksville, FL 34601

June 13, 2023

Subject: Request for a Criminal Investigation

Dear Mr. Gladson:

Please reference my Request for a Criminal Investigation (Enclosure 1), dated June 14, 2022, in which we provided evidence that should have been more than sufficient to investigate and convict members of the Hernando County School Board and Superintendent John Stratton for violations of Florida Law 827.03, **Malicious Child Abuse in the Aggregate**.

One year later, Superintendent Stratton has again endangered the children in his charge and is now fighting to keep the job into which he never should have been hired. This time he ignored a Sheriff's Risk Protection Order (RPO), which had been issued to a "transgender" teacher who allegedly threatened to harm himself and the kids.

Despite this RPO and the knowledge that the Hernando County Sheriff's Office had confiscated three firearms, Mr. Stratton placed this teacher back into the classroom on the next school day—without informing the parents of the affected children. Only after the matter was elevated to the Office of the Governor did Superintendent Stratton finally take appropriate action to at least remove the teacher from the classroom.

Now the matter is allegedly under investigation by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), but John Stratton seems to be living a charmed life with this entity also (Enclosure 2) and there is little hope that they will take the appropriate action which, at minimum, would be to fire Mr. Stratton for negligence. Instead, the investigation will die over the summer and, once again, Hernando County's School Children will be at risk for another school year.

Accordingly, I respectfully ask you to take another look at the criminal complaint filed last year and at the facts of the matter currently at hand. How is this NOT a matter of criminal negligence if not reckless child endangerment? If School Board Chairman, Gus Guadagnino, was also aware of this matter and remained silent, he should also be criminally investigated.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter. Should you have any questions or desire further information, please contact me at your convenience at 352-232-9292.

Sincerely,

Brad Benson
Team America, LLC

Enclosures (2)

cc:

Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Ashley Moody, Attorney General
State of Florida
PL-01 The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1050

Mike Blackburn, Inspector General
Florida Department of Education
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1201
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

Executive Office of the Governor
Office of the Chief Inspector General
Post Office Box 151
Tallahassee, Florida 32302

Hernando County, FL
Board of County Commissioners
15470 Flight Path Drive
Spring Hill, FL 34604

John Allocco
Steve Champion
Brian Hawkins
Beth Narverud
Gerry Campbell

ENCLOSURE 1

To Bill Gladson Letter, dated June 13, 2023, hand delivered to Brooksville Office

Mr. Bill Gladson
State Attorney, 5th Judicial District
Office of the State Attorney
Hernando County Courthouse
20 North Main Street
Brooksville, FL 34601

June 14, 2022

Subject: Request for a Criminal Investigation

Dear Mr. Gladson:

Pursuant to Florida Law 827.03, I respectfully request that you investigate the following individuals for Malicious Child Abuse in the Aggregate.

John Stratton, Superintendent, Hernando County School District
Dennis Alfonso, Counsel, Hernando County School District
Gus Guadagnino, Hernando County School Board;
Susan Duval, Hernando County School Board;
Kay Hatch, Hernando County School Board;
Linda Prescott, Hernando County School Board;
Jimmy Lodato, Hernando County School Board;
Gina Michalicka, Assistant Superintendent of Business and Support Services
Heather Martin, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning

Specifically, the above named individuals chose to implement and enforce injurious mask mandates upon the children of the Hernando County School District, at a time in which the Governor had ordered that all such mandates should be immediately terminated. Please see Attachment 1, Executive Order 21-102, dated May 3, 2021.

Therefore, the Board's decision to enforce mask mandates to the last day of school, during the final 17 days of the 2020/21 school year, meets the definition of malicious, as outlined under Florida Statute §827.03(b)-3(c), which states:

'Maliciously' means wrongfully, intentionally, and **without legal justification or excuse**. Maliciousness may be established by circumstances from which one could conclude that **a reasonable parent** would not have engaged in the **damaging acts toward the child for any valid reason** and that the primary purpose of the acts was to cause the victim unjustifiable pain or injury.

The complaints of many 'reasonable parents' and students rose to a crescendo over the final five regular public meetings in the Spring of 2021 (i.e., March 9, April 13, April 27, May 25 and June 8, 2021). During these meetings, it was abundantly clear that the parents sought an immediate

end to the injurious mask mandates. Please see Attachment 2—School Board Meeting Transcripts.

The parameters for Malicious Intent are therefore established—at least for the time period specified. However, it is hoped that this evidence might provide the requisite springboard for a more thorough investigation into the real motivations behind these otherwise indefensible decisions and policies.

