

5457 Holly Springs Drive
Houston, TX 77056

November 11, 2009

Kinkaid Board of Trustees
The Kinkaid School
201 Kinkaid School Drive
Houston, TX 77024

Re: The Tipping Point

Dear Kinkaid Board of Trustees:

I am writing to you today with a heavy heart but also with a strong sense of obligation. I am sad that things have gotten to the point they have at Kinkaid but feel I must speak up on behalf of the “silent majority” before the situation gets to a point of no return. To whom am I referring as the “silent majority?” The parents, students and families that provide 90+% of the volunteer time and funding for this school. While it has been a very slow and gradual process, I submit to you that the values, methods, beliefs and actions of the current Administration are not in synch with those of the majority of your students, families, alumni, with the original charter of the school, or with the views of this Board. So this letter is about much more than a cancelled pep rally—it’s about taking back control of the Kinkaid School.

The Catalyst

(see attachment 1 – my email to Don North the afternoon of the pep rally)

I have never seen a group of parents come together as nicely as the parent group did this year around our football team. We had a great team mom and dad in Peggy Rathmell and Kevin Snodgrass. When we “won out” and got some help with a Casady loss, we qualified for the SPC Championship. Peggy and Kevin carefully planned a full week of activities leading up to the big game (In case you hadn’t heard, we got killed 52-7).

A key event in the week was the Friday afternoon pep rally. Being her usual super-organized self, Peggy met early in the week with Mickey Saltman and went over the pep rally in detail, including a typed script. At the end of this session, I am told Mickey “high fived” Peggy and told her all was OK. One of the skits involved the classic routine of the seniors on the football team dressing up as EHS cheerleaders and doing a brief cheer followed by some clumsy cartwheels. Teams of moms went to work on making skirts big enough for the boys, while others fanned out across Houston in search of wigs, pom-poms and megaphones in the correct shade of blue. Seeing the boys practice all week in the gym, in the hallway and outside in the courtyard created a sense of anticipation for Friday afternoon (and gave everybody an idea of what the skit would be).

Friday afternoon arrived and the theater filled up with students, parents, grandparents and faculty, all eagerly awaiting the show. Just minutes before the skit was to begin, [REDACTED] (Governing Council President and Master of Ceremonies) came backstage and told the boys that their portion of the skit was cancelled. The assembled moms pushed back and said “you have got to be kidding.” The seniors posing as cheerleaders was the punchline to the pep rally. [REDACTED] said no, that under the order of Mr. Saltman, the act was cancelled. Another mom said “such an order can only come from the Administration. Where is Mr. Saltman?” After all the effort and preparation and with the crowd anxiously anticipating something, and no “official” word from Mr. Saltman, the boys shed the balloons from their shirts, exchanged their skirts for khakis, and proceeded to the stage. After getting through one line of their act, Mr. Saltman finally appeared at the back of the theater and, pointing with his finger, yelled at the top of his lungs, “I told you not to do this! This pep rally is over!” The boys were humiliated as they milled about on stage and the crowd murmured in disbelief. The parents and grandparents were shocked. What a way to send the team off to the championship game! I have never seen the air taken out of a room like that.

Even worse, many of those in attendance assumed the boys had done something wrong. That evening, our son, John Edward, went to basketball practice after the football team dinner, and the basketball coach, although not chastising the football players, felt the need to bring up the event and their seemingly insubordinate actions. For him, it was a “teachable” moment to point out what he thought was disappointing behavior.

My wife, Susie, and I were very distressed. She spends time at the school nearly every day on something, and I have never seen her so mad at Kinkaid. The same is true for many others who give enormous amounts of time to that school. Susie and I decided to talk to Mr. Saltman. Not allowing him to wait us out, we waited for an hour as he met with Ms. Lovett, [REDACTED] and Scott Lambert. (What was that meeting about?—getting “the story” straight?)

When it was finally our turn to talk with Mickey, he informed us that a “select few” teachers (Ms. Lovett) and students ([REDACTED]) had expressed concern over “negative gender stereotyping” and Mickey had become convinced they had a valid concern. He said that despite the fact that he was originally OK with the skit, he had evolved his thinking. We told him he had no right to change his mind at the last minute after having given approval earlier in the week and a large group of moms had put in a ton of work based on that approval. We told him that his decision was just plain wrong. How many approvals do you need? What is the process? The biggest issue in that skit is getting the football players to get up the nerve to make fun of themselves by putting on the costumes. Our cheerleaders certainly had no issues and, in fact, feel they are a big part of the overall team. (See attachment 2 – an email from a cheerleader parent, commenting on the closeness of the team and how included the cheerleaders felt). Nobody in their right mind could claim these boys were trying to make somebody feel bad.

So Saltman's decision clearly was wrong, but his execution of that decision was abysmal. He sent in a student who has had previous issues with football players and was part of the group complaining about this skit to do his heavy lifting for him? His excuse for not appearing himself was that he was too busy ringing the school bells? This excuse is lame at best. With his years of experience, Mickey had to have known the chaos his decision would cause backstage. Then he chose to literally shout the team off the stage like they were a bunch of misbehaving thugs?!

