

We are aware of a petition circulating asking the Board of Education to fire Dr. Austin. We would like to provide an alternative perspective on Dr. Austin's tenure in PAUSD.

PAUSD is a district of approximately 10,000 students. The vast majority of these students and families rarely, if ever, speak up on district issues. For the most part, the families that do speak up are ones that already have a voice, already feel empowered, and are not afraid to advocate for their children.

It's the responsibility of a public school district staff and leadership to put their heads down, objectively evaluate the best course of action, and move forward with a decision regardless of the political fallout. Good governance requires leaders who are willing to stand up to transitory political pressure. Good policy should always take precedence over good politics, and just because certain voices are the only ones speaking up does not mean they are the only ones that matter.

Dr. Austin is respected by PAUSD senior staff, principals and administrators. They know he has their backs and will stand in front of them and take the political heat from decisions they make in the best interests of students. We have spoken to numerous principals who have expressed their fear that a vocal minority of parents will force him out, and the district will go back to the old way of doing things: parents mobilizing against decisions they didn't like, the district then reversing course, and disrupting progress at school sites.

Since the superintendent joined the district, he has tackled various challenges, including safely reopening schools during the pandemic, addressing student mental health and wellness services, and assessing the effectiveness of our special education programs and behavioral services. While managing these challenges, he also increased student services and cultivated a district leadership team that is proactive and insightful in placing student needs at the forefront of district policies. His student-centered leadership and empowering staff has led to some of the largest increases in student learning in years.

We write this letter not to say that Dr. Austin is perfect, but to highlight that his job is to improve outcomes for our children, which we believe he has done and will continue to do by centering students in PAUSD's decision-making. He is nationally recognized for his accomplishments in PAUSD. Any potential replacement for Dr. Austin as superintendent of PAUSD is paying very close attention to the way our community is treating him. There is a huge difference between respectful advocacy—for issues, for policies, for improved transparency and communication—and what we have been witnessing.

Parental pressure has contributed to the departure of the last few PAUSD superintendents. The inability of some parents in our community to tolerate difficult decisions and not getting their way is a huge distraction and counterproductive to progress.

A non-exhaustive list of PAUSD's accomplishments during Dr. Austin's tenure include:

- Safely and proactively reopened schools during COVID, as the first in the state.
- After school care now available on PAUSD campuses accessible to all PAUSD students, regardless of family income.
- Established a comprehensive in-house Student Mental Health program (among the first in the state),

- Other mental health supports, including opening wellness centers at all three Middle School, and 9am high school start times, aligned with sleep recommendations by American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Adopted a literacy curriculum that is showing significant gains in outcomes particularly among historically underserved demographic groups.
- Supported the establishment of the Systemwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) Plan, our “north star” for executing and measuring progress toward closing the achievement gap.
- Restructured middle school math to make a pathway to AP Calculus accessible for all PAUSD students.
- Restructured moderate/severe Special Education program so that students are better served in K-2, and 3-5 classrooms, rather than a single K-5 setting. The benefits of this model—which is the norm in other districts—are well-established and have been a long discussed program change.
- Eliminated the inequitable practice of inflating PAUSD GPAs with non-PAUSD classes.
- Installed high-tech cameras on all campuses for increased security, which has proven effective in resolving several recent incidents.
- Provided funding to hire 11 new Behaviorists to improve support for students and teachers.
- Hiring and retaining the most diverse leadership team in the district’s history.

The school district is being subjected to disparaging social media attacks, with incomplete information, undermining the district's reputation. As parents who have advocated for many years to address significant and persistent inequities in PAUSD, we are concerned that this petition and accompanying social media campaign may in fact be a reaction to the progress made during Dr. Austin’s tenure; progress that threatens the status quo of a district that has historically not prioritized equity across the full range of our student body.

Under Dr. Austin, who has followed the direction of school board Trustees, PAUSD has undertaken wide-sweeping initiatives and reforms that are bearing worthy results in improved student outcomes. We worry that our district will revert to our prior state where demographics largely predicted outcomes. We also worry that all this rancor directed at the Superintendent is causing unnecessary angst and distraction among our parent and student community at a time when our district in fact has much to feel proud of. This work is “The Work” of a public school district, and deserves to continue without distraction.

Concerned PAUSD parents and equity advocates:

*Nana Chancellor*

*Michelle Higgins*

*Elizabeth May*

*Veronica Saleh*

*Christina Schmidt*

*Sara Woodham-Johnsson*