

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For more information: Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, President, 919-394-8137

Atty. Jennifer W. Marsh, Acting Director, 919-682-4700

OPEN LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT ANTHONY TATA

Dear Superintendent Tata:

You recently charged that two Wake School Board members had done something "unethical" through their involvement with the all-volunteer *Great Schools In Wake* grassroots organization. In doing so, you also attacked the teachers, parents, and children to whom this organization devotes itself.

Great Schools in Wake is a community group that advocates diverse, well-funded, excellent schools managed by policies that are based in scholarly research. Their approach is to offer programs to encourage public examination of educational issues and spend countless hours monitoring the conduct of the Wake County School Board and its staff, which includes the position of superintendent. Putting in thousands of volunteer hours, GSIW was a critical partner in the black-white-brown coalition that came together to stop efforts by the extreme right wing movement that used Wake County students as pawns in an ideological crusade.

When Great Schools and our coalition kept the Wake County Public School System from stepping off a cliff into re-segregation and high-poverty schools, we felt a new breeze of hope blowing through the administration building.

The NAACP encouraged parents and children of color to get involved again and assured them that a new spirit of respect had replaced the hostility emanating from what had become an armed, bristling palace of disregard. We put out the word through all our networks that children and parents of color were once again

welcome to bring their hopes and difficulties to the administration building. Many of our members believed that a Fox News commentator would never have a sense of fairness. Though there were many skeptics, we assured them that they would not be turned away. The people running the show, we told them, no longer regarded them as "animals." as citizens were once referred to on camera by former chairman Ron Margiotta.

Ms. Evans and Ms. Kushner, along with several other members of the board, have been patient and generous with you. They went a long way--too far, we thought--to compromise by supporting your school assignment plan, even though it ignores the commitment to diversity and the promise not to go backwards to segregated schools that got them elected to the school board. They took considerable criticism, from us and even Great Schools in Wake, for their willingness to trust in your leadership, good faith and a plan that has already indicated will result in resegregation.

We remember well your slashing attacks on the patriotism and intelligence of our Commander in Chief President Obama, a man of color, as you left the Army. Many NAACP members argued then that we should resist what they sensed to be your underdeveloped sense of social justice that would bode ill for children of color. When we met with you, you assured us that your family tradition included a respect for diversity and spoke with pride about your father receiving an award from the NAACP. Despite concerns regarding your past association, many in our community because of their love for education and their desire to see progress in our educational system, chose to give you a chance.

We knew that that you had provided far-right Fox News commentaries and peddled Sarah Palin--no friend to public education--as "precisely the kind of leader America needs." Yet despite that baggage we and many others have withheld judgment and encouraged hope that your commitment to the success of the school system would outweigh ideological commitments. In the first year, however, your administration opened a new school, Walnut Creek Elementary, which is a high-poverty school with more than 90% minority, more than 50% underperforming and overcrowded from day one. We were inundated with cries of "We told you so." And though critical of these actions, members of our community still tried to work with you. Why now have you become so inflexible when others have been so willing to try to work with you sometimes against their best instincts and knowledge?

Your decision to assail Ms. Evans and Ms. Kushner in a personal tone with ridiculous charges of "unethical" behavior marks a low point in education leadership in Wake County. Not only is that charge entirely groundless. It also reveals a broad lack of self-awareness that heads toward hypocrisy. Beyond your misrepresentations that they are somehow controlled by a certain advocacy group, we have a deep concern regarding how you feel about their constitutional right of association and how you have a double standard for Tea-Party backed ideologues.

You clearly have not taken time to develop a consistent policy with respect to advocacy groups. When you first came to Wake County as superintendent, you immediately met with the far-right Wake County Taxpayers Association, which

continues to claim that President Obama is not an American, to denounce our "gangster government," and to claim that "sustainable development" is a concept derived from the "1977 Soviet Constitution." Was that "unethical?"

John Tedesco, who calls himself "Tea Party Tedesco" and shares your Republican politics, is executive director of a right-wing educational advocacy group. Why have you not demanded that he resign this position?

Three Republican members of the board are running for other offices and seeking campaign contributions from groups that oppose the very idea of public schools and from persons who own private schools and are seeking the privatization of our public schools, which would bring them rivers of money. Why are you not calling attention to the "stranglehold" these advocacy groups have on these members?

It is clear that your concerns about advocacy groups are confined to groups whose political orientation is different from your own.

We believe in vigorous debate and even disagreement on ideas. We neither require nor expect agreement on every issue from you or anyone else; in fact, we disagree occasionally with the people whose integrity you are assailing. However, your public attack and accusations against the school board members who employ you, along with your attempt to say who they can and cannot associate with based on your personal feelings, is not only an attempt to tread on their constitutional rights but also in many circles would be seen as a form of insubordination and grounds for immediate dismissal.

We sincerely hope in this season of Lent, you will reach out in a redemptive way to the board members that you personally attacked and to Great Schools In Wake and its partners. We sincerely hope your explanation will be thorough and prompt. While you consider your next steps, we will consult with all our partners to determine their positions on what our next steps are. We intend to gather the community around these matters, inform Advanced Ed of this incident, as well as those handling our Title VI complaint at the Justice Department because we believe your conduct reveals a deep and unprofessional bias and a lack of fairness and willingness to hear all voices.

With every good wish,

Rev. Dr. William Barber, II
President
North Carolina State Conference of NAACP Branches

Dr. Timothy B. Tyson
Education Chair
North Carolina Conference of NAACP Branches
Duke Divinity School
Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University
University of North Carolina