

The Tennessee Tribune

MNPS Chief Academic Officer Fights Back Saying: “I Will Not Stand for Anyone Trying to Derail My Career”

By **Tribune Staff** -
March 14, 2019

By Tribune Staff

NASHVILLE, TN — Metro Nashville Public Schools’ Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Monique Felder, is not sitting by quietly while detractors try to damage her excellent reputation in the field of education and derail her career over false accusations that challenge her integrity, character, and commitment to the teachers and students of the school district.

Recent media reports allege that Felder “pocketed thousands of dollars in consulting fees” from Education Research and Development Institute (ERDI) yet failed to report them. But Felder said there is something missing in these media reports – “the full facts.”

“I strongly take issue with being accused of being anything less than forthcoming and honest about my professional activities,” Felder said. “I joined with other Chief Academic Officers across this country as participants in ERDI. This is something many education experts participate in.”

The Tennessee Tribune found that several statements in a NewsChannel5 Investigates report did exactly what they accused Felder of doing, not ‘disclosing’ everything. The so-called thousands of dollars Felder “pocketed” were two \$2,000 honorariums received in sessions held in the Fall 2017 and Spring 2017 – a payment that Chief Academic Officers from other participating

school districts also received. Like Felder, all ERDI participants are nominated by peer academic leaders nationwide to serve as panelists.

Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of Great City Schools, the nation's premier coalition of large urban public-school systems, defended Felder and noted her reputation for excellence.

"Monique Felder is one of those very talented people that any school system in the nation would love to have," Casserly said. "She clearly sees the challenges her students face and is thoroughly committed to finding solutions that make their lives better."

While Felder acknowledged her participation with ERDI and revealed that information on a January 2017 Disclosure Form, the oversight came when she inadvertently reported it as the current calendar year instead of the preceding calendar year – an innocent mistake that both attorneys and auditors acknowledged was easily correctable by amending the disclosure form, which is common practice. The assertion that she intentionally did not report is not accurate. In fact, the form only requires employees to list the source of income, not the amount received, or the type of work completed.

"Even before the error of how I filled out the disclosure form was brought to my attention, I had fully disclosed this information to the Board of Education after a question came up about my participation in ERDI at a September 25, 2018 board meeting," Felder said.

She continued, "Although the form only asks for sources of income, anyone wanting more details need only ask, which is what Board Member Jill Speering did when she wrote an email requesting my travel and income received for the ERDI source of income reported on my 2017 disclosure form. That detailed report went to the entire Board on October 10, 2018 via email, so all nine members of the Board were fully aware of the details of my participation with

ERDI. I also amended my disclosure form as suggested by an attorney and the auditors.”

ERDI has been in existence for 34 years. Founded in 1985, it provides companies intensive assessments of their products and services by education experts from across the country. As with industries serving public health, law enforcement and fire safety, ERDI serves public education by providing an objective forum for professionals in the field to review and provide feedback on product/service developments. ERDI enters no contracts with school districts nor does it advocate, act as an agent or negotiate agreements between school districts and vendors. Education leaders from 150 school districts across the country, as well as in Tennessee, are current participants in ERDI review panels.

Dahlia Shaewitz, Vice President of Transition, Disability & Employment, with the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, D.C., who has known Felder for 10 years, said Nashville’s public-school system is fortunate to have someone of her caliber leading the district’s academic efforts.

“Monique is trustworthy, reliable and has always held herself to the highest standards of professionalism and ethics,” Shaewitz said. “She has always been conscientious and thoughtful in all her work, and incredibly professional in her dealings with colleagues, program participants, and panelists.”

Felder went on to say, “I simply will not stand for anyone trying to derail the almost 30-year professional career I have worked so hard to build over one human error that, when brought to my attention, was immediately corrected,” she said, adding, “If you want to accuse me of something, accuse me of making an honest mistake by confusing school year and calendar year in the reporting of this activity, but do not place a discriminatory and inaccurate label on me as being a dishonest, unethical person in my profession which, as anyone who knows and has worked with me can attest, that is the farthest thing from the truth.”