Statement from East Lansing Public Schools Trustee Nichole Martin
January 17, 2020

In an attempt to make sure my words are reflective of my own decision to vote no against this week's proposed slate of executive officers, I will provide my response to Alice here. Alice, you do not have to feel wedged into paraphrasing my words and I don't have to worry about the being misleading.

Thank you, Alice, for your inquiry regarding Monday's meeting, the election of officer positions and my vote against the slate that was presented. I believe that the spirit of democracy has totally been lost amongst the East Lansing Board of Education. It would be impossible to think that individual conversations did not take place prior Monday's meeting when a potential slate of board member names are proposed in mere seconds of a request for a motion for officer positions.
It is my understanding that individual conversations were had with each member of the board, and that I was the last one to become privy to the "unofficial slate" that was presented. In a true democracy, members of the board would openly and honestly have to be nominated at the board table. They would talk about why they would like to fill the role off and could serve in an executive roll on the Board of Education.

Last January, I was also not "slated" to be the Vice President but when the unofficial slate had been presented via email, I felt the need to address why a brand new board member would fill such a role when there were senior members who had plenty to give in such a role who had not been provided an opportunity to serve in this capacity. I felt like roles should have been discussed publicly then but they were not and onward we went. When it came time for committees, I was appointed again to the Policy committee, of which I have been a committee member the previous two years but was not appointed as the chair, instead the newest member of our team was provided with this opportunity.

Early last spring, during a presentation to the board, I asked a couple of questions of student advocates that were deemed inappropriate by members of the board, staff and students. I inquired about resources of mental health statistics that had been provided. My inquiry caused quite a stir and resulted in the drafting a proposed board apology letter for the way the students had been treated. I did not sign that letter. If I was the person to have offended someone or a group of people, why would an entire board have to apology to the people they did not offend. I did not believe it was their apology to give and I certainly was not going to sign an apology that was not mine. As a result, at my request, I met with administrators and teachers, then with students, so I could hear from directly from those who were affected by my inquiry. I rearranged my work scheduled to meet administrators, staff and students during times they were scheduled to be at school. After meeting with them, I had a clearer understanding of how I had offended each one and as a result chose to write an individual apology letter to each person I had met with and I sent them off to the school. Shortly after this incident, it was decided there was no longer a need for a Board Liaison to the Mental Health Advisory Committee. Guess who that was…yup it was me. A board liaison position that was identified as a need, in a board approved resolution that was drafted and passed. Suddenly that position was no longer needed, and it was presented as though it were to align with the Sex Education Advisory Board.

Now we find ourselves looking at a new year, newly elected officials and rearrangement of committees. I voted no against a proposed slate I believe was obtained in a way that was convenient. I may be in a political role as a school board member, but I am not a politician. There was no need for anyone to lobby for or against anything different than what was presented because that slate worked well to meet the needs of others. I could have said something when asked if there was any discussion but that would have been uncomfortable for those in the room. I could have held the discussion long enough to buy time for Trustee Henderson to arrive. The board had been provided with information not only once that Trustee Henderson was on her way but a second time that she was in the building and there were no pressing agenda items that could not have allowed for the meeting to start a couple minutes behind in order to have the full board present for the voting in of officers. Action was taken to start the meeting at 7:00pm on the dot and officers were voted in at 7:03pm, respectively.
So what's next? Well the committee assignments have come out, and surprise, surprise not only am I not the chair of the Policy committee, but I have been taken off it all together. The fall out of my "No" vote, is that despite my worth and value seen by those who elected me, my involvement in the last three years of policy would be best suited this year by joining the intergovernmental committee.

The intent of this detailed response is to provide a better understanding regarding my refusal to jeopardize my integrity regardless of how people, and their perceived power, think of me. So, tasks and opportunities can continue to be taken away from me. I am still one seventh of a voting board and I will continue to I refuse to vote for things that lack any sense of integrity. I am one seventh regardless of any officer role.

As members of the East Lansing Board of Education, our primary functions as the governing body are to uphold legislative standards and update policy to support those standards, approve educational materials presented by our staff who are the subject matter experts, support the Superintendent in adhering her agreed upon goals and the goals of her administrative staff, monitor and make budget decisions (approvals) as recommended to our Director of Finance, oversee school facilities, serve as needed when disciplinary action requires us and communicating with the public. All of which can be found under Board Policy 1032 Power and Duties.

The roles of the executive board positions can be found in Board Policy 1150 – Board Officers. I do not need the title of an executive board position to uphold my duties to the community.