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Subject: Buncombe County Schools: Shining Light On Tony Baldwin's Nepotism.

The following is an article by Lisa Baldwin (no relation to Buncombe County School Superintendent Tony Baldwin) appearing in The Tribune on October 26, 2016. Here is the direct link to the article:

<http://www.thetribunepapers.com/2016/10/26/buncombe-county-schools-shining-light-on-tony-baldwins-nepotism/>

Buncombe County Schools: Shining Light On Tony Baldwin's Nepotism



School Board Watch

By Lisa Baldwin- Buncombe's School Superintendent, Tony Baldwin (no relation to the reporter), was recently named the North Carolina Western Region School Superintendent of the Year. The Western Region represents 14 of the 115 school districts in North Carolina. In November he will be considered for North Carolina's superintendent of the year. Many have questioned whether Superintendent Baldwin's actions deserve this recognition. Even the school board was surprised.

Since taking the job in 2009, Supt. Baldwin has awarded BCS contracts to family members and Central Office staff family members. As a former women's basketball coach and PE major, he's forced mandatory PE on all middle school students. With class sizes between 40 and 50 students he has encouraged the hiring of more PE teachers at the expense of other elective teachers.

Instead of trying to raise academic standards and focus dollars on teaching and learning, Buncombe Schools' response to poor scores and competition from charter schools and opportunity scholarships has been to hire spin doctors (4 person PR/Communications Department) and spend valuable education dollars to create a "positive image". This doesn't do any favors for our children and the teachers trying hard to make a difference.

The data continues to point out deficiencies in Buncombe's academic standards. Let's face it – 24 out of 39 county schools scored "C's" on the state school report cards last year; after failing grades were curved. This is a slight improvement over the 2014-15 school year when 77% of Buncombe schools were failing to ensure our children received a year's worth of learning. In 2015-16, 62% of schools scored below a grade of 70. Henderson County boasts only 24% of schools below a 70 with two elementaries scoring a grade of A+; Buncombe's elementaries don't come close. It's no wonder that about 500 students leave each year for homeschooling, public charters or private schools. Over 10% of Buncombe County's student population is homeschooled. Yet Tony Baldwin continues to recommend the building of new schools, instead of using the ones we have more efficiently.

At Superintendent Baldwin's recommendation, the school board approved over \$600,000 in bonuses for principals and assistant principals with no performance standards or accountability measures attached. They also approved about \$1 million for sports coaches but no money for academic team coaches. Instead of practicing oversight, the board functions as a rubber stamp for the superintendent's excesses.

Buncombe County Schools could easily be called the Tony Baldwin Family Business. In clear violation of conflict of interest rules, the superintendent approved two contracts with a company employing his son, Garrett Baldwin. This information was not disclosed to the school board by the superintendent; a whistleblower reported the conflict after the contract had been executed. It would have been simple for Supt. Baldwin to step aside and ask the assistant superintendent or school board to approve the construction contract. The Buncombe school board also allows the superintendent broad powers to approve construction contracts up to \$300,000, while many districts, including Wake County, set the threshold much lower. Baldwin also recommended the naming of T. C. Roberson's math wing after his mother Rosa Lee Baldwin. The new Williams-Baldwin teacher apartments near Erwin High School are also named for her and Supt. Baldwin's relation, Buddy Baldwin.

Speaking of school contracts for family and friends, Supt. Baldwin also approved contracts for his sister, Jan Webster's organization, Western Region Education Service Alliance. Once again, he violated conflict of interest rules. Since he and Jan took their positions in 2009, Supt. Baldwin has approved over \$238,000 for WRESA. While past monies also went to this organization for professional development, the fact that he didn't ask the school board for approval, raises questions. Results from a study by TNTF revealed that of more than 10,000 teachers, professional development — of any type — did little for the teachers or districts studied, and found that less than a third of teachers improved performance year-over-year as a result. Could this money have been better spent on the classroom?

Family members of central office staff also benefited from Supt. Baldwin's generosity with tax dollars. Remember controversial Buncombe math specialist, Margaret Small, who retired one week after the story broke about her Marxist background and co-teaching of a Lesbian 101 class? Small had majored in Women's Studies but after working as a machinist, obtained her doctorate in math education from the University of Chicago, under Weather Underground bomber and Graduate School professor, Bill Ayers. Small's lesbian partner and "wife", Peggy Baker, has been awarded an average of about \$33,000 per year since 2010 by Supt. Baldwin for "professional development" at the Early College and Community High School. Besides working for her non-profit EASL Institute, Baker was previously a Chicago union organizer and locomotive mechanic.

But with a school board hand-picked to run for office by Supt. Baldwin and his bureaucratic buddies, there is not much chance that the conflict of interest laws or his failure to follow his duties will result in termination. WLOS investigative reporter Mike Mason did seven exclusive stories on the failure of the superintendent to ensure school safety. Numerous fire code violations and failure to permit and inspect electrical wiring was exposed by WLOS and eventually, but silently, remedied by the school district. Carefully electing school board members who have integrity and courage is the only solution. We need more school board candidates, like Laura Bowen and Bob Chilmonik, who support high academic standards and will eradicate cronyism so tax dollars are focused on learning.