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## GDOE superintendent responds to JQ San Miguel issue

John O'Connor | Post News Staff Mar 19, 2016



CONDITIONS: From left, Somehay Estrellado, Pam Camacho and Antoinette Nadeau, teachers at J.Q. San Miguel Elementary School, speak about conditions at the school during a Guam Education Board meeting at Machananao Elementary School in Yigo, Tuesday, March 15. John O'Connor/Post

Guam Department of Education Superintendent Jon Fernandez has responded to criticisms from teachers and parents from J.Q. San Miguel Elementary School levied against the school's principal and the GDOE leadership.

In a seven-page letter sent to media and the school's staff, Fernandez assured personnel that he supported their right to relay grievances to the board. However, Fernandez denied the assertion that GDOE leadership was disinterested in their dilemma.

Teachers and parents from J.Q. San Miguel expressed their concerns during a Guam Education Board meeting Tuesday night. During this meeting, teacher Antoinette Nadeau stated she was afraid to speak out and noted that doing so that day possibly made her a target for retaliation.

Parents, like Parent Teacher Organization President Shauntay Afleje, also voiced their concerns about the negative effects the principal's actions have on teachers and students. Some of these issues include schedule changes without input or notice, denial of leave and an overall hostile work environment.

Afleje said the school had been operating without a special education teacher since the beginning of the year. While a SPED teacher had been hired recently, the teacher has been on sick leave, a fact confirmed by the principal herself. Darlene Castro, the principal, only commented that students' needs were being addressed when asked who was teaching the students.

At the top of Afleje's concerns and the concerns of other parents and teachers was the perceived lack of support from GDOE leadership.

## **Disputed**

Fernandez disputed this notion in his response. He said he had met with JQSMES staff twice about the matter, once in October 2015 and again in December 2015. He stated that he formed an Education Resource Team to investigate the situation and provide recommendations on the staffs' behalf.

This included weekly visits from education officials to hold meetings with the principal and staff and to assist with leadership improvement.

Fernandez stated that grievances were filed against the principal but these grievances were not pursued to higher levels of response. If they had, he said education officials, including himself, would have become involved and teachers would be able take their complaints to the Civil Service Commission.

With regard to the SPED teacher, Fernandez said GDOE was looking to fill the position with a limited term teacher while the permanent teacher remained on sick leave.

He also took the time to remind stakeholders to follow through with formal grievance procedures when expressing their complaints.

“These processes are in place to protect and allow for the full exercise of your rights,” Fernandez said. “Bypassing these protocols may lead you to forego the remedies that you seek and hope to enforce.”

He reminded stakeholders that he had the sole responsibility to enforce disciplinary actions on principals.

“Please know that I would not discipline or transfer any teacher or staff member based only on a petition to remove you or on a media story reporting complaints about your performance,” Fernandez said. “Nor would I do so at the mere request of a board member, a mayor, a senator, or the governor. That would be inappropriate and unjust.”

He also acknowledged the challenges of improving conditions at the school but stated that these issues would be resolved by working together.