



October 17, 2022

Dear SSD board members,

The California Educators of the Deaf (CAL-ED) is a non-profit organization that shares the same values as Louisiana School for the Deaf (LSD), supported by the Louisiana Special School District (LSSD), whose belief is “Education without Limits” for our Deaf learners.

Firing not one but two qualified Deaf professionals in less than six months; Dr. Ernest Garrett, Superintendent, in June 2022 and Dr. Heather Laine, LSD Director, a Deaf academic leader with over 20 years of experience in Deaf Education, on October 14, 2022, by the Special School District runs contrary to the “Kids Come First,” motto of LSD.

LSD’s vision is to “*empower, advocate, globalize, lead, and engage their Deaf students to become advocates in meeting the demands of this ever-changing world.*” By removing Dr. Laine and Dr. Garrett, they have been *disempowered* as Deaf role models and leaders, which negates LSD’s vision.

The mission of LSD is to maximize the whole person potential of each student, and it goes on to state that they are committed to serving as an exemplary resource in the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing students by providing the following:

- ASL/English Bilingual-Bicultural services within a language-rich environment.
- Rigorous educational curriculum while maximizing vocational training and job-earning potential within various professions.
- Established programs to address the social, emotional, cultural, physical, and educational needs of every child within a safe environment
- A culture of high academic expectations and opportunities for students to study with an educator; emphasizing instruction; teaching study, time management, and organizational skills.
- Support and training for students to develop a culture of self-advocacy.

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The future of Louisiana School for the Deaf and its Deaf students is perilous without valuing the lived experience of Deaf professionals to provide appropriate Deaf role models for their students. Their leadership is essential to the current and next generation of Deaf learners. How can these children and their families bring this mission to fruition if they do not see Deaf people in important decision-making positions?

Whether or not it was intentional, the message sent by the Board with this decision is that there is no place for Deaf professionals in leadership and decision-making roles. Not only is this unacceptable, but it is also deeply harmful to Deaf students and their families, as well as the community.

We insist that you stand by the statement made at the SSD Board meeting on July 25, 2022: “Several Board members responded to concerned teachers and parents saying the newly formed Board is dedicated to placing students first,” said Ronnie Morris, Chair of the SSD Board of Directors Personnel Committee. They appreciate the specialized skills necessary for educators to prepare their students for success in college or career endeavors upon graduation.”

We urge the removal of the current interim Superintendent, Katherine Granier, and the newly hired CAO, Venesa Harris-Edwards, from their positions overseeing LSD, as they have no experience in Deaf Education, Deaf Culture and are making decisions that negatively impact the future lives and successes of LSD’s students.

We demand the reinstatement of Dr. Heather Laine as Director of LSD, effective immediately.

Sincerely,

CAL-ED Board of Directors

Janette Duran-Aguirre, Natasha Kordus, Kim Coronado, Shane Molaison, Amy Bogartz, Laura Fernandez, Mallorie Evans, Abby Longo, Alondra Nicholson, Julie Rems-Smario, Solomon Yigsaw, Heidi Alvarenga, Blair Rasmus, Denise Sidansky, Krissey Altmayer, and Lauren Maucere

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