



*Rockwood National Education Association  
232 Vance Road, Suite 205  
Valley Park, MO 63088-1575  
Phone 314.392.1277*

*Laura Baker  
President*

*Email  
bakerlaura@rsdmo.org*

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To the Directors of the Rockwood Board of Education and Dr. Mark Miles:

We write to you today because of the increasingly divisive atmosphere within our district.

We recognize the importance of parents and guardians as partners in their children's education, and we welcome constructive, healthy dialogue as we work together. As it stands, however, teachers, administrators, and other staff members, most notably people of color, find themselves targeted on social media and in public fora. It is our belief that all staff members should be able to perform their jobs in an environment of safety and mutual respect, without fear of harassment or threat. A positive climate, where both staff and students feel physically and emotionally secure, will allow us to achieve our mission of guiding all to reach their potential.

We also recognize the unique challenges facing the central office administration and the school board. You listen to and take into account the perspectives of many stakeholders, never an easy task, especially when confronting issues with very different, seemingly polarized sides. Nevertheless, the current environment has become unhealthy and unproductive. Teachers and staff members need to feel visibly and outwardly protected when subjected to verbal abuse and harassment. Parents must know that they are heard and that their concerns have not been summarily dismissed. We believe that the community can participate in positive, constructive conversations without recourse to speech that risks staff members' health, safety, and even lives.

Accordingly, we urge the Rockwood School District to take prompt action to engage all district stakeholders in dialogue about these matters, to model and expect civility, openness, and trust in our interactions with one another, and to decry personal attacks and outright threats of violence in the strongest possible terms. We likewise call upon Rockwood to provide opportunities for us to forge stronger relationships and develop deeper understandings, which will allow us to continue our work as a connected educational community.

The expertise of professional educators is paramount for educational excellence. We stand with the district in its belief that our practices ought to be transparent and that community input remains essential to our work. In the spirit of this partnership we ask for:

better communication that clarifies our curriculum and achievement standards, provides the rationale for those decisions, and addresses misunderstandings and misconceptions;

intentional opportunities for constructive dialogue among teachers, curricular experts, educational support professionals, administrators, and our community about specific topics, resources, and activities used in the classroom to achieve mastery of those standards;

support for teachers in selecting resources and delivering instruction for sensitive topics within the board-approved curriculum;

clearly established procedures and expectations for respectful communication to ask questions, raise concerns, and provide input related to Rockwood curriculum or practices;

a strong, timely, and public call for civility within our entire educational community that denounces harassing, threatening, and hateful messages toward, from, or about any Rockwood stakeholder.

We believe in the mission of public education to explore wide-ranging perspectives on the world around us; to open fresh avenues for inquiry; to nurture, develop, and challenge body, mind, and heart; to find common ground where there has formerly existed divisiveness and rancor; to meet all students where they are and assist them on their journey toward self-discovery and personal fulfillment; to prepare the next generation of citizens to take its place in America and the world. As an educational association, we have committed ourselves to the students and families of the Rockwood School District and hope that sharing this letter will help us come together and move forward, acknowledging our unique differences and individual points of view, but recognizing our shared humanity and essential dignity.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rockwood National Education Association Executive Board



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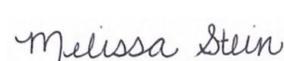
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