

May 4, 2015

A Board Member's Perspective regarding cancellation of "And Then Came Tango"

I would first like to start off by saying that any opinions and statements expressed in the following letter are completely my own. This letter is not intended to reflect the perceptions of the SFCS School Board as a whole.

In looking back on what has occurred both at the school board meeting and attention through the media regarding the play, I feel it is necessary to provide some clarification and further explanation for parents and community members that were not present at the board meeting and have only had the opportunity to hear about what happened through incomplete media coverage and rumor.

I first became aware of the scheduled assembly of "And Then Came Tango" two weeks prior to the date of performance, and long after it was originally scheduled. At this time, there was a concern brought to my attention that the play may trigger some controversy at the school. Through consultation with the administration and the staff, it was felt that the best course of action would be to proceed with the scheduled assembly, but to provide an option for parents to opt out as we understood the sensitive nature of the material discussed. To this day, I maintain "And Then Came Tango" is both age-appropriate and in line with some of the missions and visions of the school – to educate on the principals of respect, fairness, and caring and to provide science-based curriculum.

What followed was not what I expected. I was present at school the day that parents came to withdraw their children from SFCS. I observed directly the emotionally negative impact this had on both students and staff alike. The discordance created at the school was profound. I witnessed a school divided. It was heartbreaking.

Prior to the board meeting, I had the opportunity to attend a staff meeting where the topic of the (at that time postponed) assembly was discussed. What I heard very strongly was that all of the educational staff had decided to put their personal beliefs aside in the interest of regaining harmony at SFCS. The consensus among them was that the best way to do this at that point was to cancel the performance.

A board member has many responsibilities, but of utmost concern is always to do what is in the school's best interest. Often, I am fortunate in my role when my personal beliefs/opinions and doing what I feel is best for our school coincide. But when they do not, the safeguarding of the school is what must be paramount.

We are a young school and a young governing board. There is much to learn. Moving forward, the board and the staff will take a more active role in reviewing and choosing future assemblies. We are working hard to provide an assembly for the school to discuss the topic of bullying where all protected classes will be represented. My hope is that all of this controversy has sparked a discussion which can be channeled in a positive direction towards compassion, tolerance and support.

Sincerely,

Angelina Brouillette
SFCS Board Chair



May 4, 2015

Clarification regarding the board's cancellation of the play

In the days prior to the originally scheduled performance date of "And Then Came Tango", I heard from spokespersons that parents of upwards of 40 to 60 students were talking about keeping their children home from school the day of the play – in their opinion, not enough time was given to review the content of the play, the content was not appropriate for all age levels, and the opt out option offered by SFCS was not enough. The school has 140 students. This means the parents of between 80 and 100 parents were fine with, and in some cases voiced that they were strongly in favor of, their children seeing the play. This is a very large division in opinion.

The school acted swiftly in postponing the play so that everyone could have their opinions heard and the board could discuss and make a decision based on *what would be best at this time for the school community as a whole*.

Teaching staff met and decided, *no matter how they felt individually, one way or the other, about the content of the play*, the fact was the situation surrounding the play was causing a deep division within the school community. The days around the postponement of the play, they witnessed a very polarizing situation having a *negative effect on students* as some students were pulled from school, others were handing out bracelets in support of the play, and all students were affected, many upset. The following week, staff saw that feelings had settled down again and students were *back to their primary job of learning*.

Teaching staff wished to not have the disruption and upset of students happen again. It was counterproductive. The play, which had been meant as a fun assembly for students, had become the opposite of what it was meant to be. Therefore, their recommendation to the board was to cancel the play, which had no chance of fulfilling its original intent, and to work to bring the community together for the sake of the students and a successful end to the school year.

At the board meeting, the board and I heard public comment from people strongly in favor of moving forward with the play, and from a large group of others strongly opposed. In this case, the majority of those who addressed the board were opposed to moving forward with the play. Of concern, is the portrayal in the media that I stated that there was a consensus in the entire school community about the content of the play. This is incorrect. There was consensus among those opposed to the play, just as there was a differing consensus among those in support. I apologize for any misunderstanding. What the board and I continued to hear was a very strong

division in opinions – *except when it comes to bullying*. All agreed that bullying of any kind is not to be tolerated.

A school board member had noted her main concern in canceling the play was in how it would be reported and in the *un-intended message* it would send to the LGBT community. LGBT teens have enormously high suicide rates due to their feelings of being unaccepted and disenfranchised; this board member was concerned a vote to cancel the play would unintentionally add to such feelings. Her concern was echoed by others in the room.

Based on what they thought was best for the school, when it came time for a vote, *board members voted unanimously to cancel the play because its original intention was lost, it was causing a deep division within the community, and **the entire situation was having a negative effect on the student body***. They also agreed with teaching staff's recommendation on how to proceed with future potential assemblies, most importantly with longer timelines that allow for previewing and discussion with staff and parents before decisions are made.

Currently, staff is reviewing anti-bullying curriculum that will be used in assemblies to ensure students are educated on the subject, and to reinforce that no bullying of any type will be tolerated at SFCS.

This has been a learning experience for all of us regarding timelines and processes for review. Thank you to the community for voicing opinions at the board meeting and prior. Thank you to the school board for doing a difficult (volunteer) job and for continuing to leave personal beliefs at the door and voting based on what you believe is in the best interest for our young, but very wonderful school. Thank you, all, for your continued support.

Sincerely,
Alfonso Garagarza
Principal/Superintendent