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Executive Summary **Investigation of Foothill Technology High School** **LGBTQI+ Pride Week**

February 12, 2019

Background

At a meeting of the Ventura Unified School District (VUSD) Board of Education held on November 13, 2018, several student and teacher speakers alleged that the Foothill Technology High School Principal prevented the school's Associated Student Body organization from holding a LGBTQI+ Pride Week on campus. Pride Week was held at Foothill Technology High School from November 13-16, 2018, under the sponsorship of the school's Queer Straight Alliance student organization. It was also alleged the Foothill Technology High School administration would not allow the Pride Week sponsors to use the school's mascot/logo on the event t-shirt.

The Board of Education directed VUSD Legal Counsel Anthony Ramos to conduct an investigation of the allegations. In conducting the investigation, Mr. Ramos interviewed a total of 14 individuals including Foothill Technology High School students, teachers and administrative staff, and District level support and administrative staff. He also reviewed a total of 38 documents, including e-mails, notes, school bulletins, student newspaper articles and VUSD Board Policies and Administrative Regulations. Mr. Ramos has completed a confidential, comprehensive investigation report that has been provided to the VUSD Board of Education, Interim Superintendent and Appointed Superintendent. The purpose of this Executive Summary is to provide interested VUSD students, staff, parents and members of the community with the key findings of the confidential investigation report, and an associated recommendation. All of the findings are supported by credible evidence, and/or corroborated statements based on the interviews and documents reviewed in the investigation.

Investigation Findings

Questions #1 - Did site administration at Foothill Technology High School prevent the Associated Student Body organization from sponsoring a LGBTQI+ Pride week in violation of VUSD Board Policy/Administrative Regulation 6145.5 – Student Organizations and Equal Access?

Prior to October 31, 2018, students of the Foothill Technology High School (FTHS) Associated Student Body (ASB) organization discussed anti-bullying programs taking place in the District and decided to host a LGBTQI+ Pride Week to provide resources to the student body. The FTHS ASB Advisor informed the FTHS Assistant Principal of the event. A t-shirt was designed and ordered to commemorate the event. The t-shirt included a graphic picturing a rainbow surrounding the school's dragon mascot/logo, and the statement "fthsPRIDEweek, #bornthisway." Pride Week notices were included in the FTHS school bulletin, and a picture of the t-shirt was on a web posting announcing Pride Week and the availability of the t-shirts. Parent and community concerns in the form of phone calls and emails, some anonymous, were received by site and school district administration regarding Pride Week. Questions included, is this a school pride week, or a gay pride week, and is it sponsored by the school? The FTHS Assistant Principal and ASB Advisor met to clarify the intention of Pride Week and ASB sponsorship of the event, and provided information to school district administration in response to the concerns.

The next school day the FTHS Principal spoke to the ASB Advisor to discuss the same clarifications. He stated, "We cannot sponsor any event that lends itself to a specific viewpoint." The ASB Advisor interpreted the Principal's statement to mean that the event could not be held. She was disappointed, and concluded the conversation. The Principal then spoke with the Assistant Principal about his conversation with the ASB Advisor, indicating that by stating "we can't sponsor" he meant the school, school administration, and District cannot sponsor such events, but the event could be student initiated, student run, and student led. Following her conversation with the Principal, the Assistant Principal met with the ASB Advisor to clarify the conversation. The ASB Advisor and Assistant Principal decided the event would be sponsored by the Queer Straight Alliance (QSA). The Principal later clarified with the ASB Advisor that ASB sponsorship of the event would also have been appropriate. However, the ASB Advisor chose not to revert sponsorship back to ASB because of favorable student responses to QSA running the event. Pride Week took place as planned from November 13 - 16, 2018.

Conclusion – Question #1

The investigation found sufficient credible evidence the FTHS Principal did not cancel the Pride Week event, and the shifting of event sponsorship from ASB to QSA was a result of a misunderstanding, and not as a result of a directive from the Principal. In addition, the investigation found no evidence to determine the Principal's actions were discriminatory.

Question #2 – Was the Foothill Technology High School site administration's decision not to allow the Queer Straight Alliance student organization to use the school's mascot/logo on a Pride Week t-shirt commemorating the event, a violation of VUSD Board Policy/Administrative Regulation 6145.5 – Student Organizations and Equal Access?

As previously stated, following the FTHS ASB decision to sponsor LGBTQI+ Pride Week, a t-shirt to commemorate and promote the event was designed and an order was placed with a t-shirt printer to produce the shirt. Immediately following her conversation with the Principal, the ASB Advisor contacted the t-shirt printer to put the order on hold. In a follow-up discussion with the Assistant Principal, the Assistant Principal indicated the school mascot/logo could not be used on the t-shirt but that the name of school could remain on the shirt, and that the student organization sponsorship should also be included. The event t-shirt was printed and distributed with the name

of the event and sponsor, the school name, but not the mascot/logo. The use of the school mascot/logo is to be pre-approved by the principal of the school, and that had not initially happened in this case. The FTTHS ASB student organization has been allowed to use the mascot/logo on “spirit wear clothing” sold in the Student Store in the past, and on rare occasions to promote an event. District policy does not differentiate between ASB and other student sponsored organizations, and specifies that student organizations must be composed completely of students.

Conclusion –Question #2

In denying the use of the school mascot/logo to the QSA student organization on the Pride Week t-shirt, having approved its limited use by the ASB student organization in the past, FTTHS administration was in violation of VUSD Board Policy/Administrative Regulation 6145.5 – Students Organizations and Equal Access, and more specifically, the equal access provisions of the policy. However, it is noted that use of the school mascot/logo had not been granted to student clubs and organizations other than ASB in the past.

Recommendation

Existing VUSD Board Policy and Administrative Regulations provide guidelines for the definition of student organizations, the approval of student organization sponsored events and publications, and equal access and non-discrimination protections for student organizations and student speech. These policies also provide for the impartial presentation of controversial issues, the opportunity to explore alternative points of view, and the rights and responsibilities associated with establishing a Limited Forum for the expression of student views. The content and meaning of these policies is not universally understood by VUSD secondary administrators and student advisors, and the protocols and practices for implementing these policies are not uniform across schools. Based upon the findings of this investigation it is recommended: 1). A committee be formed of District and school site administrators, and teachers and other school site staff responsible for supervising student organizations; 2). The committee review all relevant VUSD Board Policies and Administrative Regulations, and develop uniform, consistent and practical guidelines and protocols for the supervision and approval of student organizations and activities; and, 3). The District hold initial, and periodic refresher training on the guidelines and protocols for all appropriate District and school site staff.