SUMMARY REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

Date: May 9, 2022

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Seabold Group

I. INTRODUCTION & SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION

Seabold Group was retained to conduct a fact-finding investigation of misconduct allegations asserted against Monroe School District (District) Superintendent Dr. Justin Blasko by the Monroe Equity Council (MEC), and members of the Monroe Principals Association (MPA) and Monroe Educational Association (MEA). Generally, these parties alleged that Dr. Blasko has abused his authority, engaged in intimidating and bullying behavior, and made inappropriate comments to and about his staff. There were also allegations that Dr. Blasko has created a culture of fear and mistrust throughout the District.

Dr. Blasko was hired in 2010 as the executive director of human resources (HR) and served in that capacity until 2016, when he was promoted to assistant superintendent. As the assistant superintendent, Dr. Blasko had responsibility over Teaching and Learning and HR. Dr. Blasko was appointed superintendent on February 10, 2020, after his predecessor Dr. Fredrika Smith, announced her resignation from the District, effective June 30, 2020. Dr. Smith ended up leaving before the end of her term, and Dr. Blasko was sworn in as superintendent in April 2020.

II. INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

The allegations against Dr. Blasko that are the focus of this investigation first arose in connection with the December 13, 2021 Monroe Board of Directors meeting. A number of students, parents, teachers and community and union leaders appeared at that meeting to express their concerns about issues of racism and other forms of mistreatment of marginalized students throughout the District. During those discussions, concerns were also advanced about Dr. Blasko's alleged inappropriate behavior and lack of leadership. The focus of this investigation was the specific allegations of misconduct and potential policy violations that were asserted against Dr. Blasko, unrelated to the allegations of systemic racism.

<u>December 13, 2021 MEC Letter</u>

In connection with the December 13 Board meeting, the MEC submitted a 9-page letter that included a number of reported incidents of incivility, intimidation, and abuse of authority involving Dr. Blasko. In preparing that letter, the MEC said it had interviewed a number of current and former District staff. Because the letter did not identify the complaining parties, the MEC was asked to provide the names and contact information of those individuals who provided information and who were willing to

participate in this investigation. That request resulted in a number of individuals coming forward to share their experiences with Dr. Blasko.

The MEA

Prior to the December 13, 2021 Board meeting, the MEA, on behalf of its membership, reported a no-confidence vote of Dr. Blasko to the Board of Directors.[1] MEA leadership was asked to provide the name and contact information of members who were willing to participate in this investigation, which resulted in a number of individuals coming forward, including a group of approximately 25 staff from Frank Wagner Elementary who were still upset with Dr. Blasko's decision to remove and immediately place on administrative leave the former Frank Wagner principal near the end of the 2020-21 school year. The group of 25 selected one of their colleagues to speak on the group's behalf.

The MPA

The MPA submitted a statement to the Board of Directors dated December 17, 2021, expressing that the association had lost confidence in Dr. Blasko's leadership and that he had created a "culture of fear, mistrust, and toxicity." MPA leadership was asked to provide the name and contact information of members who were willing to participate in this investigation, which resulted in current and former administrators coming forward to share their experiences. Most of the administrators who were interviewed in this investigation had concerns about Dr. Blasko and they echoed the complaints that had been made publicly by the MEC, MEA, and MPA. There were some who agreed to participate who said they had not personally experienced the negative interactions described by their colleagues.

Additional Witnesses

In total, 50 individuals were interviewed, including Dr. Blasko, some on multiple occasions. In addition to the individuals identified by the MEC, MEA, and MPA, witnesses interviewed included current and former staff at all levels of the organization. Several District staff contacted this investigator to express their support for Dr. Blasko and identified other staff who they believed would also be supportive. Those witnesses were not interviewed unless it was determined that they had personal knowledge of the incidents of alleged misconduct that were the focus of the investigation. The investigator accepts that there are an unknown number of District staff who have not experienced or witnessed negative interactions with Dr. Blasko and that the concerns about his conduct and his leadership are not uniformly held.

In addition to witness interviews, Seabold Group reviewed audio and video recordings, email and text messages, relevant personnel records, performance evaluations, investigation files, and various notes and documentation provided by the witnesses.

This report is intended to be a summary report of factual findings. It is not intended as a comprehensive detail of all the information that was collected, reviewed, and considered as part of the investigation. The factual findings in this report are based on the entirety of the record considered by Seabold Group

[1] The MEA said that approximately 70% of its members responded to the request for a vote, and that 90% of those who responded voted no confidence.

and are not limited to the information referred to in the body of this report. The findings presented in this report are based on a "preponderance" of the evidence, which means that based on reliable evidence gathered during the investigation, it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. These findings are not intended nor should they be construed as legal conclusions.

