



## Former Lopez principal accused of sexual offenses

By Mandi Johnson  
Editor

*Warning: This story contains explicit details of alleged sexual harassment.*

Eight Lopez residents have filed a tort claim and a complaint with the Washington State Human Rights Commission against former Lopez Island Secondary Principal David Sather.

“Mr. Sather is accused of propositioning female staff, making sexual gestures, making sexual comments, sending electronic communications that were sexual in nature, engaging in stalking behavior, rifling through individuals’ personal effects, and taking actions that prevented the claimants from being able to do their job or advancing in their employment,” attorneys Lara Hruska and Shannon McMinimee wrote in a Sept. 6, 2019, press release about the complaints. “He is also accused of intentionally and negligently inflicting emotional distress and discriminating against the claimants based on their sex and marital status.”

Hruska and McMinimee work for Cedar Law PLLC, a Seattle-based education firm. The duo represents the six women and two men who approached the firm in June, a month after attempting to resolve their complaints with the school board, McMinimee said. She added that her firm has heard from approximately 60 people about Sather’s alleged misconduct. A financial figure has not yet been determined for damages in the tort claim.

“I doubt there is a single female

See **SATHER**, Page 3

## Samish scientists seek to save struggling species



Dan Hershman/Flickr CC BY 2.0

Bull kelp in the San Juan Islands, taken by photographer Dan Hershman in 2007.

By Mandi Johnson  
Editor

While the conservation spotlight is focused on the survival of the Southern resident orcas, another keystone species of the Salish Sea is slowly dwindling relatively unnoticed: bull kelp.

“People are pretty aware of the importance of eelgrass beds. There doesn’t seem to be that awareness of keystone habitat around kelp,” Director of the Samish Department of Natural Resources Todd Woodard said. “I think there’s also a concurrent awareness campaign to let folks know this is just as important of a habitat for a myriad of species.”

Bull kelp is possibly the most iconic and is indeed the largest of the 23 species of large brown algae found in the Salish Sea, according to the Northwest Straits Commission. Bull kelp grow at a rate of up to 2 feet daily and can reach a height of 60 feet or more. Kelp forests provide shelter and protection from high currents to a variety of forage fish and other species as well as helping to bring oxygen into the ocean.

Woodard added that both resident and transient orcas will use the kelp beds to forage for food and for social activities.

“It seems to be something that’s important to the social organization or play,” Woodard said.

Orcas participate in a sort of play activity observers refer to as kelping, wherein the orca will appear to play with kelp or seaweed by dragging it around in the notch of their fluke or by another body part.

Samish DNR has joined with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Northwest Straits Initiative and more than 30 other regional agencies as part of a large-scale effort to study the kelp canopy throughout the Salish Sea and to produce a recovery action plan. The Northwest Straits Commission launched the Salish Sea International Kelp Alliance in January 2015 to combine efforts in Canada and the United States to monitor changes in Salish Sea kelp forest populations and bring awareness to the cultural and ecological importance of kelp.

Samish DNR became the lead researcher for the central Salish Sea due to its presence, access to funding and desire to do so, Woodard explained.

Samish DNR used aerial photographs from 2006 provided by the Friends of the San Juans to compare to more recent observations made by the department since 2016. Overall, the bull kelp population in the region being studied by Samish DNR has dropped 30 percent in the last decade. In some places, like off the southeast coast of San Juan Island, there is less of

See **KELP**, page 4

## Hughes talks ferries

By Colleen Smith  
Publisher

The Washington State Legislature starts its 2020 session the first week in January.

San Juan County Councilmember Rick Hughes says the ferry system will be a priority for him.

“Our county ferry advisory committee is trying hard not to complain but to find solutions,” he said. “A lot of what we do (in the near future) is tied to that vehicle tab measure on the ballot. I would urge people to take a good look at what I-695 did to ferries in the past.”

Hughes referred to political activist Tim Eyman’s measure that was approved by voters in 1999. Initiative 695, labeled the “\$30 License Tab Initiative,” lowered the statewide tax on private cars and trucks but legislators left a provision in the law that allowed municipalities to impose an additional \$15 tax on car tabs.

“Ever since I-695 passed there

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# Sather

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employee that has worked on the Lopez Island campus ... that does not have an experience with Mr. Sather to talk about," McMinimee told the Journal. She clarified that this includes knowing someone who has experienced the misconduct.

