AN OPEN LETTER TO MY CONSTITUENTS AND THE PUBLIC

From Kevin Mitchell, President, Gallup-McKinley County Schools Board of Education

September 21, 2026

I am writing in response to the recent open letter from MCFUSE.

The Gallup-McKinley County Schools Board represents the entire community. This includes all our students, families, employees, taxpayers and the communities we serve. Our first responsibility is to students and their education. Supporting the employees who serve those students is also essential. In fact, more than 80 percent of the District's budget goes toward employee salaries, benefits, programs and other support.

MCFUSE's letter raises many concerns, but several of its claims about former teacher and union president Sawyer Masonjones do not reflect the full public record. The District has been transparent about this case. Two days of public discharge hearings were recorded and remain available online for anyone to review.

The Public Employees Labor Relations Board also reviewed claims that Mr. Masonjones was targeted because of his union activity but instead found sufficient evidence of misconduct and insubordination and did not find that his discharge was based on his union role.

An independent arbitrator also found misconduct and insubordination, including problems involving instructional time, student attendance and accountability, students leaving the classroom, response to student vaping, student engagement, and instructional support. The arbitrator disagreed with the District about the penalty and determined that discharge was too severe.

The District disagrees with that portion of the decision and has chosen to appeal it.

Superintendent Jvanna Hanks later initiated a separate discharge action based on additional issues identified after the original case. GMCS has issued a notice of intent to discharge Mr. Masonjones for a second time, pending a final hearing before the Board.

The Board supports holding employees to professional and safety standards while also respecting their rights.

We are also committed to improving the District's relationship with employees and MCFUSE. Superintendent Hanks has been directly involved in collective bargaining and has worked to establish clear and open communication with union leadership. Disagreement during bargaining does not mean that bargaining is not occurring or that either side is acting in bad faith.

This is also a new chapter for GMCS.

We have a new superintendent and a Board that has changed significantly. This Board has made a deliberate decision to be more accessible, more focused on our communities, and more supportive of employees while keeping students at the center of every decision.

We should learn from past disagreements, but we should not allow them to prevent the District from moving forward.

MCFUSE also noted that voters will again decide whether I should remain on the Board. I agree.

That decision belongs to the parents, employees, families and communities I was elected to represent. For the past 15 years, I have tried to serve them with honesty, care and a commitment to the students of Gallup-McKinley County Schools.

I trust those communities to judge my record for themselves.

Kevin Mitchell, President

Gallup-McKinley County Schools Board of Education