The Johnston County Board of Education has received notice that student, Cole Withrow, has pled guilty to misdemeanor possession of weapons on school campus today. Further, the Board has received a written statement from Cole Withrow admitting that he did not tell the truth to the school principal or to the school resource officer who initially investigated the matter. After finding the firearms on school property, school officials and law enforcement took action as mandated by North Carolina law. Information was somehow released to the media and others who disseminated false and inaccurate information on a national basis concerning the incident. Now that Cole Withrow has pled guilty and truthful relevant information has become public, certain facts must be released. First, Cole Withrow admitted that he knew that two shotguns were in his truck on school property. They were not inadvertently discovered there or accidently brought to school. Secondly, Cole Withrow did not report that he had the guns in his truck to the principal or any other school or law enforcement official. Third, the principal, law enforcement, and Superintendent Ed Croom acted precisely in accordance with the laws of the State of North Carolina in the performance of their individual duties.

As in any case, subsequent investigating was done, pursuant school board policy and information became known to the principal, Superintendent, board attorney, law enforcement, and the District Attorney's Office, that Cole Withrow had been untruthful. However, because of state and federal confidentiality laws, neither the school system nor any other entity could release any information that was discovered during their investigation showing Cole Withrow's culpability. As a result, news media continuously reported inaccurate facts and information to the public, and hundreds of people went on the internet decrying Cole Withrow's situation. Messages were posted threatening school officials, messages were posted that were intimidating and slanderous, and messages were posted completely misstating and not knowing the facts of the case as people jumped to conclusions about the matter. The information that was put out in emails and calls received by the Board of Education were uncalled for and extremely hurtful.

It should especially be noted that many emails and information were sent to individual board members prior to board members having any knowledge or taking any action in this matter. Board members were specifically not informed of the facts of the case due to the possibility that any board member might be called on to serve on an appeals panel. The Board Chair wished to assure that any board panel would be composed of fair and impartial board members with no preconceived opinions as to the issue. The only school members of the School Administration who dealt with this matter were the Superintendent, Board Hearing Officer, and board attorney. Once again, it should be noted that individual board members were sent scurrilous and ugly emails when board members themselves had nothing to do with the pending investigation.

The main concern of the school system, aside from the education of the fine children in Johnston County, is for students and personnel's safety in school. The laws written by the North Carolina Legislature are there for a purpose to try and help school systems maintain a safe and orderly educational environment in public schools. When incidents such as this happen, these matters are investigated by the schools and are confidential student information. The information in the course of an investigation like this, cannot be

disclosed by anyone in the school system even if they know the information being disseminated by the press and public is false or inaccurate. That is just the way the laws are written. Board members and school personnel should be commended for adhering to the laws as they are written and not circumventing the law just to protect their reputations. By following the laws, the school systems reputation has remained intact as seen by the guilty plea in court by the student. In the future, we would ask that the media and the public not jump to conclusions in student discipline and or criminal matters, especially when all the facts are not known to them.