June 6, 2023

Jessica Cattelino, Chair
Academic Senate

Re: Addendum to the PreK-12 Affordability and Accessibility Report and Recommendations

At its meeting on June 6, 2023, the Faculty Welfare Committee (FWC) discussed and agreed to add two further recommendations to the PreK-12 Affordability and Accessibility Report and Recommendations. The committee is requesting the additional recommendations are reviewed and conveyed to Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Hunt.

Establishment of the Superintendent of Schools position

The Superintendent of Schools position was established in 2019, after a catastrophic break in trust between the parents at UCLA Lab School and the UCLA School of Education & Information Studies (SEIS), which administers the UCLA Lab School. In brief, SEIS fired the Principal of the Lab School (Norma Silva) in December 2018, for unspecified reasons, without consulting with the many stakeholders in the school. After considerable protest, Ms. Silva was reinstated and served out the 2018-19 school year.

The Superintendent of Schools position was then established by EVC Waugh in response to this crisis, to oversee and coordinate across the different units of the PreK-UCLA Schools System. Dr. Devin Serrano was appointed as the first Superintendent in 2019 and has proved to be an able negotiator, working to restore trust throughout the community. Dr. Serrano reported directly to the AVC, which gave her independence to mediate 1) conflict within the schools system, 2) resources from the departments sending faculty children to the schools, and 3) the sometimes-conflicting needs of UCLA and the different units within the school system. Thus, she was able to advocate for resources for the school on the one hand, while ensuring that UCLA’s mission is being fulfilled on the other.

However, the FWC has recently learned that Dr. Serrano has been moved from reporting to the AVC (Michael Beck), and has been reassigned to reporting to the SEIS Dean, Dr. Tina Christie. Moreover, the principals of both the UCLA Lab School and Geffen Academy no longer report directly to Dr. Serrano. Rather, the reporting structure has changed such that all the school principals and Dr. Serrano now report to SEIS.

No explanation has been given for this apparent demotion, which has significantly weakened the power and independence of the Superintendent.

Reporting structure of the Geffen Academy

As detailed in the report, the Geffen Academy was originally established in 2017 as a college preparatory middle and high school. The school is not part of the SEIS mission and was rather administered from the office of the EVC. This reporting structure avoided any conflict of interest between SEIS and the explicit mission of the Geffen Academy, which is to aid in the retention and recruitment of UCLA faculty, by educating their children.
The FWC has also learned that the principal of the Geffen Academy has been reassigned to report to Dr. Christie, such that all the major units of the prek-12 System are now administered by SEIS. No explanation has been given for this reassignment.

Recommendations

1. The executive committee asks the EVC/VC to return to the original reporting structure for the Superintendent of Schools, i.e., that they report to the AVC, and the school principals return to reporting to the Superintendent.

For Dr. Serrano to be effective in her oversight role, she must have a central position in the university, only possible from the AVC office. Thus, the FWC requests that she be restored to her previous reporting structure to AVC Beck to preserve the independence of her role. Additionally, the reporting structure whereby the principals of the different schools report directly to the Superintendent must also be restored to preserve some measure of university oversight of these valuable community resources.

2. The executive committee report to the EVC/VC, the FWC’s concerned that SEIS should not be given oversight of the entire PreK-12 Schools System.

The FWC is concerned that the SEIS has a) been an unreliable steward of the UCLA Lab School, and b) an educational mission which is in conflict with the Geffen Academy, a private college preparatory school, intended to support the UCLA mission of retaining and recruiting faculty. The FWC thus requests that SEIS should not be given the administration of the Geffen Academy, as was originally intended.

3. The executive committee seeks clarification from the EVC/VC on the role of SEIS with respect to the Schools System.

We further request more information about a) why the reporting structure of the Geffen Academy and the Superintendent of Schools was changed, without consultation with the UCLA community and b) what guardrails are in place to preserve the Geffen Academy’s specific mission of educating faculty children.

The committee once again would like to thank the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Hunt in advance for his consideration of our recommendations. If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at bonacich@soc.ucla.edu or via the Committee analyst, at trouzankay@senate.ucla.edu.

Sincerely,

Phillip Bonacich, Chair
Faculty Welfare Committee
cc: Andrea Kasko, Vice Chair/Chair-Elect, Academic Senate
    Shane White, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate
    April de Stefano, Executive Director, Academic Senate
    Renee Rouzan-Kay, Senior Policy Analyst, Faculty Welfare Committee
    Members of the Faculty Welfare Committee