In February, Sather applied for a teaching position in the school district and voluntarily vacated his principal position at the end of the school year, according to school board chairperson John Holding. Sather was set to teach high school social studies and history but is now on administrative leave, according to the Lopez Island School District's school board.

Sather is being represented by Tyler Firkins of Van Sicken Stocks Firkins of Auburn, Washington.

"Mr. Sather strongly denies the allegations and looks forward to clearing his name through the appropriate process," Firkins said. "Mr. Sather will not be litigating this matter in the media, but will instead litigate this matter in a forum where evidence is provided under oath, rather than simply trafficking in rumor and gossip."

## A history of reports

Sather began working for the Lopez Island School District in 2013 after he was let go from a school in Mosier, Oregon, where the superintendent said that his leaving was "what is best for Mosier School," according to a story published in The Dalles Chronicle.

On Lopez, he was assistant principal and was then promoted to principal of the secondary school. In 2017, Sather was investigated by the school district on claims of sexual harassment after he began a relationship with an employee.

"Despite this earlier investigation and findings against him, it appears Mr. Sather has continued his longstanding pattern of creating discriminatory and sexually hostile work and school environments," Hruska and McMinimee

wrote in the press release.

McMinimee noted that an investigation by the Lopez Island School District regarding the 2017 allegations concluded that the relationship between Sather and the complainant was consensual and therefore of no concern. The complainant was an employee of the school.

"They seem to not understand that you can't ever have a truly consensual relationship with someone who is your evaluator," McMinimee said. "There's no version of reality where you can write off quid pro quo as a consensual relationship."

In a letter to Lopez Island School parents dated Sept. 3, 2017, the school board wrote it had concluded an investigation into potential sexual harassment by Sather. The board added that it had commissioned a third-party investigation that concluded Sather had partaken in inappropriate "conversation, bantering, and joking that included sexual conduct." Because conversations of an explicit nature are not allowed in the workplace per school district policy, the board said that it was taking formal action.

"We directed Mr. Sather to cease any such conversations in the future and to take additional training on preventing sexual harassment and supporting a safe workplace," the board wrote.

The letter also asserted that the disciplinary actions were comparable to what had been done at other school districts in similar circumstances, and Sather apologized to both the board and staff for his inappropriate behavior.

"While the board is disappointed with his lapse of judgment in this area, we continue to value the many contributions he is making to our school and students," the board continued. "As such, we believe and expect that he will make the necessary changes to ensure a safe workplace."

At the time, the school board was comprised of Holding and members Dixie

Budke, Del Guenther, Clive Prout and Carol Steckler. The board remains the same with the exception of Chris Greacen, who replaced Prout in the November 2017 election, and Budke voluntarily left the board to serve as an interim principal. Budke chose to step into the principal position when the teaching position was offered to Sather in spring, Holding explained.

"The Lopez Island School District has failed to protect these eight claimants from Mr. Sather's unwanted sexual advances and sexually hostile work environment," the attorneys wrote in their press release. "Specifically, Superintendent Brian Auckland has not acted when Mr. Sather's inappropriate behavior has been reported to him."

## The accusers

Ali Smith is a longtime employee of the Lopez Island School District and is one of the eight clients represented by Cedar Law PLLC. She is currently the office manager of the Lopez Island Elementary School.

"I've watched this go on for years, and I've just had enough of it," Smith said. "I've been there for a long time, almost 20 years."

She alleged Sather "talks about everyone ... absolutely everyone, not just employees — it's the parents. He wants to know if they're single."

Smith explained, "It makes you uncomfortable to work there, and unfortunately a lot of us became almost desensitized to his remarks; we just got calous to it and it got sickening. It's time for him to go, and people need to stand up together. ... Finally, that's happening."

She believes, she said,

Sather should have never been allowed to stay after the investigation in 2017 found that he had been inappropriate.

"He's wronged people over and over and over again," Smith said. "The sad thing about it is that the administration has allowed it."

Smith's husband Brad Smith is also one of the complainants. He said he's personally witnessed Sather's alleged indiscretions.

"I don't know how else to put it other than 'locker room talk,'" Brad Smith said, who has worked as an athletic coach for the school over the years.

