

September 6, 2022

Alberto M. Carvalho
Superintendent
Los Angeles Unified School District

Scott M. Schmerelson
Los Angeles Board of Education, District 3

David Baca
Local Northwest District Interim Superintendent

Via Email Transmission

Dear Superintendent Carvalho, Board Member Schmerelson and District Interim Superintendent Baca:

CCNMA, Latino Journalists of California, is the oldest advocacy organization for journalists of color in the nation. We are writing to protest the suspension of Adriana Chavira, journalism advisor at Daniel Pearl Magnet High School.

CCNMA is joined in denouncing this suspension by colleagues at journalism organizations including the Online News Association of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, National Press Photographers Association and Radio Television Digital News Association.

Adriana was notified by LAUSD that she is being suspended for three days without pay after she refused a demand by her principal to censor an article written by her student journalists. This action is outrageous. California Education Code 48907 states that students “shall have the right to exercise freedom of speech and of the press” and notes that employees “shall not be dismissed, suspended, disciplined, reassigned, transferred, or otherwise retaliated against solely for acting to protect a pupil engaged in the conduct authorized under this section.”

What makes this action even more egregious is that it occurred at a high school named in honor of a prominent journalist whose pursuit of the truth ended in his brutal murder in Afghanistan in 2002.

We are demanding that LAUSD rescind its decision to suspend Adriana without pay, remove the Unsatisfactory Act from her personnel file, defer her performance review to next year and refrain from taking further action against her in connection with this incident.

"High school journalism advisors should not be penalized for defending their students' First Amendment rights to free speech and freedom of the press," said journalism professor Sharyn Obsatz, co-organizer of the Online News Association Los Angeles group.

Ashanti Blaze, president of the L.A Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, added: “SPJ/LA stands with our colleagues in the professional journalism community in protesting the treatment of student newspaper adviser Adriana Chavira. The administration’s conduct dishonors the man for whom the school is named.”

Adriana has had a distinguished career, first as a journalist and then as an educator.

She is a longtime CCNMA member and was a CCNMA scholarship recipient while she attended Cal State Northridge. She is a National Board Certified Teacher and for the past 14 years has been making a difference at Daniel Pearl Magnet High School. She has been a role model and mentor for countless students and endeavored to diversify journalism. As former president of the Southern California Journalism Education Association, she helped students of color attend national high school journalism conventions that for years have been predominantly white. Each year, the editor of the student newspaper has been the valedictorian or salutatorian. Her former students have attended universities such as Stanford, USC and UCLA.

LAUSD is organizing an upcoming journalism day. We believe it would be beneficial to have representatives from the media discuss student journalism rights and First Amendment issues at this event. We would be glad to work with the district on making this happen.

Adriana is dedicated to the success of her students. She is the type of teacher that LAUSD should embrace, not penalize. We look forward to hearing from you regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Laurie Ochoa
President
CCNMA, Latino Journalists of California

Sharyn Obsatz
Co-organizer
Online News Association, Los Angeles

Ashanti Blaze
President
Los Angeles Chapter, Society of Professional Journalists

Marie D. De Jesús
President
National Press Photographers Association

Dan Shelley
President & CEO
Radio Television Digital News Association