

September 1, 2021

Dear Natomas Unified Community,

Yesterday, a group released an undercover video that has been covered extensively. In this video, a teacher at Inderkum High School was recorded sharing his educational approach that is disturbing and undermines the public's trust. The district is aware of the approach of the interview and the editing used to create the video. In following the principles of democracy, Natomas Unified staff is following due process, the law, and spent the past two days investigating the alleged teacher actions and his classroom environment. As of today, this teacher was placed on paid leave because of his actions and choices in the classroom. Natomas Unified will be taking the legally required next steps to place the teacher on unpaid leave and fire the teacher. By taking a day and a half to investigate beyond the video, the district was able to learn more facts essential to the next steps. Here is what Natomas Unified staff learned beyond the video, samples of classroom decisions that have led Natomas Unified to this decision:

#### **Clear Violations of Political Activity:**

In 2018 and again in September of 2020 Natomas Unified emailed to all staff *Natomas Unified's Political Action Guidelines*. In these guideline documents, in election years, it makes clear what staff can and cannot do. Excerpts state:

- **YOU MAY NOT** post or distribute materials that advocate for or against a ballot measure on school property during work hours or copy at district expense.
- **YOU MAY NOT** conduct political campaign activity during working hours or in an instructional setting.
- **YOU MAY NOT** use district funds, equipment, services, staff time, email system, or employee mailboxes for political campaign activity, even if the district is reimbursed.
- **YOU MAY NOT** use the authority of an office or employment to encourage or discourage political activity by any other person.
- Similar information is posted in the staff handbook.

From the evidence gathered so far, the teacher violated the district's political action guidelines which are aligned with Board Policy and California Education Code. For example, in addition to inappropriate statements from the video, the teacher posted a sign supporting a personal decision for at least local political issue, and possibly more. It has also been confirmed that he DID receive the 2020 September Political Action Guideline email and did open it.

#### **The Classroom Environment:**

This morning, the walls of the classroom were cleared of all posters and signage. Not all of the material was inappropriate. However, the district believes the physical learning environment can best be rebuilt from a total fresh start. Additionally, the teacher, using his own money, purchased a series of rubber stamps. These stamps include an inappropriate image of Josef Stalin with an insensitive phrase, as well as other stamps with Fidel Castro, Kim Jung Un and others. These were purchased shortly before the pandemic and their use was likely initially limited due to Distance Learning. The district's investigation did discover that at least during the 13 days of this school year, he was using those stamps to mark student work as complete.



### **The Calendar:**

The teacher did encourage students to attend civic related activities for extra credit. It is not extraordinary to encourage students to attend local political meetings and learn about government. Some of the calendars/events the teacher shared involved potential protests and other activities that, at times, became unsafe. Through the district's investigation, there are no specific events right now to prove that, but based on events in the past few years, it is possible. The lack of involvement of parents in that kind of sharing was both unprofessional and irresponsible.

### **Students:**

There are a number of students and former students that are expressing support for the teacher on social media. By taking the extra time, we have also been able to listen to students who have shared discomfort about his shared politics. Some students have shared that the teacher has stated he believes students will move to the left as a result of his class. That is unacceptable. Students are the ones caught in the middle of this. To those who have felt uncomfortable at any time in the past 3 years, we apologize.

### **The Role of History/Social Studies Teachers:**

History/social studies teachers are required to teach material that at times can be controversial. Our own district policy makes clear "Whenever civic education includes topics that may be controversial due to political beliefs or other influences, instruction shall be presented in a balanced manner that does not promote any particular viewpoint." Our teachers must, without bias, or favoring their own personal beliefs share facts and information around differing perspectives. This teacher crossed that line and violated that trust.

### **Answering the Question: Why was this not noticed earlier?**

Here's what Natomas Unified knows and what some initial steps that need to be done next:

- In 2018, 2019 and 2020, this teacher had 25 visits by site administrators in what are called classroom walkthroughs. Those walkthroughs showed that the teacher had learning objectives posted such as "I will know the 4 ideals presented in the Declaration of Independence, and apply them to current events." Other observations included students studying about the legislative branch of government. A number of examples showed the teacher teaching standards and addressing the curriculum.
- The current principal has only been on campus with that teacher for 13 school days. She is new to the school and like all site administrators right now, addressing the effects of the pandemic as Natomas Unified has just fully reopened. She has not had the time yet to get to know and assess all 100+ staff members.
- We have discovered that some of the materials that were on the wall were added, at the earliest, May of 2021. Whether those posters were added prior to the school year or placed on the wall for the first 13 days of this school year - we are not yet sure. However, they are gone and removed. Leaders from the site have stated they do not remember the classroom looking as it did in years prior.
- To make sure this does not happen again, observing the walls and identifying what is on the walls of a classroom will be readdressed in a future training for administrators. Also, there will be a revisiting of *Natomas Unified's Political Action Guidelines* for staff.
- Also, Natomas Unified has a process for students, families and staff to file complaints regarding this teacher. They can contact our Constituent and Customer Service Office to identify these kinds of concerns where they can be addressed quickly. In this instance, NUSD first learned of it late Friday afternoon August 27, 2021, when



Project Veritas showed up with cameras and microphones demanding to speak with site leaders and then later a district leader. From then, NUSD staff began to look into the little known information at the time. On Monday, August 30, 2021, at 3:42 pm, the site leader received an email demanding answers to questions by 9:00 pm that same day. On September 1st, action was taken.

### **Inderkum High School**

The actions and approaches taken by one teacher do not represent the overall staff, students and school community. Inderkum has been recognized for its academic music, its athletic success, and its performing arts strengths. A number of students will be hurt by this action. Even more have felt the effects of their schools' negative publicity. To the parents, students and other staff - NUSD is sorry that this reached this level of disruption.

Sincerely,

Chris Evans  
Superintendent

