

Chelsea Jennings  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

07 March 2018

To:

The Governing Board of the Academy of Arts and Academics

I joined the Board of Directors of the Academy of Arts and Academics (A3) in August of 2017. I knew Michael Fisher, former principal of A3, from when I was a student at Thurston High School (THS). I took several drama classes that he taught and was in several plays that he directed, as well as traveled to Scotland with him and other students to perform a play about preventing teen suicide. Fisher and I did not keep in touch after I graduated from THS in 2007 except for the occasional casual conversation on Facebook. Fisher knew that I was heavily involved in my local community, and that I was looking for more opportunities to make a difference. Thus, he asked me to join the board and I accepted.

When the reports of his suicide, weeks after I joined this board, and later, the reports of his sexual misconduct with a student came to light, I was appalled to learn that somebody who I had once placed trust in had abused his power as a teacher and school administrator. When more evidence against Fisher came to the surface in the two *The Register-Guard* articles published on Thursday, March 1st 2018, I read both articles in their entirety, as well as the supplemental documentation, including the full police report.

The police report outlines that current Managing Director of A3, Ed Mendelssohn, failed to report the concerns of two students: that Fisher was having sex with students. Not only is Mendelssohn a mandatory reporter, and failed in that responsibility, but Mendelssohn also failed to treat the information with any level of seriousness and showed absolutely no respect for the students. According to the report, Mendelssohn replied to the students, "of course it isn't true," and then advised them "to be careful with statements like that because they sometimes are not true and can ruin people's lives." It is also outlined in the report that an A3 School Teacher noted to police during their investigation that "Mendelssohn's response was overboard and may have created a situation where a student was not comfortable reporting such behavior."

**These and other similar failures to report Fisher's unacceptable conduct outlined in the police report, motivated my decision to take action. I knew that as a board member it was my responsibility to speak out on what I viewed as gross negligence, and failure to protect students from harm.**

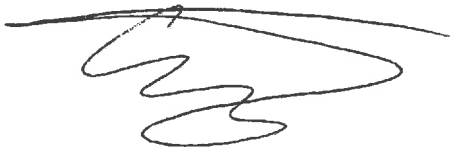
On Saturday, March 3rd 2018, I received an email from the board with a draft of a statement to be sent to the media and A3 parents as a response to the police report and articles that had been published. In my opinion, the statement that was drafted failed to adequately address the severity of the situation. It failed to offer any sort of apology, and it failed to offer any specific course of action to protect students. I then called for a public meeting to discuss the content of the statement.

On Monday, March 5th 2018, I attended a public A3 Governing Board meeting and presented my fellow board members with an alternate statement that offered an apology, that addressed the unacceptable actions of those in the police report, and recommended that further steps be taken to address the situation, including calling for Mendelssohn to be put on administrative leave until a thorough investigation into his failure to report abuse against a student had been conducted.

The responses I received from my fellow board members and the interim board president made it clear to me that they were prioritizing the legal interests of the school and the board over their duty to protect students, and did not accept any substantive changes that I had made to their original statement. **After this discussion, it became clear to me that I would not be able to use my power as a board member to affect the change that I believe is necessary to safeguard A3 students. This is the reason I resign from my position on the board effective immediately.** And I also leave you with these final thoughts:

- I believe it is imperative to take action so that no student who comes to a teacher, counselor, administrator, or other mandatory reporter has their words dismissed the way that they were for the eleven years that Fisher's crimes were overlooked.
- I also believe that teachers and administrators who heard these rumors, regardless of how they felt about them or who they heard them from, should be held duly accountable for their failure to protect a victim of child sex abuse, as well as their failures that kept a child sex predator in a school. Failure to hold these individuals accountable is a failure of the victim of these crimes, as well as a failure to protect Springfield students.
- I call on Ed Mendelssohn to be placed on administrative leave, and I encourage any A3 students who may have any other information related to this investigation to speak up. Your voices will be heard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chelsea Jennings', with a long horizontal line above it.

Chelsea Jennings