

PUBLICATION OF REDACTED VERSION
OF THE OEIG FOR THE AGENCIES UNDER THE GOVERNOR
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

Case # 20-00478

Subject(s): Heather McMeekan

Below is the redacted version of an investigative summary report from the Executive Inspector General for the Agencies of the Illinois Governor. The General Assembly directed the Executive Inspector General to deliver to the Executive Ethics Commission (Commission) a copy of the investigation's summary report and response from the ultimate jurisdictional authority or agency head. 5 ILCS 430/20-50(c-5). The General Assembly also directed the Commission to redact information from this report that may reveal the identity of witnesses, complainants, or informants and "any other information it believes should not be made public." 5 ILCS 430/20- 52(b). Furthermore, the General Assembly directed the Commission to make available to the public the redacted investigative report and response. 5 ILCS 430/20-52(a) & (b). By publishing the below redacted summary report, the Commission neither makes nor adopts any determination of fact or conclusions of law for or against any individual or entity referenced therein.

The Commission exercises its publication responsibility with great caution and seeks to balance the sometimes-competing interests of transparency and fairness to the accused and others uninvolved. To balance these interests, the Commission may redact certain information contained in this report and identify where said redactions have taken place. Additionally, the Commission may redact certain information relating to allegations that do not determine that reasonable cause exists to believe a violation has occurred. Redactions of allegations against a person who was determined not to have committed a violation are made with the understanding that the subject or subjects of the investigation have not had the opportunity to rebut the report's factual allegations or legal conclusions before the Commission because this publication is only the result of the Executive Inspector General's investigation and not the result of an adjudication before the Commission.

The Commission received this report and a response from the ultimate jurisdictional authority and/or agency in this matter from the Agencies of the Illinois Governor Office of Executive Inspector General ("OEIG"). The Commission, pursuant to 5 ILCS 430/20-52, redacted the OEIG's final report and responses and mailed copies of the redacted version and responses to the Attorney General, the Executive Inspector General for the Agencies of the Illinois Governor, and the subject(s) last known addresses.

The Commission reviewed all suggestions received and makes this document available pursuant to 5 ILCS 430/20-52.

AMENDED FINAL REPORT¹

I. ALLEGATION

On March 5, 2020, the Office of Executive Inspector General (OEIG) received an anonymous complaint alleging that Western Illinois University (WIU) employee Heather McMeekan used personal social media accounts during work hours to post material in support of a political organization to which she belongs, the [Political Organization 1].²

II. BACKGROUND

Ms. McMeekan has worked as an Information Technology Technical Associate, commonly referred to as Webmaster, in WIU's Web Services offices of University Technology since 2006. According to Ms. McMeekan's job description, Webmasters act as support for "university communications and marketing efforts through the production of the top-tier University web pages and other various University departmental and unit web sites." Additionally, Webmasters provide web-related support to other office staff members and University personnel.

According to the [Political Organization 1] website, Ms. McMeekan founded the organization in 2019 and serves as its current president.³ According to its mission statement, the [Political Organization 1] is a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization that focuses on increasing the participation of women and girls in civic engagement, politics, and public policy-making at the local, state, and federal level.⁴

The State Officials and Employees Ethics Act (Ethics Act) prohibits State employees from conducting political activity during compensated time and prohibits use of State property/resources for the benefit of a campaign or political organization.⁵ The Ethics Act defines prohibited political activity as including working on a campaign for elective office; preparing for or organizing a political rally, demonstration, or other political event; and preparing for distribution campaign literature, campaign signs, or other campaign material on behalf of any candidate for elective office.⁶ WIU policy also prohibits certain political activity, stating that "University facilities and services shall not be used to promote, help finance, or to support any individual, group, or

¹ In the original founded report, issued on June 30, 2021, the OEIG wrote that it identified 82 social media posts from Ms. McMeekan's personal social media account. It has since come to the OEIG's attention that 6 of the previously identified posts occurred during times when Ms. McMeekan was on approved leave or that cannot be verified whether or not she was on leave. These 6 posts have been deleted from the current chart in this Amended Final Report, located on pages 4–5. These amendments do not change the basis of the OEIG's findings against Ms. McMeekan.

² [The information in this footnote is redacted because it relates to an allegation in which the OEIG did not make a determination that reasonable cause exists to believe a violation has occurred. Therefore, the Commission exercises its discretion to redact this section pursuant to 5 ILCS 430/20-52].

³ [Website of Political Organization 1].

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ 5 ILCS 430/5-15. The Ethics Act defines a political organization as including a party, committee, association, fund, or other organization (whether or not incorporated) that is required to file a statement of organization with the State Board of Elections or a county clerk under Section 9-3 of the Election Code, but only with regard to those activities that require filing with the State Board of Elections or a county clerk. 5 ILCS 430/1–5 *et seq.*

⁶ *Id.*

organization campaigning for an elected office” other than listed exceptions that are not relevant to this investigation.⁷

WIU’s Appropriate Use Procedures require employees to “[u]se only those computing resources that they are authorized to use and use them only in the manner and to the extent authorized.”⁸ WIU’s Policy on Email Usage and Political Activity states: “Individuals receiving direct, person-to-person electronic messages have a responsibility to tell the sender to discontinue unwanted communications.”⁹

III. INVESTIGATION

A. Ms. McMeekan’s Work Hours And Time Records

According to WIU’s [WIU Employee 2] Ms. McMeekan’s work hours are 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday. Ms. McMeekan’s timesheets document the total hours worked per day, 7.5 hours, and whether any benefit time was taken each day. The timesheets do not allow for the recording of time used for breaks or lunch, nor do they indicate the start or stop times for an employee’s workday. The bottom of each timesheet requires both the employee and supervisor to “confirm” the accuracy of the time reported by indicating “Y/N” above their respective names.

WIU policy states that Civil Service employees, such as the Webmaster, must take a minimum of a thirty-minute lunch between 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM but may not exceed one hour. Additionally, supervisors may authorize 15-minute breaks or “reasonable rest periods” during each half-day of the workday, and breaks may not be used to cover a late arrival or early departure.

B. Review Of Ms. McMeekan’s WIU Email Account

The OEIG obtained emails that were sent to and from Ms. McMeekan’s university email account from July 1, 2018 to April 7, 2020. In total, the OEIG received over 20,000 incoming emails and over 1,500 outgoing emails. In light of the volume of emails, the OEIG searched them for various politically oriented search terms.¹⁰ Through these searches, and subsequent further review of her email account, OEIG investigators identified the following emails sent from Ms. McMeekan’s WIU email address, or forwarded from her personal email address to her WIU email address, during her scheduled work hours on days when her time records reflected that she was working:

⁷ WIU’s Policy on Political Activity is found within the Official University Policy Manual, located at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/polact.php>.

⁸ WIU’s Appropriate Use Procedures are found within the Administrative Procedures handbook, located at http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/administrative_procedures_handbook/appropriateUse.php.

