



IDEA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Directors

Dear IDEA Team, Family and Friends,

As chair of the IDEA Public Schools board, I am writing to inform you of some significant actions the Board of Directors has taken this week. These decisions, while difficult, will result in a stronger IDEA as the organization moves into our third decade. IDEA was founded to provide a quality K-12 education to students of all backgrounds and prepare them for success in college. We have had tremendous success toward that mission since IDEA began its work in 2000 in Donna, Texas. Today, IDEA's 8,000+ teachers and staff currently educate more than 66,000 students across eight regions, in two states. The Board is committed to seeing IDEA's impact continue and grow.

Beginning early last year, when spending decisions by IDEA management revealed shortcomings in the organization's financial controls and governance structure, the Board adopted [multiple measures](#) to ensure that IDEA Public Schools meets the highest standards in governance, fiscal responsibility and public transparency.

Subsequent to the departures of IDEA's former CEO and the Chief Financial Officer over the course of last spring and summer, IDEA received emails from an anonymous sender that included detailed allegations about inappropriate expenditures and other misuse of IDEA resources. Upon reviewing these emails, the Board directed IDEA's outside counsel to retain special counsel to undertake an in-depth legal and forensic review of financial transactions and activities of IDEA senior executives over the past several years. We committed to a thorough and independent review, with fairness to all concerned and transparency with our community.

This review was conducted by a team led by former senior federal prosecutor Michael McCrum, aided by expert forensic auditor Kim Ford and the KFORDgroup. Due to the seriousness of the allegations and the gravity of potential consequences, the evidence they compiled was then independently reviewed and confirmed by an additional forensic accounting expert. The Board was briefed on their work earlier this week. In summary, the review uncovered substantial evidence that in the years prior to 2020's reforms, a small number of IDEA senior leaders directed the use of IDEA financial and staff resources for their personal benefit on multiple occasions. Furthermore, their actions appeared to be done in a manner to avoid detection by the standard external audit and internal control processes that the Board had in place at the time.

Actions Taken Today by the IDEA Board:

Compelled by the Board's fiduciary responsibility to ensure IDEA's resources are directed wholly toward the mission, we are announcing that two members of IDEA's management team, our CEO and COO, are no longer employees of IDEA Public Schools.

In light of the evidence compiled, the Board also directed IDEA's legal counsel, special counsel and auditors to refer this matter to the appropriate authorities for review of the evidence

uncovered. We will not be able to provide additional information regarding the review at this time due to the confidentiality of personnel matters and the involvement of the authorities.

Additionally, the Board is cooperating with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), including a discussion with the Commissioner regarding the possible appointment of a monitor or conservator.

From the outset, the Board made clear to the special counsel and forensic auditors that they would have access to all documents within IDEA's control and, further, that they were to take the time required to conduct as in-depth a review as possible. Throughout this months-long process, the Board has been closely monitoring the implementation of the policy changes it put in place in early 2020 to ensure fiscal responsibility and strengthen oversight. We are confident those policies have been effective at preventing the types of improprieties that took place in earlier years. Nevertheless, though outside reviewers have validated our confidence, we are taking additional steps, including the hiring of additional internal auditors, to ensure all of IDEA's funds and resources are expended for the direct benefit of our students. We recognize that we must remain extra vigilant as IDEA's work continues.

Immediate Next Steps in Leadership:

The Board has named me as acting CEO and our vice chair, Collin Sewell, as acting COO. We will serve in these roles in a strictly volunteer capacity pending the Board's search for a new CEO and COO. Collin and I are fully committed to carrying out the ongoing management of IDEA. Together with other Board members, Collin and I have been speaking with IDEA's regional executive directors and other leaders, and we are confident in both their commitment and ability to continue to fulfill IDEA's mission and provide exceptional educational opportunities to all of our students.

In closing, let me assure you of this: I will give my all to make sure the founding mission of the organization is honored and our students thrive through these challenging times. IDEA's students, along with their families, trust our teachers and leaders to devote every available resource to their success. Throughout this transition, the Board, Collin and I will be relying on the strength and expertise of our extended community and supporters as we begin a new chapter in the future of IDEA Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Al Lopez