

INSTALLMENT 2

VERDE: How did you deal with other challenges, such as the OCR (Office of Civil Rights) report, Title IX complaints or the Cozen reports?

KIM DIORIO: When you have the experience of going through a suicide cluster, everything else is relative. Your perspective changes. As much as the OCR and the Title IX complaints were concerning, something to take very seriously, something that we need to work to resolve and improve upon, it was much more manageable to kind of get through that ...

I also knew in that situation I felt that we had acted with integrity. So that helped. Knowing that we might not have done everything perfectly or you might not have done everything correctly, but you acted with integrity, really helps you sleep at night.

While I know there are things that we could have done better and things we need to learn, I really feel in the moment, at the time when it was happening, we were doing the best we could, given the information we had at that time. And I stand by that.

It's really important to do what's right and not necessarily what's popular. That was one of those moments where it was hard to see it misconstrued in the press ... Some community members, who didn't have all the facts and the information of the actual cases, were jumping to conclusions based on what they think occurred. ...

VERDE: What were some examples of you choosing between what is right and what is popular?

DIORIO: ... I think the weighted grades is another big concern in the community. I still feel that putting the weighted grades on the transcript was a mistake. That's going to have a negative impact on student learning, student mental health and wellbeing for years and years and years to come.

That's a perfect example of people looking out for their own best interests and not thinking of the greater good.

I feel proud that myself, [former Gunn High School Principal] Dr. [Denise] Herrmann and [former PAUSD superintendent] Dr. [Max] McGee took a stand on that — and it wasn't a

popular stand with some parents, some students and some teachers. But still think that was the right thing to do and it was the educationally sound thing to do, especially given what we had just gone through a year earlier with so many of the mental health issues that were coming to the surface.

In terms of the OCR and Title IX, everybody wanted us to give them information. Everyone wanted to know—what happened?... that was the popular response and that's the normal response. You're reading about something involving your school or student safety, of course you're concerned. We were not, and are still not, able to talk about the specific details of that case because of student confidentiality and a lot of the different laws that protect student rights, and individual rights.

I think that's a real frustration for those people that really wanted to know what happened. It was a hard thing for them to understand 'How come they can't just tell us?' Then they make that assumption — they must be hiding something or they must've done something wrong.

That's the frustration of 'no, we acted with integrity.'

We were doing the right thing by not providing you all the information, all the details. It's the right thing, it's what the law says, but it's not popular because obviously the community wanted to know and they wanted more of a response. We really struggled in the moment with trying to come up with a way to give enough information where we weren't violating student rights and reassure the community that we're working on the matter very diligently, and that we took appropriate action, which we did.

...We did the best we could at the time. Could we have done things better? Absolutely. But it comes back to integrity—we really are well-meaning and there's no big secret we're trying to cover up or hide.

I think that's one of the hardest things about being an administrator — you're not going to please everyone and you have to say no. You have to be able to say no graciously, politely and respectfully, but you will make some people unhappy and some people are going to be upset and you just take it — that's part of the deal.

For me as an administrator, I took it [the criticism] so that teachers wouldn't have to... I want them to just focus on what's happening in their classrooms because that's really what's

important — the teaching and learning that's taking place in classrooms. Let me be the target. I don't care. ...

VERDE: Did the community pressures have any impact on your decision to resign?

DIORIO: My decision to resign was pretty dynamic and complex. It's not just one specific thing. It was something that really had been eating at me for quite a few months.

When the weighted grade decision came down and the Board supported what the parent concerns were, it was pretty clear that my time in Palo Alto was probably going to come to an end because it's very unusual for a superintendent and a principal to disagree with the board and do so in such a public forum. ... the weighted GPA really demonstrated to me that my values are just different than the values of some of the decision makers in our community.

I did a lot of soul searching around that. ...When your values are compromised or there is a conflict between what you value and what someone else values and you're in a leadership position, you're in a tough space. From that time on I started questioning, 'is this really the right fit, the right place for me?'

... After Max Mcgee left, I really was like 'oh boy.' Max and I had a really strong working relationship. He was a very big supporter of Paly. He was very present. He was very helpful. He was a good mentor, a good coach.

We didn't always see eye to eye, but he always supported me and he always backed me. That was really important for a principal because when you're not pleasing everybody, you need somebody who's going to back you up and say, 'I stand by her, she made the right decision.' ... Without somebody filling that void or filling that role, I could see the writing on the wall that I would probably would need to step down at the end of the year and move on.

... I've been at Paly 11 years. It's a totally different school today then it was 11 years ago in a very good way. And that's not all because of me — that's because of the amazing team of teachers, staff members and administrators who have come before me who have really worked to make it a better place. And a lot of those people are still going to be there so we're in good shape as we head into the next school year

VERDE: Do you think the inherent stress of the job wore you down and was that part of your decision?

DIORIO: I think physically it was wearing me down and then I didn't realize it in the moment because I was so wrapped up in the demands of the job. I wasn't really seeing the toll it was taking on my health.

I was sick from November through February with these crazy viruses. I kept going to the doctor. They kept telling me it was just the flu and I just wasn't feeling good. ... I think the stress does wear you down and it does take a toll. At some point you have to put yourself first and really just start taking care of yourself.

My doctor was like, you have to do this, you don't want to have a heart attack in your 40s, especially when I have little kids. I've got too much to live for. ...

The one thing I'll say about Connecticut, ... and I think it's something Palo Alto should really think about and focus on in the future, is the concept of forgiveness. When our superintendent died by suicide in Connecticut, there was a lot of hurt and blame in the community and a lot of people finger pointing.

... We had a lot of talks about how do we forgive each other, how do we stop this blame game and forgive each other, and move forward. At what point do we say, 'I made a mistake and I shouldn't have done this,' or 'We were heading in the wrong direction and now I realized that wasn't enough'.

... I think that goes back to what I said in the very beginning about the competitive nature. I think we're a community of perfectionists. To be an administrator makes it hard in a perfectionist because as soon as you do make a mistake, it's on the front page of the national news, whereas in other districts it might not have not even made a headline. ... I think of, not just myself and my own story, but some of the superintendents, the assistant superintendents and district level staff who came before me who ended up leaving the district, and a lot of the pressure that they were under as soon as something that they did or perceived to do wrong, made the front page of the news — how hard that was.