Indeed, mask mandates and injection regimes are rewarded with questionable funding around the State and across the Nation. Meanwhile, the negative mental and physical ramifications continue to accrue at exponential rates, which can neither be explained away nor silenced. In retrospect, it is hardly an exaggeration to state that the entire two-year ordeal of lockdowns, school closures, quarantines, mask and injection regimes was never scientifically or legally justified under any construction.

The scope of these crimes against humanity cry out for an investigation under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Statutes and, while this may be beyond the scope of this complaint or the Office of the Florida Attorney General, an investigation into the Hernando County School District would most certainly provide a revealing picture of the bottom feeders.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this request. Should you have any questions or desire further information, please contact me at your convenience at 352-232-9292.

Sincerely,

Brad Benson
Team America, LLC

Attachments

cc:

Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Ashley Moody, Attorney General
State of Florida
PL-01 The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1050

Mike Blackburn, Inspector General
Florida Department of Education
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Executive Office of the Governor
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Post Office Box 151
Tallahassee, Florida 32302

Hernando County, FL
Board of County Commissioners
15470 Flight Path Drive
Spring Hill, FL 34604

John Allocco
Steve Champion
Wayne Dukes
Beth Narverud
Jeff Holcomb

**ATTACHMENT 1—Governor DeSantis' Executive Order 21-102, dated May 3, 2021,
which eliminated mask mandates in Florida's Public Spaces.**

https://www.flgov.com/wp-content/uploads/orders/2021/EO_21-102.pdf

Criminal Complaint—Attachment 2

School Board Meeting Transcripts

The following transcripts were taken directly from the testimony of various parents, students and concerned citizens, all of whom personally appeared before the Hernando County School Board, upon the dates indicated. The statements were transcribed from video replays of these meetings, which are publicly available on the School District's Website.

Additionally, they have been edited for relevance and clarity, specifically to address the question of whether the crime of CHILD ABUSE IN THE AGGREGATE (FL 827.03) was committed by the School Board, Board Counsel or the School Administration, during the final 17 days of the 2020/21 school year.

Only those statements regarding mask mandates or experimental injections are included and no changes have been made to the context of any statement, either to increase its impact or to influence its interpretation. Additionally, identifying information has been removed from this document for privacy and protection purposes.

School Board Meeting—March 9, 2021

Female Student: This student took a survey on mask usage in her school and presented her findings to the School Board, stating:

Both sides, regardless of where I stand, had some valid points. But do you know what really stuck out to me—how many kids, parents and staff were talking about depression; how alone they felt; and every single time I've come here, I've always mentioned something about that.

But here are some comments from some individuals on the survey:

- anxiety and depression;
- harder time breathing;
- I have panic attacks when I wear a mask;
- anxiety;
- difficulty breathing;
- losing masks;
- masks not being cleaned are hazardous;
- skin rash on face that I—can only be calmed with prescription steroid cream;
- The heat from breathing into a mask, causes pores to open. Bacteria enters the skin. Then the mask is removed—the pore—the pores close, trapping harmful bacteria in the skin.
- Dermatologist has recommended wearing the mask as little as possible.

...(T)eenage suicide has seen a spike as high as 9.5 percent over the past year, across the entire nation.

...These kids are alone. We don't see each other's faces. We don't get that genuine interaction we need for our personal development.

You can all think that I'm a bad person. That's fine! But I care enough about these children to fall on this sword a thousand times, if that's what it takes for them to wake up and realize that this is not okay to be doing to our children.

Male Parent: We got over 600 side effects from people that actually took the survey in Hernando County, so I'm just going to read some of those for you guys.

- shortness of breath;
- feeling closed in;
- feeling alone;
- sinus, ear and respiratory bacterial infections;
- I've been breaking out with acne all the time.
- I'm not healthy by pressing all the bacteria into my face, in lumps (?) all day.
- Shortness of breath and more problems with asthma;
- face breakouts with difficulty breathing;
- rash all over my face;
- acne, cold sores and dental issues;
- my face breaking out;
- trouble breathing;
- It restricts my breathing.
- Student's complaints of headaches, more frequently;
- acne breakouts, from prolonged mask wearing;
- anxiety attacks;
- skin break outs;
- breathing issues;
- certain medical issues that were aroused because of me wearing a mask on my face;
- this isn't been seen (sic) as an excuse, but most people thought I should be forced to wear it;
- skin irritation and shortness of breath;
- After taking my mask off for an extended period of time, I feel dizzy and light-headed.
- I get a lot more headaches. I don't think there's any other reason for my headaches, but the fact that I'm forced to wear a mask all day.
- Rashes with anxiety, etc.
- My son has asthma. In Florida, it gets hotter and more humid. Holding anything against your face is dangerous. He suffered from attacks from obstructed air. My daughter is sensitive. (???) struggles with the effects it has on her skin.

Another student said, "I feel so trapped with it on my face."