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The complaints against Dr. Blasko were wide-ranging and shared by a number of individuals who agreed to participate in this investigation but they were not uniformly held. There were some who have worked closely with Dr. Blasko for years who reported that they had no issues and had always found him to be professional and supportive. There were, however, others who also have worked closely with Dr. Blasko and who he likely considered to be close confidants who were some of his harshest critics.

The complaints were similar and included the perception that his first priority is self-preservation and his public image. There were a number of witnesses who stated unequivocally that Dr. Blasko leads through fear and intimidation and has created a toxic environment that permeates throughout the District. He was described as volatile and unpredictable. Dr. Blasko was said to be unreceptive to feedback that didn't align with his views which, over time, has had a chilling effect on his administrators. Few are willing to challenge or confront him, and those who did were perceived to be targeted by Dr. Blasko. There were also a number of individuals who reported that Dr. Blasko personalizes his disagreements and sees those who oppose him as traitors or disloyal. Dr. Blasko was described as "gossipy" and that he at times lacked discretion in discussing issues he had with certain staff. There were a number of staff who were identified as being particularly targeted by Dr. Blasko for assorted reasons, many having to do with Dr. Blasko's perception that they were working to undermine him personally. Again, this view was not unanimous by any means, but the stark contrast in experiences suggests that Dr. Blasko has had different working relationships with different staff.

Many of the complaints against Dr. Blasko were about comments he has made that were viewed as insensitive, unprofessional, and in some cases cruel. In his investigative interview, Dr. Blasko denied making most of the comments attributed to him, but this investigator concludes that he was not forthcoming. To believe Dr. Blasko's denials would require this investigator to find that numerous witnesses were mistaken or lying. In several instances, multiple witnesses reported hearing the same comment or types of comments, such as referring to certain women as a "b*tch" or "evil." In other cases, there was evidence that corroborated what the witnesses were sharing and that contradicted Dr. Blasko's denials. It is not persuasive to this investigator that so many witnesses agreed to participate in this investigation at some risk to themselves, and then proceeded to offer false or misleading information. The various comments that have been reported and that this investigator has concluded, more likely than not, were made by Dr. Blasko are described in detail in the report.

Finally, these types of internal investigations often create fear and anxiety among individuals who are asked to participate. There are legitimate concerns of retaliation. In this investigation, there was a heightened sense of fear and anxiety among the individuals who came forward, even those who were no longer employed by the District. Witnesses were uniformly told that absolute confidentiality could not be guaranteed, and most agreed to go forward with that understanding. Others did not, or they limited what they were willing to say or insisted on no attribution or notes. In the end, 50 individuals

participated, and the experiences they shared that was found to be supported by a preponderance of the evidence is described in the report.

IV. APPLICABLE POLICIES

The applicable District policies include Policy 5010 (Nondiscrimination) and Policy 5290 (Civility in the Workplace). Policy 5010 provides that the "district will provide equal employment opportunity and treatment for all applicants and staff in recruitment, hiring, retention, assignment, transfer, promotion and training. Such equal employment opportunity will be provided without discrimination with respect to race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, honorably-discharged veteran or military status, sex, sexual orientation including gender expression or identity, marital status, the presence of any sensory, mental or physical disability or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability."

Policy 5290 states in relevant part:

Expectations of Stakeholders (Board of Directors, Employees, Parents, Volunteers, Contractors and Visitors)

In support of this policy, the board of directors expects its members and all stakeholders to:

- Treat each other and students with dignity and respect;
- Exercise reasonable, good judgment in handling interpersonal disputes;
- Exercise respect, courtesy, and concern for the dignity and cultural background of
- others;
- Refrain from use of abusive language;
- Model respectful problem-solving;
- Reduce actions or behaviors which might provoke fear, anger, frustration and
- alienation;
- Use clear, concise, and courteous oral and written communication to arrive at goodwill
- solutions;
- Extend common courtesy to others such as saying please and thank you;
- Practice civility in all conversations and behavior;
- Be respectful of others even when in a disagreement;
- Address incivility when it is observed;
- Seek to understand others' points of view and cultural perceptions.

