



June 3, 2021

Monica Montgomery-Steppe
Councilmember, Fourth District
City of San Diego
202 C Street, 10th Floor
San Diego, CA 92101

(Sent via Electronic Mail)

Ms. Montgomery-Steppe:

A month ago, students from Lincoln High School were insulted, taunted and compared to convicts. That happened at an elite prep school in a wealthy suburb. Treating our students with that type of disrespect was unacceptable then, and it is unacceptable now, even though now the insults and abuse are coming from someone who is paid to represent our community. Your attack on our students and Lincoln High School is beneath the dignity of your office. You owe those students and our community an apology.

I will also expect an apology for your decision to repeat lies in the media that have been repeatedly shown to be untrue. You wrote, "Findings show that school leaders did not spend funding as authorized by the Lincoln School Site Council, which is required by law." In fact, the findings showed the opposite.

The law firm of Atkinson, Andelson, Loya, Ruud & Romo conducted an independent investigation which revealed no missing or misuse of funds. The report was completed on July 15, 2020. The [summary pages](#) are here. They found, "The weight of the evidence did not support that any funds that were allocated to Lincoln were spent on another SDUSD school or were misappropriated by any individual for personal financial gain."

It is shocking that you, a former practicing attorney, would send information to the media that you either know or should have known is not true. For you to double down on those untruths and allege you have knowledge of fraud and "misappropriation of funds" is inexcusable.

You should also know better than to request private personnel information related to employees of the district. I find it incredibly unprofessional to demand information on the transfer of an employee. The rationale for our decisions was shared with the Lincoln community, as you would have known had you contacted the school district before launching an uninformed assault in the media.

A recent [study by the Learning Policy Institute](#) found students of color in San Diego Unified schools academically outperform their peers statewide. A companion study by UCLA's Center for the Transformation of Schools found this [success is not accidental](#), rather it is the result of intentional efforts to provide added counselors and other supports to high needs school communities.

Significantly, the increase in African American student achievement has come at the same time as San Diego Unified has raised its academic standards. San Diego Unified was one of the first urban districts in the state to require students to graduate with enough credits to attend California's outstanding public universities. College readiness for African American students has increased by 50 percent at San Diego Unified since the start of those improvements.

Should you decide to educate yourself appropriately on Lincoln's status, here is what you will find:

1. The current leadership under Principal Brown is outstanding. Despite the pandemic, Lincoln High School had a record number of early graduates this year. Fact: This year, a record 130 students graduated early, up from 37 students in 2020, and 59 in 2019.
2. Lincoln High School has made steady progress under the leadership of Principal Brown. The percentage of African American students prepared for college and career increased by 19.9 percent last year to 43.2 percent according to the California Department of Education College Career Indicator. (Source: <https://www6.cde.ca.gov/californiamodel/ccireport?&year=2020&cdcode=&scode=0114025&reporttype=s&groups>)
3. Under Principal Brown, the over-disciplining of students at Lincoln has declined. Year over year suspension rates dropped from 8 percent of students to just 2.2 percent, and for African Americans, it dropped from 17 percent last year to just 2.8 percent, as a result of Principal Brown's student-centered leadership.
4. To build on this progress, Principal Brown has mobilized the community through a series of conversations on the future direction of the school. In February of this year, Lincoln held four parent forums on college and career pathways.
5. The foundation of the plan for the future is a laser-like focus on getting new students up to grade level standards upon their arrival in 9th grade. The plan created by Principal Brown calls for a partner school leader to focus solely on those students, as well as additional counselors and support services for those students.
6. After students are prepared for their future, the upper grades at Lincoln will be transformed into a career academy with outstanding training and services provided for all students. This career pathway system will offer multiple opportunities. Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yBIKWxrbWQyjjJuTEH5imBtqSKMeRf-j/view>
7. San Diego Unified maintains an equity based funding model that has always benefitted the students at Lincoln with additional resources. The district doubles, sometimes triples, the funding it receives from the state for each Lincoln student, meaning Lincoln is the only high school with three vice principals and five counselors.

All of the above, along with every statistic you have requested are available on our website and on the state's website, which again is information you would have received had you contacted the district rather than launching your uniformed attack. Despite the nearly \$2 million in taxpayer money you receive to operate your office, you were apparently unable to locate the following links:

Student outcomes

- Average attendance rate: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/DQCensus/AttAbsByRsn.aspx?agglevel=School&cde=37683380114025&year=2018-19>
- Graduation rate: <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/37683380114025/2019#graduation-rate-card>

- Reading and math rates: <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/DashViewReport?ps=true&lstTestYear=2019&lstTestType=B&lstGroup=1&lstSubGroup=1&lstGrade=13&lstSchoolType=A&lstCounty=37&lstDistrict=68338-000&lstSchool=0114025>

Agenda for Lincoln's future, including many current and potential partners from inside and outside the school: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yBIKWxrbWQyjjJuTEH5imBtqSKMeRf-j/view>

Specific Vision 2020 outcomes for Lincoln

- Schools as neighborhood learning centers: [Community schools plan](#)
- Ensure effective teaching in the classroom: [District initiative](#) and [Learning Policy Institute Analysis](#)
- Engage parents and community volunteers in the educational process / Facilitate communication and support: [Outlined above and here.](#)

Other efforts to support students

- Black Youth Call To Action: [Goals included in site plan](#)
- Freedom Summer: [Commitments](#)
- Added Lincoln support for students' social, emotional, and academic needs: <http://transformschoools.ucla.edu/case-study-san-diego-unified-school-district/>

Finally, we will not respond to your suggestion that we hold a meeting to “potentially choose the next principal of LHS,” as we find the quality of the current leader to be exceptional.

However, if you would like to work together to solve the issues you were elected to address, please reschedule the meeting you cancelled precipitously today. We would especially like to highlight the city's lack of progress on two issues of particular concern to our students.

Last year, in the middle of the pandemic, San Diego Unified distributed more than 80,000 Chromebooks to help student learning continue. We were also forced to distribute WiFi hotspots due to the city's lack of progress in closing the digital divide, which threatens to leave the community of Southeast San Diego behind. (Link: https://www.fair5g.org/system/files/san_diego_5g_built_wrong.pdf)

Equally, we recently approved \$30 million in funding for summer programs for our students, including a summer jobs and internship program. We are unaware of a similar commitment on the part of your office to provide significant career opportunities for the youth of our community.

We look forward to your response and remain ready to meet should your schedule allow.

Sincerely,



Sharon Whitehurst-Payne, Ph.D
Board of Education Vice President, District E
San Diego Unified School District