



NAACP
Santa Rosa - Sonoma County Branch

December 21, 2022

Dear Superintendent Harrington and Superintendent- Elect Carter,

The Santa Rosa - Sonoma NAACP vehemently disagrees with the Sonoma County Office of Education's recent hire of Dr. Adrian Palazuelos. Dr. Palazuelos has a pattern and practice of dismantling key efforts of equity in the districts he's served; taking the helm as the Deputy Superintendent charged with oversight of equity is ludicrous.

This hire comes on the heels of the dysfunction he created in Sonoma Valley Unified that will take a great deal of restoration to get the district back on track. It must be noted that students of protected classes, particularly BIPOC, Special Education and English language learning students have endured generational inequities within the Sonoma Valley Unified School District(SVUSD). District 2 in particular encompasses one of two most severely impacted areas of Sonoma County in terms of educational equity and health outcomes within the Portrait of Sonoma; second only to Roseland in Santa Rosa.

Below are some of the deeply concerning incidents occurring during Mr. Palazuelos' tenure as SVUSD and Fillmore Superintendent that have been reported by parents, teachers, administrators and community advocates, much of which has been detailed in publicly accessible newspaper articles and documents. It is highly problematic that these incidents were not considered through a vetting process nor input from the education community. Incoming Superintendent of Schools Carter campaigned on a platform of equity. Carter's comments in a recent [article](#) about Mr. Palazuelos' new position show a vast disconnect between the narrative and the reality for students, parents, educators and administrators:

Reported Equity Issues as reported by the press:

- Dismantling of the Parent University program at El Verano Elementary, an essential equity resource for special education and english language learning communities that was unique to this part of District 2.
- Restricting and blocking the essential food distribution project Food for All - Comida para Todos at El Verano Elementary, which served undocumented, farmworker and low income SVUSD families experiencing disproportionate Covid-19 rates, food insecurity and transportation access during the pandemic.
- Attempting to disband the parent and student advocate led Special Education Advisory Committee(SEAC);and when unsuccessful, attempting to remove parent involvement and restructure SEAC as a district controlled entity. SEAC is



currently in abeyance by choice of the parent led leadership team.

- Implemented a new practice of sending district attorneys to IEP meetings whenever parents brought a student advocate, incurring increased costs and creating a culture of intimidation for parents seeking federally mandated services for the special education students, and English language learning parents unable to navigate an IEP without an advocate.
- SVUSD lost five female principals during his tenure, all replaced by administrators with less experience, including an English only speaking administrator at a primarily Spanish speaking school site.
- This follows a pattern of reported intimidation and targeting of largely female educators and administrators at this and previous districts who are afraid to come forward publicly about a deeply toxic culture that was normalized during his tenure.

Reported Contract and Legal Issues:

- Superintendent Palazuelos abruptly left his post at SVUSD after reaching a [separation agreement](#) with the district's board as [reported](#) in the Press Democrat. One of the trustees who voted against the agreement cited a payout to Palazuelos as well as a "a nondisparagement agreement" that limited transparency for the public and prevented board trustees from discussing the matter.
- This echoes a similar pattern of practice at a previous school district that Mr. Palazuelos abruptly departed. SVUSD paid Mr. Palazuelos \$10,000 to move 600 miles to work in Sonoma per his contract ([Item 7](#)). This followed his [abrupt departure](#) from the Fillmore school district under a mutual separation agreement following a closed session discussion, in which the Fillmore board trustees were unable to comment on the reasons for the separation.
- An official [complaint](#) was filed with the Sonoma County District Attorney's Office and the grand jury, alleging the board and Palazuelos violated California's open meetings law -- known as the Brown Act -- during an education conference in San Diego, where plans were allegedly made at a dinner to disband the Special Education Advisory Council mentioned above. DA Ravitch's office stated it did not find enough [evidence](#) to conclude that a Brown Act violation occurred, and Superintendent Palazuelos and board trustees denied the conversation occurred.
- SVUSD Trustees Ching and Coleman stated in open session at a board meeting



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in February of 2022 that they did discuss the SEAC at the dinner; yet later told the DA's office they did not. The timing of the pressure to restructure the SEAC and limit parent involvement as mentioned above just weeks later, and its unfortunate abeyance, is deeply troubling and ended in the pause of a much needed equity resource for special education students.

The news of Mr. Palazuelos' promotion to a position tasked with equity for students countywide has caused shock, anger and sadness among parents, educators, administrators and advocates who have fought long and hard for basic compliance with special education and civil rights mandates for students at SVUSD. Equally, with those who have experienced harassment and intimidation during his tenure. This is not the direction we want to go in as a county.

Superintendent Carter, we need you to walk the talk of equity that was espoused in your campaign for Superintendent of Schools. That starts with listening to voices in the community who have not had a seat at the table; those who have experienced the most harm, and those who put students first.

Sincerely,

Kirstyne Lange
President, Santa Rosa - Sonoma NAACP