

Full text of the letter from more than 140 Clara Barton Open School parents:

*Dear Minneapolis Schools leadership,*

*Thank you to Superintendent of Schools Bernadeia H. Johnson, Ed.D. for writing to the Barton Community on June 24, 2014 with a detailed explanation of the process used in selecting new principals and discussing communications issues around this choice. As parents and members of the Minneapolis community, we value open communication as well as all the other hard work the Minneapolis Public Schools leadership does for all our schools.*

*We are responding to your letter because the conversations about leadership transitions at Barton Open Magnet School and other schools across the district are important and need to continue.*

*We are motivated to write not only by concern for our kids and the teachers and staff who work with them, but also out of the deeply-held belief that Minneapolis public schools are not simply a collection of buildings. They are communities of parents, students, teachers, staff and neighbors who work together, struggle together and are inspired together to develop our kids' full potential each day and over many years. For this reason, a process for choosing school leaders, in our view, needs to make room for both rigor and democracy. It needs to be efficient and provide an opportunity for all stakeholders—including parents and staff at a school—to have a meaningful voice. We believe that honoring the voices of parents and teachers—in all schools—will not only yield great results but will build a stronger community of learners.*

*As parents at Barton Open Magnet School, we don't want a better principal or a greater voice than other school communities. We want every school to have a great leader and all parents and staff to be empowered in a successful process. We do believe that magnet schools should recruit leaders who, in addition to being well-qualified, know and value the curriculum and methodology of the magnet program, or at least have a background that suggests they would be a good fit for the program.*

*For example, at a recent parent meeting, Deputy Superintendent Cecilia Saddler shared that after the standardized selection process was complete, the pool didn't include anyone with the Spanish Language skills appropriate to run a language immersion school. Thus, the District wisely choose to recruit other candidates to apply for the job. We would submit that other magnet programs, including Barton Open, merit the same attention to their unique programs.*

*More serious than the problems with the timing and format of the announcement of a new principal were the fact that none of the communications from the District about the hiring of a new principal indicated any attention or commitment to the Open magnet program. The hiring process didn't allow anyone to apply specifically for that*

*position, but rather, to apply to be a principal somewhere in the District. We have no assurance that the general applicant pool included anyone with the specific skill, experience, commitment and passion to lead an Open education program. As a school that uses multiple forms of assessments, the focus on standardization rather than personal interaction, values, and the experience of close stakeholders raises questions for many of us.*

*Finally, the District's intention to hire two former Barton principals to mentor the candidate selected as principal, while meant with the best of intentions, raises the further question of whether candidates might not exist who already have more experience with Open methodologies and who might not require such expenditure of the District's resources.*

*In short, we believe that serious issues remain to be dealt with to resolve the loss of trust incurred between MPS and our parent community—and that it is absolutely vital to rebuild that mutual respect.*

*It seems difficult and unfair to ask this candidate to assume a leadership position until there is time for further dialogue between our parent community and MPS leadership.*

*For that reason, we respectfully request that you delay his appointment so that members of the Barton community can meet with you, in person, to reevaluate the hiring process. More work is needed to ensure that whomever becomes the principal at Barton next year can be a leader who is effective, trusted and helps all of us meet our goal of the best possible education for all our kids.*

*A Somali translation of this letter will follow when the opportunity presents, due to Ramadan.*

*We will be following up with you to set up a time to meet.*

The letter has been signed by more than 140 parents at the Clara Barton Open Magnet Program.