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OUR MISSION

The Las Cruces Public Schools, in partnership with students, families, and the community, provides a student-centered learning environment that cultivates character, fosters academic excellence, and embraces diversity.

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December 12, 2017

Christopher N. Ruszkowski
Secretary-Designate
Public Education Department
300 Don Gaspar
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501-2786

RE: Student Leader Network
Sent Via e-Mail: c.ruszkowski@state.nm.us

Dear Secretary-Designate Ruszkowski:

I am writing on behalf of the Las Cruces Public Schools Board of Education regarding the Student Leader Network program that was recently announced by the Public Education Department (PED). As you know, the student application for participation includes the submission of a signed school staff sponsor and principal contract. Participation in the program also requires students to be absent at least two full-days of school, which requires the District to designate participation in the program as a school-sanctioned activity. The reason for such designation is to recognize a student's absence as excused. While we are supportive of activities that develop student leadership skills, we are disappointed that PED did not communicate with the District prior to announcing the program so we could properly advise school staff, provide accurate information to our students and wisely consider the budgetary and legal implications. We are writing to you in an attempt to address concerns that this program raises.

Our District policy recognizes participation in school-sponsored activities as an excused absence that does not negatively affect the student or the District's attendance calculation. However, to qualify as a school-sponsored activity, the student must remain under direct supervision of the District while participating. This will require the sponsoring school staff to accompany students to Santa Fe for the February 2, 2018, and November 30, 2018, in-person sessions, which implicates the budget for meals, mileage and possibly lodging expenses. This is without the likely consideration of needing a substitute to replace the teacher who is traveling with participants. This is the only option to avoid unexcused absences, which we assume is not the intention of the PED. In the event a student is accepted for participation in the Student Leader Network, is there an option for PED to provide funding to cover the cost of staff participation?

In regards to advising our students, we have some concern about the information requested and the protection of that information. Specifically, we recognize that the application may not qualify as an education record under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and as stated in the application, may only be confidential to the extent permitted under the Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA). This is of great concern to us, as the application requires a student to provide contact information and specific information about activities they participate in both at school and in the community. Is PED able to clarify what information would be provided to the public and what information will be held as confidential so we can reassure parents that information about their student will be held as confidential?

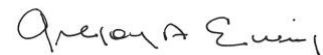
Secretary-Designate Ruszkowski
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Again, we want to express our support for activities that develop student leadership skills, however, we would appreciate your response to our questions and concerns as quickly as possible so we can advise students and parents and further make informed decisions regarding the fiscal and legal implications of declaring the Student Leader Network a school-sponsored activity. In the spirit of looking to the future, we respectfully ask that PED keep in mind the District's request for advance communication.

Sincerely,



Maria A. Flores
President, LCPS Board of Education



Dr. Gregory Ewing,
Superintendent

c: Board of Education, LCPS

