

San Diego Chicano/Latino Concilio on Higher Education San Diego, California

VIA EMAIL

May 24, 2024

TO: Board of Education, San Diego Unified School District

This correspondence reflects the analysis and advocacy of the San Diego Chicano/Latino Concilio on Higher Education that challenge the U.S. military's effort to maintain JROTC programs through the enrollment of working-class Chicano/Latino students. We are expressing our great disappointment in the San Diego Unified Schools' decision to support such enrollment, a practice that clearly undermines our community's efforts to increase college attendance and success among local Chicano/Latino students. We have attempted to work with the district to resolve this issue, but the district's recent actions have undermined our collaboration.

On May 10, 2023, our SD Concilio and other representatives of a broader, concerned coalition met with SDUSD board member Richard Barrera and the superintendent's chief of staff, Enrique Ruacho. Also present were Jennifer Roberson and one other administrative staff member. We discussed evidence that the San Diego Unified School district was "auto-enrolling" students into JROTC courses, often at schools with a significant enrollment of Chicano students. Such auto-enrollment of students in JROTC is a violation of the State of California's Education Code, Section 51750. At the meeting, there was a consensus among all present that auto-enrolling students in JROTC does indeed violate the state's education code.

We also had an extensive discussion of what constitutes student and parent "consent" that enables students to enroll in JROTC. It was and remains our contention that district schools currently utilize an enrollment permission form that does not constitute authentic, **fully informed** consent for students and parents.

On August 29, 2023, the SDCS Board of Education approved a resolution that included the following language (emphasis added):

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the **fully informed consent** of the student and the student's legal guardian shall be obtained via a signed consent form that is submitted to the high school **before** the student is enrolled in JROTC; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that any form used to obtain such consent shall acknowledge that the program is a voluntary, non-academic elective that cannot be required, and provide a method for the student and legal

guardian to indicate whether or not JROTC is being chosen in place of regular physical education; and
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that any such consent form shall identify JROTC as a leadership program designed by the military and conducted by **retired military officers**, and present a complete and accurate description of the program's special requirements and expectations that are imposed on students, including the scope of voluntary activities and time commitments that may fall outside regular school hours.

After the board resolution was adopted, we became aware that the consent form that was used for the 2023-2024 school year was not consistent with the sections of the resolution quoted above, especially the highlighted elements. On January 2, 2024, we sent the board a letter requesting major revisions in the enrollment form as soon as possible, and we asked to be allowed to participate in that process. Instead of being invited to discuss what would be included in the next version of the consent form, we were notified on January 18 that it had already been revised by district staff and that it would be sent to schools for 2024-2025 enrollments. When we reviewed the revised form, we saw that it did **not** fully reflect the spirit or letter of the board's JROTC enrollment resolution.

On January 23, 2024, our representatives met again with SDUSD board member Richard Barrera and Chief of Staff Enrique Ruacho. At this meeting, our coalition representatives emphasized the need for the district's consent form for JROTC enrollment to adhere to the principle of "fully informed consent." At that time, the form utilized by the district contained misleading language and omissions. Enrique Ruacho asked us to submit a version of the consent form with our suggested changes inserted and tracked, which we did.

On February 22, 2024, our coalition representatives met with Chief of Staff Ruacho and two members of the SDCS staff, Jennifer Roberson and Athletics Director Scott Giusti, to discuss the specific language of the district's consent form and our suggested changes. Although there were some disagreements among our respective parties, there was a consensus that the consent form would be revised to include our coalition's suggested language clarifying that JROTC classes do not satisfy any of the requirements, e.g., A-G, for admission to California's public universities. As justification for this, we emphasized the history of some school site staff falsely telling students that JROTC would help them qualify for college acceptance. We also recalled the district's failure to provide adequate instruction and counseling that encourages working-class, Chicano students to aspire to a university education. For these reasons, a clear statement that JROTC courses do not fulfill A-G requirements is essential to obtain "fully informed consent" from students and parents that is mandated in the district's 2023 resolution.

We also agreed that the consent form should be corrected to comply with the board resolution's requirement that states that JROTC classes are taught by "retired military officers," rather than simply "retired instructors." Furthermore, we pointed out that, pursuant to the board resolution, the consent form must provide a method "to indicate whether or not JROTC is being chosen in place of regular physical education." We left the meeting believing that these critical changes would be made in the district's consent form and used for any additional JROTC

enrollments going forward. It was told to us that the JROTC program manager would be given the new version of the form to review.

Despite our agreements, on March 12, 2024, we received an email from Jennifer Roberson stating that the district would make no changes in its present consent form for JROTC programs. It appeared that the consensus reached by our coalition, Chief of Staff Ruacho, and the other two district staff members was unilaterally vetoed, presumably by the district's JROTC program manager. This is an outrageous, unacceptable action by the district. It is an affront to the principle of institutional transparency and inconsistent with the board's mandate requiring fully informed consent prior to JROTC enrollment.

Although the faulty consent form has already been sent to district schools for its use during the 2024-25 academic year, we encourage the board and superintendent to remedy this egregious action by district staff.

Sinceramente,

Patrick Velasquez, Ph.D.
Co-Chair
San Diego Concilio

Isidro Ortiz, Ph.D.
Co-Chair
San Diego Concilio