Definition of Uncivil Conduct

For the purposes of this policy, "uncivil conduct" includes but is not limited to, the following:

- Using vulgar, obscene or profane gestures or words;
- Using insulting or disrespectful nonverbal behaviors toward or in connection with
- another;

- Taunting, jeering, or inciting others to taunt or jeer an individual;
- Raising one's voice at another individual, and/or repeatedly interrupting another
- individual who is speaking;
- Using personal epithets or slurs,
- Gesturing or behaving in a manner that puts another in fear for his/her personal
- safety, including invading the personal space of an individual after being directed to
- move away, physically blocking an individual's exit from a room or location, or
- remaining in a classroom or school area after a teacher or administrator in authority
- has directed one to leave, or other similar disruptive conduct.

V. SUMMARY OF ALLEGATIONS & FINDINGS OF FACT

A. Dr. Blasko and the MEA

Dr. Blasko has been deeply involved in labor and management negotiations with the MEA since he was the HR director. It was reported that he has had a longstanding, contentious relationship with MEA leadership, which further deteriorated in the past two years because of the pandemic and efforts to return to in-person learning. Dr. Blasko was viewed by some, but not all, as a leader who perpetuated an environment of "us against them." There was also significant feedback that Dr. Blasko personalized his disagreements with the union. Others in management who have participated in negotiations and who were interviewed in this investigation said that generally they did not have adversarial relationships with MEA leadership. Rather, they viewed MEA leadership and members of their bargaining team as fulfilling their roles to represent their membership, not as the enemy to be defeated.

1. Former MEA president

Dr. Blasko was reported to have said on multiple occasions that the former MEA president was "the worst thing that ever happened to this District." That sentiment became his "mantra" and he made it clear to staff that he personally disliked her. Dr. Blasko denied making the comments and said he had a mutually respectful working relationship with the former MEA president.

This investigator credits the witnesses who reported the statements and Dr. Blasko's sentiments.

2. Current MEA president

Dr. Blasko was reported to have referred to the current MEA president on multiple occasions as a "b*tch" or "evil b*tch." Dr. Blasko denied making the statements. This investigator credits the witnesses who reported the comments and his animosity toward the current MEA president. There were other occasions in which Dr. Blasko was alleged to have referred to individuals as "evil" and/or a "b*tch," indicating that it is not out of the realm that Dr. Blasko uses that kind of language to describe staff. Dr. Blasko himself admitted referring to a former principal as a "b*tch."

On October 16, 2020, union representatives were scheduled to meet with Dr. Blasko to discuss the return of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students to in-person learning. Dr. Blasko said he had to leave early for personal reasons. He told the bargaining team that he could always be reached by cell

phone. The MEA president tried to reach him multiple times that weekend and did not hear from him until late Sunday evening. Dr. Blasko told her he was in a remote area without cell phone service.

Building administrator-witnesses stated that Dr. Blasko bragged during one of their meetings that he "blew smoke up [the MEA president's] skirt" and that he had tricked the MEA into agreeing kids could return to school by refusing her calls. Witnesses viewed the comments as unprofessional and unbecoming of a superintendent. Dr. Blasko denied making the comments. This investigator credits the witnesses who reported hearing the comments. They reported their recollections independently without being prompted by the investigator and were consistent in their recollection.

In a November 5, 2020 Zoom call with the MEA leadership and over 170 of its members, Dr. Blasko muted the MEA president in mid-sentence and never returned to her despite being told that she had additional questions from her membership that she wanted to ask him.[2] Muting the president was viewed as an effort to embarrass and humiliate her in front of her membership.

3. Pilchuck UniServ representative

The Pilchuck UniServ representative has been assisting the MEA in union-related matters since January 2020. Three witnesses reported that Dr. Blasko referred to the Pilchuck UniServe representative (a woman of color) in words or substance as an "angry BIPOC woman trying to prove herself." It was also reported that Dr. Blasko said that she was "such an evil b*tch" and that he "feels sorry for her husband." Another witness reported that Dr. Blasko commented that Pilchuck couldn't "get rid of her because she's a woman of color."

Dr. Blasko denied making the comments. This investigator credits the witnesses who reported the statements. They were consistent in their recollections regarding Dr. Blasko's animosity toward the representative and had clear recollections of hearing him make the comments. They also reported their recollections without being prompted by the investigator and said the comments were impactful because they were so disturbing.

4. Another female member of the bargaining team

Dr. Blasko referred to another female member of the bargaining team, who was considered a strong advocate, as an "angry b*tch" on multiple occasions.

In his investigative interview, Dr. Blasko said the individual was "a very intense person." He said, "I don't recall calling her a b*tch, I have talked about how intense she is, very intense, very vocal member of the bargaining team."

