

File: VR response

Gompers Preparatory Academy director Vince Riveroll responded to questions posed to him regarding San Diego Unified School District's decision to revoke his and three other long-term GPA employees' on-loan status. Below are his emailed answers.

How do you feel about the district revoking your on-loan status?

In 2005, you reported that the newly elected Board of Education directed the Superintendent to remove me as Principal of Gompers to stop the efforts to convert the failing district school of Gompers into a charter school. At that time, there was no masking over how members of the Board of Education opposed the creation of Gompers Charter.

In this season of masks, relating to the current global pandemic and Halloween, the nightmare of current members of the Board of Education opposing Gompers is still alive, 16 years later. It is just masked differently.

Using the disguise of the on-loan agreement issue, the district and members of the Board of Education continue to weaken the stability of our charter school. Gompers Preparatory Academy was born out of necessity for students, and out of discontent from parents who were fed up with the school district's failure to support the children of southeastern San Diego. Destabilizing efforts made by the district puts GPA at risk.

As a "mea culpa" for allowing decades of failing schools in Southeast, an on-loan agreement was created to ensure the success of Gompers Charter. This was a reluctant move by SDUSD, but no one could deny it was the right move.

The district knows the success of GPA is partly due to the stable leadership of its employees' on-loan for the past 16 years.

The district must also know the notion of not having these on-loan leaders at GPA would bring instability to GPA.

Why would the district take any chances that might hurt Gompers Preparatory Academy? Why now? Why after 16 years? Why during a pandemic? Couldn't the district postpone cancelling the on-loan agreements? Couldn't the district provide a "grandfather clause" for these four remaining on-loan employees?

Of course they could, if they wanted to. They have the power to allow the on-loan agreements to remain in place. In fact, they have used their power to allow on-loan employees to remain on-loan for the past 16 years.

This is a masquerade that SDUSD and members of the Board of Education are conducting with the intent to weaken GPA should its four leaders return to the district.

It is daunting for the on-loan employees to speak out in fear of retaliation from district leadership or members of the Board of Education, as the relationship between the district and charter schools is contentious. Not knowing what the district may or may not do to their on-loan employees upon return to the district compounds the issue. The on-loan employees' positions in the district, and their standing, is beholden to district leadership and the will of the Board of Education.

Even in the best of times, the cancelation of the on-loan agreement would cause great distress; removing the on-loan agreement during distance learning and a pandemic, is not only haunting, but cruel.

We feel this decision is unacceptable and should not be tolerated. After almost 100 years of combined service from our on-loan employees, we believe the district must do a better job of showing gratitude and respect to these faithful educators for the past 16 years at Gompers Prep.

If the district supports the success of Gompers Prep, they must allow its four leaders to remain on-loan and stop this masquerade.

Anyone familiar with schools in District E knows the prolific challenges we are up against. Anyone who believes in schools in District E, and who believes in the children of southeastern San Diego, should demand the very best for them. They should demand the district gives more to inner city schools, and they should demand the district does more for inner city schools.

Our community has united in declaring that hurting any southeastern District E school in any way is shameful and will no longer be accepted. The San Diego Unified School District must honor the consistent and successful leadership in District E schools, not work to destabilize them.

Gompers Prep is just one example of what our children deserve in southeast San Diego. It would behoove the Board of Education and district leadership to celebrate the efforts of its employees who, day in and day out, put students first on the corner of 47th and Hilltop. They should be supporting their efforts, not giving them an ultimatum.

The SDUSD Board of Education must take off their political masks and show their true intentions and support inner city schools once and for all, regardless if it is a charter school or district school. Their adult agendas must stop, so all District E students' dreams can start.

It pains us to see surrounding District E schools not living up to their potential of success for all children due to the tiresome political games of bureaucrats in power.

What are you inclined to do?

The forced decision to either resign from SDUSD or return to the District is not easy for any of the four on-loan employees to make. Our on-loan employees have been consumed with leading Gompers Prep through the pandemic and navigating distance learning. The District's looming March 1, 2021 deadline to make this painful decision is something very personal and unique to each on-loan employee and their family. We only hope and pray that the district and Board of Education will quickly change their minds and allow the four on-loan employees to remain on-loan.

What would it do to Gompers if you and the three others left?

It would leave a painful void in our hearts after 16 years of dedicated service to the Gompers Prep community. We are all grateful for being able to serve our community and honored to have brought safety, high standards and joy to GPA.

We have more work to do at GPA, and we want to be part of leading that important work while keeping students first. Our mission is a hard one, but we know that with the right people and leadership it is possible. We have proven that. Surrounding our school with the most dedicated and hardworking individuals that believe in our mission is what will keep our school successful.

We are so proud of our school. Even during distance learning, our students have an average attendance rate of 98% in the first quarter. We hope the district allows us to stay on-loan at GPA.

To date, we have not heard from the district about what our role would be upon the possibility of returning to the district. SDUSD has been aloof regarding their plans for us despite numerous inquiries. We only hope the district and Board of Education change their minds and offer the on-loan agreement in order to support GPA indefinitely.

This choice is no choice at all. We hope and pray the district can find it in their hearts to grandfather in our on-loan employees as a symbol of good faith and support of our little charter school that is making a big difference in the lives of our students and parents in southeastern San Diego.

What impact would it have on you if you abandoned your on-loan status and stayed with Gompers?

We would rather focus our attention on the real issue of changing the decision to end on-loan agreements.

There will be an economic impact on each of us and possibly the school. With the amount of years of service our on-loan employees have accrued in the second largest school district in California, our premature resignation versus retirement could force us to lose

many of the benefits that go with retirement from a large district. A district that we have been vested in for decades.

This includes, but is not limited to, the possibility of losing a “golden handshake” should SDUSD offer this as it has in the past. Loss of district retiree healthcare benefits is also at stake.

Resigning prematurely from the district versus retiring from SDUSD after such longevity would exclude us from specific retirement benefits that SDUSD offers to their employees.

Finally, with the current anti-charter climate in San Diego, it is our belief that GPA continues to be targeted by SDUSD with the ultimate goal of making GPA into a district school once again.

Forfeiting our decades of service, with the possibility of the charter being taken over by the district, may contribute to another negative impact imposed on GPA by the district.

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