

# Coachella Valley Unified School District



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Dr. Edwin Gomez

October 11, 2018

### VIA U.S. MAIL & ELECTRONIC MAIL

City of La Quinta Council  
78-495 Calle Tampico  
La Quinta, CA 92253

Attn: Linda Evans, Mayor of La Quinta

Re: Request for Reconsideration of Limitations on Celebrations of Ethnic Diversity in Student Performances at La Quinta Branch Library

Dear Mayor Evans:

On behalf of the members of the Board of Education and in light of our joint mission to serve the families of the Coachella Valley, we request your special attention to an unfortunate incident that occurred on September 15, 2018 involving District students performing at the La Quinta Branch Library. We believe there has been a significant and harmful misunderstanding.

As you are aware, the Coachella Valley Unified School District serves all resident students, regardless of race or ethnicity. California Education Code section 220 states in relevant part, "*No person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic that is contained in the definition of hate crimes set forth in Section 422.55 of the Penal Code, including immigration status, in any program or activity conducted by an educational institution that receives or benefits from, state financial assistance, or enroll pupils who receives state financial aid.*"

State law supports the mission of the District in providing students with historical and cultural context for ethnic diversity. For example, Education Code section 60040 requires school boards to adopt only instructional materials which accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity of our society including the roles and contributions of, among other ethnic groups, Mexican Americans.

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Students from the Cultural Club at Cesar Chavez Elementary School had been invited to perform at the La Quinta Branch Library on September 15, 2018 with their teacher Mrs. Maria C. Hassan, an outstanding educator, 2017 teacher of the year for CVUSD, and the recent recipient of the KESQ "One Class at a Time" award in December 2017 for her volunteer work teaching children about their dual cultural heritage through dance. The group has previously performed at the library and was prepared to perform songs and dances from *ballet folklórico* in celebration of Hispanic heritage.

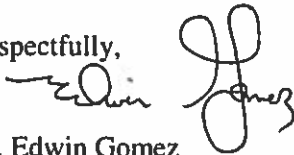
The Board is informed that a supervisor at the library had been directed by library manager Ms. Lisa Baiz to notify Mrs. Hassan that the City had ordered a change in the manner of public performances at the library due to a local citizen having complained to the mayor of La Quinta about celebrations that depict Mexican culture. Mrs. Hassan was told students may no longer utilize a Mexican flag in the performance, and that they may not present information related to Hispanic culture. The group was restricted to their performance with no introduction of their program or the reason that they were in attendance and thus prevented from providing information about their dual language immersion studies or about Mexican Independence Day, the catalyst for their presentation. Mrs. Hassan was told that if they wished to perform future events at the library, the group would have to change their songs and dances to a more patriotic, American performance, singing songs such as "It's a Small World" with the mariachis performing "Yankee Doodle" instead of the performance of "Marcha Zacatecana."

The Board of Education has always valued cooperation and partnerships with local civic authorities and the opportunity for our outstanding teachers and students to perform in community venues. We are thus dismayed at the reception that this voluntary and authentic performance has received, apparently due to the desire of one community member to limit the event.

While the Board of Education is informed that it does have legal remedies in light of what can reasonably be construed as a violation of the civil rights of participating students, the Board seeks at this time to reach out to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, the Riverside County Library System and the La Quinta Branch Library for renewed discussion, understanding, and appreciation of the cultural heritage of all students.

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,



Dr. Edwin Gomez  
Superintendent

cc: Board of Education  
Coachella Valley Unified School District

Ms. Elizabeth Baiz  
La Quinta Library Branch Manager

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