According to Brad Smith, Sather has reportedly "blatantly" looked down female employees' shirts "numerous times" in front of him. Sather also allegedly made comments about how it was unfortunate that Brad Smith had returned to the island from his annual trip to Arizona because it meant Sather would have to stop dating Brad Smith's wife. This statement was made in front of both of the Smiths and a student, the couple claimed.

"I was so humiliated that he said that in front of a student," Ali Smith said. "I could hardly breathe."

According to Della McCullough, bus driver, paraeducator and the head of the district's classified staff union, it's not just employees about which Sather would talk explicitly. She explained that when she would talk to Sather, her supervisor, about problems she'd seen with special needs students, he would reportedly say to her, "We could change that child's behavior if I was to 'blank' the parent all night." He allegedly con-

tinued, telling her that the child would then find him in the kitchen in the morning making breakfast for the student's mother.

She added that Sather then questioned what was wrong with the teacher. He'd allegedly ask if she had "something up her butt," then offer to put something in there for her," McCullough explained.

McMinimee said that it had been reported to her that Sather would attempt to use administrative secretaries to obtain information that was not for educational purposes. Such inquiries were whether the new employee "had baggage,"

meaning where they married or had children.

One such administrative secretary is Jennifer Norvelle, Auckland's secretary. She has worked for the Lopez Island School District for 2.5 years.

"I considered myself a friend and a coworker to my district employees and to David [Sather] personally," Norvelle said.

In the time that she's been with the school district, she reportedly heard several comments of a sexual nature from Sather, most indirect, and many about his ex-wife. Over the past few months,

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## Guest column

# News from the San Juan Island Superintendent

Submitted by Kari McVeigh

San Juan Island School District Superintendent

What a wonderful start of the school year! The schools were immaculately clean, the teachers created warm and inviting learning environments, and all administrative staff worked hard to ensure that all was organized and moving smoothly. We are happy to be fully back in action, serving our treasured students and the families of San Juan Island.

This year we welcome our new elementary principal, Caspar van Haalen and our new Special Services Director, Ms. Becky Bell. Both have quickly become trusted and valued additions to our administrative team.

Principal Fred Woods has stepped up as my superintendent intern. In addition to his current duties as middle and high school principal, he will be meeting with me regularly to learn all aspects of being a superintendent.

When you see Becky, Fred or Caspar, be sure to give them a huge smile for working hard on behalf of this remarkable district.

We have received the results of our student's state-mandated exams and are grateful for the excellent teaching that continues to show such positive results. Nearly all grade levels scored well above the state average for both English and Math. Fifth-grade English Language Arts virtually tied the average state scores. Some grade levels were over the top

above the State.

Our graduation rate continues to rise, far exceeding the state averages. Our Special Education students, English Learners and low-income students also scored well above state averages. Although these students are doing well, there continues to be a small gap between these groups and the rest of the student population. We are committed to decreasing this gap over time.

As Superintendent Intern, Woods has convened a Tech/Capital Levy committee (staff and community members) to look at the needs of our district to stay current on technology for both students and staff and to ensure that schools are safe and modernized for the years to come. The committee will provide the Board of Directors a list of projects to present to our community in a February levy. We are always deeply grateful to our generous community for keeping our students safe, in well-maintained buildings, and equipped with the technology needed to prepare for this ever-changing world.

Both Mr. Woods and I have started to engage mixed stakeholder groups (staff, parents and community members) in strategic planning meetings. Over the next few months, these groups will define shared cultural belief statements describing how each member of our school community will be responsible for creating shared responsibility and accountability toward achieving district goals.

## Sather

Continued from Page 3

when concerns began being raised, she continued, the comments became more direct and targeted.

"I definitely feel all of his behavior was always fishing behavior," Norvelle said. "It was a lot of conversation about women and intimacy."

She claimed that Sather would regularly ask her for "playdates." She assumed it meant getting their children together to play.

"I didn't think it was appropriate because I am married, and I don't typically set playdates with our kids with the father. It's typically the mom," Norvelle said. "It didn't feel right."

McMinimee said it appears that what Sather meant by playdates was that while their children played, he and the mother would be intimate. Sather had allegedly told Norvelle that the incident investigated in 2017 was because a playdate had gotten sexual. Sather had told Norvelle, "I've been intimate with women before, and I've made them pass out."

Sather also supposedly joked to Norvelle that she would file a Title IX claim against him. It's a federal mandate that prohibits discrimination against someone based on their sex, and in schools it protects students from sexual harassment. At the time, Sather was the Title IX coordinator for the district.