[2] The MEA president was the second speaker after the former MEA president had asked some challenging questions and been openly critical of Dr. Blasko. The current president asked a rhetorical question to the effect of how many teachers needed to die before Dr. Blasko took the Covid health risks seriously. As she began to ask a follow up question, Dr. Blasko muted her and never again returned to the president for additional questions.

This investigator credits the witness who reported the statements. The witness provided other credible information that was corroborated by other witnesses and/or other evidence. There also was a pattern to the name-calling that witnesses consistently reported.

5. November 16, 2020 letter to first-grade teachers

Dr. Blasko distributed a November 16, 2020 letter to first-grade teachers directing them to report for "in-person/onsite instruction" the next day, November 17, 2020. The letter further stated that failure to report to their "classroom/school" could result in discipline up to and including termination. Dr. Blasko had Board approval to send the letter and said that outside counsel had reviewed it. The MEA, however, believed Dr. Blasko was acting in bad faith, citing a September 4, 2020 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the MEA and the District, which stated:

> The parties have been meeting and will continue to meet to discuss the appropriate instructional model. Currently, remote instruction is the main instructional model with the ability to serve Monroe's neediest students with limited in-person services.
>
> The District will reexamine the current instructional model, on a quarterly basis using Snohomish County Health Department, Washington State Health Department and other relevant state and federal guidelines to inform their decisions. ***All decisions shall be made in collaboration with the Monroe Education Association. (emphasis added)***

The MEA filed a grievance and unfair labor practice claim upon which it prevailed. Dr. Blasko's letter ordering teachers back to the classroom under threat of termination resulted in further erosion of trust between Dr. Blasko and the MEA that he was never able to restore.

6. Principal [redacted] placed on administrative leave in December 2021

Another turning point for the MEA was Dr. Blasko's decision to place Monroe High School Principal [redacted] on administrative leave following Principal [redacted] presentation at a school assembly on December 3, 2021.[3] The timing of the union's vote of no confidence was triggered in large part by Dr. Blasko's decision. Dr. Blasko had consulted his executive cabinet as well as outside counsel, and there was support among his team for placing Principal [redacted] on temporary, non-disciplinary leave.

However, Dr. Blasko reversed his decision within a day, after receiving numerous complaints from staff, students, and community members. Witnesses reported that his quick reversal was emblematic of his leadership style of prioritizing his public image.

B. <u>Dr. Blasko and the MPA</u>

1. Efforts to meet with Dr. Blasko in the fall of 2020

[3] The assembly was intended to address a racially motivated incident at Monroe High School on November 10, 2021. During the assembly, Principal [redacted] "verbally listed derogatory and racial slurs" in an effort to demonstrate inappropriate and unacceptable language.

MPA members said they tried to meet with Dr. Blasko in the fall of 2020 to address the tension and lack of trust between teachers and District administrators about how to move forward during the pandemic. They also wanted to discuss how they could support Dr. Blasko but also show empathy and sensitivity toward their staff. It was reported that Dr. Blasko refused to meet with them as a group to have those discussions.

2. Spring 2021 principal survey

Dr. Blasko engaged Dr. Larry Nyland of the Washington State Leadership Academy as a leadership coach and mentor. In the fall of 2020, Dr. Nyland began working with a team of leaders selected by Dr. Blasko, which included [redacted] as the high school representative, Terry Cheshire as the middle school representative, and [redacted] as the elementary school representative. Also on the team were Dr. Blasko [redacted] (the current interim superintendent), and [redacted] (chief of support services). Dr. Nyland began meeting with this group on a regular basis, and through his facilitation, the team identified the divide between building and District administrators as a priority. As a result, Dr. Nyland recommended and developed an anonymous survey to be completed by building administrators. The survey was distributed to administrators in the spring of 2021. The results were returned to Dr. Nyland, and he summarized them in two reports: one a long-form report, and a second shorter report that summarized the responses by category. There was specific feedback that reflected poorly on Dr. Blasko's leadership and communication styles.

Multiple witnesses reported that Dr. Blasko blamed [redacted] the former principal of Frank Wagner elementary, for the negative responses. He told members of his staff that she had manipulated the results and unduly influenced people's responses. In his investigative interview, Dr. Blasko denied making the statements and said that he believed the survey responses fairly reflected administrator sentiments at the time. This investigator credits the witnesses who reported Dr. Blasko's statements and animosity toward the former principal because of her perceived role in conducting the survey.