- acne;
- trouble breathing;
- rash around my mouth;

- light headedness;
- break-outs.
- I can't properly wear my glasses.
- I haven't, but my daughter has had a speech impediment and she has difficulty with masks.
- Bronchial infection;
- acne;
- you know, it bothers my child's allergies;
- they're toxic;
- They lower the immune response.

...I have 600 responses. All we're asking is that you guys will listen to us. We have been told that you guys got input. **I can't find anybody that you've gotten input (from).**

Female Parent: The mask issue—we have been coming here for six months. Have any of you had...bacterial pneumonia from the masks? It is not pretty, especially on a child and the medication is not cheap either.

The masks, I don't understand the lack of common sense that comes along with it. They're supposed to wear masks as they're going to...class, going to lunch, but they're sitting (in) the lunch room, with the mask off to eat, because...you can't eat with a mask. So they're already exposed to whatever could be floating around.

These masks did not stop the stomach flu that spread like wildfire after Christmas break. It has not stopped strep-throat. It has not even stopped the common cold. It is certainly not stopping this God-awful pollen we're dealing with. What point are these masks serving for these children?

Their immune systems are going to be shot by the time you pull the masks off. Why can't you guys be leaders of the State, instead of following what everyone else is doing, be the first county to put the option for us parents to choose whether our children will wear a mask or not. Thank you.

Female Parent: I'm short. Okay hi, my name is XXX I live in Spring Hill, Florida. I've been here a few other times. I have two kids that are in this district. I grew up in this district.

I personally don't appreciate many things that are floating around on the Internet right now. I know a few of you are definitely involved in Hernando fix schools or whatever it's called. "Fix Hernando!"

There's obviously been an arrest lately. It's made public now to what that arrest was for and I have a major question as to why these people are even in our schools.

One of my daughters is six years old. She has a speech impediment and she is an ESC Student. If she came to someone and had something to say as far as a sexual conduct being an issue, half of her class in school wouldn't understand her.

My...other daughter is in sixth grade this year. We decided to test the theory of...electronic learning. She's failing almost every class, because she doesn't have a teacher that is educated in teaching. You guys made it a choice for us to be able to go to school, or not to go to school, but you haven't made it a choice to wear masks or not wear masks.

We have many people here that are against the masks and all we're asking is for the choice of to wear one or not to wear one.

Female Parent: (M)y body, my choice, and for those who need masks...you should be comfortable wearing it...

- skin looks flushed;
- trouble concentrating on thinking clearly;
- dizziness;
- disorientation;
- shortness of breath;
- hyperventilation;
- feeling tired;
- changes in the color of the skin.

...I only wear one when I absolutely have to. I am, I am 55 years old. I (shouldn't) have acne, (but) I have acne. I get it on my nose. I get it in my chin line. I've got sores in my nose from breathing...carbon dioxide...

...If we were to put one of these on a newborn, that would be abuse. And we all know it. You cannot, you cannot constrict your breathing for long periods of times...

...They don't like it. They don't want the masks. So...I got a call at 1:15 to come pick up my child from school yesterday. They're quarantining him.

Pick him up. Go home. Well, you know, of course I asked them what the procedure and everything was. Well they'll call you. No problem.

Okay, so, Monday...March 8 (1st beep), my child had, my child at high school had close contact with positive Covid 19 Case, effective 3/3 to 3/13. I got this March 8...So, 3/3 to 3/13, my child's going to be quarantined. My kid was going to school for six days. That's...ridiculous. Masks are a joke and we all know it. My body, my choice! Thank you.

School Board Meeting—April 13, 2021

Male Parent: I would like all the teachers and staff to be aware of this fact, that if (Governor DeSantis) drops that mask—the state of emergency...my daughter will be going to school without a mask...

School Board Meeting—April 27, 2021

Female Parent: (T)he Covid protocols (re:) quarantine... from the Florida Department of Health (state that) after seven days you could get tested, and if you have a negative test you could be released from quarantine.

I was just trying to figure out why our district isn't following that...

...(M)y daughter (is) on quarantine through this week. She's missing out on her softball districts. She missing out on her AP studying.

(My son)...a senior's missing out on...his baseball districts. It's his last year and it's basically because of one day.

...(T)hey both tested on the sixth as...the Florida Department of Health recommended, and I'm waiting on the results...for both... (A)s of yesterday morning we haven't seen those results back.

But, other than that, just why are we not going forward on that and trying to figure out how to get these kids back in school where they should be—for mental health, for their education, for everything to finish out their school year...

...I know that nothing can be addressed today, but when you look at the student's quarantine time, it's literally a day that they're losing out on, because of, if they missed the whole 10 days, so they could be coming back with a negative test and released early.

Counsel, Dennis Alfonso: Thank you for your comments.

