



## **Stockton Non-Profit, Community, and Parent Leaders Join Together to Welcome New Superintendent to SUSD**

*Community Leaders Applaud SUSD School Board for Structured, Transparent, and Inclusive Selection Process in Pursuit of Bringing Stability to the Superintendent Role*

**[June 12, 2023 - Stockton, CA]** Stockton community, nonprofit, and parent leaders joined together to congratulate the Stockton Unified School Board on their selection and approval of new superintendent Michelle Rodriguez, and on the structured and inclusive process that led to her selection. Through transparency, two-way communication, and active involvement, the Board majority is empowering the community to actively participate in shaping the future of education in Stockton.

“I applaud the new SUSD School Board members for identifying and choosing a new Superintendent using a transparent process,” shared Gracie Madrid, former SUSD Principal and Director of the nonprofit Mexican Heritage Center. “Our district is better when we include community members in important processes like these. This hiring reflects that, and we look forward to learning more about and getting to know the new Superintendent.”

The SUSD school board hired the nationally-respected search firm McPherson & Jacobson, LLC in March, after public presentations in February from four firms, including: Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates, McPherson & Jacobson, LLC, BWP & Associates, and Leadership Associates. Once hired, the Stockton Unified School District’s board majority embarked on an inclusive process in its search for a new Superintendent, including forming a Superintendent Search Subcommittee and establishing a diverse stakeholder interview panel to ensure the voices and insights of community members were heard.

In addition, they implemented a structured search process that included a community survey in English and Spanish, several open community meetings, and regular updates at public board meetings. The Board opted for an expedited process in order to ensure the superintendent could be hired permanently for the new school year. The timeline for the hiring process that was outlined included:

- Closing date for applications: May 2, 2023
- Board of Trustees selects finalists to interview: May 15, 2023
- Interviews with the Board of Trustees: May 19 & 20, 2023
- Selection of new Superintendent: late May-early June 2023
- Start date: July 1, 2023

“This school board deserves great credit for selecting a firm, letting them identify an objective process, and sticking to that process,” said Bobby Bivens, President of the NAACP Stockton Branch. “Too often, the only thing that makes headlines are dysfunction and disarray. This board set a timeline and process that they stuck to while managing through many other critical issues, they included community input, and they hired a qualified candidate.”

This superintendent hire comes after several years of turnover and a lack of transparency in the hiring of superintendents by the school board. Since the resignation of superintendent John Deasy in 2020, the District has hired two separate interim superintendents, and one “permanent” superintendent who served just over one year of the identified contract. That permanent superintendent was hired through a process with no search firm involved or other competitive candidates named.

“Stability of leadership is so critical,” added Bill Trezza, vice chair of the Board of the Business Council of San Joaquin County. “Whether you are a parent, an educator, or a member of the business community, knowing and building trust with district leadership is essential to collaboration and long-term planning. We believe this process should position us all to better do that and look forward to welcoming the new superintendent.”

On Tuesday June 7th, in a public meeting, the Board voted to hire Michelle Rodriguez from Pajaro Valley Unified School District, serving roughly 20,000 students in Santa Cruz County. Rodriguez has a track record of leadership stability, serving in her previous role for a total of seven years, since 2016. In 2021, Rodriguez was named her region’s superintendent of the year by the Association of California School Administrators.

“We look forward to welcoming the new superintendent, and identifying what is needed to move our district forward,” added Jasmine Dellafosse, Member of the Stockton Education Equity Coalition. “Our role as community members and advocates will always be to put our children and family needs first, and we are hopeful that this process has identified a leader who can partner with us in that mission, and create a district that prioritizes serving their needs.”

With the new superintendent starting on June 30, there will be a significant to-do list to prepare schools for the beginning of the new school year in August. The new leaders will also need to continue to reform the District’s budget and transparency processes after two separate grand jury reports and a county FCMAT audit revealed the significant financial and governance issues created under the previous board leadership.

“We are grateful to this new board, and to interim superintendent Traci Miller for their leadership and collaboration through this tumultuous time,” said Thaddeus Smith III, Chair of the African American / Black Parent Advisory Committee of SUSD. “The increased transparency and improved governance achieved over the last six months have been welcomed, but we now need a stable leader who can point a successful way forward for our students. It is vital that our new superintendent prioritize improving the learning experience to produce desired outcomes for student achievement, and also help rid the devastating equity gaps affecting groups such as our African-American students and students with disabilities as soon as possible in Stockton Unified School District.”

SUSD student outcomes lag significantly behind the State average in math and reading proficiency, and in completion of A-G requirements, both before and coming out of the pandemic. While other districts have spent considerable time and funding to catch students up with federal COVID relief funds, SUSD leadership has not shared a detailed or transparent plan for spending ESSER or COVID relief dollars.

“Now is the time for us to refocus our conversations on what we can do as a community to better support our youth,” added Don Shalvey, CEO of education nonprofit San Joaquin A+. “We must prepare Stockton students with the skills and knowledge needed to do what they love and earn what they need in adulthood. Our new superintendent has a clear mandate to lead us in a conversation not only about how to make improvement with the urgency our children deserve, but also to do so with the patience needed to find solutions that serve them best in the long-term.”