

Subject: Extreme Disruption at Extera Board Meeting

From: Jim Kennedy <jkennedy@exteraschools.org>

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To: "Cole-Gutierrez, Jose" <jose.cole-gutierrez@lausd.net>

CC: "Pawinski, Lori" <lap4521@lausd.net>, Corri Ravare <cravare@exteraschools.org>, "Jernigan, Sean" <sean.jernigan@lausd.net>

José,

As you are aware, on Tuesday we experienced a significant disturbance at our board meeting. I believe that you might have seen some of the footage from video that was recorded by the ring leader of the disruptive behavior, lise Escobar, a parent organizer from UTLA. Her contact information, taken from the UTLA web site, is below.

To summarize what took place, a group of parents from our Eastman co-location, led by the UTLA parent organizer and accompanied by a few teachers and others, shut down our board meeting. There were about 30 protestors outside and about a dozen inside the board meeting. All those in attendance were provided an opportunity to speak during the public comment portion of the meeting. They took turns expressing their concerns about the co-location at Eastman. In particular they were concerned about the parent center that was taken away, and I believe they mentioned a science center as well.

The meeting progressed following all of their comments, but about 30 minutes into the meeting, they began a campaign of disruption, attempting to shut the meeting down. They were extremely disruptive: repeatedly chanting "Shut it down!" "Extera, escucha, estamos en la lucha!" and other similar comments. They continuously interrupted with loud comments, talking over board members, refusing to stop talking, walking around the room while holding cell phones in the faces of Extera staff and making harassing comments, and other outrageous behavior. They were out of control and unresponsive to our requests to refrain their activity. The UTLA parent rep in particular did the majority of the behavior I just described. Ultimately, the meeting had to be concluded because the board was unable to conduct any business and the facility was in chaos. Outside, the parents and protestors surrounded board members' cars as they attempted to leave, creating a threatening environment and safety risks for all. Inside, the UTLA parent organizer stalked Extera staff members into their offices, taking videos, taunting them with comments and other harassing behavior.

In one example, the UTLA person followed one of our principals into an Extera office with her phone, videotaping her as she pursued her. The UTLA person was narrating the video, saying "I want to know who this is. Let's find out who this

person is.” As she followed her, another Extera principal was behind and tripped on the door jam. She reached out to catch herself and bumped the UTLA person, who dropped her phone. Then the UTLA person stated, “Did you see that? She just knocked the phone out of my hand!” The incident was misrepresented and highlighted on social media (Facebook), where the video has received well over 5,500 views so far. The entire episode was being live-streamed on Facebook, where some of those viewing responded to what they were seeing by saying, “That b*#@&” (referring to our principal) and so forth. To make the situation worse, the Extera principal who tripped had surgery just a few weeks ago and re-injured the area of the incision as a result of the incident. The outrageous, hurtful, unprofessional, unsafe, and injurious behavior carried out by the UTLA parent rep was beneath anyone associated with schools or education. Apart from potential legal implications and the disruption to our organization’s business caused by the events, the entire incident was an embarrassment to the teaching profession, to UTLA, and to the District.

We have never experienced anything like this before, and we are working now to put in place strategies to be prepared in the event we have to deal with this in the future. We are also in consultation with our legal counsel regarding any potential legal action that can be taken now or in the future should this type of incident be repeated. It seems highly likely that they will attend our board meeting next month to try to do the same.

During the meeting, I attempted to communicate with the parents in attendance by offering an opportunity to speak with me at a more appropriate time. I distributed my business card and asked them to contact me to set up a meeting where all voices could be heard and responded to, and I would have an opportunity to address their questions. One person who identified herself as a grandparent took my card and asked me for an appointment. We agreed to meet tomorrow, Friday, at 1:00 at my office. Subsequently, she announced outside our office while on video that she had secured a meeting with me at 1:00 on Friday. She invited all interested persons to attend.

It’s clear to me that it is highly, highly likely the meeting will digress into more of the same. Instead of a productive, positive, open dialogue as I had intended, I believe it will become a shouting match that will be used against Extera on social media as we have seen the past few days. As a result, I am postponing the meeting indefinitely.

I am requesting support from the CSD and LAUSD to assist us with this situation so that it is not repeated or escalated. I am asking that you assist me with communicating with lise Escobar that the meeting is cancelled. She is the contact person for the parents who attended. I don’t have contact information for those parents, and I don’t have means of communicating with them. I don’t know

if it's possible for you or someone from LAUSD to communicate with Ilse Escobar to inform her, but if that is possible, it would be greatly appreciated. I will attempt to notify her as well, but I suspect she will respond aggressively to my communication, as she did on Tuesday.

I'm also asking for any support that can be provided to communicate with the parent community at Eastman regarding our co-location. We need the District's support with addressing their questions and concerns and decreasing the hostility that is being directed at our schools and offices. We don't have access to those parents and are unable to establish positive communication. If the district school would like to arrange a parent meeting and would like me to attend, I'm happy to do that, provided someone from the District's central office is there as well to provide support if needed.

Moving forward, there may be additional supports that are needed to get through all of this. My fear is that if we don't work together to identify and implement solutions, this situation will worsen. I don't see how we can move forward successfully without working collaboratively.

Please let me know your thoughts about next steps and what can be done to address this before it gets worse and the problems become greater.

I greatly appreciate your support.

Thank you,

Jim

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