

February 13, 2023

SUBJECT: Dr. Steve Greer's Response to GMC Board of Trustees (BOT) Directive to respond to No Confidence letter

Ref: Vote of No Confidence regarding President William B. Caldwell, IV to the Board of Trustees (attached)

The purpose of this letter is two-fold. First, I feel compelled to protect my reputation. While serving as Principal of Georgia Military College (GMC) Prep School, I was abruptly fired without just cause. Details are included below. The results of this unexpected event created fear, anxiety, and uncertainty throughout the school. Second, I feel as if it is my duty to correct and to provide background information that directly refutes the official response to the letter outlining a Vote of No Confidence. This letter was rendered by prep school teachers regarding President Caldwell's leadership and the resulting environment created by his actions at GMC.

It is important to note that I was not a signatory to the vote of No Confidence. It is also important to remember that the No Confidence vote was directed at the president and not at the principal.

Having carefully read the letter outlining the Vote of No Confidence and the institution's response, I was motivated to set the record straight. I have first-hand knowledge of the events referred to in the institution's response that are contrary to statements made.

What happened?

On January 30, 2023, I met with the president in his office. The purpose of the meeting, so I thought, was to provide my thoughts and plans for the future in terms of retirement. During that meeting I was not asked what my plans were. I was told that I would be moving after the 22-23 school year to a recruiter position inside the college. My reaction was utter bewilderment.

Moving a principal without cause after only two years is a major disruption to the school and the positive work our team has accomplished over the last year and a half. The admin team, in concert with teachers and staff have made great strides in support of the students. We implemented MAP testing in grades K-7 so we had data to drive instruction for the first time ever, we implemented professional learning communities to ensure teacher growth, we codified and enforced the student attendance policy, and we conducted the first-ever faculty Dawg Walks to thank our Marching Band and college engineering department. The prep school was in great shape, enrollments were up, and teachers felt supported and respected. Perhaps more importantly, the prep school will undergo their 5-year accreditation review next school year.

During the meeting I was offered a position as a recruiter. This position was later characterized as a "leadership role" in the college. In fact, there was no such position. I was never given a job description, and the Chief Human Resources Officer was not aware that any such position was

open nor being created. In a text message exchange with Human Resources immediately following my meeting with the president it was very clear there was no position:

“Omg you mean fired?” “What happened?” “He didn’t tell you why he is moving you?” “Where would he move you?” “Will it be out of the prep school?” “Omg.” “With no explanation and no plans of where...that is unbelievable.”

Following this text exchange I was left with several questions regarding the reasons for moving me to a recruiter role - a clear demotion in scope of leadership duties, not in alignment with my educational level, and absolutely no reason provided for the decision. In addition, I was told that my salary would remain the same working as a recruiter for the college. My salary is double what a recruiter makes at GMC, and I could not in good conscience accept that condition. That offer added further mystery to the move. Knowing that the institution is undergoing financial strain, why would paying a recruiter a six figure salary make sense? On the surface, my gut told me it was an effort to move me along quietly.

When I arrived back at my office I alerted the Associate Principals. Bad news does not get better with time and they deserved time to start preparing the continuation of the accreditation efforts. That evening, I received several messages asking me why I was not returning. The following morning, on January 31, 2023, I sent an email to prep faculty and staff alerting them of the pending move. The purpose of the email was to quickly dispel any rumors, thank them for our successes, reaffirm my responsibility for any failures, and to assure them that they had my complete support.

This is the email sent to prep faculty and staff:

Team Prep - I’m not a fan of the rumor mill so wanted to get this out to all of you in an effort to be completely transparent. Yesterday, I was informed that I will not be returning for a 3rd year as principal. At this juncture, I have no plans but I know God has a plan.

I’m fully committed to working on your behalf until I’m replaced and there will be no slack in my efforts to support you and our amazing students. Any success we have enjoyed over the past 2 years sits squarely on your shoulders! I take full responsibility for any and all failures.

We have a super busy 2nd semester so let’s roll up our sleeves and get to work!

Go Bulldogs!