⁹ WIU’s Policy on E-Mail Usage and Political Activity is found within the Official University Policy Manual, located at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/email.php>.

¹⁰ The search terms used included the following: Republican, Democratic, Conservative, Vote, Support, [Politician 1], President, McDonough County, Protest, [Politician 5], [Political Organization 1], [Political Organization 2], [Politician 4], [Politician 3], and [Politician 2].

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Content</u>
10/1/2018	9:46 AM	Ms. McMeekan forwarded to her work email, an email chain that discussed biographies for a McDonough County Board election and picking up campaign signs in support of [Elective Office 1] and [Elective Office 2] candidates, [Candidate 1] and [Candidate 2], respectively.
10/19/2018	8:08 AM	Ms. McMeekan replied to an email from [Elective Office 1] candidate [Candidate 1] that inquired about the status of memes that were being used for his campaign. Ms. McMeekan stated that “a few” memes would be ready for [Candidate 1] by that Sunday.
11/30/2018	3:47 PM	Ms. McMeekan emailed a [Political Organization 1] member the [Political Organization 1] organization constitution as an attachment.
1/4/2019	10:45 AM	Ms. McMeekan sent a [Political Organization 1] member a [Internet Company 1] Forms document that contained the [Political Organization 1] Membership Application. ¹¹
2/27/2019	12:35 PM	Ms. McMeekan replied to an email from another WIU employee with the subject, “tonight: democratic women,” that inquired about an event scheduled that evening at City Hall. Ms. McMeekan stated, “We are going to be pressing all our local decision makers to start addressing Climate Change locally. We cannot wait for the federal government to make them.”

Additionally, OEIG identified numerous emails that Ms. McMeekan received from political organizations on her State email account, including approximately 1,663 emails from the [Political Organization 2], 515 from the [Campaign 1], 221 from [Politician 2], 179 from [Politician 3], and 74 from the [Politician 4] campaign for [Campaign 2]. During the 12 days between October 27, 2018 and November 7, 2018, Ms. McMeekan’s State email account received over 430 emails, the majority of which were related to the November 6, 2018 election.

In the emails received on Ms. McMeekan’s State email account from various political organizations, each organization provided some type of mechanism to unsubscribe from or stop receiving future emails. For example, the [Political Organization 2] emails contained two options at the bottom of each email that would allow recipients to unsubscribe from or limit the number of emails received: (1) “If you’d like to take a break from [Political Organization 2] emails, click here”; and (2) “If you’d like to stop receiving all emails from [Political Organization 2], please click here.” Each option provided a link for the recipient to click on in order to be removed from the organization’s mailing list. The emails from the other political organizations contained similar

¹¹ In order to access [Internet Company 1] Forms, one must first use credentials to log in to the associated email address. If a [Internet Company 1] Forms document is sent to a recipient, the document arrives in the recipient’s email inbox and also appears in the sender’s email sent box.

variations of these mechanisms.¹² A review of Ms. McMeekan's outgoing emails did not identify any emails that she sent requesting any political organizations to remove her State email address from their email list.

C. Social Media Posts

On April 1, 2020, OEIG investigators initially reviewed social media posts published on a [Social Media Service 1] page with the name "Heather Marie McMeekan," and subsequently periodically completed additional checks of that page through May 21, 2020.¹³ Investigators compared these posts with Ms. McMeekan's signed timekeeping records, and identified many posts made to Ms. McMeekan's page during her scheduled work hours on days when her time records reflected that she was working. The OEIG randomly sampled eleven days for which Ms. McMeekan's timesheets reflected she worked full 7.5-hour days, and determined that on these days, there were posts and/or comments on Ms. McMeekan's personal [Social Media Service 1] page a total of approximately 76 times during her scheduled work hours of 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, as detailed below:

Dates	Time(s)	Total # of Posts
Thursday, 2/20/20	10:57 AM, 10:58 AM, 11:57 AM, 1:04 PM, 1:15 PM, 1:51 PM, 1:57 PM, 2:15 PM, 2:26 PM	9
Friday, 2/21/20	9:41 AM	1
Tuesday, 2/25/20	2:55 PM, 3:20 PM, 3:48 PM	3
Wednesday, 2/26/20	8:00 AM, 9:05 AM, 9:33 AM, 9:35 AM, 9:49 AM, 9:52 AM, 10:37 AM, 11:03 AM, 11:23 AM, 11:25 AM, 12:02 PM, 12:03 PM, 12:06 PM, 12:27 PM, 1:05 PM, 2:24 PM, 2:35 PM, 3:44 PM, 3:47 PM	19
Thursday, 2/27/20	9:49 AM, 9:53 AM, 11:25 AM, 11:51 AM, 1:15 PM, 1:25 PM, 2:00 PM, 2:12 PM, 2:18 PM, 2:24 PM, 4:25 PM	11
Monday, 3/16/20	8:23 AM, 8:30 AM, 8:59 AM, 9:01 AM, 9:16 AM, 10:59 AM, 11:20 AM, 11:51 AM, 1:54 PM, 2:08 PM	10
Tuesday, 3/17/20	9:52 AM, 10:10 AM, 12:51 PM, 1:13 PM	4
Thursday, 3/19/20	8:10 AM, 8:40 AM, 8:46 AM, 9:01 AM, 9:41 AM, 10:26 AM, 10:27 AM, 10:40 AM, 11:03 AM, 2:31 PM	10
Friday, 3/20/20	8:35 AM, 12:41 PM	2

¹² Many of organizations also included the following language: "If you believe you received this email in error or no longer wish to receive emails from us, please unsubscribe," along with a link that would remove the recipient from future email lists.

¹³ Ms. McMeekan confirmed in her OEIG interview that this page was her personal [Social Media Service 1] page.

Tuesday, 3/24/20	9:45 AM, 9:46 AM, 10:59 AM	3
Monday, 4/6/20	9:47 AM, 10:10 AM, 11:17 AM, 2:01 PM	4
Grand Total		76

As noted above, for some of the dates reviewed, there were multiple posts and/or comments throughout Ms. McMeekan's scheduled working hours. For example, the following summarizes posts and comments that were posted on Ms. McMeekan's page from Ms. McMeekan's account during her scheduled working hours on Monday, March 16, 2020, a date when her time records indicated she was working:

March 16, 2020 Posts

Time	Summary of Post/Comment
8:23AM	Link to an article from [News Source 1] "Italy Has Been Trying To Send Us A Warning. Will We Listen? The country with the world's second-worst COVID-19 outbreak is imploring..."
8:30AM	Caption: From 2018....but in their haste to destroy all Obama's good work, they destroyed pandemic preparedness, too. Republicans have condemned us all to far more suffering and deaths thanks to their anti-science stupidity." Link to an article from [News Source 2] "Top White House official in charge of pandemic response exits abruptly"
8:59AM	Link to an article from [News Source 3] "Coronavirus is exposing America's shameful selfish streak. We have forgotten how to make sacrifices for each other. We have forgotten..."
9:01AM	Link to an article from [News Source 4] "Groups: Release immigrant detainees at high coronavirus risk. Immigrant rights groups want U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement..."
9:16AM	Post of an image that reads: "Sending love to immuno compromised people, people without stable income, anyone experiencing chronic anxiety, students struggling financially, emotionally, or physically, parents worried about their child(ren)'s well-being, anyone struggling mentally & physically."
10:59AM	Caption: "Gee....BTW, Macomb, Rushville's response by their city leaders puts ours to shame" Link to an article from [News Source 5] "Taylorville mayor asks residents to stay home"
11:20AM	Link to an article from [News Source 6] "15 Broadway Plays and Musicals You Can Watch On Stage From Home [News Source 6]"
11:51AM	Caption: "...Any politician not pushing for immediate closure of all public spaces and events doesn't deserve our support." Link to an article from [News Source 7] "It could happen to anybody: Kenner lawyer, 45, in critical care with coronavirus, wife says"
1:54PM	Link to an article from [News Source 8] "If you voted for [Politician 1], You Owe My Children an Apology"
2:08PM	Post of an image that reads: "Straights: I can't believe the government would just ignore an epidemic that threatens thousands of lives. Gays: You don't say..."

While many of the posts to Ms. McMeekan's page were about political issues, in the sampling reviewed the OEIG did not identify any during her scheduled working hours on days when her time records reflected that she was working, that related to working on a campaign for elective office, organizing a political event, soliciting campaign contributions, soliciting votes on behalf of a candidate, distributing campaign literature, or other activities listed in the Ethics Act's definition of prohibited political activity.¹⁴

OEIG investigators also reviewed social media posts from an organization [Social Media Service 1] page under the name "[Political Organization 1]." On the dates reviewed, OEIG investigators identified numerous posts on the [Political Organization 1] [Social Media Service 1] page made during Ms. McMeekan's scheduled work hours, but these posts do not identify the user who created and posted them from the [Political Organization 1] [Social Media Service 1] page.

OEIG investigators also reviewed posts made on a [Social Media Service 2] account under the name "Heather McMeekan" with the username "[Social Media Service 2 Username]." ¹⁵ Although OEIG identified numerous [Social Media Service 2 Posts] made on Ms. McMeekan's scheduled workdays, the times of posting could not be identified.

D. Interview Of Heather McMeekan

On October 6, 2020, OEIG investigators interviewed Ms. McMeekan. Ms. McMeekan stated that as Webmaster in WIU's University Technology department she has "direct responsibility for over 38,000 webpages" at WIU, and that she provides direct support and was listed as an administrator for several WIU departmental webpages and [Social Media Service 1] pages. She said that she has an office on WIU's campus, but due to COVID-19 restrictions, she has been working from home since March 2020. Ms. McMeekan confirmed that she was issued a WIU laptop but said that WIU did not issue her a work cell phone. She said that since she has been working from home, she has been using her personal laptop computer rather than the WIU-issued laptop.

Ms. McMeekan stated that she also is the founder and current president of the [Political Organization 1], which she identified as a 501(c)(4) non-profit educational organization that cannot endorse candidates.¹⁶ In addition, she said that she is the committee person in the MC-1 [precinct for National Political Organization 1].

Ms. McMeekan stated that prior to March 2020, her usual workday at WIU was Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM, with two paid 15-minute breaks and a one-hour paid lunch break taken at varying times.¹⁷ Ms. McMeekan stated that due to the nature of her work, she and

¹⁴ See 5 ILCS 430/1-5.

¹⁵ Ms. McMeekan confirmed in her OEIG interview that [Social Media Service 2 Username] was her personal [Social Media Service 2] account.

¹⁶ OEIG reviewed the Illinois State Board of Elections website and did not identify any filings by the [Political Organization 1].

¹⁷ As noted above, WIU's CIO advised the OEIG that Ms. McMeekan's scheduled work hours are 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM. In an August 31, 2020 interview, Ms. McMeekan's supervisor, [WIU Employee 1], stated that Ms. McMeekan's

her team often receive three 5-minute breaks in lieu of each 15-minute break. She stated that while working from home, her lunch times were “all over the place,” but she tried to take her lunch sometime between 10:30 AM and 2:00 PM. Ms. McMeekan stated that due to [Personal Medical Issue 1] since working from home, her supervisor, [WIU Employee 1], has allowed her to check in early (around 4:00 or 5:00 AM), answer emails, go back to sleep for one to two hours, and then continue working later in the evening. Investigators showed Ms. McMeekan various timesheets throughout her interview, and for each timesheet shown, Ms. McMeekan confirmed that she reviewed and approved the timesheets.

Ms. McMeekan confirmed that between 2018 and 2020, she received approximately 74 emails from [Politician 4] campaign and over 1,600 emails from the [Political Organization 2] on her WIU email. Ms. McMeekan claimed that she never registered her WIU email address to either organization or requested to get emails from either organization. Ms. McMeekan said that her WIU email address was used when the forms were completed to name her to the [Precinct Committee for National Political Organization 1] Precinct Committee, and the emails from both organizations may have started around that time. She further stated that she received on her WIU email account approximately 15 to 20 emails per day from the [Campaign 1]. Ms. McMeekan stated that as a “public figure,” she receives a great deal of unwanted or spam email from political organizations.

According to Ms. McMeekan, she has tried adding the [Political Organization 2] and the [Politician 4] campaign to the email spam filters and unsubscribing from their email lists, but that she “gave up” with regard to reporting the [Politician 1] emails as spam. Ms. McMeekan maintained she also sent a message to the [Politician 4] campaign to stop sending emails to her WIU email account but said she did not receive a response. Additionally, Ms. McMeekan claimed she contacted the chair and the secretary for her local [precinct for National Political Organization 1] to remove her WIU email address from their rolls, but said she was still getting emails from the organization.

Ms. McMeekan said that her username and password are required to log into her WIU account, and that she has not given her computer sign-in information to anyone. Investigators showed Ms. McMeekan copies of the emails sent from her WIU email address on November 30, 2018 and January 4, 2019, which, as noted in the chart above, sent information related to the [Political Organization 1]. Ms. McMeekan confirmed that she sent both emails from her work email address, and that the emails were not related to her work at WIU. Ms. McMeekan said that the November 30, 2018 (3:47 PM) email was not sent during a break, but she claimed that she may have been off work already if she started her workday early that day. Ms. McMeekan also claimed that she believed she was using her personal email account and her personal cell phone when she sent these emails.¹⁸

work hours were 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM, but in a subsequent November 24, 2020 interview [WIU Employee 1] stated that prior to March 2020 Ms. McMeekan’s scheduled work hours were 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM.

¹⁸ OEIG discovered the other emails on Ms. McMeekan’s WIU email address that are listed in the chart above, after Ms. McMeekan’s interview had already been completed. As a result, Ms. McMeekan was not asked about these emails or their contents.