The Governing Council President

██████████ serves as Governing Council President, and by virtue of that position, serves as Master of Ceremonies at pep rallies and assemblies. He supposedly was among the students who complained about the skit. This week, he met with our son, a senior football player, and told him that he "personally had no issue with the skit." If true, then he was poorly positioned as Saltman's messenger. If false, then his worries about "negative gender stereotyping" seem a bit hypocritical when one looks at the clever campaign video he used in his campaign for President. Click on the following link to see Andrew – yes, that is him dressed in drag:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNV7iqOLRws>

The Teacher

Ms. Leslie Lovett is regularly ranked among the least desired teachers (at least on the parent "whisper circuit"). Good students are afraid they will never get a decent grade from her because they represent the conservative viewpoint and literally dread having to be in her class. Her leftist invective is neither accurate nor part of the approved curriculum. Last year, she commented to an 11th grade history class including my son that somehow both Lehman and Barclays made a bunch of money on the Lehman bankruptcy, and that all investment bankers were "sleazeballs" and dishonest. With tears in his eyes, John Ed called her out in front of the class and said his dad worked for Lehman Brothers and had been working around the clock trying to save 11,000 jobs and that she had absolutely no idea what she was talking about. She later sent John Ed an email apologizing for her behavior saying that she did not mean to attack his dad but that she was just stereotyping (emphasis added). Yet when it serves her political agenda, she is the first to complain about stereotyping. What hypocrisy!

Last year, Ms. Lovett suggested that Homecoming should be at a girls' field hockey game rather than at a football game. She also complained that there were no women on the football team and poked her nose into the yearbook with nonsense issues that she has no business raising.

So it should be no surprise that Ms. Lovett (Head of our Diversity Committee) is the aggrieved party who complained about the issue of "negative gender stereotyping." She

(and perhaps ██████) got to Mickey and he caved at the last minute, after he had already given his official sign off.

- Why are we tolerating teachers like Ms. Lovett?
- Why are we allowing one or two highly motivated, highly politicized individuals to control our agenda as a school?
- Why is Mickey so ready to pounce on good kids? (Earlier this year, Mickey called the peer mentoring group together to berate them for hazing freshmen on a retreat, only to learn later that he had his facts wrong, and he had to apologize to the entire group).

Conclusion

The pep rally incident is just a symptom of a broader problem. As I said in the opening paragraph of this letter, this is not about a pep rally. When a small group can force their agenda on the whole school, we have lost control of our school. In our rush to be “politically correct,” we have become obsessed about pacifying even the most extreme of views—even if they are far from representative of the core values and character of Kinkaid families and alumni. By standing for everything, we actually stand for nothing.

What happened to our ability to laugh at ourselves and have fun? What happened to common sense and good judgment? Why is a married, heterosexual coach considered an oddity at Kinkaid? Why is a gay female coach telling high school girls on her team that she was disappointed in them for belonging to the spirit club (SOK) and that by doing so they are just pandering to the football team?

The number of parents who have been talking about this particular pep rally is enormous. It is not because they care about football or pep rallies, it is because they have all encountered the same issues in some form or fashion. We have lost our way.

My own view is that this all boils down to leadership. That is always the case in “people businesses,” and certainly the business of education is a “people business.” I don’t think the current Administration’s world view is consistent with the vast majority of Kinkaid parents, families and alumni. I think the Board of Trustees has been too passive as the school has shifted farther and farther away from its core values.

So, if it were my decision, Leslie Lovett should be terminated immediately. Absent an informed view by the Board that he is the best man for the job going forward, Mickey Saltman should be encouraged strongly to retire at the end of this year. I think the Board should have a hard conversation with Don North about the direction of the school. I like Don personally and would hope that meeting would be a productive one. However, I think that both the Board and Don should also be open-minded as to whether it is time for both sides to move on.

It is time for a change of direction, and it is time for the Board of Trustees to act. Like many other families, the McGees will be watching closely. We pulled our oldest child (Katie) from Kinkaid years ago due to concerns over the middle school experience, and she subsequently flourished at St. Johns (she is now a senior at Princeton). John Ed's group of friends is what has kept us here at Kinkaid. They are now all graduating. Sadly, we may find ourselves forced to leave Kinkaid once again for the benefit of our third child, Lizzy, who is currently an 8th grader, as four more years of "status quo" is rather unappealing. Many, many parents have expressed the same concerns I have but they are worried about getting their seniors into college—I am not. Many are concerned about whether they can change schools – I am not, as I know St. Johns will take another McGee in a heartbeat. So on behalf of the "silent majority," I tell you that this cancelled pep rally is the "tipping point" for many families.

I hope and pray the Board reacts responsibly.

Respectfully submitted,

Hugh E. McGee III