V/r

Steve

Shortly after I sent the email, the president and the chief human resources officer showed up in my office. We did not sit down. The president was irate and asked me why I sent the email. He said he was receiving phone calls asking why Dr. Greer was fired. I explained to him that my email mentioned nothing of the sort. I suggested he was taking my email out of context. He asked me if I saw anything wrong with the email and I replied, “Honestly sir, I don’t see

anything wrong with the email.” I was never told not to mention our conversation from the previous day.

The president said, “Then we can’t work together, take your shit and get out.” I responded with “Yes, Sir. You are the president and that’s your prerogative.” He then left my office and I sat down with the chief human resources officer and we discussed the next steps following my termination. I complied with his directive and cleared out my office by 11 pm that evening.

I served at the pleasure of the President. Although we did not agree on some issues, disagreement is not disloyalty. I’m a leader and I stand by all decisions I made as the principal. The lack of professional judgment in the president’s actions to remove me mid-morning thus impacting the students, staff, and faculty and disrupting the school day is cause for concern. There was no pressing reason to remove me from my position – I was not a threat to anyone, nor had I been accused of doing anything illegal, immoral, or unethical. It was not necessary to berate me in my office in earshot of my colleagues, and the fit of rage exhibited by the president was disconcerting. He demonstrated a lack of professional judgment.

Within an hour of my removal, I was no longer able to access my email or computer which prevented the orderly transfer of information and documents to the Associate Principal related to upcoming accreditation, discipline issues, personnel, and ongoing operations.

The actions and messaging that followed my removal further created controversy and distrust among many stakeholders. Parents were told via email from the president that the decision to remove me was not taken lightly, teachers were told that same afternoon that my dismissal was a mutual decision, days later the Chairman of the BOT issued a statement indicating that they analyzed all the information and supported my removal from the prep school. Only two days later, the teachers were told in a meeting with the president that I resigned. The different theories offered by the same people indicate a lack of truth-telling and transparency.

On February 1, 2023, the morning after I was removed, I received a phone call from Human Resources and was once again offered the yet-to-be created position as a recruiter. That offer raised further questions as to why there was a need to remove me mid-morning as the principal only to offer a new position 24 hours later.

I declined the verbal offer. I submitted a counteroffer in writing requesting that I be reinstated as the principal and would consider the recruiter position later but only under the condition that the salary I received was commensurate with that position. That request was denied verbally by the president.

My abrupt removal created an outpouring of concern, outrage, and negative publicity on social media. I did not engage nor participate in the social media frenzy and will not do so in the future. The fact that my removal was handled so recklessly directly fueled the negative comments, uncertainty, speculation, and anger among many parents and students. The abrupt decision to move me after the 22-23 school year, knowing that the prep school will undergo their accreditation review during school year 23-24, places the school in a difficult position.

Teacher concerns regarding misappropriation of funds:

As a former senior leader in the organization, I am aware of the annual audits that the institution undergoes. **I'm confident that the audits have never raised a concern of misappropriation of funds.**

The issue is not misappropriation, it is lack of prudent leadership. Leaders are responsible to exercise proper judgment. Two significant financial effects resulted from the failure to ensure the state legislature approved the expansion of K-3 grades.

First, the state did not provide funding for the new teachers' salaries for one year. GMC has no authority to expand without approval from the state. Because prior approval was not formally secured, the institution bore the full cost of those salaries for one year.

Second, as a direct result of the failure to obtain approval to expand, the state only provided enough funding to ensure that teachers in grades 4-12 would receive the \$2,000 salary supplement. The institution rightly decided to spread the state funding among all teachers in grades K-12, which resulted in a smaller amount allocated per teacher at no fault of their own. Four administrators in the prep school, myself included, opted out of the supplement to allow more funding to go to teachers.