As of this publication, Washington's Office of

Superintendent of Public Instruction's website has Auckland listed as the current Title IX coordinator, while Lopez Island School District's website says it's Budke.

When Norvelle began to feel most uncomfortable about working in close proximity to Sather, she asked him to only communicate with her via email.

"I was trying to get him to give me some space and he would not respect that space," Norvelle said. "I was nervous. I didn't feel well about it. I was sick to my stomach."

Norvelle is responsible for compiling the school board's meeting packets — no small task, she added. Earlier this summer, one such board packet went missing. She said that she believed it was Sather who took the board packet, as he had admitted to going through her things before.

"I've never had it missing before," she said. "It doesn't just disappear."

McMinimee said Sather was both impacting Norvelle's ability to do her job well and creating extra work for her. Norvelle felt it was time to tell her husband of Sather's actions. Previously, she added, she was afraid to tell her husband for fear of upsetting him and afraid to tell anyone else for fear of losing her job.

"[My husband] was highly offended; I was highly offended," Norvelle said. "When I started pushing back, saying this is not appropriate, ... I felt very fearful. I was afraid to go

to work."

One of the final straws for Norvelle was when Sather reportedly said he had heard Norvelle and her husband were divorcing.

"I was kind of appalled because it's the farthest thing from my mind," she said.

In June, Norvelle went to Auckland with her concerns. She said she felt ignored and dismissed. Norvelle continued to report Sather's statements by contacting school board chairperson Holding via email. He was on vacation, she said, and he supposedly asked her, "What do you want me to do?" She tried to get a response from Auckland again in August.

"He never really replied to my concerns," Norvelle said. She expressed concern over the fact that Sather had left the principal position but placed into one of teaching, where he would be with the students. "It's so unsafe, it's sickening. It makes me sad to think that young women could be vulnerable to that behavior."

Just a few weeks before school began this fall, accuser Sarah Rucker resigned from her position as a para-educator with the district. She wrote a letter explaining her reason for leaving.

"I said that I didn't feel safe or comfortable in the school environment," Rucker said.

She added that notes from the most recent school board meeting stated that Auckland "clarified" her language, saying she resigned because she has an infant she didn't want exposed to germs.

"That entire statement that he made to the board was a complete fabrication," Rucker said.

She explained that Sather was friendly, humorous and supportive in the beginning, but later Sather noted a student had "luscious young breasts." Rucker was the employee with whom Sather had reportedly had a sexual relationship with that prompted the investigation in 2017. She said it started with the same sexual talk other women in the district reported he had used with them.

### What's next

The members of the school board released the following statement on Sept. 12:

"On behalf of the Lopez Island School District and School Board, we want to acknowledge that our district is in the middle of a very trying time.

"As many in our community are aware, allegations of verbal sexual harassment between adult staff members were brought forward to the district. Members of our staff have reported feeling unsafe in the workplace, which is something we never want to occur.

"We know that there are many questions in our community, as well as information being shared — both accurate and inaccurate.

"The district and board take allegations of improper conduct very seriously and we are committed to having a safe workplace for our staff and an environment that fosters learning for our students.

"At this time, the district

They will also look at a host of both quantitative and qualitative data to create districtwide actionable goals. Once goals are established, we will create action plans with specific timelines for activities, outcomes and deliverables. This will all be made public during the course of this school year. Stay tuned!

We've worked hard to create a balanced budget with a healthy end fund balance this year. However, last spring the state unexpectedly capped how much of our voter-approved levy that we are able to access. This has the effect of making future budgets less solvent.

I am meeting with our legislative representatives in the house and senate, as well as with other superintendents of districts also unfairly hit with this levy cap, to identify legislative remedies to try to achieve during the next Legislative session, in January.

None of the 30 districts across the state unfairly hit with this levy cap can solve this problem by cutting current budgets. We need legislators to act. I am happy to speak with any of our service groups or individuals who would like to understand more about these issues, and how you can help.

I continue to be humbled and proud to serve this gem of district. I thank you for your support, suggestions, and guidance and am open to discuss with you this truly amazing place any time. Feel free to call if you have questions or concerns.

has placed the individual accused of inappropriate behavior on administrative leave and has engaged a professional third-party investigator to gather facts related to the allegations presented. The investigator is now in the process of gathering information.

