



MEMORANDUM

Date: March 15, 2024

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: Jan Leshe 
County Administrator

Re: **Further Information for the March 19, 2024 Board of Supervisors Meeting – Agenda No. 14 - Pima Vocational High School**

On March 19, 2024, the Board of Supervisors will consider the status and future of Pima Vocational High School (PVHS). PVHS is a charter high school serving youth ages 16-21, operated by Pima County Community & Workforce Development (CWD). Staff provided an update on PVHS December 7, 2023, and subsequently on March 11, 2024. The Board has received additional specific inquiries from a current PVHS contract instructor. The attached memorandum from CWD Director Dan Sullivan provides a response for those issues that were raised on not previously addressed in our prior memoranda to you.

JKL/dym


Attachment

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator
Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer
Steve Holmes, Deputy County Administrator
Dan Sullivan, Director, Community & Workforce Development

MAR 15 2024 09:50 AM
W/CO

Date: March 15, 2024

To: Jan Leshner
County Administrator

From: Dan Sullivan 
Community & Workforce Development
Director

Francisco García, MD, MPH
Deputy County Administrator and
Chief Medical Officer

RE: Response to comments from Pima Vocational High School staff member Joe Casey and former staff member Sydni Stout

This memorandum contains written response to Mr. Joe Casey's March 11 and March 15 correspondence and Ms. Sydni Stout's March 15 correspondence to the Board of Supervisors that have not been addressed in previous communications to the Board. We have made every effort over the last three years to build connections and strengthen services between CWD and PVHS. The school is operated by CWD. CWD has made operational decisions based on what we believed best in light of the current situation. We understand that some disagree with those decisions. It is important to emphasize, however, as our memos make clear, that nothing that has happened this school year (i.e. FY23-24) has been part of the basis of the CWD recommendation.

Below each question posed by Mr. Casey are our responses. In addition, we have responded briefly to the central themes of the March 15 communications, and attached them in their entirety as Attachments 1 and 2. As always, we are happy to answer any further questions.

Joe Casey March 11 Correspondence - Question and Response

I must first inform you of the deliberate actions (and inactions) of individuals within CWD to hinder the progress of our school without any regard for the authority of the Supervisors of Pima County (BOS), the Arizona Charter School Board and the PVHS Governing Board, and without regard for State and Federal regulations that protect our special education and homeless students.

Operational decisions are within the authority of CWD. We have kept the BOS and Governing Board apprised of those decisions. We have met with the Arizona State Board of Charter Schools and followed their guidance. They expressed no concerns about our path forward pending BOS action.

1. Rather than hire a new Director, CWD placed a junior individual from Tucson Youth One-Stop as the Interim Director of our Irvington Campus, and a team of individuals from the Pima Early Education Program (PEEP) to oversee our Ina Campus.

CWD provided interim leadership as necessary. Given the resignation of the prior Program Manager and HR investigation involving the prior Program Coordinator, the interim leadership we provided was the best option available. Individuals tasked to the school are seasoned employees with deep knowledge of youth programs.

2. CWD posted the opening for the Director's position at a salary that was substantially lower than the minimum principal salary for a school of PVHS's size.

The post attracted only three applicants. CWD claimed they were all unqualified. The post was subsequently withdrawn. No subsequent action has been taken since October 2023.

The posting was consistent with the job title and salary historically used for that position. The classification and compensation study had not yet been completed at the time and the posting was in keeping with current policy.

3. On October 5th, the junior individual emailed that PVHS would not enroll any new students for our Session 3.

CWD has explained its reasons for pausing active recruitment of new students in prior memoranda.

4. It wasn't until December 1, 2023, that CWD informed the BOS of their unwillingness to continue supporting PVHS. On December 7th, CWD informed the PVHS Governing Board of their intention to abandon PVHS. TWO MONTHS AFTER BLOCKING ANY NEW ENROLLMENT.

Review and development of recommendations was in process at CWD and pausing recruitment of new students was appropriate.