Superintendent John Stratton: Ma'am, you may have talked to Ms. Cropley, Lisa Cropley, back there. We are following the guidance and advice of our local health department. CDC did come out with some of those rules that you're talking about, that after the sixth day, if you weren't showing symptoms, you could test, that there's an "or" in there about 10 day quarantine and, working with them, based on the advice we were given, we took the conservative approach of 10 days. That's not changed. Unfortunately, I hate that they're missing those events and we've had, unfortunately, kids miss several events, but I didn't want you to think that we were not following the protocols.

Female Parent Response: No, it's just because other counties are, in our state, they are following the Florida Department of Health and they are allowing that six day, returning on the seventh day, with negative test.

If they come back with multiple negative tests, with the PCR Test, proving that they were only in contact in—you know, without, having a, you know, they don't have it. They're not, they don't have Covid. They've passed that. That's what I'm concerned, you know, and it's because it's so, such a short time.

Mr. Stratton: Again, it's the current guidance we're receiving from our local health department. Each local health department is independent and, until they advise us otherwise, that, that's unfortunately, in your case, that's what we'll do.

Female Parent Response: And it was the health department that told me to...

Mr. Stratton: Actually, because there is that rule out there. Yeah, both agencies working together, was the 10 days, so I am unaware of any other districts doing anything other than 10 days, but there might be. I certainly don't know of any in the area. Anyway, I apologize that they're missing that but it is 10 days until we are advised otherwise.

Female Parent Response: All right. Thank you.

Female Parent (new speaker): I want to address the informal meeting from this morning. Miss Hatch, you made a comment that, at the BOCC Meeting, that I had expressed my negativity towards the mask policy. In all due reality over the past eight months, I have stood before you, expressing my negativity and my disapproval of this policy.

Also, for those of you that don't know, this morning at the BOCC Meeting, the Commissioners voted unanimously across the board to remove masks within our schools. I don't know how much longer, we are going to actually have to tolerate, or put up with these masks.

Female Parent: ...I've come and addressed you multiple times as well.

...(M)y six year old is in Explorer KA. She's been there for four years. She's special needs. This is detrimental to her. She comes home crying of headaches. She comes home crying of I don't know who that is. It's not fair. They're little.

High school has an easier time of dealing with it, but now they're dealing with depression. They're dealing with other issues of concentrating. There's high school rules, in the school board, that say that she cannot wear a spaghetti strapped shirt because it's a distraction to boys. She can't have colored hair because it's a distraction to other kids. You're telling me this ain't!

Female Student: It was brought to my attention that teachers are calling kids against the mandatory masks, "whiney", and/or called "inconsiderate" for not wanting to get the vaccine. I'm glad the kids that are having panic attacks, endless headaches and overall having emotional issues are just "whiney".

Male Parent: I purchased this box of a hundred (masks), for seven dollars, from Amazon. Do we really think that something that costs seven cents is going to protect us from Covid?

Then when I'm done...I'm just going to throw (the mask) in the garbage can and the janitor's going to come by and pick it up...

...(S)omebody mentioned Earth Day. Did they project that two billion of these things are going to end up in the ocean? That's terrible. You know, does anybody, I know you guys aren't going to answer, but does anybody think something that costs seven cents, that was made in China, is going to protect you from Covid?

Male Parent: You all know who I am.

...(T)his is getting ridiculous. I talked to...you...and it's, "We want public info. We need public input". But then you all send out a survey to everybody—kids, teachers, everybody, and not one question about masks. Why?

...(Yet) today in the informal meeting, you all are bragging, "Hey, we got the survey back and look how positive it was"... ..(L)ook who's here. Why don't you put a question about the mask on it? If you really want to know what's going on, you have the chance to do the study yourself. Haley did it!

Sixty-five percent said no mask. You all don't want to know the answer, because you know what everybody is going to say.

...You all—I get responses back: "Well, you know, you're only one part of one percent that...does this. Really Miss Prescott?"

Miss Hatch, you were asked to find out why our pictures weren't being put on the screen today. All right, why did you all take us off the video? I didn't hear you bring that up in the informal meeting (as promised)...

...Why do you want to know personally where I work? What agenda do you have for that question?

Female Parent: Thank you board, for wearing your masks, and keeping me safe. I'm going to tell you right now, first hand, it doesn't work. Still lost my fingers—still got scarring on my lungs.

Wearing the mask, I sit over there and try to keep from coughing. It doesn't work. I'm telling you. My doctor has also told me, "Don't wear the mask," because it will cause my lungs more damage—more than what they already have.

Board! You were put in this position to speak for the public. You are here to uphold the parents of the community. You were going to be our voice. What happened?

Female Citizen: I, too, attended the BOCC Meeting this morning and listened to Kay Hatch's presentation and to the commissioner's response.

