

# Investigation into concerns raised by two North administrators

By Isabella Boedeker, Ian DuVernay & Kate Kasuba  
SECTION EDITOR & STAFF REPORTERS  
PHOTO | Ian DuVernay



**CALL TO ACTION** | To promote school pride, Athletic Director Michelle Davis thinks students should stay engaged in community-based activities. “Kids, they need to go out and represent North every day,” Davis said. “We talk about representing North, protecting this house obviously, is one thing, but when they’re at a concert in the community, on a field, still doing what we believe is true as Norsemen to do, to make sure that people see North the way we see North.”

On the first floor of the B-building lies Principal Dr. Kate Murray’s office. Found within her office, is a vertical wooden sign with white letters spelling the word “home.” It stands as a symbol of inclusion, belonging and community for all students. Murray’s steadfast commitment to her “home” serves as the driving force to uphold the student body, even more so since Jan. 2023. Since then, Murray has witnessed the repeal of North’s healthcare clinic and substantial fiscal reductions resulting in the loss of courses and teachers. Most recently, the investigation by the Miller Johnson law firm that found former Board of Education President, Ahmed Ismail, had engaged in retaliatory behavior against herself and Athletic Director Michelle Davis.

At the Board of Education meeting on Feb. 27, the agenda schedule listed “Superintendent’s Report / President’s Report: Employee Complaints & Investigations,” which addressed the executive summary from Miller Johnson. Along with finding Ismail to have engaged in retaliatory behavior, Miller Johnson also determined Ismail made comments to a then-GPPSS employee indicating a desire to “push out” Complainants after the termination of former coach Frank Sumbera. However, Miller Johnson also determined Ismail didn’t engage in any actions to terminate Murray and Davis. The Interim Superintendent at the time, Chris Fenton, decided there would be no consequences for Ismail, as Fenton did not support the findings. Despite the release of

the executive summary, meeting attendees requested the full report during the Public Comments portion of the meeting. In attendance at this board meeting were Murray and Davis who both want to safeguard North students during this investigation.

“I think what drives me is the students in that I get up every morning to take care of North, the students, the staff, and the community and to protect this house,” Murray said. “And that these students deserve administrators who fight relentlessly for them and that allows me to stay grounded in my values.”

Past and present North staff members demonstrated support for Murray and Davis, but also for the wellbeing of North, by attending this same meeting. A member of the leadership team and math teacher, Eric Vanston, emphasizes the concept of “family” at North. Vanston holds onto this concept as a beacon of hope for resolution amid this investigation, echoing the sentiment of North being a welcoming “home.”

“The resolution I am looking for is to make sure Mr. Ismail does not engage in any more retaliatory behavior towards North,” Vanston said. “It is not my opinion that he did engage in such things, rather it is the opinion of the outside-sourced law firm that looked into the matter.”

While recognizing the gravity of the investigation’s effects on North and the broader community, Board of Education Vice President Ahmed Ismail

emphasizes the importance of addressing other pressing issues within our school community.

“I think the investigation and the misunderstanding surrounding the basis of it has sidetracked the school board and the school system administration from the real challenges our school system faces,” Ismail said. “Declining enrollment and the loss of the \$4.5 million the school system was receiving in COVID-related Federal funding.”

Despite Ismail’s emphasis on dealing with other crucial district issues, North parent Sarah Schroeder believes its impact on community morale has negatively affected the district and overshadowed the district’s positive aspects.

“When the publicity around the district centers around maleficence committed by board members, with proof publicly available even with the full report shrouded in mystery, there is little room left for the public to center their opinion on the great work done by the school, the incredible talent of our students and the inspirational job our administrators do to build an environment of trust, safety and learning,” Sarah Schroeder said.

Moreover, Sarah Schroeder’s child, A, believes informing oneself about issues presented at board meetings can be a way for students to show appreciation for teachers and administrators who tirelessly advocate for their well-being and education.

“I’ve become more conscious of my surroundings and the climate at school related to these issues,” A Schroeder said. “I’ve also been becoming more aware of my teachers and administrators and how much work they do to protect our home at North.”

However, according to Ismail, progress has been made since the Feb. 27 board meeting. He asserts that the issue has been resolved and wants to get back to making Grosse Pointe a strong district.

“I believe this matter has been settled,” Ismail said. “The process outlined in our school system Policy Manual for dealing with this kind of issue was followed. Our Superintendent at the time, Mr. Fenton, issued his findings on the investigation, which under our Board Policy, are final. I hope the complainants feel the same way.”

While Ismail considers this investigation resolved, Davis recognizes its direct impact on North. Davis accentuates the prevailing spirit at North and believes North’s resilience is being demonstrated in the face of challenges.

“I think we’re fighters and always have been at North, so I mean it’s exhausting to fight all the time, and I think the teachers feel it, and administrators feel it and the community feels it, but it’s good exhaustion because we know it’s for a good cause,” Davis said.