5. On December 5th, teachers and staff were handed printouts of an email from the Deputy Director of CWD to the Interim Director of PVHS declaring the consolidation of both campuses at the Ina Campus. Fearing widespread scrutiny of this witless decision, the email was not sent electronically to any of the PVHS Staff or Teachers. The excuse given for combining campuses was to relieve stress on the teachers. We were short of teachers because CWD refused to recruit any. It wasn't the teachers who were stressed. The actual reason for combining both campuses in January 2024 was that the interim director at Irvington had quit, effective December 26, 2023.

The reason for consolidation had nothing to do with the interim director's leaving. The combination of the two campuses was discussed back in June/July 2023 but not implemented at that time. The rationale had to do with low enrollment, few instructors, and safety concerns expressed about the Walter Rogers location

7. The number of Irvington students outnumbered Ina students by approximately 2 to 1. However, the decision was made to consolidate campuses at our Ina location. The reason given for selecting Ina was that continued operations at Irvington posed a health risk due to homelessness and drug use at the front door of the school. This public health hazard had existed since 2016 when PVHS moved from our downtown campus. Persistent concerns of PVHS directors were routinely de-valued by a deputy county administrator with a medical degree by comparing the 'relatively benign' daily substance abuse activity at our front door to the number of fentanyl overdoses at Pima County libraries and the Laos Transit Terminal.

This statement is factually incorrect.

8. Our Irvington enrollment is predominantly students from underrepresented minority populations in South Tucson. Many asked, "Why do we all have to go to the rich white kids' school?! After all, there are many more of us! And many of the Ina students already get a van ride to the Ina campus! (?)" Our students are smart. This social bias is not lost on them.

We understand this is a concern. Still, we have not received any complaints from students or their families.

9. Our interim director promised "as many vans as needed to transport students from Irvington to Ina." During the first weeks of school, students were being left behind at Irvington in the morning and at Ina in the afternoon because of shortage of seats on the allotted van. At one point, the interim director considered terminating van transportation for Ina students due to the lack of adequate transportation for Irvington students. This preposterous proposal was

dismissed by staff and teachers. Eventually, the transportation load diminished due to withdrawals by students and parents who became frustrated by transportation shortages. However, two students must still wait for a second van run to return home after school.

We understand these concerns, and initially had some transportation capacity issues but transportation was provided at no cost to every student who wanted to be it. At this time we have not received complaints from students or parents. Every decision about consolidating was made with the interests of students in mind. We absolutely understand that some staff and teachers who had a long tenure and felt most comfortable at the Irvington campus may be inconvenienced.

10. The interim director also promised to transport any Irvington students to any of the schools proposed by CWD as alternatives to CWD if they didn't want to travel to Ina. Not one student has taken up the offer. Many of our students (and some of our teachers) had transferred away from the proposed schools. However, it is important to note that one of our Irvington students travels from her home in Vail, and another takes three buses from his home in Northeast Tucson to our Irvington campus every morning, and they then board the van for another half-hour ride to Ina.

We are happy to talk to the students who may have been unhappy with the consolidation. Again, despite communicating these decisions to students and parents, including by mail and email, we have not directly received any complaints.

11. During the period between October 5th and December 8th while CWD refused enrollment, our PVHS website still offered a very prominent on-line application, and both of our campuses displayed prodigious "Now Enrolling" signs. This contradiction put our staff in a dubious position of rejecting enrollment requests of parents and guardians who flaunted our on-line application and huge signs, and suggested we were lying to them.

We believe we have cleared up some initial confusion about "enrollment" vs. "recruitment" and have a process in place for students who wish to enroll. However, we maintain that actively recruiting students to a school with an uncertain future causes harm.

12. Between November 2023 and January 2024, three highly-qualified staff members resigned out of fear of being blamed for CWD-induced lawlessness regarding fair treatment of special education and homeless students. The interim director often utters the bewildering statement, "I'm not going to jail over this"!

To our knowledge none of the staff who resigned provided this explanation for their resignation. Also, all actions taken have been vetted by representatives of the Arizona Charter Board and no concerns have been raised.