Current and former building administrators who were interviewed in this investigation expressed the view that the survey was fairly conducted without any attempts to influence them or their colleagues. Most of the administrator-witnesses also stated that they shared many of the concerns expressed in the survey results. Two administrator-witnesses said they personally had never experienced any negative interactions with Dr. Blasko and that he had always maintained his professionalism and civility in their presence. They were aware, however, that some of their colleagues have had much different experiences. Another administrator-witness reported no negative interactions with Dr. Blasko but noted that he lacked discretion at times by sharing personal details about other staff.

3. Building administrators denied a meeting to discuss the survey results without Dr. Blasko

Building administrators wanted to meet in June 2021 to discuss the survey results among themselves. Dr. Blasko insisted on being present for that meeting. A witness reported that Dr. Blasko said he was not going to allow "a b*tch session" and there was nothing that he had not already heard. The meeting went forward with Dr. Blasko present, but it was viewed as unproductive.

4. Dr. Blasko directed the public records manager to delay producing the survey results

District staff were informed of a public records request for "staff climate and culture surveys" on May 20, 2021. Dr. Blasko knew of the request and directed the records manager to delay producing the principal survey results until later that summer, which were eventually produced on August 13, 2021. The records manager had never before been asked to delay the production of records and spoke to the HR Director who told the records manager that it was permissible.

Other witnesses reported that Dr. Blasko commented to them that he had directed the records manager to delay producing the survey results until after Dr. Blasko negotiated his contract extension in late June 2021.

In his investigative interview, Dr. Blasko said he didn't recall any discussions with the records manager about the timing for disclosing the survey results. He was then asked directly, "Did you ask [the records manager] to delay the release of those results?" He said, "we might have had that conversation. She typically asks is this something we want to move on right now, I might have said how long do we have, we might want to wait until summer until it blows over." Dr. Blasko denied that he asked the records manager to "delay" the production of documents and said he just asked, "What's the timeline on that?"

The investigator credits the witnesses who stated that Dr. Blasko told the records manager to delay the production of the survey results.

Dr. Blasko denied telling staff that he wanted to delay the production of the survey results until after his contract was extended. Dr. Blasko said he informed the Board president of the survey results immediately and that they were part of his performance review. He believed that the full Board was aware of the survey results before his contract was extended on June 28, 2021.

The current Board members who were also on the Board in June 2021 reported that they knew of and/or had received principal survey results before Dr. Blasko's contract extension, but they believed the results were mailed to their homes anonymously. Board members did not seem to be aware that Dr. Nyland developed the survey or that it was his idea to conduct the survey. It appears that Dr. Blasko indicated or left the impression with Board members that the former Frank Wagner principal facilitated the survey to make Dr. Blasko look bad, and that it did not represent the views of building administrators overall.

5. Dr. Blasko directed building administrators not to take notes at their meetings

Building administrator-witnesses stated that there came a time when Dr. Blasko directed them to stop taking notes during their regularly scheduled meetings. He was concerned that they would become public records. According to the witnesses, Dr. Blasko said that HR or other support staff would document the meetings and distribute the notes, but that never happened.

Dr. Blasko acknowledged that there were discussions about note-taking but denied that he issued an across-the-board directive that administrators could not take notes. He said it was more narrowly

tailored to topics like bargaining strategies. Administrator-witnesses believed the directive was not to take any notes, and they felt it was an unusual request.[4]

6. December 10, 2021 letter

The MPA provided Dr. Blasko with an unsigned letter dated December 10, 2021, noting that the association was aware that the MEA had voted no confidence in Dr. Blasko. MPA members had heard a rumor that Dr. Blasko was going to ask building administrators to sign something indicating their support for him, and the December 10 letter was intended to communicate that the association planned to remain neutral.

Dr. Blasko said he received a copy of the letter and that "it hurt;" he wasn't expecting it. Dr. Blasko said he believed he read the letter to the current board president right after receiving it.

A witness reported being asked by Dr. Blasko to try to persuade MPA leadership to delay releasing the letter publicly. He told the witness, "Can you believe this?" and said that the letter would "ruin him if it got to the Board."

In his investigative interview, Dr. Blasko said that his staff member volunteered to engage in those conversations with the MPA to delay the release of the letter. However, the staff member said he/she felt pressured to do so.

7. December 17, 2021 letter

MPA's December 17, 2021 letter was submitted directly to the Board of Directors in anticipation of an executive session that was scheduled for the same day. The letter calls for the removal or investigation of Dr. Blasko and indicated that the association as a whole had lost confidence in Dr. Blasko's ability to lead the District. The MPA reported that its members heard that Dr. Blasko had informed a Board member that he had the unanimous support of the building administrators. The letter was meant to inform the Board of the MPA's concerns about Dr. Blasko. The MPA attached its December 10 letter and the results of the 2021 principal survey because it was not certain that Dr. Blasko had shared that information with the Board.