Ms. McMeekan said that in order to access a [Social Media Service 1] page for a WIU department, she first has to sign onto her personal [Social Media Service 1] page. However, Ms. McMeekan said that, related to use of [Social Media Service 1], she and [WIU Employee 1] have discussed that she had to work to “keep personal and professional lives separate.” She said that these discussions occurred at various times, including after a 2018 complaint was filed against Ms. McMeekan about her online presence during work hours.¹⁹ Ms. McMeekan confirmed that those in her work section also have “regular talks” about being cautious when using social media during the workday.

Ms. McMeekan confirmed that the [Social Media Service 1] page under the name “Heather Marie McMeekan” was her personal [Social Media Service 1] page, and that all posts on that page were created or reposted by her. Ms. McMeekan confirmed that she had not given anyone else access or permission to use her personal social media accounts, including [Social Media Service 1] and [Social Media Service 2]. OEIG investigators showed Ms. McMeekan a sampling of posts obtained from her personal [Social Media Service 1] page that were published during her assigned work hours on days she reported working on her timesheets. Other than a couple of posts that she said she did not recall, Ms. McMeekan admitted that she published the posts on her [Social Media Service 1] page.

For example, OEIG investigators asked Ms. McMeekan about multiple posts on her [Social Media Service 1] page from March 16, 2020 with various timestamps, including 8:23 AM, 8:30 AM, 8:59 AM, 9:01 AM, 9:16 AM, 10:59 AM, 11:20 AM, 11:51 AM, 1:54 PM, and 2:08 PM, as listed in the chart above. Ms. McMeekan stated that the 8:23 AM post, which discussed Covid-19, was posted from her cell phone during her break. Ms. McMeekan said she typed the 11:20 AM post regarding Broadway plays during her lunch break. She indicated that she shared these plays with “traumatized people” who do not have the funds to be able to pay for online entertainment and it was good for WIU’s campus community. Ms. McMeekan also confirmed that she posted the content in the 11:51 AM post regarding a family affected by Covid-19 for the sake of WIU’s campus community. Ms. McMeekan said that she made her 1:54 PM post regarding individuals who voted for then-[Politician 1] because she felt that “it was destroying our children’s safety.” Ms. McMeekan stated that all of these posts occurred during her normal scheduled work hours but that she might have been working a modified schedule that day. Ms. McMeekan indicated that she worked a modified schedule during spring break to cover her department, working later in the evening, and added that she might have been half asleep when posting. Ms. McMeekan further claimed that if she was at work when these posts were made, they were created using her cell phone during her work breaks or lunch period.

Ms. McMeekan stated that she tries to make sure posts on her personal [Social Media Service 1] page are of benefit to WIU students when posted during the workday, or that posts are made during her breaks. During her interview, Ms. McMeekan often referred to herself as an “ally” for WIU students, claiming that many of her [Social Media Service 1] posts made during work hours were done so because of her role as a student ally. When asked what she did when acting as an ally, Ms. McMeekan said she was able to “ask tough questions of people in power,” and she was available to attend to “emotional needs.” Ms. McMeekan also stated that she usually

¹⁹ [The information in this footnote is redacted because it relates to allegations that the WIU determined were unfounded. Therefore, the Commission exercises its discretion to redact this section pursuant to 5 ILCS 430/20-52.]

takes a ten-to-fifteen-minute walk during the afternoon, where she makes it a point to post one to two items on her [Social Media Service 1] that she deems “important.”

Additionally, Ms. McMeekan confirmed that she set up the [Political Organization 1] [Social Media Service 1] page and still maintained administrative access to add or remove posts to it but said that other members also have access to add or remove content on that page. Ms. McMeekan said she had shared community news on the [Political Organization 1] [Social Media Service 1] page that occurred during her workday, such as notices of lost dogs or significant news events from the area around WIU, and said that [WIU Employee 1] was aware of those uses. Ms. McMeekan added that [WIU Employee 1] warned her to use caution when posting on [Social Media Service 1], and that even though she uses [Social Media Service 1] for WIU purposes, she was not to post to “the [National Political Organization 1] stuff” during her workday. Ms. McMeekan said that any work she did in her role as the committee person in the MC-1 [precinct for National Political Organization 1] was completed outside of her work hours.

Ms. McMeekan confirmed that [Social Media Service 2 Username] is her personal [Social Media Service 2] account, and that she has not given anyone else access or permission to use it. When shown various [Social Media Service 2] posts from that account that were made on days when she reported working, Ms. McMeekan said that if she posted the [Social Media Service 2 Posts], it probably would have been when she was on a break.

Ms. McMeekan offered to investigators that she suffered from [Personal Medical Issue 1], [Personal Medical Issue 2], and [Personal Medical Issue 3].²⁰ Ms. McMeekan called it “a struggle” to keep separate her computer activities for work and for her outside activities, and attributed mistakes due to these episodes to her [Personal Medical Issue 3]. For example, Ms. McMeekan said that due to her [Personal Medical Issue 3] she has different “fragments,” and “under duress, those fragments may be more driving the bus.” Ms. McMeekan stated that some of these fragments may be younger but she cannot access the skills from an older fragment until she reaches out to a friend, and “all of sudden the wall of [Personal Medical Issue 3] lets down.” Ms. McMeekan further stated that when her [Personal Medical Issue 2] is triggered during the workday, she sometimes has to reach out to friends using her phone or [Social Media Service 3].

Ms. McMeekan said she had a letter and other documents on file for a reasonable accommodation for her [Personal Medical Issue 2], which allowed her to go online for support “during times of stress.” Ms. McMeekan also stated that [WIU Employee 1] had granted her permission to work a modified schedule as part of these accommodations.

E. Interviews Of [WIU Employee 1]

The OEIG interviewed [WIU Employee 1] on August 31, 2020 and November 24, 2020.²¹ [WIU Employee 1] stated that he has been Ms. McMeekan’s supervisor since he became the

²⁰ At the beginning of her interview, Ms. McMeekan was asked whether she had any physical or mental condition that would affect her ability to understand and answer questions. Ms. McMeekan did not indicate that she was having any trouble understanding or answering questions during her interview.

²¹ For purposes of this report, the OEIG will generally refer to his “OEIG interview” when describing statements made and exhibits shown on either day.

[identifying information redacted] in 2005 or 2006. [WIU Employee 1] said that as part of her WIU duties, Ms. McMeekan has used her personal [Social Media Service 1] page during her workday to access WIU [Social Media Service 1] pages for maintenance and to assist other departments, but that that was infrequent. [WIU Employee 1] said he had never given Ms. McMeekan permission to make posts or changes to her personal [Social Media Service 1] or [Social Media Service 2] accounts during work hours. [WIU Employee 1] said Ms. McMeekan's involvement with students for web-related questions or problems was "almost zero," and that working as an "ally" was not part of her job.²²

In his initial interview, [WIU Employee 1] stated that Ms. McMeekan's work hours were 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM, but in his subsequent interview he stated that Ms. McMeekan's scheduled work hours had been 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM. [WIU Employee 1] said that she had a one-hour lunch break taken at varying times between 11:00 AM and 1:00 PM, and that in addition to the lunch break, WIU policies allowed his employees to have two 15-minute work breaks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. [WIU Employee 1] said no one had asked him about separating their 15-minute work breaks into three 5-minute sections, and that he probably would not allow that, because that idea went against the intentions of a break.

