

Whistleblowers' Letter

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61st Open Letter

From: Whistleblowers– Comprised of a Large Group of Extremely Concerned TUSD Administrators, Teachers, Retired Administrators and Parents, Grandparents

Subject: Pompous Elitism- University High School's Kalnienk-Vision Statement to the TUSD Board- Recommendation to Move it to its Own Segregated Campus and Catalina High School's Shocking Eviction Notice

As we have shared before, members of our group are spread throughout TUSD, inclusive of University High School (UHS), Rincon High School, Catalina High School and good old 1010. What we have learned directly from our members who are affiliated with these schools, on top of what was gleaned from the UHS presentation to the TUSD Board that was given during the October 3rd Board meeting, has us in a state of insult, anger, confusion, and disbelief. Our people at 1010 have also provided valuable information. We hope that you will read this letter and become as concerned as we are over the UHS situation. We have two systems within TUSD: One system is for the "haves" and one system is for the "have-nots." TUSD continues to give the haves more support and to withhold support from the have nots. We hope that by what you learn you will become as incensed as we are and that you will communicate your sentiments to the TUSD Governing Board, especially to Mike Hicks since he is the only Board member who can turn this situation around.

Last May the Board majority voted to empower a group of UHS parents, staff and students to develop a plan to move UHS to its own campus and to include a feeder middle school. Mark Stegeman has championed this agenda on behalf of UHS for years but now his fellow Board majority members Rachael Sedgwick and Mike Hicks have conceded to him and to the "influential" lobbying from the most powerful parent/faculty group in TUSD (according to those at 1010). This is not said as a compliment since the source of influence comes from a combination of superiority; entitlement; presumption; and privilege. As a U of A professor, Stegeman rubs shoulders with professors who have their children enrolled in UHS. This is where the gravitation toward moving UHS to its own site was initiated. Stegeman has enjoyed a great deal of political support from UHS staff and parents and soon into their lobbying efforts he became one of their loudest champions. Sedgwick, having embarrassed herself based on her own elitist actions over the last several months, has become a natural for the UHS lobby to instantly win over. The October 3rd Board meeting once again dealt with the UHS and those in the audience enthusiastically applauded her during the Board meeting as she fell over herself proclaiming her support, stating that she was ready to take action (now) to make the move happen and that UHS has waited too long! This was without having all of the needed facts before her. Sedgwick has the least amount of experience and

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history with TUSD of those on the Board. She leans on Stegeman excessively for her information, which gives her only one much tilted perspective. She does not listen to anyone else on the Board. She giggled as the applause from the UHS crowd at the meeting seemed to swell her injured ego. (And yes, we did endorse her for the seat she now holds on the Board but back then she was articulating a very different platform and clearly stated her horror at what was taking place at schools such as Utterback. How soon she has forgotten! If she thinks that she can talk out of both sides of her mouth, she needs to understand that she will trip on her own contradictions.)

Both Stegeman and Sedgwick view themselves as intellectuals. Part of their own validation in this self-view is seen in their devoted support for a school that exists to serve “intellectually gifted” students without regard to the consequences of having to evict another school to accommodate the demands of the UHS staff and its parents. The UHS mission states: “UHS is a special function high school which serves students who are academically focused and intellectually gifted and provides curriculum and social support not offered in the comprehensive high school.” Stegeman and Sedgwick relate to the idea of being intellectually gifted and see themselves as elevated above others who lack high intelligence. Stegeman and Sedgwick each look down on their fellow-Board members believing that they are not as “bright” as they. (Sedgwick especially looks down on Hicks and believes he is not as smart as she. She does not recognize the type of intelligence he has accrued in his life.) What we witness in Sedgwick’s and Stegeman’s behaviors is one of the many personality psychoses that develop when one believes that they are intellectually superior. (We were also not aware of all of Sedgwick’s personality flaws when we took up for her during the election.)

