

Miramonte Struggles: What Can the Rest of Us Do?

Miramonte Elementary School has been through hell for the last two weeks, and for many children and adults the pain will not be forgotten. The school has suffered the unnerving realization that students were abused, and trust in the school and in the school system has eroded. An entirely new workforce has stepped in halfway through the year adding to the students' educational upheaval.

When news broke last week, we learned that a longtime teacher who had been under investigation and out of the classroom for about a year was arrested. He has been charged with 23 felony counts of lewd acts on a child. Shortly after, a second teacher was arrested and charged with three counts of lewd acts.

The Los Angeles Unified School District's response was swift and drastic. The school was closed for two days and Superintendent John Deasy said the entire school staff would be replaced pending an investigation. "I can't have any more surprises at Miramonte," he said (KPCCⁱ).

Deasy's actions have been widely discussed and argued, and they have been met with both praise and criticism from parents (Los Angeles Timesⁱⁱ, Los Angeles Daily Newsⁱⁱⁱ, Washington Post^{iv}, Christian Science Monitor^v, USA Today^{vi}, This Week in Education^{vii}). The move is a costly one with the district spending \$5.7 million to transfer 85 teachers and 40 support staff, and hire replacements (Los Angeles Times^{viii}). Plus, there's the cost of potential litigation and teacher grievances.

Many who question the mass transfer have said that a trusted teacher, rather than a new one, is best suited to help students through this experience and return a sense of normalcy to their education. Teachers' union president Warren Fletcher said, "We resent it when this community and these parents have their children's education deeply disrupted for no other purpose than to deflect criticism from an administration that failed to do its job" (Los Angeles Times^{ix}). But many teachers and others are less inclined to lay blame on the administration—looking instead to broad, structural challenges that Miramonte and other schools face.

Miramonte is located in Florence, an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County with high poverty and a largely Latino population. It is one of the few remaining year-round track schools in the district, and it enrolls almost 1,500 students (down from a high of more than 2,100 just a few years ago.) That is almost three times the statewide elementary school average of 555. In other words, the school is overcrowded, more difficult to manage and supervise, and has greater unmet needs than schools in more affluent communities. These conditions did not *cause* the tragedy, but better conditions might, just might, have prevented it.

Across the state, generally, Californians can't do much to heal the emotional disruptions of the student victims or their families. But they can act to give all schools adequate space, manageable size, and sufficient, responsible supervision.

ⁱ http://www.scpr.org/news/2012/02/07/31157/lausd-replace-entire-staff-miramonte-elementary/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+893KpccSouthernCaliforniaNews-Education+%28KPCC%3A+Education+News%29

ⁱⁱ <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-0208-lopez-miramonte-20120207,0,4639284.column>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.dailynews.com/news/ci_19918452?source=rss

^{iv} http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/sex-abuse-probe-leads-to-removal-of-schools-entire-staff/2012/02/07/gIQA0uUkwQ_blog.html?wprss=answer-sheet

^v http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2012/0208/Miramonte-School-sex-abuse-scandal-Was-replacing-entire-staff-too-extreme-video?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+feed%2Fusa+%28Christian+Science+Monitor+|+USA%29

^{vi} <http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2012-02-06/los-angeles-teacher-abuse-miramonte-school/52994558/1?csp=34news>

^{vii} http://scholasticadministrator.typepad.com/thisweekineducation/2012/02/video-lausds-aggressive-reponse-to-school-sex-scandal.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+typepad%2Fthisweekineducation+%28This+Week+In+Education%29

^{viii} http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2012/02/lausd-costs-miramonte-scandal.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+lanowblog+%28L.A.+Now%29

^{ix} http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2012/02/miramonte-teachers-grievances-sex-abuse-scandal.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+lanowblog+%28L.A.+Now%29