



PVP Watch

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List of Newsletters

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August 2 Board Meeting Part I

Superintendent Hiring Process, Conflict of Interest?

The hiring process of Dr. Devin Serrano as Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District's (PVPUSD) new superintendent was discussed during the August 2, 2023 Board meeting. Michael Hixson wrote in the [August 4th Torrance Daily Breeze and the Palos Verdes Peninsula News](#) on August 10th about the hiring. Hixson's focus was on the new superintendent's education, experience, and family. This PVP Watch article covers discussions at the meeting NOT found in Hixson's article. The community should be aware of the issues.

The district's law firm owns the search firm

The law firm Atkinson, Andelson, Loya, Ruud & Romo

(AALRR) which is contracted to provide legal counsel to PVPUSD has a subsidiary, Education Support Services Group (ESS). ESS was retained by the district to search for a new superintendent.

Community members and one board member were concerned

PVPUSD board member Julie Hamill counseled against this on May 2 at the beginning of the search process.

At the August 2nd board meeting Jeremy Vanderhal, a school board candidate last November, addressed the board saying it was a clear conflict of interest that the search firm used is a subsidiary of the law firm the district retains as counsel.

Joan Davidson also addressed the board. Davidson, a California credentialed teacher, has lived in the district for 47 years and is a former PVPUSD board member. She is a keen observer of the civic and education scene on the Peninsula. Amongst other things, Davidson pointed out that the board had violated the Brown Act by not making public the new superintendent's contract for 72 hours prior to this meeting. This violation did not give her, or any member of the public, time to review and comment on the contract. She agreed with Vanderhal and Hamill that there was a clear conflict of interest in appointing ESS as the search firm.

PVP Watch also feels this is a conflict of interest, or at least appears to be. Despite this concern, the board voted 4-1 to engage ESS, Hamill being the only one

who dissented.

The district's reaction appeared to be an afterthought

Upon hearing comments from the community, the board directed interim superintendent Doug Kimberley to have an independent third party review the hiring process to determine if a conflict of interest exists.

Board member Sara Deen stated that the board had done its due diligence and she (Deen) is unconcerned about a conflict. Davidson asked Deen whose counsel Deen had relied on and who Deen had questioned or spoken to regarding this. Davidson received no response. Thus, the first thing that should have been resolved at the beginning of the hiring process, was the last thing to be resolved in August, **after** Serrano was hired. That begs the question...what would be done if it was determined there is a conflict?

Epilog - The district concluded that there was no conflict of interest

On August 30, 2023, the next board meeting was held. Doug Kimberley reported that he had retained Peter Fagen of the law firm Fagen, Freidman & Fulfrost to determine if there was a conflict of interest in hiring the new superintendent. Kimberley advised that Fagen found no evidence of a conflict in PVPUSD's retention of ESS as a search firm. It took Kimberley about 30 seconds to report his results. **What Kimberley did not tell the public is what Fagen based his opinion on, how many billable hours**

Fagen took to research this, and how much it cost the PVPUSD for Fagen to render his opinion. PVP Watch believes the public deserves more than this brief announcement by Kimberley - **another example of a lack of transparency.**

PVP Watch welcomes Devin Serrano to her new position. We hope that she provides the wise, strong leadership that the PVPUSD needs as it faces difficult issues on several fronts. We recognize, as do our readers, that the PVPUSD is a valuable asset to all the citizens of our community.

PVP Watch welcomes your comments

We would like to know your position on this issue, actions that the district should take going forward, and other suggestions you may have. Please send comments to info@pvpwatch.com by clicking this link.

Comments (0)

Newest First

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August 2
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Meeting Part
II

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