

612's B.S Alert on Sisney's email to all Broken Arrow Staff

I read Dr. Sisney's email to all Broken Arrow staff several times, trying to get its meaning from different perspectives: from the perspective of a concerned superintendent who was dismayed by the seemingly irresponsible actions of board members, and who was trying to address concerns, fears, and rumors among his staff; and from the perspective of a superintendent who knew pieces of information could be coming to light soon that could be potentially damaging to him, and who was trying to set the stage to guide his staff's perception of the events to his benefit.

There are several sentences in the letter that conflict, in my mind, with the "benevolent leader" perspective.

- "I don't believe the three board members who purposefully did not attend a regularly scheduled Board Meeting, intended for their behavior to cause these issues of concern..." - this is a contradiction. Trying to excuse their bad behavior by saying it wasn't intentional while pointing out that it was intentional doesn't make sense. I believe the BA debate team could pull this off better, without the contradiction being detected.
- "...look for facts to be unfolded over time that will shed significant light on the real issues..." - this looks more like a distraction than a reassuring, supportive, or informational statement. It gives the impression of setting the stage for an orchestrated series of events.
- "...doing my best to keep our employees out of harm's way..." - this letter specifically draws employees into the controversy while attempting to present itself as keeping them out of it.
- "One of the key items on the agenda that could not be addressed (because of a lack of quorum) was negotiations, impasse, and teachers pay raises. How is not having a meeting beneficial to this process?" - Bringing up negotiations and pay issues looks like an attempt to generate staff outrage at the board's actions, by pointing out how it can personally negatively affect them.
- "Very few items have ever been placed on a board agenda by the superintendent since I have been in Broken Arrow. And, this is true in all school districts." – The number of items placed on the agenda by the superintendent is irrelevant. At issue is the placement of items by the board members – that were *vetoed* by the superintendent. We are expected to accept the *superintendent's* total control of the board's agenda – *over the board members?*

A letter that was written to address concerns would not encourage employees to take sides. To me this looks like an attempt to intercept people's perceptions and steer them in a direction that draws their attention away from the superintendent and toward the 3 school board members. Even if Dr. Sisney was sincere in writing this letter, and he had truly tried to be accommodating and reasonable but the board members insisted on behaving irresponsibly, it is still out of line for him to disparage them in writing to all Broken Arrow staff.

In my opinion, this letter is not designed to provide honest and constructive information to staff; it's designed to fan the flames.

Notice the tactics used to influence readers to his way of thinking, encourage them to take sides, and discourage them from considering alternate viewpoints:

- taking a flawed premise as fact and building on it
- appealing to "reasonableness"
- appearing to praise while discrediting
- minimizing others' claims
- mischaracterizing statements by others into something ridiculous and unreasonable
- using inapposite analogies
- distracting with questionable assertions