

When I shared the letter with the media, I was confident I was sharing a document the public had a right to access. Indeed, my notes that accompanied the document I sent make this point.

I remain convinced today that the letter is a public document

First, the document in question was just that -- an unsolicited letter sent from someone not employed by the district. It was not a confidential student record. It was not an offer of a legal settlement. It was a letter sent from an address in Bedford to an elected member of the school board.

Second, the letter, which was sent twice -- once via email, and once to the homes of members of this body -- was distributed to the entire board and to the superintendent. Since being sworn in in January, the one consistent message we have received is that any email shared with the entire board is a matter of public record. We have regularly received reminders from our clerk and legal counsel making this point.

In fact, the presumption that an unsolicited email is not subject to right-to-know protections is so great, the city of Manchester includes on all correspondence a warning that any email is subject to exposure under the provisions of the right to know law.

Third, nothing in the letter makes any reference to the desire of the of the writer to keep the letter confidential -- something no recipient would be able to do given the point I just made about sending the letter to the entire board. There is no "confidential" or "top secret" stamp on the letter -- something that accompanies all information from the school district that

board members are expected to keep secret -- and a warning we are conditioned to look for.

Fourth, unlike previous instances in which the board has been asked to keep something private, no school official made that request of board members before I shared it with the media. In non-public session, we regularly receive warnings about confidentiality. This letter was never the subject of such a meeting or discussion.

I might also add this: When the board was asked one evening earlier this year not to make any comment about the situation involving Webster's former principal, a board member the very next day announced the name of the school's interim principal. No eyebrows were raised over an obvious breach of the will of the board to keep something secret.

Fifth, the letter was not addressed to the superintendent or any school district employee -- like a teacher or a principal. It was addressed to an individual member of the board, who cannot expect that he, as an elected official, has an claim on keeping this information out of the public view. The law, quite simply, does not afford elected officials the right to keep embarrassing letters sent to the entirety of an elected body secret.

Sixth, as I noted before, the letter was sent to the entire board TWICE. When I arrived at home to find the paper copy, it had been opened by a third party and placed face up on my dining room table in full view of anyone in the house.

Given that circumstance and various others that could have played out in our homes, it is hard to make the case there was anything secret about the letter.

Seventh , the board has repeatedly received conflicting information about confidential information and how to handle it in the context of disciplinary procedures. I have complained about the issue, received a response that appeared to address my concerns -- only to witness the contradictory behavior continue.

Finally and most importantly, let's not forget what brings us to this place. The subject of the letter is the behavior of an elected official -- a topic that the right-to-know law was drafted to expose to the eyes of the public. Matters involving elected officials are presumed to be open for public scrutiny.

A few other points: I certainly regret the inadvertent repetition of the student's name, but my intention in sharing the letter was not to expose her to criticism or undue scrutiny -- that had already been done . In fact, as Dr. Vargas can attest, I worked very hard late one afternoon to facilitate phone calls between the superintendent and her parents, phone calls that led to the decision to assign her a new email before the superintendent eliminated school board members' access to student emails across the district.

As the former editor of and adviser to the school newspaper at the center of this issue, I felt a particular responsibility to ensure that all of the facts were

known, because I genuinely felt the student in question and the paper were getting a raw deal.

And I do regret what something like this does to board comity, and I will be careful in the future when it comes to sharing information in this manner -- not because the law prevents it, but because it does cause an unnecessary distraction.