[WIU Employee 1] said that any changes in Ms. McMeekan's hours had to be requested and approved by him and documented in the team calendar. [WIU Employee 1] said occasionally Ms. McMeekan mentioned that she "[Personal Medical Issue 1]," but said she had made no requests for any accommodations for [Personal Medical Issue 1]. He said that Ms. McMeekan did not have permission to work a modified schedule, such as doing work during times [Personal Medical Issue 1] then splitting her workday, and that she had not asked him about working during early morning hours while she was awake. [WIU Employee 1] said there was not enough work to do outside normal office hours to justify someone working other than normal office hours.

[WIU Employee 1] said Ms. McMeekan had told him that she had an occasional inability to concentrate, causing her to be easily distracted, which she said was caused by her medical condition. [WIU Employee 1] said he worked with WIU's Office of Equal Opportunity and Access (EOA) to position Ms. McMeekan's work desk in the WIU offices so she could see her office door, and worked with Facilities Management to install full-spectrum fluorescent lighting in her office. [WIU Employee 1] said Ms. McMeekan had not told him, nor does he have any documents from the EOA, that Ms. McMeekan may use her cell phone or [Social Media Service 3] as an accommodation, adding that would be "an odd accommodation." [WIU Employee 1] said that Ms. McMeekan had mentioned her medical condition to him but said he had not received any documents from EOA about the condition.

[WIU Employee 1] said that in the past, he had reminded Ms. McMeekan to make sure her political activities did not involve university resources and were done outside her work hours. [WIU Employee 1] confirmed that these discussions have occurred at various times, including when an employee complained to him about Ms. McMeekan's online activities or when Ms. McMeekan was at work discussing her outside activities with him or other employees. [WIU Employee 1] said as recently as January 2020, he reminded Ms. McMeekan not to discuss politics

²² Ms. McMeekan's job description does not reflect any duties relating to interacting with WIU students in any capacity.

in the office, saying she was telling him about using benefit time to attend a political rally in Springfield. [WIU Employee 1] said he also discussed with her to avoid doing personal things during work hours.

[WIU Employee 1] said it was not appropriate for Ms. McMeekan to receive political emails at her WIU email address, and that he assumed Ms. McMeekan had the computer knowledge to unsubscribe from them. In addition, [WIU Employee 1] said that she could have asked the University Technology Support Center to block nuisance emails from a WIU email account at the server level. During his interview, [WIU Employee 1] used his computer to check support staff work tickets dated back to 2016 and reported that he saw no record of Ms. McMeekan requesting assistance regarding email-related issues.

[WIU Employee 1] said he had no knowledge that Ms. McMeekan was posting to her personal [Social Media Service 1] page during her workday. When shown multiple posts on Ms. McMeekan's [Social Media Service 1] page dated April 6, 2020, including at 9:47 AM, 10:10 AM, 11:17 AM, and 2:01 PM, [WIU Employee 1] said he could attribute two or three of the posts to Ms. McMeekan's work breaks and lunch breaks, but not all of them, because the times would not add up correctly.

F. Accommodation Documents

Because Ms. McMeekan claimed to have received accommodations for medical conditions which allowed her to use her personal social media during her work hours and work a modified schedule, investigators asked WIU to produce its policies relating to requests for reasonable accommodations, and any records relating to accommodations granted to Ms. McMeekan.

WIU policy requires employees seeking a reasonable accommodation of a disability to provide appropriate documentation of the disability and meet with the Affirmative Action/ADA Compliance Office and the employee's supervisor to discuss the essential functions of the job position, the needed reasonable accommodation, the appropriateness of the accommodation to the work environment, and the recommended course of action. WIU determines all reasonable accommodations requests on a case-by-case basis specific to the impact of the disability on the individual.²³

In response to the OEIG's request for documents relating to any allowances or accommodations provided to Ms. McMeekan based on any physical, psychological, or mental disability or condition, WIU produced documents related to a 2011 accommodation request. The documentation indicated that the only accommodations requested and provided were for full spectrum lighting, a headset, an office away from odors, and a desk-facing door.

IV. ANALYSIS

Although the OEIG discovered only minimal instances of Ms. McMeekan sending to or from her State email account campaign-related emails, evidence showed that she received a

²³ WIU's policy "ADA Services for Faculty/Staff" can be located at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/adafacstaff.php>.

significant number of emails from multiple political organizations on her State email account over an extended period of time. The OEIG's investigation also revealed that Ms. McMeekan regularly and frequently posted on her personal social media throughout her work hours. Finally, Ms. McMeekan provided false statements in her OEIG interview regarding receiving permission to work a modified schedule and using social media for personal purposes during her work hours.

During its investigation, the OEIG identified several emails in Ms. McMeekan's State email account over a nearly two-year period that arguably constitute prohibited political activity under the Ethics Act. Further review of Ms. McMeekan's personal [Social Media Service 1] page did not identify posts that met the Ethics Act's definition of prohibited political activity. While Ms. McMeekan is the president of the [Political Organization 1] and has access to its [Social Media Service 1] page, and the OEIG identified posts made to it during Ms. McMeekan's State work hours, Ms. McMeekan stated that other individuals also have access to the [Political Organization 1] [Social Media Service 1] page. In light of the minimal evidence of prohibited political activity, the OEIG does not make a finding that Ms. McMeekan violated the Ethics Act's prohibited political activity provision.

However, the OEIG discovered an extensive number of emails that Ms. McMeekan received on her State email account from political organizations. Between July 1, 2018 and April 7, 2020, Ms. McMeekan received over 2,100 emails from various political organizations, and during just a 12-day period from October 27, 2018 through November 7, 2018, Ms. McMeekan received approximately 430 emails, the majority of which were from political organizations. Although Ms. McMeekan claimed that she tried to take steps to either unsubscribe or contact the organizations, OEIG did not find any evidence to support her assertions. The evidence showed that all of these emails included some type of mechanism allowing a recipient to easily unsubscribe from or stop receiving future emails, but the emails continued to come to Ms. McMeekan's account from multiple political organizations over an extended period of time. A review of Ms. McMeekan's outgoing State emails did not reveal any emails that she sent requesting political organizations to remove her State email address from their email list. Additionally, [WIU Employee 1] confirmed that the University Technology Support Center would have helped block these emails, but he saw no record of Ms. McMeekan requesting assistance regarding email-related issues. Especially given that Ms. McMeekan is an IT employee, she was perfectly capable of knowing how to unsubscribe, request assistance from the Support Center to block these emails, or even simply to email them back saying to stop.

