



ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS

NEWS RELEASE

Parent and Community Groups Call for National Search for Next San Diego Unified School District Superintendent

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A broad coalition of parents, educators, and community groups have come together to urge the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education to conduct a transparent and inclusive process that includes a national search for the next superintendent of California's second largest school district with its more than 100,000 ethnically and socio-economically diverse students, more than 200 schools, and \$1.6 billion budget.

Like many school districts, San Diego Unified has faced challenges during the pandemic resulting in educational and emotional challenges for students, their families, their communities, and educators. Poor and inconsistent communication with these stakeholders during the pandemic has created concerns that their voices will not be included in the selection process to replace Superintendent Cindy Marten, who has been nominated as Deputy Secretary of Education for the Biden administration.

The stakeholders are particularly uneasy considering how Marten, herself, was selected as superintendent. Amy Redding, parent of two graduates of the district and past chair of the District Advisory Committee for Compensatory Education, learned of Ms. Marten's appointment in 2013 when she was asked to solicit parents for a hastily prepared press conference to announce it. "Cindy Marten was chosen behind closed doors without any stakeholder input," she said, adding, "We deserve actual input into who will manage our district in the future." Gina Smith, co-founder of the ReopenSDUSD parent group that has been calling for better communication and transparency in San Diego Unified, echoed her sentiments. "My top priorities would be open and ongoing communication with stakeholders and a collaborative process."

The pandemic has magnified pre-existing issues of opportunity, achievement, and equity for many students, eroding the trust of these communities with the district. The African American community, whose children have faced disproportionate rates of suspensions and expulsions during Ms. Marten's tenure, wants reassurances that their community will be heard in the selection of the next superintendent. "Our African American students and educators' have suffered enough and demand that we secure a Superintendent who is committed to providing equity for all students," explained LaShae Sharp-Collins, President of the Association of African American Educators, San Diego. She added that the AAEE coalition is "demanding a national search with transparency and real community involvement," and that they would "not tolerate another closed door superintendent appointment, as it violates the Brown Act." "Moirra Allbritton, parent of past and current

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students in the district and former Chair of San Diego Unified School District's Community Advisory Committee for Special Education, explained her reasons for needing input for students that have disproportionately suffered during distance learning. "The needs and priorities of students with disabilities as voiced by their families are vital to the selection of a new superintendent." Lallia Allali, parent and Chair of the District Advisory Committee for English Learners, called on the School Board "to engage in a timely, reputable, professional, national search to hire an effective superintendent" with a vision "to improve instruction and services for all English Learners" that have included systemic inequities that have prevented too many of these students from attaining high expectations."

In order to conduct an effective nationwide search for a new superintendent, the coalition stakeholders maintain that the district should use an independent, reputable, and professional search firm that specializes in public outreach to ensure a collaborative process that provides for meaningful input from all stakeholders. While the coalition understands that the final selection will be made by the San Diego Unified School Board, the coalition stakeholders believe that they should be included in the interview process and all relevant aspects of the hiring process should be conducted with transparency and in public, insofar as the law allows.

Other community members active in education also support this process. Derick Boerner, Past President of the San Diego Unified Council of PTAs voiced his support. "True collaboration between all stakeholders is required to find the best possible candidate for superintendent," he said, adding that "the students of San Diego Unified deserve the best possible leader." Educator Rickenna Boyd echoed Mr. Boerner, explaining that finding the best superintendent for students "requires a national search of well-qualified and experienced school administrators." Ms. Redding warned the San Diego Unified District School Board members, "They are not doing the next superintendent any favors if they repeat any of the opaque--possibly illegal--behaviors that occurred when they hired the last superintendent in 2013." She added, "Having a transparent, independent, and inclusive process, independent of the San Diego Unified School Board as much as possible, is the only way for the board to rebuild its relationship with parents, students, and the communities they serve."

To this end, the coalition members urge the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education to place the superintendent search topic on its regular, public meeting agenda on February 2, 2021 and provide the opportunity for all public comment on this topic to be heard, per the Brown Act. The most important job of a school board is to hire an outstanding leader, and actively and meaningfully including all stakeholders in this process is the best way to rebuild trust and an educational community worthy of our children.

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Coalition Partners (AASSC):

- The Association of African American Educators (AAAE)
- The San Diego Chapter Black American Political Association of California (BAPACSD)
- San Diego Urban League (SDUL)
- Moira Allbritton, Past Chair, San Diego Unified CAC for Special Education
- Amy Redding, Past Chair, San Diego Unified DAC for Compensatory Education
- Dr. John Browne, Community Member
- Rev. Wendal Bass, Community Member
- Parents for Quality Education (PQE)
- Chicano Federation
- NAACP, the San Diego branch
- ACLU San Diego and Imperial Counties

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