

June 14th, 2019

Dear CAO Diane DeBacker and Superintendent Denise Juneau,

Over the course of the past two years Gatzert staff have had a variety of concerns with our principal, Laurie Kazanjian. The concerns ranged from areas of professional conduct to school climate and safety to instructional leadership. In early December of 2017 Gatzert's SEA reps compiled those concerns and met with Principal Kazanjian to share them (see attached). We had hoped they would be received in good faith and we could move forward and grow and become a strong high functioning school community. Many of the concerns were dismissed and labeled negative. In response Principal Kazanjian organized a "listening session" for staff which occurred shortly after on December 13, 2017. Staff were invited in small groups and she asked for feedback in several areas (see attached for her follow up notes from these sessions). Areas that had surfaced earlier by the SEA reps were documented in these sessions. Staff were cautiously hopeful that this meant our concerns had been acknowledged and heard. As the 2017-2018 year continued we were not seeing any signs of Principal Kazanjian implementing our feedback.

We began the 2018-2019 school year with many new staff members. Many left due to frustration with the lack of leadership and the notable decline in climate and escalating student behaviors. This school year started where we left off last year. Climate, safety and student behavior were clearly suffering as early as October. Again, in December of 2018, Gatzert's SEA reps gathered staff concerns and met with Principal Kazanjian to problem solve. Again, clear systems and handling habitual student behavior were discussed along with other areas of leadership. Principal Kazanjian heard some of our concerns and deflected others. Most recently, on May 10th, 2019, Gatzert staff conducted a vote of no confidence. The results reflected two years of failed attempts to work with Principal Kazanjian, 73% no confidence (40 members), 13% abstained (13 members), and 3% have confidence (2 members). Staff submitted written concerns to the SEA reps (which we can send if requested) and for the fourth formal time concerns were presented to our principal. This time with Michael Starosky and Principal Kazanjian's mentor present as well as Tim Kopp, SEA Uniserv. Since that meeting Principal Kazanjian is clearly trying to be more visible in the building and is attempting to handle more student behaviors. Though this shows a delayed attempt to respond to feedback, as a staff we feel it is too late and the damage is irreparable because the staff are concerned that the attempt at collaboration is interest of her self-preservation rather than building a culture of collaboration.

Professional Conduct

Several areas of poor professional conduct have arisen. They include lack of honesty and transparency, consistently telling different staff members different things. There have been many instances of gossiping about staff members to other staff members creating a divisive work environment. There has been no seeking of input from stakeholders when making changes and when ripple effects occur Principal Kazanjian has had no concern or sought input for improving a situation.

Behavior/School Climate/Safety

Principal Kazanjian has also made racist remarks that overgeneralize complicated situations. We try to implement clear expectations for our students using the PBIS framework. When we approached Principal Kazanjian about clear consequences for behaviors, her reply is simply "We do not discipline black boys" resulting in no consequence, follow through or re-teaching of desired behavior. She has made no effort in using data to inform the decisions of the building. There is no missed instruction data to inform behavior and building protocols. Principal

Kazanjian has asked multiple teachers to abandon their classrooms and tend to students in the office because she has no relationship with any student and is unable to manage difficult student behaviors. Staff members who have been in this building for over 10 years have commented that “this building was always a safe place for children in our community but has now turned into a war zone.” A lack of effective decision making in terms of discipline and behavior has resulted in a major upswing in physical altercations in the building, which has finally resulted in suspensions in the last 2 months of school.

Instructional Leadership

Principal Kazanjian has shown to be ineffective as instructional leader of the school. At the start of the school year, she mandated that all staff teach the CCC reading curriculum by reading the manual verbatim. Staff pushed back on the instructional effectiveness by citing the Danielson Framework which reflects rote teaching as being unsatisfactory. Staff pushed because we wanted to be responsive to our students’ needs and not all of our students’ need is reflected in the script and lesson plan of CCC. We wanted to make lessons and units more rigorous and ensure that all common core and SPS report card standards were taught but were denied the opportunity to supplement the curriculum because it was not in the script. Principal Kazanjian refused all attempts to compromise. Most surprisingly, Principal Kazanjian admitted to never having taught, read or even looked through the curriculum. Furthermore, Principal Kazanjian expected grade level teams to meet in PLC’s to review data but provided no leadership when asked about how we are expected to respond to data if we were expected to simply “follow the script”.

We have attached our record of prior attempts for collaborative feedback to Principal Kazanjian starting in December of 2017 through this spring. Our concerns were ignored by Michael Starosky on May 17th, 2019, but we need immediate support in order to ensure equitable access, to close the opportunity gap, and to provide excellence in education for students at Bailey Gatzert. We need district support on this matter - this school shares a history of prejudicial treatment (along with our sister school Washington Middle) by the district that negatively impacts a family community whose voice is often not heard. We are not advocating for ourselves as a staff, but for the education and safety of the families and community that we serve. This school has become a pipeline to prison, we are in dire straits.

Anxiously awaiting your support,
The dedicated staff at Bailey Gatzert Elementary