"We are committed to a thorough and fair investigation. If it is determined that misconduct occurred, appropriate action will be taken by the district and the board, and outcomes will be shared with the public.

"Because we are in the midst of a process intended to thoroughly and impartially explore the facts, and one which involves confidential personnel information, we are limited in what we are able to share with the community at this time.

"We will be holding our regularly scheduled school board meeting on Wednesday, September 25. Any additional information that we are able to

release will be presented at that meeting. Additionally, members of the community will have the opportunity to address the board in the public comments section of our agenda. The meeting will begin at 6 p.m. in the Multipurpose Room of the Elementary Building.

"We recognize the tremendous impact this situation has had on the individuals involved, our district and our community as a whole. Despite the attention this issue has demanded of staff and faculty, they continue to provide quality education and a sense of normalcy for our students. That cannot be overlooked and it is truly appreciated.

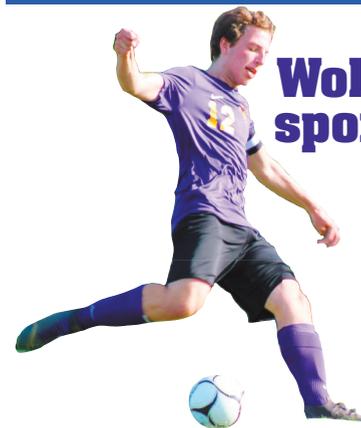
"It is our commitment to work through these difficult times together and return our collective focus to educating our young people. We appreciate your patience as this matter is thoroughly and impartially investigated."

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## Lopezians weigh in on allegations against teacher

### Community attends board meeting to comment on the reported misconduct

By Mandi Johnson  
Editor

It was standing room only at the first Lopez Island School Board meeting held after allegations of sexual harassment were made against David Sather, a secondary school teacher and former secondary principal. More than 100 people packed into the school's multipurpose room on Sept. 25 to share and listen to testimony from students, parents, teachers and community members at large. Sather is currently on leave.

"I'm so impressed with all of you that have come here tonight and so thoughtfully and honestly shared your pain. And we've all listened," said community member Charlie Janeway. "I think the truth will come out and I have confidence in these board members. I know them — they're good people."

School Board Chairman John Holding said the board wanted to hear from everyone who had something to say. Over the course of the next 2.5 hours, more than 50 people stood to address the room about their experiences with the accused. Each speaker was allowed five minutes to speak.

#### A brief history

Eight Lopez residents filed a tort claim and a complaint with the Washington State Human Rights Commission against Sather in

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## Striving for change with art San Juan County and the climate



Robert Dash/Contributed photo.

*Sunflower, by Robert Dash. One of the photographs on display during San Juan Islands Museum of Art's exhibit "Food for Thought: Microviews, Threats and Prospects."*

By Heather Spaulding  
Reporter

The agricultural industry is one of the largest contributors to many environmental issues, but it may also provide some solutions. The San Juan Islands Museum of Art's latest exhibit examines both threats and resolutions in "Food for Thought Micro Views: Threats and Prospects," using Robert Dash's photomontage images.

"I like to think of it as taking a hike, walking along a microscopic leaf landscape, where no has been before," Orcas Island photographer Dash said.

"Food for Thought" opens Sept. 27, and runs until Dec. 9. SJIMA is open 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Friday-Monday. Mondays are pay what you can, all other days admission is \$10 for adults and children 18 and under are free.

Dash speak Oct. 12, from 3-5 p.m. at the Grange, on how one part of nature—our food—is connected to climate change.

The talk, "Food, Planet, Future: A Photographer's Journey," costs \$15 for adults, \$12 for SJIMA and grange members, and \$10 for students. Make reservations online at [www.sjima.org](http://www.sjima.org) under "Learn" or at 360-370-5050. Tickets will be sold the door as seats

are available.

The images, including a burning piece of buckwheat, mushroom clouds, chili pepper, even a sunflower, were all found locally.

Dash was drawn to photography at a young age, he said. During his high school years, in the '60s, the camera took on an even more prominent role in his world. Dash began documenting what he saw as he walked through life, capturing what he saw around cities and in neighboring forests.

Dash has since become a renowned photographer, educator and naturalist. His work has been published by National Geographic, TIME and LensWork, and shown in galleries and juried shows in the United States and abroad.