Mike Hicks is not an elitist and has never been captivated by the likes of the UHS Committee. Elitist intellectualism goes against his values. But Hicks plans to run for a City Council seat and is attempting to garner support from- well, anyone. Hicks is really a blue collar advocate and has also been one who has come through for students who are far from privileged and from elitist backgrounds. His recent vote shows that part of his soul seems to be up for grabs. Is it too late? His blue collar/ “salt of the earth” ethics may be melting away. Our disappointment in Hicks is monumental. His future vote on this issue will be the one that separates the superiority attitude that has plagued TUSD for decades from an outlook that makes claim that all kids count. **It will totally be up to Mike Hicks.**

The fact that TUSD has been under a court order for 40 years is testament to the existence of its attitude that some children count a great deal more than other children. The three Board members named above are the ones who gave the green light on Tuesday for the UHS group and the District to continue to put a plan together to allow for UHS to encroach on another campus by completely taking it over while forsaking the existing school and its community- Catalina High School. Almost as much disregard for the Rincon school community was exhibited. The proposed plan is for Rincon to absorb

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Catalina and if carried out, it will essentially result in Catalina High School's eviction from its campus, something the Catalina school staff and parents learned about only when the UHS Committee's vision statement became known to them on October 3rd. This is a calloused and uncaring way for one school community to act. It is one school (UHS) turning on two other schools- all under the direction of the new Board majority.

The District has recently modified its branding to accentuate "unified" in Tucson **Unified** School District. But TUSD should not be allowed to fool the community with its new branding when its actions are anything but unifying. When one school community is directed to develop a plan that allows it to devour another school (Catalina) to accommodate it and then to spit it up at the doorstep of another school (Rincon), it is anything but unifying. It is a statement by TUSD's governance that one school, its students, its staff, and its community are much more important than any other. It is divisive. It is elitist. It is harmful. It exhibits a sense of privilege and entitlement. It is classist. It is racist.

The depiction of a shark swallowing its prey whole comes to mind. In this case, the shark takes over the prey's habitat and then spits the prey out to barely survive (on Rincon's doorstep). Stegeman, Sedgwick, Hicks and the UHShark Committee embody the shark and this shark abandons its carnage believing that it should be thanked for having spared its life. The actions involved in this entire process have been calloused and condescending. **It is institutional cannibalism.**

It is interesting and probably the result of Stegeman's planning, that the Board direction of May 23, 2017 did not create a Board advisory committee which would report directly to the Board. This would have required a **public process** with notification to the public of each meeting through public postings of each meeting agenda. Instead, as provided in the materials as part of the UHShark presentation of 10/3/17, the Board directed that "UHS and the UHS Site Council provide a report on the feasibility of implementing the Board's 2012 direction to give UHS a dedicated site and create a co-located or nearby high-standards middle school which would have no admissions test. The Board also requested that UHS seek input from the interim superintendent and relevant departments in central administration and report back to the Board by October1, 2017. While the request is open-ended, the Board specifically requested information on several key topics; this proposal will include the information on those topics, based on previous Board's resolutions and guidance. Several related goals are addressed in this proposal, including a separate campus for UHS, a high performing middle school that will benefit TUSD students, and an enhanced curriculum at Rincon High School. These proposals should advance the desegregation goals of improving academic achievement and integration in both UHS and Rincon High School." The presentation included approximately 50 pages contained in the documents presented to the Board only a few days before the Board meeting. **Every single meeting that took place was conducted without public knowledge.** The UHShark Committee did not seek input from the

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superintendent and relevant departments, instead the Shark Committee **imposed** request after request for specific research, data compilation, and a great deal of information. The resources which were used, as referenced in the Shark documents, also included the TUSD Legal Department which was involved in providing support to the Shark Committee. How special! They basically had 1010 at their disposal to do whatever was asked of them. **The Shark Committee totally excluded Catalina staff and parents and Rincon staff and parents from any participation/input. This is ELITISM on TUSD steroids!** Central administration responded to every request made by the UHShark Committee. Whispers among the 1010 staff doing the work for the UHS Committee would warn one another to hurry in responding to the many requests since UHS and its parents have a lot of power and influence and that the work had to take priority.

