

6 News Richmond

RPS Board Chair gives herself perfect score addressing student achievement; concerned board is 'distracted'

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RICHMOND, Va. — Richmond School Board Chair Dr. Shonda Harris-Muhammed gave herself a perfect score in driving school board discussions that center around the impacts of decision-making on students.

During a June school board retreat described as a "self-check" and aimed at improving morale within the board, members were asked by a facilitator with the Council of Great City Schools to rate themselves on their prioritization of student outcomes.

Harris-Muhammed rated herself a 10 out of 10.

In her reasoning why, Harris-Muhammed told CBS 6 she intentionally makes the best decisions in the interest of all children and does not allow her personal viewpoints to interfere with the professional decisions she must make.

"I do not verbally attack or embarrass school board colleagues; that is not a healthy outcome. I am very excited about the call on my life to stand in the gap for all children because I was one of the children I have been honored to advocate for. I do not focus on the number in the rating, I focus on the behavior in the outcome," Harris-Muhammed said. "Each and every school board meeting I bring my positivity to the dais with the focus of standing in what is right. My faith depends on doing what is right."

The Council of Great City Schools, a coalition which provides support to urban school districts across the country, analyzed ten RPS board meetings between January and May for the amount of time members spent talking about student achievement.

The council's findings showed there were six meetings in which the board spent between 0-10% of discussion focused on student outcomes. Three meetings were listed at 0%.

The highest percentage the board reached was 31.8% during its March 21 meeting.

CBS 6 asked Harris-Muhammed if she thought there was room for improvement in her leadership as chair to help navigate board discussions toward student outcome-focused solutions.

"It is not my job to ensure school board members remain focused on student outcomes and student achievement. How I facilitate those discussions often is not liked by others, but I am not here to receive praise from others. I am here to stand in what is right, not what is popular," Harris-Muhammed said.

The chairwoman said she believed a majority of school board members, "whomever they are," are focused on outcomes for students and staff, but emphasized the body faces distractions that deter members from their goals.

"I do believe I can assist with facilitating positive adult behaviors, the main thing: student achievement. How I can do that is simple, not responding to foolishness," she said. "I was hopeful after this weekend this board could find a way to move beyond the whirlwinds and distractions. Evidence has proven several will continue to operate in a space of distractions to hide the main focus."

Harris-Muhammed said her main focus includes improving student outcomes, creating an environment where staff feel valued, and addressing attendance and graduation rates.

"I am so excited about the work I do with my school board colleagues who hold a desire to work with me and not against the school board leadership. I am humbled and blessed

when school board members discuss with me on a weekly basis how we as a team can improve and move forward," she said. "That excites me!"

Harris-Muhammed added she continues to pray that her colleagues remain serious about the work of a school board governance team and dodge distractions of poor adult behavior.

"Student outcomes will not change unless adult behaviors change, and that is a fact," Harris-Muhammed said.