Over the last four years, Dash explained, his focus has been on projects involving studies of patterns and textures. With a fascination for science and nature, he began photographing microscopic aspects of plants. The work combines both art and science, Dash added, noting that the two areas are tightly linked.

"They feed off each other," he said. Both require imagination and fascination for the world. Scientists have to have imagination to come up with questions,

By Colleen Smith  
Publisher

Councilmember Rick Hughes says San Juan County has long been at the forefront of solving environmental issues.

"We have a very pro-climate change council, and we spend a lot of time in Olympia fighting for positive changes," Hughes said. "We live in a very progressive state that is trying to make a difference. ... It's all about our local environment and what we do every day. What sacrifices are we willing to make for our children and grandchildren?"

The San Juans were the first county in the country to adopt Leave No Trace principles. In April 2016, the county council adopted the following seven principles: plan ahead and prepare; stick to trails and camp overnight right; trash your trash and pick up poop — pack it in, pack it out; leave it as you find it; be careful

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## Lopez

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mid-September. They claim that Sather propositioned female staff and said sexually inappropriate things to and about several women, both of whom were employees and parents, among other accusations.

Lara Hruska and Shannon McMinimee work for Cedar Law PLLC, a Seattle-based education firm. The duo represents the six women and two men who approached the firm in June, a month after attempting to resolve their complaints with the school board, McMinimee said.

Sather began working for the Lopez Island School

District in 2013 after he was let go from a school in Mosier, Oregon, where the superintendent said that his leaving was “what is best for Mosier School,” according to a story published in The Dalles Chronicle.

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In a letter to Lopez Island School parents dated Sept. 3, 2017, the school board wrote it had commissioned a third-party investigation into potential sexual harassment by Sather, which concluded Sather had partaken

in inappropriate “conversation, bantering, and joking that included sexual conduct” but that the relationship was consensual. Because conversations of an explicit nature are not allowed in the workplace per school district policy, the board said that it was taking formal action.

“We directed Mr. Sather to cease any such conversations in the future and to take additional training on preventing sexual harassment and supporting a safe workplace,” the board wrote.

The tort claim also names Holding and Superintendent Brian Auckland, alleging that the pair ignored complaints made to them as a way of covering up Sather’s reported misdeeds.

### School board meeting

Most speakers on Sept. 25 were there to make statements about Auckland, Sather, the school board, the investigation and the situation as a whole. Comments ranged from support of the accused and the school, while others commended the accusers for speaking up.

At the meeting, the first person to give public comment was Elizabeth Simpson, a former teacher for the Lopez school of more than 25 years. She said the complainants should have told Sather to stop and “it would have stopped.”

“I found that when I had a colleague that made a racist or sexist or otherwise objectionable comment, or whose behavior upset me, I just called them out,” Simpson said. “I wish that had happened in this case. The people that felt offended or upset had simply called that person out.”

Simpson added that the articles printed in the San Juan County newspapers were “fiction” and that it “savaged” Sather’s reputation and hurt his family.

“Strong women, outspoken women are portrayed in that article as being shy, weak, wimpy and they are not,” Simpson stated.

Lopezian Anne Hall echoed Simpson’s comments, saying she was very unhappy with the “kerfuffle” she’s seen in the press.

One parent who introduced herself as Laura stated that she was “blind-sided” when she heard about recent events on the 11 o’clock news. Laura has three children in Lopez secondary school.

“I feel betrayed. I trusted the most important things in my life with you,” she said, adding that she was not aware of the 2017 situation. “The lack of com-

munication felt like betrayal. How can we trust [the school board] when [it has] kept so much from us?”

Parent Brian Estey said that he has had pleasant experiences with both Sather and Auckland in the past. Estey stated he was concerned, however, with what the school board may have known from the beginning since it hired Sather following his dismissal from Mosier, Oregon.

“You’ve got two things that are not mutually exclusive here. Because on the one hand, of all the principals I’ve seen here, ... in my personal experience, Mr. Sather is the best principal they’ve had in secondary by a long shot,” Estey said. “That being said, you guys on the board are the first line of defense for our children. ... That’s not a person — regardless of how good of a principal he is — that should have been here.”

One man, who did not identify himself prior to making his statement, said he believes the accusers.

“I don’t think it’s very often that people make false allegations,” he said.