...Governor DeSantis...refused to do a mask mandate for the State and...has suggested that:

- it would be best if younger kids in schools were not required to wear masks;

- school districts cease with the masking, because it would be healthier, on every level, with children; and,
- ...the Covid Infection Rate, in Hernando County, is point zero, zero, zero, zero, four (.00004), which is lower than any other county in the State of Florida;
- most of them are not children;
- Ms. Hatch take this back to the Board;
- (a no-mask policy should be) present(ed) for...adoption;

(S)he said she would take it under consideration. That's not a quote. I don't remember the exact words. (T)hey became very vocal about her doing it, saying that:

- this (is) a school policy only;
- it is not a mandate;
- that it is up to the Board itself to make a change to that policy; and,
- it could be done tonight, if they so chose.

So, it falls entirely on the board to choose to do what's right for the children, which is what this is all supposed to be about. Isn't that what your job is? You're doing what's right for the children?

Female Parent: ...I have twin boys that are in Nature Coast Technical High School. They have an opportunity to go to regionals on Saturday and possibly go to State. My one twin is quarantined, yesterday, and my other twin has gone into school today...

...In the meantime, my child's missing out on AP Classes, has exams coming up next week and the following week.

Female Parent: It is absolutely disgusting to see officials that I voted in, go completely against everything that I believe in, and everything that I moved to this county to avoid...

I pulled both of my kids out of brick and mortar this year because I'm not going to force them to be masked. It was bad enough that my son was taken out of recess and they ate lunch with their same class...

...That survey you guys sent out, I was able to actively answer eight questions, as an E-school parent this year. Those questions did not pertain to me...

...It was all bogus questions—nothing relevant, nothing current.

You guys had BLM Movement that has gone through and there was issues with that. You guys say it is current events. You can teach it. Tell me why a white honor roll student is being sent home with a letter for a party that she can't attend because she's not a minority.

...I see executive titles being added to administrative assistants and, in administrative positions, executive titles only need more pay. What about our teachers? Where's our staff? You've taken

away STEM Programs. You've taken away band. You've taken away extra classes. Where's the money going to go?

You have para employees in here saying they need more. You have other school board officials, or school officials, they need help! (1st beep) You guys are getting more money and yet I see you guys doing less and less...

School Board Meeting—May 25, 2021

Male Citizen: Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. I want to touch on three key issues that I'm certain we'll come back to it another time...

...The first is our children having to continue to wear masks until June 18. The second is assuring that Critical Race Theory is never a topic that Jews are taught in our school system and third that, in conformity with the State Law regarding gender, that our school system is defined by biological birth...

Mr. Alfonso (impatiently interrupting): Thank you for your comment. **Your time's up.** Thank you.

Female Citizen: I don't see those leadership roles being promulgated (by the Board)...

...we'll let 'em all hang a little bit longer, because we don't need to make a decision here.

Regards the masks, when I was here last month, there were eleven people ahead of me that all had mask issues, that had been here previously, and none of those issues had been addressed. None of them—and they were all here for the same issue again.

...The flu shots—the contamination rate for children was below 1/10 of one percent. Why do we have to have children receiving vaccinations? And is it necessary that children receive armbands to show that they haven't been vaxxed to separate them from the rest of the students? This was sort of like Nazi Germany all over again.

Male Citizen: Been here many times.

I want to start off by saying that you guys are getting rid of the mask mandate but it's too little, too late. Waiting till the end of the year is unacceptable.

...(At) a lot of these schools, you have to go outside to change classes. It's ninety degrees outside and we have five year olds walking around with masks on!

...I know you guys won't...answer any questions, but I'm just going to leave a little pause here, if anybody can tell me what is changing between today and the last day of school. If you guys want to answer, I could sit here and wait for a minute. I got three minutes, right?

(Pause met by silence)...

...I just want to be acknowledged. There's a lot of different issues and we just want to be taken seriously. We voted for you guys...

Female Parent: Take a look around. These people in this room are working taxpayers—paying your salary. Yet we are here to do your job. Isn't it crazy that we are all given the opportunity to do the research ourselves, yet here we are doing it for you.

...Mr. Stratton, by releasing your recommendation of mandatory masks until June 18, you are already agreeing and stating that you understand these children should not be wearing masks and the harm they have caused. And let me just say, why wait until June 18?

...(T)he 14th Amendment, Section 1 states: No State shall make or enforce any law, which shall abridge the privileges of any citizen of the United States. Nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law, nor deny to any person within this jurisdiction, the equal protection of laws.

Please understand we are mothers and fathers that just want to teach our children that the right to life, liberty and property are not earned by wearing a mask and complying to your requirements...and it's our God given right to refuse to comply because our health is at risk.

