



High School District
COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE
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• GOVERNING BOARD MEMBERS

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RICHARD HOY
PRISCILLA SCHREIBER
ROBERT SHIELD
DR. GARY C. WOODS

• SUPERINTENDENT

ROBERT J. COLLINS

Media Statement

July 9, 2009 12:00 PM

For Immediate Release

At its scheduled Board meeting tonight, the Grossmont Union High School District (GUHSD) Board will take action to consider holding a hearing on revoking the Helix Charter. This is the next step in the State mandated process to ensure that we are providing our students with a safer environment.

Grossmont Board members and senior staff continue to have ongoing, lengthy discussions with the Helix High Charter Board and administrators regarding the actions of teachers, staff and its board, suggesting possible improvements to its charter that would help prevent a significant breakdown of accountability in the future. The Helix board contends that the current, modified policies and procedures are adequate, and that substantive changes are not necessary.

The Grossmont Board strongly disagrees. We believe that changes to the governance of the school are necessary to provide for a truly independent board and to maintain effective oversight of the teachers and staff. The purpose of these changes is to ensure the safety of the students in their care. The Grossmont Board remains committed to encouraging Helix Charter High School in its creative endeavors to pursue educational excellence with an independent charter. However, there are profound weaknesses in its current board structure, exacerbated by perceived significant conflicts of interests. It is these conflicts of interest issues which have caused the Grossmont Board to lose confidence in the Helix Board's ability to effectively oversee the school and, when necessary, act in a decisive, independent manner when the safety and welfare of students is threatened.

We recognize that Helix Charter has impressive academic achievements. That is not the issue. The issues are oversight, child abuse reporting, and accountability. State law charges the Grossmont District with the responsibility of oversight authority over the governance of the school. Unfortunately, the process of revocation of the charter is the only method we have to accomplish this.

The following summarizes what the Grossmont District is asking Helix Charter to do:

- ***Adopt Grossmont Union High School District policies that specifically address the reporting of suspected child abuse and teacher misconduct.***
- ***Adopt GUHSD policies, practices and training regarding child abuse reporting, teacher-student interaction, and related issues.***

The Grossmont District has concerns regarding Helix's misunderstanding of what constitutes reasonable suspicion of child abuse, as highlighted in the Helix Staff and Student Interaction Policy (see Section Entitled "Acceptable with Caution" on page 3 of following link :

<http://tinyurl.com/mvj4ot>

- ***Change the composition of the governance structure of the Helix Board to eliminate potential or perceived conflicts of interest, to ensure effective oversight of the Charter, and create public accountability for a public charter school.***

Currently, the composition of the nine-member Board includes three teachers and one classified staff member. One parent is selected by the PTSA; and only one parent is elected by the current parents. One of the community members is elected by the Board and the others are confirmed or elected by the faculty. At the same time, former faculty members can serve as community/parent members. ***Under the current composition, seven of the nine Board members are either directly or indirectly controlled by the staff.*** As a result, there is virtually no public, parent, or community accountability for the Charter.

Given its current configuration, we do not believe that the Helix Board is able to exercise independent oversight of the school. Maintaining independent oversight at any school is essential to ensuring its long term safety and order.

It is the desire of the District to allow Helix to continue as a truly independent charter without our intensive oversight and involvement. However, based on the evidence and the matters that have transpired, the District cannot with confidence continue its oversight of Helix Charter High School under the Board as currently structured. The lack of independent oversight by the Charter Board resulted in conditions that allowed educator sexual misconduct and abuse to continue unreported. While the Charter Board is obviously committed to the success of Helix, it lacks the independence necessary to hold staff accountable when significant problems inevitably arise. The District cannot accept the possibility of having more students harmed.

The notice of revocation is merely a continuation of the process that has been ongoing for the past two school years. As the process continues, it will neither impede nor affect the day-to-day operation of Helix Charter High School. The Board and staff of the Grossmont Union High School District remain committed to ongoing communication with Helix Charter High School with the hope of developing a mutually acceptable amendment to the Helix Charter.