C. Inappropriate Comments Attributed to Dr. Blasko

Witnesses reported a variety of comments by Dr. Blasko that they believed indicated a lack of professionalism, civility, and discretion. Others believed his comments indicated a lack of respect and/or bias toward female staff. Several witnesses who have worked closely with Dr. Blasko for years said he could be "gossipy" and openly disparaged staff without any apparent concern about who could hear his comments. Witnesses said Dr. Blasko was prone to sharing HR stories about investigations he conducted when he was the executive director and divulging confidential information to staff who had no need to

[4] Another witness said it was not unusual for Dr. Blasko to say something in a meeting and then follow up saying, "Don't write that down." It's unclear whether all of the building administrators followed the request to stop taking notes. Not all of the administrators were asked about this issue.

know. Witnesses also reported that Dr. Blasko sometimes discussed personal subjects that were unsolicited and uncomfortable to hear.

In his investigative interview, Dr. Blasko denied making most of the comments attributed to him, or he had a different recollection of the context. Below is a description of comments that this investigator finds more likely than not were made by Dr. Blasko as reported by a witness or witnesses:

- Dr. Blasko referred to the former principal of Frank Wagner elementary as a "b*tch" and "a raging b*tch"and said her building was a "cult" and the principal was the "cult leader."[5] He told several staff that the former principal manipulated the results of the 2021 principal survey, blamed her for the negative responses, and said the survey was the last straw for him. Dr. Blasko also made cruel and disparaging remarks about the principal's divorce situation. He further commented to staff regarding the former principal that "you can't have a principal more popular/powerful than the superintendent; that's a recipe for disaster."[6]

- After informing the Frank Wagner principal that her contract would not be renewed, Dr. Blasko immediately placed her on administrative leave and had her escorted out of the District office and her building by a security officer. She was denied any opportunity to speak with her assistant principal or assist in the transition of leadership. Dr. Blasko said he had never done that before and that, in this case, it was necessary because he believed she would be disruptive and "it would be detrimental to the students." Other than Dr. Blasko's subjective opinion, there was no factual support for his claim that the former principal would have been disruptive or tried to negatively influence school operations.[7] Many witnesses believed his decision was cruel and vindictive. Others, particularly Frank Wagner staff, said that Dr. Blasko had no regard for the impact to staff, students, or parents. Some members of the MPA said it was a turning point for them and resulted in further loss of trust. They were shocked at the insensitivity of having one of their colleagues walked out of the building by security for reasons that were never discussed or apparent to them.

- Dr. Blasko also told Frank Wagner staff that the former principal was under investigation in the context of telling them she was on administrative leave.[8] It is not accurate that the former

[5] Dr. Blasko admitted calling the former principal a "b*tch"on one occasion and saying "no wonder her husband left her." Dr. Blasko also admitted referring to the former principal as a "cult-like leader" and "manipulative." He denied the other comments.
[6] Dr. Blasko admitted he said you can't have a principal more "powerful" than the superintendent, not "popular." He said that was based on the former principal "galvanizing the troops" to push back on District initiatives. None of the witnesses supported Dr. Blasko's belief that the former principal was "galvanizing the troops." Witnesses reported that the former principal was Dr. Blasko's strongest advocate and supporter and that she routinely stood up for him. The principal was also credited with being a fierce advocate on behalf of her school, which caused significant tension, particularly with central office staff.
[7] Dr. Blasko cited one administrator in particular who he said was putting pressure on him to subordinate the principal and immediately place her on leave. That witness contradicted Dr. Blasko and said though he/she had concerns and was trying to coach the former principal, the witness was not part of the conversation of whether and/or how to remove the principal.
[8] Dr. Blasko said he did not recall saying that the principal was under investigation and that "I don't recall us investigating her at that time."

principal was under investigation or that she had engaged in any wrongdoing as the basis for her administrative leave.

- Another witness reported that as the assistant superintendent, Dr. Blasko frequently complained that the former Frank Wagner principal was bringing her newborn to work, and in that context stated, "Being a single mom is not my problem."[9]

- Dr. Blasko referred to at least two former female administrators as "bipolar," which one witness explained was meant to indicate the staff member was crazy or emotional.

- Dr. Blasko referred to members of his leadership team as "f*cking snowflakes" because they took sick leave after getting the Covid vaccine.