Teacher concerns regarding transparency and trust:

On January 13, 2023, the special audit was briefed to the BOT. One slide (see pg. 8) provided information regarding the purpose of the audit and the timeline. Due to the number of questions from the staff and faculty regarding the special audit, I emailed the Chief Financial Officer on January 23, 2023, to inquire if the special audit was part of the agenda during the upcoming Quarterly Staff Meeting with all employees. On January 25, 2023, I received a reply that the special audit was not on the agenda. On January 25, 2023, I sent an email which contained the same slide that was briefed to the BOT regarding the special audit. The lack of transparency and unwillingness to discuss the audit further exacerbated the distrust felt by the teachers.

Teacher concerns regarding expansion of the prep school without legislative approval:

It is true that the institution submitted its plan to expand to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB). However, submitting a plan neatly embedded into our strategic initiatives was **not a request to expand** but either an attempt to do so without seeking approval or an example of failed leadership. We did not request to expand nor wait for a decision from the state before moving forward. The result of such poor decision making and inability to predict the

potential fall-out from the state placed an additional financial burden on the institution as previously mentioned.

Teacher concerns regarding lack of transparency and trust:

- ❖ It is the responsibility of leaders to ensure transparency. Only recently was the GMC web page updated with names and photos of the members of the BOT after a teacher inquired on December 2, 2022, to the Director of Staff. Moreover, the lack of parent notification regarding the Board of Trustees meetings, the lack of contact information for the board members, and refusal to take questions at the recent Quarterly Staff Meeting has produced a real or perceived lack of transparency and trust among stakeholders at all levels. The fact that the BOT meetings do not provide an opportunity for parents to ask questions or address concerns is telling. Furthermore, sending the agenda to the Union-Recorder and posting the agenda to the door of the conference room located inside the prep school is hardly a good faith effort to notify stakeholders. Only in the past week did the GMC web page provide board meeting dates and past board minutes available for public viewing.
- ❖ The GMC BOT was enacted in the 19th century. According to the by-laws, members must reside within the city limits of Milledgeville. In 1879, this may have made sense given the sparse population in Baldwin County. Today, 90% of prep-school students reside outside the city limits, and encompass at least 8 different surrounding counties. Is the board set up to represent the people? The fact remains that the BOT does not represent the parents at the prep school and that leaves parents without a voice or representation. If we are willing to accept funding for traditional educational positions such as teachers, superintendents, and nurses, then why don't we have a more traditional board of education? Should amending the antiquated by-laws be a legislative priority?
- ❖ The sudden creation of the Assistant Superintendent position and the limited role this position plays within the prep school has teachers questioning the need for such a title. The fact that the position receives funding from the state for a portion of the salary appears to be an abuse of public funds. Given the fact that the position is so far removed from a traditional assistant superintendent position in terms of duties and responsibilities, one might assume the title was selected to obtain state funding to offset a salary. There is no question that the duties of coordinating NewDayUSA scholarships, parent interviews, and admissions is a critical mission for the institution. The question remains is Assistant Superintendent the most prudent title given the duties of the position? Does the state have an expectation that when funding such positions, they are funding a position that resembles best practices and scope of duties?
- ❖ The creation of the Superintendent as a "dual-hat" position also raised teacher questions. A typical superintendent has an educational background with years of experience as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. Our superintendent has no experience in any of these roles. By the BOT's own admission, the "dual-hat" role was created for the first time since 1879 after learning that a portion of the superintendent's salary would be

funded by the state. The question remains is this the best use of public tax-payer funds when the prep school has operated without a superintendent position since its inception?

Teacher concerns regarding fear of retaliation:

In the spring of 2022 the president convened a meeting following a mistake made while inputting the Cross-Country roster into the GHSA system. Present at that meeting were the President, Assistant Superintendent, Chief Human Resources Officer, Associate Principal, Athletic Director, Social Studies Teacher, and myself. The actual coach who made the honest mistake was not invited to the meeting, despite the fact that his input would certainly have been needed if the intent of the meeting was to “prevent this from happening again.” During the meeting, the president never sat down; instead he chose to stand behind a chair berating those present from the prep school. Once he learned that the situation could not be resolved in our favor, he became enraged. His demeanor and comments were totally unbecoming of the president of this great institution. The moment I returned to my office I exchanged a text message with one of the senior members in that meeting.