CDC (Studies) state that masks are loose fitting devices that were designed to be worn by medical personnel to protect (against) accidental contamination of patient's wounds, splashes...or sprays of blood. There is no evidence that states (that) masks prevent the spread of virus.

There are obvious mental and physical health hazards with children wearing dirty, soggy, bacteria ridden masks for eight hours per day. Covid 19 survival rates from ages 0-19 have a (1st beep) have 99.997 percent survival rate.

Enough is enough. My child has been forced to wear a mask this entire year and was forced to choose his education over his health. Tonight we want to make masks optional, not tomorrow, not next year and not June 18.

Tonight! That's what our children deserve and if we are here for our children tonight, we are standing up to you and we demand that we—that you get back to being a non-political board that listens to the parents. (sustained applause)

Female Stakeholder: I'm a... **registered Behavior Technician.**

And I work with special needs children and children with autism spectrum disorder. And I can tell you, from personal experience, that these masks have already done irreversible damage.

It makes me emotional and I apologize because I have seen, for the first time ever, a speech pathologist trying to teach a child, who doesn't know how to communicate, how to speak with a mask on.

It's so antithetical and counterintuitive to everything that we, as therapists, have been taught to teach children. It's wreaking havoc on their social skills.

These kids have problems trying to communicate socially and interact socially on a regular day, but when they're socially distanced and masked up, for no reason, they don't understand what's going on. You don't understand the emotional harm and the psychological abuse that this is causing for these children.

And, like I said, the damage has already been done. A lot of it is irreversible. These children, ages five through nine, have a zero point, zero, zero, zero, zero, one (0.00001) percent chance of dying from Covid.

Why are they being forced to wear masks in school and how many more instances of suicide and self-harm are you willing to risk until June 18? Because I don't want to see any more of this happen. It's gone on way too long. The suicide rates are up to 145% in some areas. This is unacceptable. Children, ages 10-19 are at a zero point, zero, zero, zero, zero, five percent risk (0.00005) of dying of Covid.

You have a higher risk of dying of sunstroke, radiation, lightning strikes and shark attacks. It's ludicrous that these children are being forced to wear masks in school. It does not affect them. What does affect them is their health and their anxiety and their depression and their panic attacks that are skyrocketing, because of these mask mandates.

It doesn't make any sense to force these children to live like they're in some sort of social experiment. (1st beep) Like, I don't want to see this go on any longer. So I agree with Cassy. It's unconstitutional according to the 14th Amendment and it needs to stop today, not, we can't wait until June 18.

These kids are already going to have to have more psychological therapy because of the damage we've caused them this past year. And I, as a therapist, for special needs and other children, cannot stand by and watch this happen anymore.

I'm so fed up, so I appreciate you listening to me, and I don't know who is in support of the mask mandates and who's not. I appreciate anyone who is for pushing back on this and, for those of you who are cowardly, I encourage you to maybe call Ron DeSantis and ask where he got his spine 'cause you should find one.

Mr. Alfonso (breaking in): Thank you for your comments.

School Board Meeting—June 8, 2021

Female Citizen: I'm here to discuss the topics of masking and Critical Race Theory. And I would like to ditto what the young man said on equity and equality.

I know you think that this is beating a dead horse but, with the end of the school year being right ahead of us, the masking is wrong and the horse is not dead.

(I)n conjunction with medical advisors throughout the state, (Governor DeSantis) made a decision on masking, predicated on the statistics that were involved in Covid—infection, reinfection, mutation, hospitalizations, survival rates. (Florida is) amongst the best in the nation...

...You've got these kids that have...medical and emotional issues—from wearing the masks!

...(Y)ou know that and yet the three women on (this) board voted to keep (the children) in masks!

(If) teachers...administrators, anybody...want to go unmasked, they should be allowed to. If the parents want their children to be unmasked, they should be allowed to. Other people want their children to be masked—fine! Let them be masked. It's their choice.

Female Parent: On the masks, I don't believe in them. I've been here a few times...

...**It's child abuse you all. It's child abuse!** ...I'm giving you all notice, if my children acquire any health problems that relate to breathing in (excess) carbon dioxide on these hot summer days, post Covid, ...I will hire an attorney and...hold each and every one of you guys personally responsible...

Female Stakeholder: Hello. All right, so, last time I talked about masks and you guys all know how I feel about that...

...I'm going to be talking about something even more controversial and that's...vaccines. I recently learned about a vaccine promotional event, on June 21, that's going to be at Challenger and it is promoting the vaccine for 12 to 15 year olds and...I would...like to provide some information about (these) experimental and potentially hazardous vaccine(s).

Pfizer and Moderna...are mRNA Vaccines and they are DNA altering. (These) mRNA Vaccines have not been approved for human trials and they have (had) very questionable results in the animal trials.

