



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
COUNCILMEMBER
MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE
FOURTH DISTRICT

Delivered via Email

May 19, 2021

San Diego Unified School District
Attn: President Richard Barrera
4100 Normal Street
San Diego, CA 92103

Regarding: An Open Letter on Lincoln High School

Dear President Barrera,

On May 16, 2021, the nation celebrated the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling. I can't help but notice familiar disparities that indicate there is much more work to do regarding equal access to a quality education in the city of San Diego.

In recent months, we witnessed another abrupt leadership change at Lincoln High School (LHS). Sixty-seven years after *Brown*, the achievement gap of African American students remains stark.

I am writing this correspondence because of my grave concerns over the instability at LHS. Perpetual missteps have turned into a crisis that continues to impact our entire community. As the councilmember for the Lincoln Community who does not have jurisdiction over matters of the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), I am addressing these issues in an open letter. LHS has been a source of hope for our community, and we must improve it in order to have a full and thriving district.

My office has had the opportunity to interact with constituents whose children attend LHS. There are two consistent themes that I hear from parents: the desire to have a good education for their children, and the sentiment that the school district does not listen to their concerns. I've been approached by a variety of organizations that want to partner with Lincoln but have found the leadership to be non-responsive. In addition to these complaints that I hear regularly in my capacity as councilmember, I have also read consistent media accounts of fraud, sexual assault, misappropriation of funds, and constant leadership turnover at LHS.

My collective experience leads me to conclude the following:

- **SDUSD has not demonstrated the ability to effectively hire individuals who can provide consistent leadership at LHS.**
- **SDUSD does not understand the historical, political, cultural and socio-economic context of the school to lead the school and community effectively.**

I am requesting answers to the following **twelve (12) questions**, and I am confident these responses will be sent to me in a timely manner with truthful, accurate, and actionable answers, so that we can work together to ensure LHS receives the relevant resources it deserves:

1. Why was Jennifer Roberson removed from LHS?
2. Why was she removed without warning or notice to employees, students, parents and community members?
3. Findings show that school leaders did not spend funding as authorized by the Lincoln School Site Council, which is required by law. What is the consequence for district officials who broke the law?
4. How and when will these funds be replaced and returned to LHS to be used as the School Site Council intended?
5. What is the impact of the current leadership (principal and site director) on student outcomes?
6. What is the average attendance rate across their entire time at Lincoln?
7. What is the graduation rate, along with reading and math rates?
8. How has the school community been engaged to support this work?
9. What partnerships have the Lincoln High principal and former site director created and/or mobilized for the benefit of the students?
10. Has the current principal articulated a vision for Lincoln High School? If so, where can it be found?
11. In 2013, former Superintendent Marten outlined Vision 2020, in which the district committed to develop schools as neighborhood learning centers, ensure effective teaching in the classroom, engage parents and community volunteers in the educational process, facilitate communication and support. She also identified 12 indicators of a quality school in every neighborhood. What is the result of the Vision 2020 commitment, particularly as these outcomes relate to Lincoln?
12. What is in place at Lincoln to support students' social, emotional, and academic needs that also addresses the inequities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, including loss of life of Lincoln students, trauma, and the achievement gap?

I would also like the district leaders to provide a report on the impact that initiatives such as the Black Youth Call To Action, Freedom Summer, the community-driven Blueprint to Accelerate the Achievement of African American and African Students have had on changing the quality of education for student populations who overwhelmingly underperform others. In addition, an open forum that includes community members and parents, along with district officials, is needed in order to provide feedback and potentially choose the next principal of LHS.

As the second-largest school district in California, with sweeping gains and national accomplishments, we must remember to maintain Lincoln as a top priority for the students and residents who still live here. The overwhelming concerns I hear from families who attend Lincoln contrast with the aforementioned Vision 2020. The school's ability to effectively engage all populations in elevating LHS is a testament to the district's priority of respect, honesty, and student achievement at Lincoln.

I earnestly hope that we can work together to make LHS a priority for the district, and I believe that reconciliation with the community, as well as, accountability to students and parents are in order here.

The anniversary of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* is a reminder of the measures our elders had to undertake to diminish institutionalized educational inequities rooted in the law. In that same spirit, we must continue to do what we can with the resources we have to drive change. If we don't effectively measure impact and drive performance, we will never close the achievement gap at LHS and all schools in communities of concern. Despite the blatant dereliction of duty that we have historically faced, we must vigilantly work to address the state of LHS for the future of our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Monica Montgomery Steppe".

Monica Montgomery Steppe, Councilmember
Fourth Council District
City of San Diego

MM:pes

cc: Interim Superintendent Lamont Jackson
District A -Sabrina Bazzo
District B - Kevin Beiser
District C - Michael McQuary
District D - Richard Barrera - Board President
District E - Sharon Whitehurst-Payne - Board Vice President
Assemblymember Akilah Weber
Principal Stephanie Brown
Community Advocates for Just and Moral Governance
Association of African American Educators
Lincoln School Site Council
NAACP San Diego Branch
ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties
BMU
BAPAC SD
Kiwanis Club of Southeastern San Diego
Philip Liburd
Roosevelt Blackmon