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HUMAN RESOURCES

Complaint against Ernesto Zamudio, principal of Hilltop High School

On Behalf of the Staff of Hilltop High School

September 26, 2014

SUHSD Board Policy 5131.2(a) states in part, "The Governing Board of the Sweetwater Union High School District affirms that every student and staff member has the right to a safe and secure school environment, free of humiliation, intimidation, fear, harassment, or any form of bullying behavior."

Unfortunately, for many staff members of Hilltop High School, their school environment has not been free for many years of humiliation, intimidation, fear, harassment, or bullying from their principal, Ernesto Zamudio.

An extremely low morale exists at Hilltop High School due to the humiliating and intimidating manner in which Mr. Zamudio addresses the staff. In meetings, he will talk down to staff as if he expects the worst from them. He will yell at staff members in front of others and even over the walkie-talkie. He will say to a teacher, "You are a horrible teacher." He will forbid people to speak to each other, and even forbid members of the same department and PLC to speak with or associate with each other. He labels people as "trouble makers" or "toxic" and identifies them this way to others. He tells groups of staff members they are known throughout the district as "problematic". He speaks to the classified staff in a very aggressive, rude and unprofessional manner. His method is to talk about staff members behind their backs and spread rumors and ill will amongst the staff to try to drive a wedge between them. He demonstrates that he does not value nor respect the staff members.

SUHSD Board Policy 4030(a) states in part, "The Board of Trustees prohibits unlawful discrimination against and/or harassment of district employees and job applicants on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, age, marital status, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, medical condition, veteran status, gender, sex or sexual orientation at any district site and/or activity." And yet, the perception at HHS is that Mr. Zamudio targets and harasses individuals based on age and/or physical disability or medical condition. That is a recurring pattern in his victims.

Board Policy 4030(a) goes on to state, "The Board also prohibits retaliation against any district employee or job applicant who complains, testifies or in any way participates in the district's complaint procedures instituted pursuant to this policy." The climate of fear on campus is due to Mr. Zamudio's prolific retaliation. His retaliation comes in the form of undesirable assignments, directing duties while withholding assistance, changing hours of work, requiring lesson plans weekly for years, excessive negative attention, and administrative transfers. He also makes verbal threats to those who might lodge a complaint against him. He is not above using tactics like this on students, too.

In addition to the SUHSD Board Policies already noted, Mr. Zamudio has been derelict in performing his duties as described in the District's job description for a principal of a high school. These state in part, "Develop and implement ... staffing requirements for the purpose of ensuring the efficient operation of the school site..." The opening of school at HHS has been fraught with disasters every year. Every year Mr. Zamudio refuses to listen to the counselors regarding the needs for the following year. Every year he pushes off listening to the needs for the opening of school and so there are students without classes and classes without teachers every year. And then he blames the counselors to anyone who will listen. By directive he forbids teachers to talk with the counselors regarding student placements, keeping teachers from being able to advocate for their students. He uses the master schedule as a sword; to wield against those he wishes would not be there. Among the specific abilities listed for a principal are: working as a team and establishing and maintaining effective relationships. This is not happening at Hilltop High.

The staff at Hilltop High School have been traumatized over the years as they have had to endure an intimidating, hostile work environment. This is not the first complaint. It is an atrocity that there have been numerous previous complaints made against this principal, but there has been a refusal to take action on the part of the district. Relief is requested in the form of removing Mr. Zamudio from being the principal of Hilltop High School, or the principal of any school in this district. No school anywhere needs to have such a fate befall them.