“He’s so powerful it’s almost scary. OMG”

“That was SO WEIRD!!!”

How does GMC move forward?

The overarching concern emanating from the teachers’ vote of No Confidence in the president’s leadership reflects a toxic leadership environment. The leader of any organization has a duty to ensure a safe, positive, and inclusive workplace far removed from fear of retaliation or retribution. Until the BOT recognizes this simple fact, the employees at GMC will continue to experience a toxic environment.

On July 28, 2022, a vice president sent a message to members of the senior team entitled: GMC Morale and Culture.

The email was an alarming admission that there is a problem at GMC citing a rash of resignations, toxic leadership, lack of communication, poor culture and morale, and undercurrent of malcontent at GMC.

The email also suggested that a meeting be held with senior leaders to try and tackle these issues. I responded immediately to the email and indicated I was in favor of meeting to discuss this important topic.

A meeting was never held.

(a copy of this email is available)

On July 29, 2022, I sent the following email to all prep school staff and faculty:

From: Steven Greer <sgreer@gmc.edu>

Sent: Friday, July 29, 2022 9:20 AM

To: PrepFac <PrepFac@gmc.edu>

Subject: Greer Sends - Morale and Culture

Team Prep – I wanted to take a few minutes and share with you some thoughts...

Last year was a steep learning curve for me personally as a new Principal. I'm blessed that I am surrounded by amazing people a lot smarter than I am and 99% of the time they keep me on track. The 1% of time that I stray from their sage advice is where I'm committed this year to doing better! By now, most of you know my sense of humor and my leadership style. For better or for worse, it's just me! My personality, values and experiences shape my decision making every day. I subscribe to the idea that leadership isn't a personality contest. I want to be everyone's friend but understand that more importantly, I want to earn your respect as one of your administrative leaders. My main mission is to ensure a safe learning environment for our students and be as supportive as possible to our faculty and staff. I want you to be able to count on me to work in your best interest. My door is always open. I'm prepared to listen without judging you, will tell it to you straight, and will seek out an answer when I have no clue.

Each of you is an important entity within the Prep School. Every job is important! When you are hurting or struggling, I want to be riding the struggle bus with you and do my best to help steer you onto a more joyful path. We are a FAMILY! FAMILY's take care of one another. I realized this tenfold when my father and twin brother died of the same terrible cancer only 2 weeks apart. You all collectively supported me, prayed for me, and set me on a path to return to school during my darkest days.

Please don't hesitate to come to me with your challenges/concerns. I've got thick skin...and I'm eager to improve!

There is an old saying that "Culture eats strategy for lunch!" I 100% believe that to be true. I want to ensure that our culture is welcoming to all, inclusive to others, respectful, and driven by a sense of "we are in this together!"

It's my HONOR to be serving with you on Team Prep!

See you at the Luau on Monday!

Very respectfully,

Steve

I call on the members of the Board of Trustees to act in the best interest of Georgia Military College. A good faith effort would be honoring the teacher's request to meet in private.

Special Audit slide briefed to BOT in January:

**GEORGIA MILITARY
COLLEGE**

**Dept of Audits and Accounts
Special Examination of GMC**

- May 31, 2022, House Appropriations Committee requested a special examination of GMC, and have just been notified, with the intent to:
 - Evaluate the various funding streams of GMC
 - Evaluate methods to modernize state statutory obligations to the GMC
 - Analyze requisite oversight for the institution and its reliance on public resources.
- **Audit Source:** The request noted the unique partnership between GMC and the state. The committee wanted to understand GMC's various funding streams, as well as to view any recommendations related to the state's statutory obligations, input, and requisite oversight for the institution and its reliance on public resources.
- **Process & Timeline**
 - Entrance conference: June 6, 2022
 - First site visit @ GMC: June 22 (1 analyst)
 - Fieldwork: July 2022 – March 2023
 - Second site visit @ GMC: November 14-15 (3x analysts)
 - Draft Report: March-April 2023 (* change from initial timeline)
 - Review Report: April 2023
 - Release: (T) April – May 2023

1/12/2023