



Illinois School for the Deaf Alumni Association

Tuesday, February 23, 2016

Office of the Governor
Attn: Dr. Beth Purvis, Secretary of Education
100 W. Randolph
JRTC Ste 16-100
Chicago, IL 60601-3220

Office of the Rehab Director
Attn: Kris Smith, DRS Deputy Director
100 S. Grand Ave E
FL 002. Springfield IL 62762

Dear Dr. Beth Purvis and Ms. Kris Smith:

On behalf of the Illinois Association of the Deaf (IAD) and Illinois School for the Deaf Alumni Association (ISDAA), we write to you to express our respective organizations' concerns regarding the steps taken by the Governor's Office and Department of Human Services (DHS) in securing a new superintendent for Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD).

Members of the IAD and ISDAA are not only concerned with preserving ISD's rich heritage, but also in ensuring future generations of ISD students receive a quality bilingual education. However, as long as ISD remains without a permanent superintendent with the necessary experience in bilingual education, the current situation will worsen. Under the current administration and leadership at ISD, the school remains under continuous scrutiny and its image has been increasingly irrevocably damaged. American Sign Language (ASL) remains marginalized and very visible instances of audism and oppression of students, parents, staff, educators and the larger Deaf community continue to infiltrate and become a way of business at ISD.

During the September 11, 2015 Illinois School for the Deaf Advisory Council (ISDAC) meeting, of which Dr. Purvis was present, it was stressed the importance of fostering a bilingual environment in which ASL and English are equally valued in practice. Despite the numerous objections from the current administration, several ISDAC members and various stakeholders, including IAD president Corey Axelrod and ISDAA president Susan Dramin-Weiss, recommended various solutions for ISD to overcome systematic limitations and repair the institution's tarnished image. During the meeting, Dr. Purvis assured the advisory council and various stakeholders present at the meeting that she would work with the DHS and ISD to make policy and procedural changes to address issues of audism and oppression at ISD. Despite these assurances, the situation at ISD remains unchanged.

There were many attempts the Deaf community implored the Governor's Office and DHS, especially Dr. Purvis and Ms. Smith, to take action to address the issues at ISD. Letters, emails, calls, and meetings were done

repeatedly by IAD, ISDAA and the Deaf community regarding ISD's oppression of deaf students, staff and educators; disdain and hostility towards those who do not agree with the current teaching philosophy; lack of deaf employees at ISD; ISD's lack of respect to the greater Deaf community; declining enrollment at ISD; and continuous, frequent blatant occurrences of ASL marginalization and audism. All the while, these issues at ISD have become insurmountable due to the Governor's Office and DHS' neglect and refusal to hold ISD leadership team, especially the principals, accountable. Consequently, the situation has rendered the ISD superintendent position as undesirable and serves as a deterrent to qualified candidates applying for the position.

After DHS was unable to secure applications from qualified candidates during the initial call for applicants, Ms. Smith turned to the Deaf community requesting our support in the distribution of the superintendent and assistant superintendent job postings. We've been down this path before; the Governor's Office and DHS cannot continue to neglect that the struggles to secure candidates are indicative of a larger issue at play, the culture of discrimination and disempowerment that continue to penetrate the ISD community.

We are also concerned the March 15th deadline is not a reasonable deadline in securing applicants, especially as the current recruiting efforts lacks appeal, a huge concern, as there are a significant amount of other schools for the deaf across the nation currently looking to secure a new superintendent. The Governor's Office and DHS' recruiting efforts are in stark contrast to the recruiting processes in which creative, inspiring videos were produced to support recent superintendent searches at Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind (<https://youtu.be/gyA6GDjuGkE>) and Washington School for the Deaf (<https://youtu.be/GvXaf2KcKk>). Along these lines, the Governor's Office and DHS must also creatively showcase ISD to generate interest from prospective candidates.

The IAD, ISDAA, ISDAC and Deaf community members continuously urged the Governor's Office and DHS since August 2015 to be transparent and include the Deaf community throughout the process of securing a new superintendent for ISD. As the Governor's Office and DHS elected otherwise, it was not until Ms. Smith's email to the community at large on February 11, 2016 that we found out none of the unspecified amount of candidates was qualified.

To this date, the Deaf community's lack of representation on the search and selection committee continues to be disconcerting. In an email dated February 18, 2016 to both of you, Mr. Axelrod shared the Deaf community receiving periodic updates from the Governor's Office or DHS and only being allowed to directly interact with candidates during the later phases of the selection process is not sufficient. The current state of oppression and audism at ISD has warranted a need for complete transparency with the Deaf community throughout the entire process. It is critical the Governor's Office and DHS not further add to this oppressive state, a process that would further damage the creditability of both offices.

The inclusion of Deaf community members on the committee, from start to finish, will help ensure the final recommendation made to the Governor takes into consideration the Deaf community's diverse perspectives on language and cultural nuances not intuitive to other individuals involved in the process. At the same time, this demonstrates to the community at large that members of the Deaf community are valued constituents, an initiative that will appease and attract qualified applicants who have every intention of strengthening ISD's relationship with the Deaf community. To these points, the IAD and ISDAA strongly posit the Governor's Office and DHS include representatives of the Deaf community, including representation from the IAD, ISDAA and credentialed deaf educators and administrators, on the search and selection committee.

While these are the first of many steps in building bridges with the Deaf community, taking these actions will also serve as an imperative part in repairing ISD's image and communicates a high level of commitment to the applicants and shows respect for the search process and the Deaf community.

All in all, the steps taken by the Governor's Office and DHS to secure a new superintendent have not been encouraging, to say the least. It has reached a point where it is absolutely necessary for representatives of IAD and ISDAA to meet with both of you, as well as James Dimas. We strongly suggest a meeting the week of March 28, 2016 to discuss the ISD superintendent position search and next steps the Governor's Office and DHS intends to take in resolving long-standing issues of oppression at ISD. In line with full transparency, we request the Governor's Office and DHS share by March 18, 2016 the total number of applications for the superintendent position received by the DHS and include total number of Deaf and hearing applicants.

Sincerely,



Corey Axelrod
President
Illinois Association of the Deaf



Susan Dramin-Weiss
President
Illinois School for the Deaf Alumni Association

cc: Evelyn Sanguinetti, Lieutenant Governor
James Dimas, DHS Secretary
Dr. Tony Smith, State Superintendent
Serena Preston, Illinois School for the Deaf Superintendent
Howard A. Rosenblum, National Association of the Deaf CEO
Chris Wagner, National Association of the Deaf President
Tawny Holmes, National Association of the Deaf Education Policy Council