13. During the December 22nd school board meeting, the PVHS Board of Directors voted unanimously and vociferously to reject the CWD Memorandum recommending PVHS closure. Promptly after the meeting adjourned, the CWD director, in a sweating rage, demonstrated his displeasure by ruining the hinge on the meeting room door as he hastily fled campus.

Management were present at the meeting and none recalled any "rage" or damage to hinges. Also, there is no record of any service request to fix a broken hinge.

14. Effective December 26, the initial interim director at Irvington quit, having been told in June 2023 that she would have the position for no longer than 90 days. Since then, the new interim director is the same person who was responsible for failed oversight of PVHS during the previous school year.

The CWD staff member who served as the interim director did so on a temporary detail that ended after 90 days. We greatly appreciate her efforts and the efforts of CWD staff who have come to the aid of PVHS and taken on additional responsibilities.

15. On January 14th, the Deputy Director of CWD called a meeting to address an email she had received from who she referred to as “a member of OUR TEAM” about the possibility of all PVHS teachers and staff quitting en-masse due to the deceptiveness and hostility of CWD individuals. At this meeting, the Deputy Director insisted that we “provide CWD with adequate notice of any pending intention to quit en-masse”, thus revealing an unbounded absence of respect for the sentiments of the teachers and staff.

After having been informed by our staff that, during an exit interview, a departing employee suggested a “mass exodus” would occur, it was appropriate to address this issue directly with the staff. It is our culture to address issues head on to find solutions. The CWD deputy directors have been very responsive to staff concerns and have addressed these concerns in an open and safe manner in order to find a positive solution. I commend their calm and respectful reactions to PVHS staff members who have been hostile and disrespectful toward them.

16. In our January 16 school board meeting, the Director of CWD declared the CWD “never stopped enrollment; we just stopped actively recruiting students”, contradicting what his deputies had been telling us for the previous three months.

If there was miscommunication, we apologize. This has been cleared up as of January at the latest.

17. Shortly after the January 16th board meeting, when confronted with erroneous data in their December 1st Memorandum, the CWD attorney acknowledged the errors and promised to amend the memorandum and issue an apology to Administrator Leshar. As of March 1st, the amendment and apology still have not been issued.

Andy Flagg is not CWD’s attorney and has never introduced himself as such. He did apologize for the error directly to the President of the Governing Board and promised a correction and explanation in the next memo to the BOS. The correction was provided to the Board in a prior memorandum.

18. When confronted with the reality of violations of federal law with respect to the rights of special education and homeless students to re-enroll, CWD allowed ONE STUDENT to re-enroll. CWD insists that by allowing ONE STUDENT to re-enroll, they haven’t stopped enrollment.

We have explained our current process to the Board in the latest memo. Again, our actions have been vetted by the Arizona Charter Board with no concerns.

19. To display their deceptive commitment to enrollment, CWD has initiated a sham application process where interested students and parents are directed through a maze of administrators and disclaimers before they are eventually provided access to an on-line application. A CWD employee maintains a record of potential applicants. This record is not made available to teachers and staff at PVHS.

As stated before, we believe it is irresponsible to enroll students with full transparency of the current situation and without explaining the uncertainty of the school’s future.

20. For all the students who had completed applications or expressed interest in enrolling from October 2023 to March 2024, this enrollment daisy-chain produced a total of 6 students - 3 returning and 3 new - for our Session 5 which began March 4th. One additional new student was initially denied admission to Session 5 Orientation because he did not participate in the ‘mandatory enrollment process’. Rather, he had taken the initiative to find our

application on-line and complete it entirely without getting tangled in the ‘mandatory’ process. This student was eventually admitted after the PVHS School Board President (who witnessed the anemic orientation for Session 5) confronted the CWD director with this farce.

I am glad we were able to fix the situation. We always strive to serve with heart and urgency and fix mistakes if they occur.