Per WIU's Policy on Email Usage and Political Activity, "[i]ndividuals receiving direct, person-to-person electronic messages have a responsibility to tell the sender to discontinue unwanted communications."²⁴ Ms. McMeekan's failure to take action to inform the various political organizations to discontinue communications violated WIU's email usage and political activity policy, and thus, this allegation is [REDACTED].²⁵

²⁴ WIU's Policy on E-Mail Usage and Political Activity is located at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/email.php>.

²⁵ The OEIG concludes that an allegation is "[redacted]" when it has determined that there is reasonable cause to believe that a violation of law or policy has occurred, or that there has been fraud, waste, mismanagement, misconduct, nonfeasance, misfeasance, or malfeasance.

The OEIG also discovered that Ms. McMeekan frequently posted to her personal [Social Media Service 1] page during her State work hours. For example, in a sampling of 11 days when Ms. McMeekan's timesheets reflected she worked full 7.5-hour days, there were posts and/or comments on Ms. McMeekan's personal [Social Media Service 1] page a total of approximately 76 times during her scheduled work hours. Ms. McMeekan admitted that she created many of the posts she was asked about and confirmed that she was the only person who had access to her personal social media accounts but claimed that she made many of these posts during her breaks. The OEIG, however, identified multiple dates with posts and comments that were made throughout her scheduled work hours, all of which could not have been made solely during her two 15-minute breaks or half-hour lunch period. For example, even accepting Ms. McMeekan's claim that she was on a morning break when she posted to her [Social Media Service 1] page at 8:23 AM on March 16, 2020, and that she was on her lunch break when she posted at 11:20 AM that day, she could not have also been on breaks for all of her various other posts at 8:59 AM, 9:01 AM, 9:16 AM, and 10:59 AM that day.

Ms. McMeekan also claimed that she was permitted to divide her 15-minute breaks into three 5-minute breaks, allowing for a total of six breaks throughout the day, in addition to her lunch period, and that her supervisor, [WIU Employee 1], permitted her to work a modified schedule due to her [Personal Medical Issue 1]. The evidence does not support Ms. McMeekan's assertions. [WIU Employee 1] denied ever permitting Ms. McMeekan to divide her breaks into smaller increments and confirmed that Ms. McMeekan was only entitled to two fifteen-minute breaks and a half hour lunch period. [WIU Employee 1] also said in his interview that he did not give Ms. McMeekan permission to work a modified schedule, and WIU did not produce any documentation verifying that Ms. McMeekan requested and received a reasonable accommodation that would allow for such a schedule.

Additionally, Ms. McMeekan claimed that posting to her personal [Social Media Service 1] page was part of her work duties and was permitted because she was helping the community and acting as an ally on behalf of WIU students. However, Ms. McMeekan's job description does not mention any Webmaster duty or responsibility relating to interacting with WIU students. [WIU Employee 1] confirmed that her job does not include such duties and said he had never given Ms. McMeekan permission to make posts or makes edits or changes to her personal social media accounts during work hours. Thus, the allegation that Ms. McMeekan abused State time by posting to her personal [Social Media Service 1] page during her State work hours is [REDACTED].

Finally, during Ms. McMeekan's OEIG interview, she made statements that were false. Among other questionable statements, she stated in her interview that [WIU Employee 1] permitted her to work a modified schedule due to her [Personal Medical Issue 1], and that she had reasonable accommodations in place with WIU for her [Personal Medical Issue 2], which included allowing her to go online for support. However, [WIU Employee 1] said Ms. McMeekan had made no requests for a modified schedule, and that she did not have permission to work a modified schedule, such as doing work during times she could not sleep then splitting her workday. In addition, there is no documentation of any accommodations granted to Ms. McMeekan that allowed her to modify her scheduled work hours or use her personal social media during her workday, and [WIU Employee 1] was unaware of any accommodations granted to Ms. McMeekan.

to use her cell phone or her personal computer/[Social Media Service 3] as therapy or an accommodation.

Section 20-70 of the Ethics Act provides that “[i]t is the duty of every . . . employee under the jurisdiction of an Executive Inspector General . . . to cooperate . . . in any investigation Failure to cooperate includes . . . intentional omissions and knowing false statements.”²⁶ Because Ms. McMeekan made statements during her OEIG interview that were false, the OEIG finds that the allegation that Ms. McMeekan failed to cooperate with the OEIG’s investigation is [REDACTED].

V. [REDACTED] AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of its investigation, the OEIG concludes that there is **REASONABLE CAUSE TO ISSUE THE FOLLOWING [REDACTED]**:

- [REDACTED] – Ms. McMeekan violated WIU’s email use and political activity policy by her failure to take action to stop communications from various political organizations sent to her State email.
- [REDACTED] – Ms. McMeekan abused State time by frequently accessing her personal social media accounts during her work hours.
- [REDACTED] – Ms. McMeekan failed to cooperate with an OEIG investigation, in violation of the Ethics Act, by knowingly making false statements during an OEIG interview.

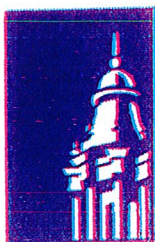
The OEIG recommends that WIU discipline Ms. McMeekan and place a copy of this report in her personnel file.

Additionally, WIU’s timekeeping system only requires employees to record the total hours worked, and does not require them to record their start, end, or break times. Nearly two years ago, in September 2019, the OEIG referred case number 19-00674 to WIU with a recommendation that WIU:

reconsider its timekeeping policies and require employees to record the actual times worked, specifying start times and end times, to the nearest quarter hour so that it may be determined when employees are on State compensated time.

As this case illustrates, WIU’s continued use of a timekeeping system that does not include such requirements makes effective supervisory oversight of employees difficult, and makes it difficult to later determine whether employees are on State compensated time when they conduct non-work activities, including prohibited political activity. Therefore, the OEIG again recommends that WIU implement a new timekeeping system requiring employees to record start times, end times, lunch periods, and any permitted breaks.

²⁶ 5 ILCS 430/20-70.



WESTERN
ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY

July 21, 2021

Via Electronic Mail at [REDACTED]

Ms. Susan M. Haling
Office of the Executive Inspector General
69 W. Washington, Suite 3400
Chicago, IL 60602

Re: OEIG Case No. 20-00478

Dear Executive Inspector General Haling:

This is in response to the OEIG's Final Summary Report related to the above-subject matter. The report indicated that the OEIG found evidence to support a conclusion that Western Illinois University (WIU) employee, Heather McMeekan violated WIU's email use and political activity policy by failing to take action to stop communications from various political organizations sent to her State email address, abused state time by frequently accessing her personal social media accounts during her work hours, and failed to cooperate with an OEIG investigation by knowingly making false statements during an OEIG interview violating the Ethics act.