- Dr. Blasko commented to staff that a former assistant principal had been going behind his back to stir up trouble to undermine him. There was no factual support that the actions of the assistant principal were intended to undermine Dr. Blasko. There was one incident that became known in the fall of 2020 that appeared to be a miscommunication issue but Dr. Blasko was viewed as personalizing the issue, claiming that the assistant principal was deliberately trying to undermine him.

- Dr. Blasko referred to a director as a "f*cking idiot" and said he would have fired the individual but for the lawyers.[10]

- Dr. Blasko commented about an executive director, "That guy doesn't know sh*t from shinola but he sure is a nice guy."

- Dr. Blasko publicly joked about and criticized a male staff member who is known to paint his fingernails.

- Dr. Blasko made disparaging comments about a former Board member to his staff.

- After learning that [redacted] Dr. Blasko stated to a staff member, "Can you believe [redacted] picked a [redacted] as [redacted]?" "I'm so sick of the woke culture."[11] Other witnesses also reported that Dr. Blasko has been openly critical of the "woke culture."

[9] Dr. Blasko acknowledged he engaged in many conversations with the former superintendent and the HR director, expressing concerns that the principal was bringing her newborn to work, but denied making the comment attributed to him. The investigator credits the witness who reported this comment. The witness provided other credible information that was corroborated by other witnesses or evidence.

[10] Dr. Blasko acknowledged he was told by lawyers not to take action against this individual and said he didn't remember calling him a "f*cking idiot, "but we were very frustrated."

[11] Dr. Blasko admitted learning about this and "wondering aloud how that would go in our community." He said he did not recall expressing an opinion on "woke culture." The way the witness described the conversation indicated to the witness that Dr. Blasko disapproved and was critical of "woke culture."

- Dr. Blasko referenced by name a student in the District who was reportedly [redacted] He also identified the student's parent by name to a witness who had no legitimate need to know this information.[12]

- Dr. Blasko told one of his staff that he had determined that only women dislike him, and he surmised it was because some women can't handle "really masculine men," stating, "I'm as masculine as they come; there's nothing I can do about my masculinity."

- After the former Board president commented publicly, in words or substance, that teachers were home day-drinking, which is why they didn't want to return to in-person teaching, Dr. Blasko told a staff member privately that "everyone knows it's true, but you can't say that publicly." Dr. Blasko also referred to teachers as "lazy," which he said is why they didn't want to return to the classroom.

- Dr. Blasko referred to a high school teacher as an a**hole because the teacher would not agree to insert a political advertisement into a playbill.

- Dr. Blasko referred to a high school counselor as "evil" reportedly because she was active in bargaining and on television. One witness reported that Dr. Blasko called the counselor evil because the counselor mentioned his name to a media outlet. Another witness reported he called her evil in connection with a grievance filed by the counselors, for which Dr. Blasko blamed this counselor for spearheading.[13]

- Upon learning that a female principal had announced she was pregnant, Dr. Blasko commented "she was a disaster and had no business having another baby."

- Dr. Blasko criticized an assistant principal to several staff about how the assistant principal handled a student who tried to sneak alcohol into a football game. Dr. Blasko was present at the event and informed of the situation but he did not advise the assistant principal regarding how to address the issues. Witnesses said he disparaged the assistant principal on multiple occasions even though he had acknowledged that he might not have known how to address the situation at the time.

- Before being placed on administrative leave, Dr. Blasko commented to staff that the former Board president had done him a "solid" when he "increased his severance package." Dr. Blasko also said in a loud voice, "It's not illegal to be an a**hole." Dr. Blasko further commented to staff that he was going to cancel his holiday plans because his lawyer told him he could earn $1,000 a day if he was placed on administrative leave.

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[12] Dr. Blasko said he only discussed this with staff who had a need to know and who could provide building support. However, the witness who reported the comments was not the individual identified by Dr. Blasko and had no business reason to be part of the conversation.

[13] Dr. Blasko said he might have called the counselor "evil" in the context of bargaining because it was an "emotional" time.

D. Events Leading up to the December 13, 2021 Board Meeting

Witnesses reported that November and December 2021 were particularly stressful. After a racially motivated incident at the high school on November 10, 2021, there were a barrage of media and community inquiries and pressure on Dr. Blasko and the Board to respond. Some staff reported that they were afraid to meet with Dr. Blasko alone during this period, and that they had a pact not to be in the office with Dr. Blasko if there was not another witness present. Other witnesses reported that some central district office staff were locking their doors during this period and that there were a lot of "panic meetings."