22. While we hear a wearisome drone of “We’re waiting on a decision from the BOS”, CWD individuals have allowed our Irvington Campus to deteriorate as if they have no intention of re-opening the campus. Our security guard has been dismissed and the building has been vandalized.

There is still a security guard on-site and the WIC program continues to operate out of the building. If there is vandalism it should be reported and addressed.

23. CWD individuals refused to submit requests to the County IT Department to transport laptop computers from Irvington to Ina so that each student would have access to their lessons. As a result, PVHS staff have transported laptops in their personal vehicles, placing the equipment at risk, with liability held against the staff.

This issue has not been previously raised to our knowledge. We will check with staff to define the problem and find a solution.

24. In contrast, CWD individuals have arranged for the cannibalization of high-value assets from the Irvington Campus such as the Toshiba e-Studio 3518A printer/copier, thereby making eventual return to operations at Irvington burdensome.

The Toshibas are leased, not owned. It doesn’t make sense to pay for a machine that’s not being used.

25. From January 14th to March 6, the interim director has been on our Ina Campus for a total of approximately six hours. One hour of which was for a student’s medical emergency. She has a regular job at Youth One Stop (YOS). Late-winter and Springtime is the busy season at YOS. By continuing to support CWD’s charade at PVHS, her ability to perform in her primary job is being compromised. Her attitude toward PVHS has deteriorated to one of frustration, presumption, confrontation, and infrequent superficial concern with an underlying foundation of apathy.

The person who served as the interim director of PVHS is an exemplary CWD employee with an unimpeachable track record of stepping up to help with very challenging projects. We appreciate their efforts and find no issues with their performance while at PVHS.

26. Substantial lead time is required to renew contracts for teachers and contractors, and for computer programs used to maintain student records and data. No actions have yet been taken on these matters.

Teachers who are County employees don’t have contracts; there is nothing to renew. If the Board votes to continue the school, there will be time to renew contractors. All school computer programs are currently licensed and are renewed as needed, with the exception of Tyler. This program needs to be replaced.

28. CWD claims that “housing the school within Pima County does not provide a significant benefit to the community.”, yet they contradictorily maintain funding for and promotion of the CWD-sponsored Las Artes project.

We have explained the differences between PVHS and Las Artes.

29. It is common knowledge at PVHS that the individuals who prepared and concurred with CWD's December 1st memo both have a pre-existing bias toward PVHS; one over enrollment competition with schools run by family members, and the other over insisting students return to school in November 2020, during the height of the COVID pandemic, long before vaccines were available, without concern for the risks to students and teachers whose households included frail or elderly family members.

We disagree that discussions are made with any bias toward PVHS. We have been very consistent that we were tasked by County Administration to evaluate if it is appropriate for Pima County to administer PVHS. For reasons stated in previous memoranda, we stand by our recommendation to the Pima County Board of Supervisors to surrender the PVHS charter.

Joe Casey March 15 Correspondence (Attachment 1)

"In a response to my email to the Board of Supervisors dated January 13, 2024, a member of Supervisor Rex Scott's office replied by inquiring about the degree of engagement the staff and teachers had with decisions about the school's operations and future."

CWD Response

We have provided the Board with the information we can about leadership challenges and operational decisions in the two previous Board memoranda. We acknowledge the situation has been challenging for all involved. We have kept staff informed about these decisions and the status of the school, but there have necessarily some matters that are handled internally by CWD leadership and County Administration. The CWD recommendation was developed by CWD leadership based on the factors previously described in the two memoranda. We recognize that there are staff members who disagree with that recommendation. They have been open with their views, which we respect.

CWD leadership have been in communication with the Arizona State Board of Charter Schools and Arizona Department of Education and explained the status of the school and current operations.

Sydni Stout – March 15 Correspondence (Attachment 2)

"As a former employee of PVHS, and nominated board member, I wanted to provide my view on how staff and students of PVHS were included in the decisions of the school."

CWD Response

Issues with prior leadership were the subject of reports to Human Resources and a subsequent investigation, the results of which remain confidential. We have communicated to staff what we are able to, when we are able to. CWD has done its best to provide on-site support during this challenging school year. Details surrounding those staffing decisions have been provided in the two prior memoranda.

