

# NAACP NEWS

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**June 2, 2016** – The Mississippi State Conference NAACP is troubled by the progress of the Clarksdale hearings regarding the allegations of cheating at Heidelberg Elementary School in the Clarksdale Municipal School District. Our concern, at its heart, is for the well-being and best interests of the children involved. However, the way this investigation, and its subsequent hearing, has been conducted is questionable at best and suspicious at worst. From its inception, this investigation has been shrouded in darkness. Children have been interrogated without the consent, knowledge, or presence of their parents. Teachers have been harrassed and threatened. And yet, the supposed “evidence” collected from these efforts has not been shown. When the “evidence” has been requested, those requests have been denied or parties have been told that the evidence has been destroyed.

This is not only unacceptable, it also suggests the possibility of wrong-doing by the state and the investigative firm.

Lowanda Tyler-Jones, principal at Heidelberg Elementary School, faces allegations that are damning to any education professional. The allegation itself is likely to forever cast a cloud of doubt upon her integrity. And yet, Tyler-Jones has been met with delays at the absence of a quorum of commission members. She has been informed that there exists testimony from witnesses supporting the allegations, but neither she nor her council has been allowed to interview these witnesses. There exists videos that capture the interrogation of some of the children involved, but once again, these videos have been produced to neither Tyler-Jones and her council nor to the children’s parents.

The costly erasure mark analysis provided by the Caveon Test Security Company is another questionable piece of evidence of against Tyler-Jones. Supposedly, the analysis shows that there is evidence of possible cheating on the children’s answers sheets. However, neither the comparison sheets nor the children’s sheets have been produced. All in all, the lack of

opportunity to review and respond to the evidence being used against her triggers some alarming due process concerns.

“It seems the position of MDE is that the growth seen at Heidelberg Elementary School could only be the result of cheating and not student, parent, teacher, and community effort,” stated Derrick Johnson, President of the Mississippi State Conference NAACP. “This entire process appears to be an assault on the possibility of success in impoverished districts.” Johnson continued saying, “This teaches our children the wrong lesson. It tells them that their academic successes will be answered with scrutiny and not support, and with accusations and not applause. This is not the sort of lesson the state should be teaching.”

This entire process, so far, has been one questionable decision after another and has displayed none of the necessary transparency demanded in such proceedings.

“We do not support bad actors who undermine quality education for children nor do we support accusations without providing transparency and due process rights. Our concern is to ensure the best interest of children are protected.”