



From: Jose Espinoza

Sent: Wednesday, March 5, 2025 3:00 PM

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Cc: nmagee@smcoe.org

Subject: Public Comment in Support of Marco Durazo Phd for SMCoe Board of Education

Dear Members of the San Mateo County Board of Education,

I am writing to express my strong support for the appointment of Dr. Marco Durazo to the San Mateo County Board of Education. During my tenure as Superintendent of the San Bruno Park School District, I had the privilege of working closely with Dr. Durazo in our shared efforts to support and uplift our community. Through this collaboration, I came to deeply appreciate his commitment to education, his ability to work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders, and his unwavering dedication to ensuring the success of all students.

Dr. Durazo possesses the skills, vision, and experience necessary to serve as a valuable member of the San Mateo County Board of Education. His focus on student-centered decision-making, coupled with his strong leadership abilities, make him an ideal candidate to represent the interests of students, families, and educators across San Mateo County. I am confident that his work will continue to foster positive change, enhance educational opportunities, and ensure that every student receives the support they deserve to thrive.

I offer my highest recommendation for Dr. Durazo and fully support his appointment to the Board. He is committed to serving all students in San Mateo County, and I am certain that his contributions will have a lasting, positive impact on the San Mateo educational community. Thank you.

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SM County Board of Education Trustees,

I cannot imagine a more fitting person to join you, on behalf of District Three, on the San Mateo County Board of Education. I have roughly 15 years of experience with Marco, both professionally and personally, and I am a product of San Mateo County. It is not an overstatement to say that had there been a “Marco” in my life when I was a student in San Mateo County my trajectory could have looked very different.

I met Marco years ago through our mutual connection to the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center. PCRC had been the major provider of community-based conflict management and prevention services in San Mateo County serving government, individuals, groups and organizations. PCRC services aimed to empower people, build relationships, and reduce violence through all phases of conflict prevention, management and resolution. My work with them began a couple years after I had been released from a lengthy prison sentence and centered largely around youth and families most influenced and impacted by gangs. I was initially contracted to serve the East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park students scattered throughout multiple South County high schools and my role grew from there to encompass North County schools and communities facing similar challenges. Prior to, and distinct from, PCRC I was also doing a lot of work in the Youth Services Center, the Juvenile Detention for our young people. This is where Marco and I first connect.

I saw a lot of well - intentioned service providers come through the YSC seeking to help those kids and I saw a lot of organizations chase the funding available without having a viable plan so I was skeptical to say the least when I heard through the grapevine that this Marco guy *from Los Angeles* was going to run a pilot program there. Then Marco called me. He asked if we could grab coffee. He told me about his experiences growing up, which were relatable. He told me about some pivot points in his life and voices that influenced his decisions. Those are the voices we need. He told me about his journey in education and what he was learning about himself and the systems in place and it was inspiring and insightful. I had met people who lived in communities impacted by violence for whom school was their refuge from day one and they were stellar students and went on to college and lived successful lives. I had also met people who made horrible decisions as a youth and got their life on track well into adulthood, sometimes with the help of education - that was me. I did not want our young people to be me and many were already convinced that they were not the “stellar student” type. Marco is the first person I met who experienced that middle space, which is actually the most common, and who was willing and able to articulate it. That conversation impacted my life and was the start of a friendship but its one thing to have this conversation at Starbucks. It’s another to have this conversation in Juvenile Hall. That’s the real test because frankly its hard for me to take you serious as a voice for a demographic of people if you can’t have a conversation with that demographic - that is the true test of authenticity.

Marco invited me to Juvenile Hall with him. Prior to that he asked a lot of good questions that showed me he was coming into this as someone with some experiences and skills yet also the new guy who needed to get the lay of the land. Collaboration is harder to come by than it is to hear. People want to leave their mark and show what they can do etc. and that ego triggers other people’s ego and then its just people working in the same space but not together. Marco was seeking real collaboration and I think it’s because he really cared about what he was doing. He wanted to be the best *for* the youth, not *to* the

youth. That first night he showed he was a great facilitator, he was flexible but stayed on task, he didn't take himself too serious but he kept control of the room and that he was comfortable with who and what he was, and who and what he wasn't. I don't think I attended his classes after that but I did check in with the youth in my own time and they definitely approved.

Some years later I was hired on staff by PCRC and Marco was the Associate Director I believe so I got to see him in a leadership role and he taught me a lot about process and the behind-the-scenes part of being a service provider and managing. We sat on innumerable boards and committees throughout the County and he was my go-to to bounce ideas off or ask questions. Marco was patient with me and I grew a lot. He was an inspiration for me to get back into higher education and when I was accepted into UC Davis and UC Berkeley he is who I called and sought advice from (Go Bears!). I can go on and on about Marco, his family, his passion for community and the myriad of ways he has demonstrated that on and off the clock but I'm confident that as you look at his qualifications and experiences and speak with him you will see for yourself what I see - he is eminently and uniquely qualified to add value to the Board of Education. My apologies as I know this is not a traditional letter of reference - I am actually on vacation so I'm not able to look up all the dates and put this on fancy letterhead however I could not pass up the opportunity to lend my voice to the choir of people who believe Marco Durazo is an excellent addition to the San Mateo County Board of Education. Not because he is my friend or because we have been professional colleagues but because he understands our students and their families, the transformative power of education, the particulars of school administration on multiple levels and he makes those around him shine. Should you want to discuss Marco or need any information on particulars etc. I am leaving my personal email and cell phone below and would be happy to make time.

Regards,

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Help Others Move In Excellence, that's what homies do.