Attachment 1
Email from Joe Casey to Board Members

From: Joe Casey [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, March 15, 2024 8:15 AM
To: Sylvia Lee <Sylvia.Lee@pima.gov>; Rex Scott <Rex.Scott@pima.gov>; Adelita Grijalva <Adelita.Grijalva@pima.gov>; Matt Heinz <Matt.Heinz@pima.gov>; Steve Christy <Steve.Christy@pima.gov>
Cc: Mary and Rob <[REDACTED]>; Jimmy Hart <[REDACTED]>; Michael Olguín <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Teacher, Staff and Student Engagement at Pima Vocational High School - School Year 2023/24

CAUTION: This message and sender come from outside Pima County. If you did not expect this message, proceed with caution. Verify the sender's identity before performing any action, such as clicking on a link or opening an attachment.

Dear Esteemed Supervisors of Pima County,

In a response to my email to the Board of Supervisors dated January 13, 2024, a member of Supervisor Rex Scott's office replied by inquiring about the degree of engagement the staff and teachers had with decisions about the school's operations and future.

The purpose of this note is to give you an idea of the degree of our engagement in the decision-making process.

We have been planning for the continuation of our school; but at the same time, we must plan for the possibility that our school will close. In both cases, we have not been included in any discussions or decisions made by CWD personnel.

Our current complement of teachers at PVHS represent a group of individuals with whom I am proud and privileged to serve. They are all committed to delivering a quality education to our students despite the challenges of the present working environment.

We realize there is a possibility that PVHS will close at the end of the current school year, and a June shutdown will not affect the graduation plans for 11 of our students.

However, the remaining 25 students will be faced with the dilemma of finding another high school or giving up on the goal of achieving a high school diploma. It is for those 25 that we are working to maximize the number of academic credits they earn in core subjects to reduce the academic burden they would bear if they transferred to another school.

Since January 2024, each staff member and teacher has been assigned additional duties that had been previously performed by the school's data Specialist who resigned in January 2024. The Data Specialist had been performing duties of the Registrar. The Registrar resigned in November 2023 due to fears that she would bear the blame for violations of Federal, State and Charter Board regulations regarding CWD's refusal to re-enroll our homeless and special education students.

The current Math teacher's class sizes are larger due to the resignation of the Math teacher who had been teaching at our Ina Campus. Both the Data Specialist and the Ina Math Teacher resigned due to the

environment of suspicion, condescension, hostility, and deception cultivated by CWD personnel from October 2023 to January 2024.

Upon the departure of our Data Specialist, our Youth Specialist assumed responsibility for standardized testing. Within a week, he earned certificates as a qualified administrator for the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA) test, the AZSCI (Arizona Science) test, the ACT for our 11th graders and the new ACT Aspire test for our 9th graders.

All these tests should have been administered throughout January and February. However, they had been postponed until shortly before their deadline due to lack of CWD oversight.

A marginally qualified member of Tucson Youth One Stop staff assumed control of student transcripts and class scheduling. At PVHS, we use the TYLER-SIS program to maintain transcripts and schedules. Scheduling for the current session was so tangled that A TECH REP FROM TYLER COULD NOT DETERMINE what the administrator had done to create a problem that requires **substantial hours of teacher intervention to work around**. Transcripts have not been completely updated since December 2023.

The CWD employee assigned as a placeholder for our incoming director has a full-time job within CWD. Her full-time job requires her full-time attention. The placeholder employee has been on the PVHS campus for a total of 7 hours since January 14th. One of those hours was for a student's medical emergency; another hour was as an escort for a school observation conducted by a representative of the Arizona Department of Education. Staff are wondering who is in charge.

Confronted with the federal violations regarding enrollment of special needs students, CWD opened enrollment in late February but closed it again March 1st. CWD controlled the enrollment process. Of the 34 students who expressed interest in enrollment since October 2023, 7 students were enrolled. Only one student has attended classes – and we're not even two weeks into the new session. And the student who remains DID NOT ENROLL THROUGH CWD's convoluted process.