The level of support and attention dedicated to the UHShark Committee by the Board majority (especially, its Clerk, Stegeman) and 1010 staff is difficult to comprehend. Those of us at various magnet schools know that similar attention was not anything like what has been witnessed in the showering of support for UHS so that it can segregate itself even more than it has been. Six of our schools lost their magnet status due to the lack of TUSD Board and central administration support. As in the case of UHS, which has put in place a political campaign to support its proposal, there was no committee assembled to look out for our best interests (our students); not a single Board member took up our cause; there was no orchestrated campaign with a swarm of letters to the Arizona Daily Star Editor; there were no endorsements for our schools from community organizations or prominent figures; and there were no Face Book and blog posts to support our efforts. For the magnet schools, there was nothing. In fact, our schools were insufficiently funded. Our staffs did not receive the required professional development to implement our plans. Most of our schools were staffed with an abundant number of substitutes and long-term substitutes. The lack of support caused the loss of magnet status for six of our schools. Contrast this to the support and prestige that UHS is given from the Board and administration.

Let's point to something as specific as textbook allocations. Every student at UHS has their needed textbooks, which should be the standard for every school in TUSD. Yet, it is not. Not even for magnet schools. Last year Utterback students were not allowed to take textbooks home to do their homework because there were not enough textbooks to allow for this. The administration and Board were informed of this without any correction to the situation. We could go on with dozens of examples.

The Board room at the Duffy site was packed with about 90 UHS supporters, a group mostly made up of white individuals. The presenters were both white: Meredith Tully, a UHS European History teacher and David Smutzer, a UHS parent. There was a spattering of minority individuals in the group and, of course, UHS minority students

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were strategically asked to speak during call to the audience. However, they had no input in the planning. (Exploitation, anyone?)

The Board vote on the Shark Committee's recommendations/vision statement took place after the UHShark Committee presented a glorious report about all of the school's accomplishments, leaving out that for most of its existence it has been under legal scrutiny by the Department of Education Civil Rights Office and the Federal Court. Stegeman made the motion by reading a very detailed prepared statement and Sedgwick seconded the motion. The middle school is not being included in the immediate plan but will be added later. The vote was 3 in favor and 2 opposed (Adelita Grijalva and Kristel Foster). From what most of us can tell, the historical desegregation information which has been provided in the Board materials by the UHS group is terribly twisted and inaccurate. There are those within the community who may better be able to provide us with the facts but no one should rely on the UHS group to know or appreciate any of the history of the desegregation or Civil Rights Offices cases. The Shark Committee has attempted to rewrite history. They have contorted the facts to save themselves from embarrassment. After all, they do not want to be perceived as bigots.

They have one agenda and one perspective and it is to grow UHS in all ways possible on its own segregated campus. Let's get real: until Stegeman and the UHS group started this newest "vision" all UHS staff and parents did was complain about the Unitary Status Plan (USP). Now they are gritting their teeth as they are forced to promise to comply with the USP because they know that approval from the Court is needed in order for them to obtain their even more segregated setting. Their exposure to students with lower intelligence than those at UHS will no longer be the problem it has been. They will promise to meet all of the USP requirements but fall short in comprehending why the USP even exists. It is nothing but rhetoric. The Committee has been coached to commit to the USP and throw USP vocabulary around as if they understand it. Their lack of understanding is loudly transmitted as they bulldoze their agenda through.