San Juan County Councilmember Jamie Stephens also commented during the session. He said the community needs to show support to staff and teachers at this time — particularly the people who came forward. He added that the county has taken a zero-tolerance stance on the topic after being on the “wrong side” of two sexual misconduct cases.

“If you hear the same complaint several times, there might be some truth to it,” Stephens said. “We cannot tolerate what we’ve heard. We cannot tolerate a hostile workforce for anyone — men or women or children.”

### School’s investigation

Several parent speakers asserted their faith in “the process.” The Lopez Island School District said in press releases since the allegations came to light that it is performing an independent investigation into the allegations. According to a Q&A flyer available at the meeting, the school hired Celeste Monroe, an attorney with Seattle-based firm Karr Tuttle and Campbell.

“Ms. Monroe has significant experience conducting investigations for public and private employers on a variety of employment-related issues, including claims of harassment, discrimination and retaliation,” the board wrote in the document.

One of the accusers, Brad Smith, said in his testimo-

ny that the investigator is not as independent as the district claims and that she was hired by the school’s attorney and is being paid for by the district. His wife, Ali Smith, agreed, stating that the investigation isn’t as independent as it is being presented.

Ali Smith claimed at the meeting that the impartial interviews being conducted are of people selected by the school district — not everyone. Brad Smith later alleged that the interviewees are “being told” by Auckland that the complainants are lying.

“I think we’re being fed a line of crap,” Brad Smith said. “It’s real clear where we are on this.”

Other community members questioned “the process” as well, with some referencing the investigation into Sather in 2017, after which he was sent to training and returned to his position.

Commenter Rick McCoy explained a situation where in his son was bullied by a teacher in the past — not Sather. He said the school did its investigation and the teacher received “a slap on a wrist and sensitivity training.”

“We trusted the process and it failed,” McCoy said. “To trust the process doesn’t always work.”

Former Lopez Island School District employee Anthony Rovente said, “If the allegations today are true, then the process failed [in 2017.]”

Rovente added that he believes it’s not just the employees who were victims but also students. He said that during Sather’s first chaperoning trip to Greece, two female students — one 15 and the other 16 — allegedly returned with tattoos.

“The process only works if the policy and procedures behind that process are the right ones,” Stephens said, urging the school board to make sure it has good policies and procedures in place to make “the process” work.

### The accusers

Besides the Smiths, two other complainants made statements — Della McCullough and Jennifer Norvelle. McCullough is a bus driver and paraeducator for the district; Norvelle works as Auckland’s secretary.

“It was a hard process thinking about [coming forward]. Dave [Sather] was also my friend, I cared about him as a person, but I’m also a professional human being,” Norvelle said. “I did say it was inappropriate. I did come to the board, I did

go to the superintendent. I did not feel like I was heard rightfully.”

Norvelle said when she had gone to Auckland, he requested they discuss her concerns in person — 22 days later.

“That’s a long time when you’re sitting on something that hurts,” Norvelle said. “When you’re sitting on something that you care about so deeply because you don’t want to come forward, you don’t want other people to have to do this.”

Norvelle said the only way she felt like she, and everyone else who had experienced Sather’s alleged inappropriateness, would be heard was if they reached out for help beyond the school.

“I came forward for these kids,” McCullough said, adding that she has been experiencing other types of harassment from the community since the complaints were filed. “I will stand here and I will still drive my school bus. ... because that’s what I do — protect the children.”

### The students

For many of those in attendance, their primary concern was the students of the Lopez Island Schools. Among the adults who made statements at the meeting, eight female students also commented.

“The students are listening,” said one girl, who doesn’t believe Sather should return.

A second student said she felt uncomfortable in the school’s environment and opted to go to Friday Harbor Elementary this year instead.

One eighth-grader said she hopes that the adults listen to the “voices of the children.” Another added that she can’t believe this is happening, and that it is affecting the students “more than you actually know.”

“It’s just very uncomfortable having a teacher who has been called out for what’s going on,” one eighth grade student said.

“I don’t think I could be more disappointed and sad,” said another.

“I feel like we need to believe what is being said. We need to believe these women. We need to believe these accusations are true,” one student stated, adding that people need to consider how it is affecting the accusers’ lives. “When you’re protecting Dave, you’re harming the women that he’s hurt. ... We need to stop the people who are harassing others and start protecting the people who are being harassed.”

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