However, despite all the challenges of last school year and the collateral damage caused by heedlessness of CWD this school year, teachers have been maintaining their regular teaching schedules.

Students are still coming to school – some travel from Vail. Others take 3 busses...just to get to Irvington. Then they take a van ride to Ina.

Students are achieving personal best scores on Reading and Math Benchmark Tests.

We have a calendar for school year 2024-25.

We have a block schedule for classes if we can't hire teachers fast enough.

We have identified students who will return to the Irvington Campus, and students who will graduate in December 2024.

We have identified an additional Math teacher.

We have identified our new Director.

In summary, school and staff engagement has been an all-hands effort to prepare for next school year as well as to plan for the contingency of a June closure. Students are learning, and more will be

graduating. All of this is being accomplished in an environment of uncertainty, hostility, and deception.

I hope this note gives you all some appreciation of the engagement of our teachers and staff here at PVHS and it is enough of a foundation for you to decide in favor of keeping our school open, running, and growing -- for the benefit of our students and for the future of Pima County.

Sincerely,

Joseph M. Casey

Attachment 2
Email from Sydni Stout to Board Members

From: Sydni Stout [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, March 15, 2024 8:42 AM
To: Sylvia Lee <Sylvia.Lee@pima.gov>; Steve Christy <Steve.Christy@pima.gov>; Matt Heinz <Matt.Heinz@pima.gov>; Rex Scott <Rex.Scott@pima.gov>; Adelita Grijalva <Adelita.Grijalva@pima.gov>
Cc: Mary & Rob [REDACTED]; Michael Olguín <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Teacher engagement at PVHS

CAUTION: This message and sender come from outside Pima County. If you did not expect this message, proceed with caution. Verify the sender's identity before performing any action, such as clicking on a link or opening an attachment.

As a former employee of PVHS, and nominated board member, I wanted to provide my view on how staff and students of PVHS were included in the decisions of the school.

To my recollection, school staff was never informed of any changes to enrollment, consolidation or closing until AFTER an official decision was made by CWD staff. The Dec 21 Governing Board meeting alluded to the Board members not being aware until after as well. Student and community impact was not documented until the Governing Board President asked for the survey responses, which have time stamps from Dec 11 - Jan 17, again after official decisions were made by CWD. Teachers were frequently blindsided, for lack of a better term, by decisions coming down with no prior warning. We were often told that we had to make it work, no matter what. At times, we were even asked to "do it for the students" implying that the higher ups were fully aware that what was asked of us was a huge sacrifice and we needed to be guilted into it. This happened after we had already been stretched thin from experiencing half of a school year with our "leaders" being chronically absent. The lack of empathy from CWD staff (aside from Nicole, Irene and Chula) to school staff was discernable in nearly every interaction we had.

My resignation from my position was heavily tied to the stress created from the environment and the hostility. I truly loved teaching and helping students graduate, but working full time at PVHS had become detrimental to my physical and mental health. In an effort to continue to serve the students I left behind, I chose to join the board at PVHS. The school and its students and staff are important to me and I still feel like part of the team we formed.

My thoughts on this were inspired by the timeline of events, outlined below.

Jan 2023 - May 2023: Program Manager and Program Coordinator are basically non-existent due to absenteeism.

June 2023: CWD gets involved and manager and coordinator resign. We were promised many things and at no point was closing mentioned.

July 2023: Start of session one, did the best we could with what we had.

October 2023?: Stopped enrollment, which we later found out once students were turned away.

Dec 5, 2023: Meeting about consolidation. This was sprung on teachers. Daphanie says we have to "stabilize and continue on" and we have no choice but to make it work. Absolutely no mention of the memo.

Dec 7, 2023: (two days after meeting) Date of memo that has the plan to close the school.

Dec 11 - Jan 17: Survey responses

Dec 21, 2023: Governing Board votes not to accept CWD recommendation to close the school.