Human Resources sent a copy of the final report to Ms. McMeekan on July 13, 2021 and she was placed on administrative leave, effective July 14, 2021. Human Resources met with Ms. McMeekan and her union representatives on July 15, 2021. On July 16, 2021, the University initiated the State Universities Civil Service Act pre-discharge proceedings. Human Resources sent Ms. McMeekan the required State Universities Civil Service notification of the intent to initiate discharge. The effective date of discharge is not yet known.

The University is in the midst of a multi-year Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementation project. WIU has begun the process of converting our administrative information management system to the ERP system, which will support the collection, storage, processing and reporting of data records including payroll and timekeeping. As part of this project, WIU is reviewing options for timekeeping data collection.

If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Elizabeth L. Duvall
General Counsel



WESTERN
ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY

September 2, 2022

Via Electronic Mail at [REDACTED]

Ms. Susan M. Haling
Office of the Executive Inspector General
69 W. Washington, Suite 3400
Chicago, IL 60602

Re: OFIG Case No. 20-00478

Dear Executive Inspector General Haling:

This is an updated response related to the above-subject matter.

The arbitrator found that she was not discharged for just cause. He directed the University to rescind Ms. McMeekan's July 28, 2021 discharge and reinstate her to her former position as an Information Technology Associate (Webmaster) in the Web Services Office of the University Technology Department, by or before Monday, June 20, 2022. In place of McMeekan's rescinded discharge, WHU was directed to substitute with a 10 working day disciplinary suspension without pay.

She returned to work on June 13, 2022.

If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Elizabeth L. Duvall
General Counsel



Smock, Craig <craig.smock@mcusd709.org>

RE: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] Sept 5 School Board Meeting - Following Up

1 message

Dan <dan.beckler.777@gmail.com>

Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 10:41 AM

To: "Smock, Craig" <craig.smock@mcusd709.org>

Dr. Smock,

Thank you so much for your reply! I'm greatly relieved to hear that the schools have a support network in place for these kids – I had it would and expected it would, but glad to have it confirmed. Thanks again for your leadership! Have a great weekend too!

Dan Beckler

From: Smock, Craig <craig.smock@mcusd709.org>**Sent:** Friday, September 8, 2023 8:37 AM**To:** Dan <dan.beckler.777@gmail.com>**Subject:** Re: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] Sept 5 School Board Meeting - Following Up

Hello, Mr. Beckler,

First of all, thank you for being at our board meeting and having the boldness to speak and share your perspective, especially with so many cameras rolling.

Like you, I was focused on trying to sift through many emotional points and comments, on both sides, to determine what our district can do to improve the lives of our students. Certainly, we can not tolerate unfair treatment or bullying by students or staff, regardless of the issue or worldview. We have forms and procedures in place to address harassment, but perhaps that is an area we need to stress to everyone once again.

We do have several faculty members -- school psychologists, counselors, and social workers -- who support and counsel students who are dealing with difficulty in their lives or are struggling with their relationships and/or sexuality. There certainly is a place for students to go, in addition to many trusted teachers who listen. I know this because I just met with one of those supporting people this week who poured out her heart to me about the many kids that she sees who are in heartbreaking, crisis situations with no place to go. Any notion that LGBTQ kids might be abandoned or "on their own" at MHS or MJHS is definitely not factual. We have those bases very well covered by some very outstanding, loving people.

But, what is very difficult to control, of course, is what any given teenager might say to another teenager. As we have seen with Mr. Saunders' critics, and what we saw at the board meeting, the mere mention of a religious view counter to one's own beliefs is viewed as hate speech by some. It's viewed as harassment. And I'm sure that kids can be more cruel than just quoting Bible verses. I do not think we are ever going to solve that one. But, it is our intentional district goal to teach students to listen to opposing views and to disagree respectfully, unlike so many adult examples that we see in our lives. We will certainly keep working on that.

Again, Mr. Beckler, thanks so much for showing up and reaching out. Concerned parents and community members like you make Morton a great place to live.

Have a nice weekend!

Craig Smock, Supt.

On Thu, Sep 7, 2023 at 4:20 PM Dan <dan.beckler.777@gmail.com> wrote:

Good afternoon, Dr. Smock & Dr. Sander,

I attended and spoke in defense of the school board's statement and in defense of Mr. Saunders this past Tuesday. Again, thank you for the way the board handled this.

I'd like to say that I'm a strong supporter for LGBTQ issues and overall awareness... I have nothing but love and support for all children who are on the journey to figure out who they are and who they may choose to love as they grow into adulthood. All of us have been on that journey at some time and the destination is unique to each of us.

Even though I consider myself an "ally", I was very disturbed and sickened by the arguments and statements made by some of those "advocating" for those concerned LGBTQ families and students. I felt that two of the speakers in particular were simply there to exploit our students for the sake of creating a spectacle, perhaps for the national stage. Despite this, I feel that a couple of the other pro-LGBTQ speakers DID make a couple points which should be considered by the school board outside of that particular agenda. But their attempts to connect those points to a non-sequitur argument attempting to tear down the career and reputation of such a valued educator & administrator was inappropriate, illogical, and caused those points to be lost in rhetoric and posturing.

But what also resonated with me was the fact that several of our students perceive that they have faced bullying and hate within our schools and community due to how they present themselves to the world. I wonder if Morton CUSD 709 has the capacity / ability / mandate to provide some resources to teachers and staff of our schools... perhaps some guidance on what teachers can do if a student comes forward in confidence to them or asks about LGBTQ topics... education about awareness in suicide rates among LGBTQ-identifying children and potential steps or ways to intervene... I'm not urging you to step into any sort of legal quagmire or grey areas as I honestly don't know what the schools could or could not do around providing resources to LGBTQ kids. But I can't help think of the two students (perhaps former?) at the meeting who were clearly trying to communicate that they felt excluded but their voices were lost amidst the shouts of others.

I appreciate your time in reading this, and I hope there are some positive and appropriate actions that would further aid these kids on their personal journeys.

Dan Beckler

1301 S Missouri

Morton, IL 61550

309-339-1729

dan.beckler.777@gmail.com

--

Dr. Craig Smock

Superintendent

Morton C.U.S.D. 709



This is a staff email account managed by Morton Community Unit School District 709. This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error please notify the sender.

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Sept 5 School Board Meeting - Following Up

dan.beckler.777@gmail.com Dan

To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org, joseph.sander@mcusd709.org

Thursday, September 7, 2023 at 4:20:40 PM Central Daylight Time

Good afternoon, Dr. Smock & Dr. Sander,

I attended and spoke in defense of the school board's statement and in defense of Mr. Saunders this past Tuesday. Again, thank you for the way the board handled this.

I'd like to say that I'm a strong supporter for LGTBQ issues and overall awareness... I have nothing but love and support for all children who are on the journey to figure out who they are and who they may choose to love as they grow into adulthood. All of us have been on that journey at some time and the destination is unique to each of us.