...There is only an emergency authorization for this vaccine. It is not FDA Approved.

There is zero liability for the vaccine creators and distributors and it just confuses me as to why, in Hernando County, we're promoting an experimental vaccine for children, who are not affected by this virus, and we don't know how the vaccine is going to affect them down the road and it can have potentially catastrophic consequences and long term health conditions.

ENCLOSURE 2

To Bill Gladson Letter, dated June 13, 2023, hand delivered to Brooksville Office

Mike Blackburn, Inspector General
Florida Department of Education
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1201
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

June 22, 2022

Reply Attn: Brad Benson
14391 Spring Hill Drive #289
Spring Hill, FL 34609

Subject: Whistleblower Complaint

Dear Mr. Blackburn:

Please be advised that there are serious issues with the Hernando County School Board (hereinafter, the Board). This matter involves mid-contract modifications to the benefit of Hernando County School Superintendent, John Stratton, with virtually no public scrutiny.

Mr. Stratton has been under fire for several years and a number of current candidates for the Board have already promised to fire him if elected. So now we have what appears to be a lame duck and very unpopular Board, which has made substantive changes to an embattled Superintendent's Contract, at a time in which he is threatened with imminent removal.

Rumors were floated and reports also appeared in local media that Mr. Stratton's Contract had been extended by two years, from 2026 to 2028. However, this change was allegedly 'caught' and removed by Board Member, Jimmy Lodato, (Please see the attached statement of Diane Liptak and Lisa Savarese).

It is therefore reasonable to assume that Mr. Stratton's Contract might very well have been improperly extended, if Mr. Lodato had not carefully read the document. Two years hence, no one would have remembered that the contract had been illegally extended—with the exception of Messrs. Stratton and Board Counsel, Dennis Alfonso, who most assuredly would have said nothing.

Mr. Stratton briefly addressed the changes to his contract at the very end of the public Board Meeting on May 24, 2022. With most of the public having left the building, Mr. Stratton thanked the Board for making the 'language changes' he had 'requested'. The Board then quickly adjourned—having actually approved the new Contract as an 'agenda item' in a sleight-of-hand manipulation engineered by Mr. Alfonso. This went largely unnoticed by the public attendees.

Taking the benign view, if the announced contract extension had truly been a mistake that was caught by the eagle-eyed Mr. Lodato, an error this egregious constitutes sufficient grounds for

immediate termination of Mr. Alfonso's contract. He has one job and, notwithstanding the questionable need for overnight changes to Mr. Stratton's Contract, the best assessment in this case is that his ineptitude could have cost the County dearly.

However, none of this passes the smell test and the night and fog element of these sudden contract changes strongly suggests criminal intent. For that matter, why would it be necessary to retype **ANY** dates if the contract is maintained as a .pdf file? Could these 'few language changes' not have been achieved through simple paragraph changes (i.e., without the need to alter signature blocks or expiration dates in the .pdf file)?

Mr. Alfonso's documented history strongly suggests that he is anything but inept, especially in regard to contract law. At minimum, he and his wife have made a very good living serving as counsel of record for two school districts, Hernando and Pasco, while seemingly always deciding against the children, the parents and the taxpaying citizens of both.

As an example, here in Hernando County, on June 12, 2018, Mr. Alfonso presided over what can only be described as an ambush, in which the former Superintendent was fired in a sudden 'no confidence' vote, which was taken at the end of a non-public workshop. The 'no confidence' vote (i.e., termination) was then announced as a fait accompli, to a stunned public, at the regular public meeting on that same evening.

Shortly thereafter, the Board installed Mr. Stratton into the acting Superintendent's role and later slid him right into the permanent job, despite a well-known and very public history of issues that had arisen when he had previously supervised his current wife. Two scandalous divorces; one happy wedding; two undeserved promotions; one political hit-job; and one newly hired Superintendent later, the Board was forced to immediately add two Deputy Superintendent Positions merely to maintain the façade that there is a buffer between Mr. Stratton and his wife.

Now, in an era in which the County cannot keep bus drivers on the job; pays less than \$12 per hour for qualified substitute teachers; and has shortages of funds and staff at all of the lower rungs in the system, the Board has authorized Mr. Stratton to hire an additional 17 people to further expand the administrative empire that he has built out of that initial buffer of two additional deputies.

But empire building is costly! Therefore, the Board is currently suing the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) for not moving on an initiative that would have given them earlier access to more money. The Board made its presentation to the BOCC and were publicly voted down 4-1, which should have been the end of it. However, this lawsuit is currently moving forward. Taxpayer paid lawyers are suing other taxpayer paid lawyers over the availability of additional taxpayer funding! This alone constitutes serious fraud, waste and abuse.

