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To Whom It May Concern:

Superintendent **Steve Bliss** has simultaneously reminded me of two presidents: Abraham Lincoln and Jimmy Carter.

Indulge me as I explain my unsurprisingly historical take on him.

Having served as president of the Dover-Sherborn Educational Association for the last four years, I have had the chance to see Steve Bliss in action as an assistant superintendent and a superintendent.

He has regularly reminded me of Abraham Lincoln in two noteworthy ways. One, he typically speaks and writes with empathy or even compassion, reflecting his familiarity with what others are thinking and what matters most to them. For instance, he knows us well often to send heartfelt e-mails or even handwritten notes of appreciation or condolence. His predecessor sometimes publicly mispronounced our names, but Steve appears to have Dale Carnegie's gift for knowing us by name and affinities.

This humanity has also been evident even when he has had to let an educator go. Even when a member of our union has had . . . issues, he has treated the employee with respect and made sure that I knew that he knew the strengths of that employee and the devotion of that employee to the job and the individual children.

Two, the way that he has handled the voices of different stakeholders has reminded me of how Lincoln formed and managed his cabinet, assembling what Doris Kearns Goodwin has called a team of rivals. True, Steve did not have Lincoln's advantage of having the final decision as a wartime president. Still, he often has had to weather the challenges of having school committee members, parents in general, and teachers in general each think that they had the solution to a given problem or situation. This was true not only in contract negotiations, but also in the day-to-day business of running a school system with three school committees, one for Dover (Chickering), one for Sherborn (Pine Hill), and one for the region (middle and high schools).

**OVER, PLEASE**

This has not been easy for Steve. Let me be clear about my context and his context when I say that. The first in my family to go to college, I was fortunate enough to earn my undergraduate degree at Harvard. Since then, I have earned my graduate degree at Boston University and worked in schools with teachers and students alike who invest the hours necessary to fare well in each class.

All that said, let me now say that Steve devotes more hours in the day to his job than anyone else I have met.

In short, having so many people who see themselves as authorities on a given topic has not been easy for Steve because I have listened to him question why a given obstacle stands in the way. On behalf of the union, I know that I have sometimes frustrated Steve when speaking about honoring the contract. We consistently have candid and respectful conversations; he becomes frustrated, however, when what he is proposing will benefit our students and I acknowledge that but still must push back.

Steve also has typically reminded me of Jimmy Carter in that he is a voracious reader and truly wants to know about all or virtually all of the minutiae involved before making a decision or implementing a change. He cares deeply about the two towns served by our four schools and holds himself to what might be called impossibly high standards.

Again, let me be clear about my context. I am a difficult grader who somehow still finds himself asked by many seniors to write letters of recommendation on their behalf for college admissions. Like these adolescents, Steve knows that I always include a criticism to demonstrate the height of my standards.

The criticism that I wish to offer concerning Steve Bliss is that like Jimmy Carter, he could relax a little. Since he works so hard and plays so rarely, he occasionally frustrates employees who are invested in their jobs but have familial or other commitments and daily need down time.

Overall, I therefore offer a strong recommendation for Steve Bliss, a man with an impressive memory, a large heart, and an almost preternatural work ethic. I thus must respect his decision to pursue employment elsewhere.

Please feel free to e-mail me at [kaplank@doversherborn.org](mailto:kaplank@doversherborn.org) or phone me at school at (508) 785-1730 x8664 or home (508/561-0201) if you have any questions. I am

Sincerely yours,



Keith Valentine Kaplan, NBCT and President of the Dover-Sherborn Education Association