Even though I consider myself an "ally", I was very disturbed and sickened by the arguments and statements made by some of those "advocating" for those concerned LGTBQ families and students. I felt that two of the speakers in particular were simply there to exploit our students for the sake of creating a spectacle, perhaps for the national stage. Despite this, I feel that a couple of the other pro-LGTBQ speakers DID make a couple points which should be considered by the school board outside of that particular agenda. But their attempts to connect those points to a non-sequitur argument attempting to tear down the career and reputation of such a valued educator & administrator was inappropriate, illogical, and caused those points to be lost in rhetoric and posturing.

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Morton, IL 61550

309-339-1729

dan.beckler.777@gmail.com

craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

To: dan.beckler.777@gmail.com Dan

Bcc: joseph.sander@mcusd709.org, timothy.braker@mcusd709.org Timothy Braker, troy.teater@mcusd709.org Troy Teater, michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Michael Saunders

Friday, September 8, 2023 at 8:36:37AM Central Daylight Time

Hello, Mr. Beckler,

First of all, thank you for being at our board meeting and having the boldness to speak and share your perspective, especially with so many cameras rolling.

Like you, I was focused on trying to sift through many emotional points and comments, on both sides, to determine what our district can do to improve the lives of our students. Certainly, we can not tolerate unfair treatment or bullying by students or staff, regardless of the issue or worldview. We have forms and procedures in place to address harassment, but perhaps that is an area we need to stress to everyone once again.

We do have several faculty members -- school psychologists, counselors, and social workers -- who support and counsel students who are dealing with difficulty in their lives or are struggling with their relationships and/or sexuality. There certainly is a place for students to go, in addition to many trusted teachers who listen. I know this because I just met with one of those supporting people this week who poured out her heart to me about the many kids that she sees who are in heartbreaking, crisis situations with no place to go. Any notion that LGBTQ kids might be abandoned or "on their own" at MHS or MJHS is definitely not factual. We have those bases very well covered by some very outstanding, loving people.

But, what is very difficult to control, of course, is what any given teenager might say to another teenager. As we have seen with Mr. Saunders' critics, and what we saw at the board meeting, the mere mention of a religious view counter to one's own beliefs is viewed as hate speech by some. It's viewed as harassment. And I'm sure that kids can be more cruel than just quoting Bible verses. I do not think we are ever going to solve that one. But, it is our intentional district goal to teach students to listen to opposing views and to disagree respectfully, unlike so many adult examples that we see in our lives. We will certainly keep working on that.

Again, Mr. Beckler, thanks so much for showing up and reaching out. Concerned parents and community members like you make Morton a great place to live.

Have a nice weekend!

Craig Smock, Supt.

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Morton, IL 61550

309-339-1729

dan.beckler.777@gmail.com

Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Saunders, Michael
To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig

Friday, September 8, 2023 at 8:49:55AM Central Daylight Time

Very well said!

On Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 8:36AM Smock, Craig <craig.smock@mcusd709.org> wrote:
Hello, Mr. Beckler,

First of all, thank you for being at our board meeting and having the boldness to speak and share your perspective, especially with so many cameras rolling.

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But what also resonated with me was the fact that several of our students perceive that they have faced bullying and hate within our schools and community due to how they present themselves to the world. I wonder if Morton CUSD 709 has the capacity / ability / mandate to provide some resources to teachers and staff of our schools... perhaps some guidance on what teachers can do if a student comes forward in confidence to them or asks about LGBTQ topics... education about awareness in suicide rates among LGBTQ-identifying children and potential steps or ways to intervene... I'm not urging you to step into any sort of legal quagmire or grey areas as I honestly don't know what the schools could or could not do around providing resources to LGBTQ kids. But I can't help think of the two students (perhaps former?) at the meeting who were clearly trying to communicate that they felt excluded but their voices were lost amidst the shouts of others.

I appreciate your time in reading this, and I hope there are some positive and appropriate actions that would further aid these kids on their personal journeys.

Dan Beckler

1301 S Missouri

Morton, IL 61550

309-339-1729

dan.beckler.777@gmail.com

Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



craig.smock@mcusd709.org Smock, Craig
To: michael.saunders@mcusd709.org Saunders, Michael

Friday, September 8, 2023 at 8:59:14AM Central Daylight Time

Thanks!

On Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 8:50AM Saunders, Michael <michael.saunders@mcusd709.org> wrote:
Very well said!

On Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 8:36AM Smock, Craig <craig.smock@mcusd709.org> wrote:
Hello, Mr. Beckler,

First of all, thank you for being at our board meeting and having the boldness to speak and share your perspective, especially with so many cameras rolling.

Like you, I was focused on trying to sift through many emotional points and comments, on both sides, to determine what our district can do to improve the lives of our students. Certainly, we can not tolerate unfair treatment or bullying by students or staff, regardless of the issue or worldview. We have forms and procedures in place to address harassment, but perhaps that is an area we need to stress to everyone once again.

We do have several faculty members -- school psychologists, counselors, and social workers -- who support and counsel students who are dealing with difficulty in their lives or are struggling with their relationships and/or sexuality. There certainly is a place for students to go, in addition to many trusted teachers who listen. I know this because I just met with one of those supporting people this week who poured out her heart to me about the many kids that she sees who are in heartbreaking, crisis situations with no place to go. Any notion that LGBTQ kids might be abandoned or "on their own" at MHS or MJHS is definitely not factual. We have those bases very well covered by some very outstanding, loving people.

But, what is very difficult to control, of course, is what any given teenager might say to another teenager. As we have seen with Mr. Saunders' critics, and what we saw at the board meeting, the mere mention of a religious view counter to one's own beliefs is viewed as hate speech by some. It's viewed as harassment. And I'm sure that kids can be more cruel than just quoting Bible verses. I do not think we are ever going to solve that one. But, it is our intentional district goal to teach students to listen to opposing views and to disagree respectfully, unlike so many adult examples that we see in our lives. We will certainly keep working on that.

Again, Mr. Beckler, thanks so much for showing up and reaching out. Concerned parents and community members like you make Morton a great place to live.

Have a nice weekend!

Craig Smock, Supt.

On Thu, Sep 7, 2023 at 4:20 PM Dan <dan.beckler.777@gmail.com> wrote:

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Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



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Dr. Craig Smock
Superintendent
Morton C.U.S.D. 709



dan.beckler.777@gmail.com Dan
To: craig.smock@mcusd709.org 'Smock, Craig'

Friday, September 8, 2023 at 10:41:30AM Central Daylight Time

Dr. Smock,

Thank you so much for your reply! I'm greatly relieved to hear that the schools have a support network in place for these kids -- I had it would and expected it would, but glad to have it confirmed. Thanks again for your leadership! Have a great weekend too!

Dan Beckler

From: Smock, Craig <craig.smock@mcusd709.org>
Sent: Friday, September 8, 2023 8:37 AM
To: Dan <dan.beckler.777@gmail.com>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL EMAIL] Sept 5 School Board Meeting - Following Up

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