To be clear, the common denominator in all of this is Dennis Alfonso and any reasonable investigation into his machinations as Counsel for the Pasco County School District will yield similar manipulations. Mr. Alfonso's contract was recently renewed with minimal, if not zero, notice to the public. One wonders how this contract has been consistently renewed in two Florida Counties with no discernable bid process. Is his firm a sole-source proprietor and, if so, why?

A formal investigation of these matters should include, but not be limited to: the current Board, Mr. Dennis Alfonso, Ms. Nancy McClain-Alfonso, Superintendent John Stratton and the McClain-Alfonso Professional Association. Where there is smoke, there is fire.

Thank you for your assistance regarding these matters. Should you have any questions or desire further information, please contact us at 352-232-9292.

Sincerely,

Brad Benson

Attachment

cc:

Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Ashley Moody, Attorney General
State of Florida
PL-01 The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1050

Mr. Bill Gladson
State Attorney, 5th Judicial District
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Office of the Chief Inspector General
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Hernando County, FL
Board of County Commissioners
15470 Flight Path Drive
Spring Hill, FL 34604

John Allocco
Steve Champion
Wayne Dukes
Beth Narverud
Jeff Holcomb

06/14/22 Hernando County School Board ("HCSB") Meeting 6 pm
District Office-Board Room 919 N. Broad Street Brooksville, FL

Discussion between Jimmy Lodato and Lisa Savarese and Diane Liptak prior to start of Meeting

Re: HCSB extension and revision of contract for John Stratton, Superintendent (Agenda Item #28)

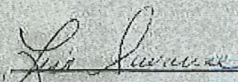
Immediately prior to the start of the June 14, 2022, HCSB meeting, Mr. Lodato came over to Lisa and I where we were standing in the constituent seating area, to say hello to us. Lisa proceeded to ask him about an article she had read in the Suncoast News that stated that at the May 24, 2022 School Board meeting, Superintendent John Stratton's contract had been on the HCSB Agenda for renewal, and that it had been renewed till 2028. Having attended that meeting, Our understanding at the time was that Susan Duval had made a motion to table the issue, the tabling of which was approved.

However, according to the paper, and to Jimmy Lodato, the HCSB actually did approve the contract extension, but only until 2026. Item 28, John Stratton's draft contract, was never discussed separately, or even alluded to until later, but rather approved with the general Agenda Items 1-28, though the other Items were discussed separately, except for those 4 items which were pulled to be discussed and dealt with separately. In reviewing the meeting video we had indeed misunderstood what had been approved or tabled. Lisa asked Jimmy about the extension date as the Hernando Sun article indicated that the contract was extended thru 2028. Mr. Lodato said that he had caught that and told the HCSB at that time that "he would not go for that," that the extended date should be 2026, and that the HCSB agreed to that. So "we weren't to worry about that. He took care of it." (But none of that contractual interchange took place at the May 24th 6pm meeting, and the end date of the draft contract attachment was already altered by meeting time.)

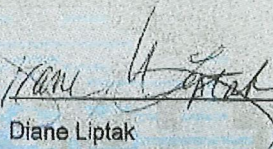
We then asked about the modification to the contract language that Superintendent Stratton had thanked the HCSB for at the end of the May 24, 2022, meeting. Mr. Lodato said that referenced a \$25,000 payback required if a superintendent was terminated. He said he thought it wasn't really a fair requirement. Dr. Romano had had to pay it back as it was in her contract also, so they removed that contract language. And he stated that that was the only language change requested or made.

The meeting then went into session and the conversation ended.

I hereby attest to the accuracy of the above transcription of the meeting and discussion that occurred immediately prior to the onset of the June 14, 2022 School Board meeting, between Jimmy Lodato, Lisa Savarese and Diane Liptak.


Lisa Savarese

Date: 06/19/22


Diane Liptak

Date: 06/19/22

State Board of Education

Tom Grady, Chair
Ben Gibson, Vice Chair
Members
Monesha Brown
Esther Byrd
Grazle Pozo Christie
Ryan Petty
Joe York



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
fldoe.org

Manny Diaz, Jr.
Commissioner of Education

September 21, 2022

Brad Benson
14391 Spring Hill Dr #289,
Spring Hill, FL 34609

Re: FDOE OIG Correspondence # 2022060055

Dear Mr. Benson:

The FDOE OIG has received and reviewed the response from the Hernando County School District regarding your allegations.

The FDOE OIG accepts the district's findings and considers the matter closed.

Thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention. Should you have any questions, please contact this office at (850) 245-0403

Sincerely,

Thomas Wood
Florida Department of Education
Office of Inspector General

www.fldoe.org

325 W. Gaines Street | Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400 | 850-245-0505