One consistent fact that has been in place for the entire time that UHS has existed is that its student population has never been reflective of TUSD's student enrollment. The UHS Principal and her staff along with the rest of the UHShark Committee are bragging that African American and Hispanic student enrollment has significantly increased since 2013. Let's get real. Both African American and Hispanic UHS student enrollment figures are far from being close to or at parity when compared to the District's African American and Hispanic high school populations. Period. To brag about bringing up the numbers while being scrutinized by those monitoring the court order is foolish. UHS was forced to comply. Plus, we are not sure that the numbers reported for Hispanic student enrollment are accurate. Some white parents enrolling their children at UHS have been asked if by any chance there is any "Latin" lineage in their family and if so they could register their child as "Hispanic" even if their child was previously coded white. With the

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wink-wink-nod-nod game being played with parents, we believe that ethnic/racial coding of students has been highly irregular and therefore inaccurate. The UHShark group states the UHS commitment to “students first.” Is this similar to the current “America first” commitment which we hear from the current administration? Both seem to have one thing in common which is the disenfranchising of specific groups. Each has a base to which they cater. All other groups seem not to matter.

In its haste to consume the Catalina site as its own and send its student body and staff packing to Rincon, did the UHShark Committee neglect to assess the effect of their recommendations on these two schools which have significantly large African American student populations? In looking at the 2016-17 enrollment, **UHS has the lowest African American student enrollment of all high schools** while **Catalina and Rincon are in the top 4 high schools with the largest African American enrollment.** With such a low number of African American students attending UHS (it was even lower prior to 2013) perhaps it reveals that UHS folks have gotten used to dismissing the African American population all together. The recommendation to relocate a significantly large African American student population from Catalina to Rincon without any input from Catalina staff and parents shows on-going lack of respect for this community. Almost half of the student population at Catalina is Hispanic and the same applies to the lack of input from staff and parents and the absence of any respect. Obviously no one from UHS has bothered to speak to the desegregation plaintiffs. We have to wonder if UHS lives in a bubble or at least desires to live in one.

It was ironically funny to listen to Grijalva and Foster strongly recommend that the District involve the Special Master and plaintiffs before any action be taken. Of course they are right but until now, they have ignored the need to involve the plaintiffs. Action was taken anyway by their three peers.

Of the two UHS presenters, one is a teacher of European History at UHS and the other one is a Budget/Finance Administrator with the Pima County Attorney's Office. The UHS teacher had great command over the 90 or so people in the audience who were in attendance to cheer her and her co-presenter on. When the UHS supporters applauded at one point, she turned and instructed the crowd to stop until later. Simon says! We cannot help but comment about the fact that UHS offers a European History course but has refused to offer either a Mexican American Culturally Relevant Literature course or a History Course. It also offers no African American Culturally Relevant courses. All other high schools have stepped up to the plate on this. Yet, this group claims that they will comply with the USP. Then, why haven't they?

Another one of the insults within the Shark's proposal was that Catalina is a good site for UHS because of its proximity to the University of Arizona. This suggests that the Catalina student population is not being offered any opportunities at the U of A and that there are no plans to avail U of A course offerings to Catalina students. Remember,

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there are two distinct systems in TUSD: The system for the haves and the system for the have-nots.

A good amount of UHS work-time has been devoted to putting all of the information provided by 1010 staffers together, obtaining endorsements and support from various organizations and people of influence, writing the report for the presentation. Endorsements were sought and gained and Gabby Gifford was successfully approached for her support with the promise that the middle school feeder to UHS would be named after her. In itself, this is out of bounds. Never in the history of TUSD has a site committee been as presumptuous. A process like the one used in this case has never before (to the best recall of our members and those who they have contacted) been put in place. The naming of schools has always been left to the District's Board. But in this case, with great presumption and arrogance, a recommendation to name the middle school feeder after Gabby Gifford was put forward by this Committee. This is way out of bounds of their charge by the Governing Board. None of the above noted campaigning was part of the UHS Committee's charge as voted on by the Board in May. Gabby Gifford was totally innocent in this shenanigans.

The school administration and faculty are supposed to be serving its students and not using their time and resources to justify why it must evict another school from its campus so that it can take it over, much less campaigning to gain support. The whole thing seems tremendously uncivil in nature and as said before, it is institutional cannibalism.

Let us stress that there is no shade being thrown to the Penguins. The Penguins are not the sharks.

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