

108-912

**Via E-mail*, Certified Mail
& Regular Mail**

February 1, 2024

Mr. Heriberto Gonzalez, Superintendent
Ms. Esmeralda Solis, Board President
Dr. Nereyda Cantu, Board Vice President
Mr. Anthony Uresti, Board Secretary
Dr. Alda T. Benavides, Board Member
Mr. Alejandro Cantu, Board Member
Ms. Mary T. Hernandez, Board Member
Dr. Roberto Zamora, Board Member
La Joya Independent School District
201 E. Expy 83
La Joya, Texas 78560-2009

**RE: Appointment of Board of Managers following TEC §39.006 Commissioner
Determination**

Dear Mr. Gonzalez and Trustees:

In my written decision dated February 1, 2024, I notified the La Joya Independent School District (district or ISD) of my decision to appoint a Board of Managers and new superintendent to serve the district based on the Final Report resulting from a Special Investigation (SI) of the district, the issued findings of fact and conclusions of law by Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) following an administrative hearing before the State Office of Administrative Hearings (SOAH), and oral arguments presented to me by the district and the Texas Education Agency (TEA or agency) on October 25, 2023. While rule and statute allow for judicial appeal, the filing of an appeal does not affect or stay the enforcement of my written decision.¹

The TEA has conducted a comprehensive application, selection, and training process to identify and select qualified members of the Board of Managers. Over 100 community members applied and were evaluated, and I am appreciative of everyone who displayed their interest and commitment to the students and community of La Joya ISD. I hereby notify the district of my appointment of seven members of the La Joya ISD Board of Managers. The Board of Managers will be comprised of the following individuals:

* Emails sent to the Superintendent and as indicated on the district website, Elda Hernandez, Secretary to the Board of Trustees. Individual Board member email addresses are not listed in AskTED or on the district website.

¹ Texas Education Code (TEC) §39.007(d) and Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §157.1135(d).

- **Julian Alvarez III (recommended to serve as Board President):** A Harlingen native, Mr. Alvarez III currently serves as the Executive Vice President-Director of Community Relations at Lone Star National Bank. He previously served as the Commissioner Representing Labor of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) where he was instrumental in helping school systems in the Rio Grande Valley, including La Joya ISD, receive grant funding for workforce and vocational training. Prior to his appointment to the TWC, Mr. Alvarez III served as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Rio Grande Valley Partnership where he fostered relationships and helped coordinate programs to advance regional economic development through education and employment opportunities. He holds a degree from Texas A&I University.
- **Anita Chavez (recommended to serve as Board Vice President):** A second-generation La Joya ISD alumna, Ms. Chavez is proud to still call the district home. Ms. Chavez grew up in a family that understood and stressed the importance of a good education, a value that stuck with her as she obtained a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Sciences from the University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley and a Master of Science in Environmental Analysis from Rice University. Professionally, Ms. Chavez is an Environmental Compliance Specialist doing contract work within the Rio Grande Valley.
- **Alyssa Peña (recommended to serve as Board Secretary):** Mrs. Peña is a proud alumna of La Joya ISD, attending E.B. Reyna Elementary, Memorial Middle School, and Juarez-Lincoln High School before graduating from La Joya High School in 2006. She holds a bachelor's degree in international business and a Master of Business Administration and currently works for the Ford Motor Company as a Senior Solutions Sales Manager. Mrs. Peña is a co-founder of "Next Generation Cup," a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in Dallas that provides high-quality extracurricular activities through the game of soccer.
- **Celso Gomez Jr.:** A proud product of La Joya ISD, Celso Gomez Jr.'s roots in the community run deep. Mr. Gomez Jr. married a La Joya native and sent his three children to La Joya ISD schools. Able to view the district from an educator's perspective, Mr. Gomez Jr. served as a band director in several Rio Grande Valley-area school districts where he dedicated his time to providing enrichment for students through the arts. After receiving his Master of Business Administration, he transitioned into the automobile industry where he has worked for the past 13 years.
- **Dr. Rosalva Hernandez:** Dr. Hernandez is a La Joya ISD graduate and native of the Rio Grande Valley. As a second-generation immigrant, Dr. Hernandez understands the struggle many in her community face and puts her focus on serving those most in need. She was the first in her family to obtain a college degree, graduating with a nursing degree from South Texas College in McAllen. She moved to Arlington to obtain a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Fort Worth for a Master of Science in Nursing, and Jacksonville, Florida to become a Doctor of Nursing Practice. Dr. Hernandez and her husband Isaac reside in Palmview with their two children.
- **Dr. Carlos Margo:** Dr. Margo was raised in Rio Grande City and is a 1991 graduate of Rio Grande City High School. He currently serves as Dean for Industry Training and Economic Development at South Texas College (STC) and, since 1998, worked at STC in multiple roles within the workforce training or continuing education division. Dr. Margo holds a bachelor's degree in English Rhetoric from Texas A&M University, a Master of Business Administration from The University of Texas–Pan American and a doctoral

degree in Higher Education Administration from Texas Tech University. He resides with his family in McAllen and has three children enrolled in McAllen Independent School District. He also serves as the Vice President of the Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley.

- **Jessica Ochoa:** Mrs. Ochoa has called the Rio Grande Valley home for more than 20 years and is a proud La Joya ISD parent with two children currently attending La Joya ISD schools. She is passionate about positively impacting her community and providing an excellent example of civic engagement for her children. In her free time, Mrs. Ochoa enjoys exploring new places, volunteering in the community, and spending time with her extended family and friends. She is a graduate of the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin and holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley.

The members of the Board of Managers will be responsible for governing La Joya ISD, and they will provide the leadership needed to work towards positive change and effective governance for the district. Accordingly, with this appointment of a Board of Managers, the powers of the district's Board of Trustees are HEREBY SUSPENDED until further notice and for the duration of the tenure of the Board of Managers.²

State law also requires that I appoint a superintendent.³ Under that authority, I hereby appoint Dr. Marcey Sorensen as the Superintendent of Schools of the La Joya Independent School District, effective immediately and with the full authority, rights, and responsibilities as permitted under the Texas Education Code.

Dr. Sorensen is a passionate educator, leader, and advocate for students. She most recently served as Deputy Superintendent for the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and focused chiefly on initiatives surrounding learning acceleration, early literacy, and special education. Prior to that, she spent a number of years in the Fort Worth Independent School District as the district's Chief Academic Officer and Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, during which time the district saw significant academic improvements. Beyond that, Dr. Sorensen has a lengthy track record of success in multiple roles in K-12 public education, including as a long-tenured principal and social studies teacher. Dr. Sorensen's experience as an academic leader and in improving academic performance will provide valuable new leadership for the students and community of La Joya ISD.

I wish the new superintendent and Board of Managers all my best. It is my sincere hope that all parties work together in a cooperative and productive manner to address the systemic board and administrative issues identified in the Final Report and create a culture of ethical and effective governance with an unrelenting focus on improving student outcomes.

Sincerely,



Mike Morath
Commissioner of Education

MM/lm

² TEC §39A.202(a)(1).

³ TEC §39A.202(a)(2).