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TEXTS REVEAL TENSIONS

Superintendent Don Austin messages board trustee Shana Segal to express frustration with critics

Text messages between Superintendent Don Austin and school board trustee Shana Segal seem to show a high degree of tension at the upper levels of district administration. The texts, obtained by parent Ginne Noh through a California Public Records request, show Austin's anger toward Segal's former campaign manager Gayle McDowell after McDowell made a social media post saying Austin should be fired.

In her post, McDowell said she was hoping for Austin to be replaced as superintendent soon.

"Unfortunately we need 'three' board votes to get him out — one or two board members can't do anything by themselves,"

McDowell wrote in the post. "My hope is that with enough public pressure, they might be swayed, but we need to gather this momentum."

Using online messaging, Austin told Segal she needed to own the statements from McDowell and that he was ready to leave the district.

"Seriously, just own it, and it will be easier," Austin said in the text exchange with Segal. "I am ready to go out soon. I can't take the constant lies and attacks. You guys can pick the next person. I'm sure it will be everything you guys want. I'm done."

Austin was granted a four-year contract extension by the board of education this summer.

For her part, Segal said McDowell's words don't necessarily represent her point of view.

"I cannot control what (other people) do or write," Segal said in response to Austin's message. "I am not campaigning, and she is no longer my manager."

Austin said this incident is shows how criticism he receives, from what he calls a vocal minority, affects his personal life.

"I do everything in my power to protect all of us," Austin said. "I take the blame for things I don't even touch. I test my messages for tone and take the high ground. I don't let people attack our staff. For that, my kids cry reading comments."

In an email to The Campanile, Austin said other school officials are also facing community attacks, but

that Segal is not the source of them.

"Relentless attacks have targeted not only myself, but also esteemed educators, several school principals, dedicated teachers, our counselors, Instructional Leads and even a student who dared to simply and sincerely advocate for civility," Austin said. "Ms. Segal is not the source of the abuse."

Austin also said he originally sent the texts to Segal because she knew people who were the source of some of these attacks.

"She is an elected official with relationships and connections with some of our biggest offenders, which is why I reached out to her," Austin said.

Austin said he has given community criticism too much power over his life, and wants to focus on his accomplishments as superintendent, including Niche, an on-line ratings aggregation service, naming the district as the top one in California, and students showing unprecedented growth in literacy rates.

"Like many PAUSD leaders before me such as superintendents, principals and board members, I gave the vitriol more attention than it deserved," Austin said. "Our successes shouldn't be overshadowed by divisive narratives."

Austin also said he has apologized to Segal for his text exchange with her.

"In May, I extended a sincere apology to Ms. Segal for not

"I can't take the constant lies and attacks. I'm done."

Don Austin

discussing this matter in person, which had been our usual approach in previous interactions," Austin said.

And Austin said Segal told him she will not let the incident affect her decisions as a board member.

He said, "With her resolute commitment to not be influenced by the actions, words, lawsuits, petitions or postings of her campaign manager, friends, associates and donors, I am now assured that I can operate without fear of retaliation."

Segal declined an interview request for this story.

Naveen Narayanaswami
Staff Writer

Late start Mondays changes schedule

For teacher collaboration, six Mondays during year will shift class start time to 10:15 a.m

Heather Song
Social Media Manager

To provide more time for teacher collaboration, PAUSD added six late-start Mondays to the school calendar. For Paly students, this means the third Monday of each month will start at 10:15 a.m., classes will meet in 35-minute blocks and the school day will end at 3:50 p.m.

Principal Brent Kline said the schedule changed to give teachers time to collaboratively review curriculum and track student academic growth. During these Mondays, Kline said teachers will use evaluations of student progress to improve instructional practice.

"The purpose of it is to continue to provide our teachers opportunities to develop their craft and align their work and thinking with building goals for student achievement," Kline said. "The cycle of learning includes how they assess students and how we change our practice based upon our assessments."

History teacher Adam Yonkers said he is optimistic about the new opportunities to discuss with his colleagues. He said he particularly appreciates the addition of these late-start days because the district previously gave staff a limited amount of time to meet for group discussions.

"In my history of being a teacher here, there hasn't been a lot of carved out time to work with a team of teachers, and I welcome more time," Yonkers said. "(Late Start Monday) is a change that's going to give teachers more of a chance to collaborate, which is always good in terms of getting teachers to talk to each other about what's working and what's not."

Similarly, School Board President Jennifer Dibrienza said the current periodic staff collaboration meetings, called Professional Learning Communities, are too short. She said this newly allocated collaboration time will give teachers a chance to adjust their practices.

"When we are talking about different initiatives, whether it's adopting a new curriculum, grading practices or issues of equity, there was not a lot of time for the staff to get together and do that work," Dibrienza said.

Junior Keerath Pujji said the schedule change is also favorable for students because Mondays tend to be more demanding.

"Mondays are typically very stressful days because it's the start of the week, and you always get more homework than normal days," Pujji said. "Having buffer time to be able to sleep in and to start the week positively is going to be great."

Freshman Dante Velasquez isn't quite as enthusiastic about the change. He said while he will enjoy the opportunity to sleep in, he is concerned about the disruption a different start time could create in students' weekly routines.

"A lot of people might come to school late and some people might not be able to have their parents drive them," Velasquez said.

And Yonkers said he knows there will be initial obstacles formed by 35-minute class periods, but said teachers will eventually adapt.

"It will be an adjustment because any sort of change to the schedule always creates a bit of short-term disruption," Yonkers said. "But long term, it seems like a good idea."

Dibrienza said the difference from the normal 45-minute Monday classes is minor.

"Teachers will probably use (shorter class periods) as a time to check in with students, do something small and have some more face time with their students, but it is not that different," she said.

Ultimately, Dibrienza said the additional teacher collaboration time will produce a positive outcome for both students and teachers.

"Teachers serve students better when they work with other teachers, exchange ideas and work together to come up with plans," Dibrienza said. "The schedule change will serve everybody. Teachers will feel more prepared and students will get a better experience."



Stadium renamed, honors Earl Hansen

Retired athletic director and football coach Earl Hansen, a mentor to numerous college and NFL players, is the new namesake for Viking Stadium.

The stadium was officially renamed the Earl Hansen Viking Stadium during halftime of the Viking's Sept. 9 home game against Sacred Heart Prep. Included in the renaming is funding for a new sound system and a repainted scoreboard.

The halftime ceremony also celebrated Palo Alto's first state football championship in 2010, which earned Hansen ESPN RISE's Cal-Hi Sports State Football Coach of the Year, the first time a Paly coach won the award.

University of Michigan football head coach and Paly alumni Jim Harbaugh, who played football under Hansen, said he was excited his former coach was being honored.

"Coach Hansen has been not only a great coach but a pillar of the community," Harbaugh told The Campanile. "I always felt welcome. He was always happy to see me. He always let you do you, but he was there to help, give advice."

Tina Bono lead the renaming committee and said the idea was a long time coming and finally gained support and sufficient funding last year.

"We would also like to do a scholarship fund in Earl's name, so any extra funds will go to that," Bono said.

Hansen said he was honored by the night and is proudest when he sees his athletes succeed.

He said, "It's a great honor to have my name where I've dedicated 26 years of my life."

Tyler Wong & Luca Vostrejs
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