1. Public records request for Dr. Blasko's personal cell phone records

Dr. Blasko was informed on December 6, 2021, that the District had received a public records request for his cell phone records, including text messages to or from his personal cell phone. Dr. Blasko informed the records manager in a December 6, 2021 email that he did not conduct District business using his personal cell phone.

Two staff reported that Dr. Blasko informed them that he had just put in writing that he did not conduct District business using his personal cell phone, which these witnesses said was not accurate. One witness said Dr. Blasko appeared flustered at the time of this conversation. The witnesses reported that they and others were part of a group chat that included text messages from Dr. Blasko's personal cell phone, some of which were personal but others clearly related to District business. One witness said that Dr. Blasko commented that no one could ever know about their group chat, and he later suggested or directed (depending on the witness) that staff delete the group chat texts. Staff provided screenshots of a few text messages that came from Dr. Blasko's personal cell phone and that were addressing District business.

In his investigative interview, Dr. Blasko reiterated that he does not use his personal cell phone for business but that he was part of a group chat and there were times "the lines were blurred and we reverted back to district cell phones." He denied asking staff to delete the group chat texts but said he did have "a conversation that said this is probably not the best idea and we shouldn't do this" (referring to the group chat). He also denied saying no one can ever know about the group chat.

This investigator credits the witnesses. Their statements were consistent, corroborated by the text messages that were produced, and to some extent were confirmed by Dr. Blasko's admissions. Another witness also recalled that Dr. Blasko used his personal cell to discuss District business but did not possess any of those texts at the time of this investigation.

2. Dr. Blasko requested staff to publicly support him

Before the December 13 Board meeting, Dr. Blasko was aware that the MEA had pursued or planned to pursue a no confidence vote and that members of the community and various organizations intended to appear at the Board meeting to offer public comments that he believed would be critical of his leadership. He informed at least two senior staff that he had hired a consultant/strategist who

recommended that he have individual District leaders prepared to express support for him to rebut these anticipated public comments. Dr. Blasko urged those staff to agree to offer their public support of him. One staff was asked to appear at the Board meeting as a "private citizen" to offer commentary in support of Dr. Blasko.[14] During that discussion, Dr. Blasko told this individual that "all I need are the principals to do the same and this is over." Both individuals stated that they felt pressured to support Dr. Blasko and that when they declined to come out publicly in support of his leadership, he appeared visibly angry and shaken. Both felt their careers with the District were over after they refused his request.

3. Dr. Blasko told staff that he had Board support

Staff reported that before the December 13 Board meeting, Dr. Blasko had informed them that he had persuaded one of the Board members to read a statement blaming the communications department for failing to sufficiently communicate the District's ongoing efforts under his leadership to address racial issues. Staff also reported that Dr. Blasko said he had spoken to three Board members who had assured him individually that they would publicly support him at the Board meeting.

E. December 13, 2021 Board Meeting

Dr. Blasko submitted a report to the Board, titled "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," that was placed on the agenda the morning of the December 13 Board meeting. Staff stated that Dr. Blasko had asked them to draft this report and that the Friday before the Board meeting, they "were playing make believe" about the diversity, equity, and inclusion work that had been going on in the District. Staff said they sent a Google document to Dr. Blasko that was mostly blank and asked for his input but received no response. On Monday, Dr. Blasko produced a report that staff said he alone drafted and that they believed was factually inaccurate and/or misleading.

Witnesses reported that after the December 13 Board meeting, Dr. Blasko told them that they needed to be careful about what they said because there was a "rat" in the building. None of the witnesses knew what he was referring to specifically, but assumed it related to information that came out publicly during the December 13 meeting.

F. Dr. Blasko's Communication and Leadership Style

Multiple witnesses described personal experiences or observations of Dr. Blasko quickly losing his temper, raising his voice, and interrupting staff who asked questions or who disagreed with him. There were also multiple examples of individuals being reduced to tears after speaking with or being called out by Dr. Blasko during meetings. Some of the concerns date back to Dr. Blasko's role as the HR Director. He was described as being insensitive and lacking empathy, tendencies that witnesses felt had gotten worse after he became superintendent. Witnesses also reported that he was cavalier and dismissive about the health and safety concerns expressed by staff during the pandemic and that he lashed out

[14] Dr. Blasko said he had extensive conversations with one of his staff who "was considering" making a statement of public support but that individual was advised against doing so by one of the organizations the staff member represented. That same individual reported that Dr. Blasko specifically asked the witness to appear at the meeting and that the witness felt pressured to do so.

against a building administrator who insisted that he wear a mask when he entered the school. Again, those concerns were not shared by all of the witnesses and there were individuals who said they had never seen or experienced the behavior described above.