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Former school employee alleges improprieties

John O'Connor | The Guam Daily Post Sep 6, 2017 Updated 15 hrs ago



LETTER RAISES CONCERNS: Guahan Academy Charter School had to delay the opening of its high school and middle school facility. David Castro/The Guam Daily Post

An open letter from a former Guahan Academy Charter School employee is calling attention to alleged improprieties by the school's board of trustees.

According to O.J. Taitano, the board allegedly ignored procurement law when issuing contracts, arbitrarily determined policy matters and failed to adequately garner enough stakeholder input on key decisions.

Taitano was a consulting resource teacher at Guahan Academy but also served as a high school coordinator.

The letter was sent to several stakeholders as well as the Guam Legislature.

"Beyond the fact that I have already been terminated (assumedly in retaliation for demanding ethical and legal operations), I send this letter out specifically to those who have pledged their support and those who have asked that I champion certain efforts while keeping their anonymity," Taitano stated.

He listed four reasons for submitting the letter and areas that he wished to see changed. Taitano said the stakeholders with Guahan Academy lacked the power to make any real difference in school matters and that the board was self-serving.

Taitano alleged that board members would decide on pay rates and make determinations on employee qualifications without having expertise in relevant fields. He also alleged that the board would make contracts or agreements without following government procurement laws.

Taitano also stated the board has ignored calls to have board liaison Marilyn Manibusan submit a bid for her contract.

Lastly, Taitano stated that Guahan Academy administrators were being treated poorly.

"Administrators are not being empowered and respected," Taitano said.

He also called attention to the Tiyan facility used to house middle and high school students. The facility does not have an occupancy permit, according to the Department of Public Works.

In June 2016, members of the Guahan Academy board appeared before lawmakers to express support for a bill that would rezone certain lots in Barrigada for the development of a permanent campus.

The school was looking toward a \$7.8 million loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to finance development. This was contingent on rezoning the Barrigada property. The bill to rezone the lots became law in September 2016.

However, the school is currently using a renovated Tiyan facility to hold middle and high school students. The temporary facility is worth about \$6.5 million, according to Taitano, and is being utilized through a lease agreement.

Financing for use of the Tiyan facility is contingent on the enrollment of 1,015 students and a clean audit, Taitano added.

The enrollment number is the amount that Guahan Academy projected in its budget proposal for fiscal year 2018 to the Guam Legislature, but the school was awarded a cap of only 740 students – the same as fiscal 2017. Charter schools receive funding from the appropriation to the Guam Department of Education, at about \$6,500 per student attending that particular charter school.

The cap for fiscal 2018 did cause some concern among board members because of the possibility of unenrollment for students already attending Guahan Academy.

Taitano said exceeding the population cap was an issue the school has faced the past two years, and that administrators and other school officials opposed a population jump until a new school facility was guaranteed.

Guahan Academy board Chairwoman Fe Valencia-Ovalles stated yesterday evening that she had not seen the letter from Taitano and will reserve comment until seeing its contents.

Taitano provided a brief statement on his letter.

Don't shut down Guahan Academy

"Some evidence of the statements I made in my letter might be hinted upon by the current occupancy and enrollment issues," Taitano told The Guam Daily Post.

"I want to ask our governing officials, in pleading on behalf of myself and parents and staff that have asked me to champion them, please do not shut (Guahan Academy) down. ... Our students are improving greatly."

Taitano added that, in his opinion, the removal of two trustees and the discontinuance of the board liaison's contract "should bring an end to the constant state of reactivity" that Guahan Academy has been in.

"If this does happen, I would gladly serve as a trustee and I have commitments from qualified colleagues to provide their services in the interim. ... Our faculty and staff are resilient, our techniques are proven. ... Please don't shut (the school) down," Taitano said.

Meanwhile, GDOE Superintendent Jon Fernandez has issued a letter to the Guahan Academy chairwoman stating that, in case the school does consider reducing its enrollment, he has assigned Deputy Superintendent Erika Cruz to help facilitate the transition of students back into GDOE.



Fernandez letter to GACS chairwoman
Updated 15 hrs ago



Taitano letter to GACS stakeholders
Updated 15 hrs ago

John O'Connor

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