

STATEMENT FOR THE PATTERSON JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES ON THE  
SUBJECT OF RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT  
SUBMITTED BY DR. PHILIP M. ALFANO, SUPERINTENDENT  
*Presented February 7, 2022*

As our board is aware, there hasn't been much residential development in Patterson during recent years. I joined the district in July 2008, just as the housing bubble burst and the Great Recession began. Recently, I've tried to educate myself on past residential development in Patterson. I've been reading extensively about previous general plans and community vision for Patterson's future. Unfortunately, after combing through old newspaper articles dating to the early 1980s, it is starting to look like history repeating itself.

As we move forward towards the future together as a community, make no mistake about it, a developer's primary interest is the profitability of his or her projects. Some developers will hold private meetings and groom intermediaries to do their bidding, while others will work collaboratively and transparently to engage public agencies in thoughtful dialogue and come up with constructive solutions to develop the best plan possible for all stakeholders, even if this means taking more time. In every region of the country, there are developers with proven track records who have earned the community's trust and others who have not.

Recently, erroneous statements about our district were submitted to The Irrigator by former Patterson Mayor Pat Maisetti. The basis for this letter was a conversation she'd had with an unnamed developer. I won't speculate on who the developer is, but he or she is more than welcome to come out of the shadows and speak before our board publicly and transparently about their concerns at any time.

I have only met Ms. Maisetti in passing at community events and I don't know her personally. When she was first elected Patterson mayor in 1978, I was a 13-year-old middle school student living in Orange County. I moved to the Central Valley in 1989, to Stanislaus County in 1997, and began working for the Patterson Joint Unified School District in 2008. I do not own property in Patterson, nor do I have any financial interest in commercial or residential real estate development here or anywhere else for that matter. We raised our children in Stanislaus County, but having grown up in Orange County, I witnessed first-hand what can happen to a community when development is rushed and poorly planned. My only interest is in seeing that Patterson's residential development plans don't move forward at the expense of the students, staff, and families I've had the pleasure of working with for the past 14 years.

As superintendent, I engage with diverse community stakeholders having many different political views, cultural experiences, and religious beliefs. I collaborate with these stakeholders and our board to implement a unified vision that, to the best of our ability, meets the needs of all Patterson residents – not just those with power and privilege. I try to keep abreast of current events, but do not involve myself in local politics. Upon becoming your superintendent in 2012, I dropped my party affiliation and do not endorse candidates for public office, except the non-partisan offices of state and county superintendent.

I'm sure Ms. Maisetti cares deeply about the community she served for so many years. As many citizens in Patterson have articulated in recent months, the title of mayor – whether past or present, is supposed to carry with it a high level of respect, responsibility, and trust. Citizens expect their elected officials to represent the facts accurately, honestly, and fairly so sound policies are developed and implemented for

the benefit of all citizens, not just a select few. Former mayor Maisetti did not contact our school district to get its perspective or background on this topic before writing her letter. Instead, she based her comments solely on private conversations she allegedly had with a single land developer she knows. As superintendent, I serve as clerk to our elected board of trustees; therefore, it is imperative that our elected officials have detailed background on matters of such monumental importance as residential development.

Just as city governments must collect fees from developers to fund infrastructure projects and maintain public safety, school districts are responsible for negotiating a mitigation agreement with developers that adequately covers the cost of school construction to house the influx of additional students when new homes are built.

It is also my responsibility, and that of all school administrators, to be advocates for our children who are too young to vote, cut a campaign check, or run for political office, but whose lives will be dramatically impacted by development plans. This charge is so important that it is explicitly stated in Standard Six of the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, upon which our professional credentials are issued. Standard Six states that we will: ***“Support public policies and administrative procedures that provide for present and future needs of all children and families (and) improve equity and excellence in education while promoting public policies that ensure the equitable distribution of resources and support services for all students”.***

At last count, the massive size and scope of these planned residential projects encompasses a whopping 8,756 new homes that will change the landscape of Patterson forever. This means that our district will not only need to build schools but must secure additional space to warehouse supplies and equipment, house support staff, develop a central kitchen, expand maintenance and operations, and provide technology support for our growing student population and new school sites. In order to be good stewards of our tax dollars and operate these support services efficiently, we have tried to centralize operations in the Keystone Business Park where our district office has been housed for over 15 years.

While our elected board members represent the entire community, as public servants they also share a unique responsibility specifically to the parents of the children entrusted to our care. Roughly 70% of children in Patterson come from families living in poverty. Our parents often work more than one job to pay their rent or mortgage and put food on their tables. We owe it to them to make sure their children are provided the same quality education and school facilities as children in more affluent communities. This is a public trust we hold sacred, and it is the very foundation of our beliefs as Americans. Our entire public education system is predicated on the belief that all children deserve equality of opportunity.

As Dr. Martin Luther King metaphorically explained: ***“It’s all right to tell a man to lift himself by his own bootstraps, but it is cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps.”*** Over the past 60 years, through both landmark legislation and court decisions, we have done much as a society to improve the historical funding inequities in public education that existed between those schools serving wealthy communities and those located in impoverished neighborhoods. Since Proposition 13 was passed, land developers and home builders have had more than 40 years to lobby for a better solution to fund public school construction. They certainly have the power and influence in Sacramento to have done so by now.

Our teachers and classified employees, many of whom are also residents of Patterson and parents or grandparents of Patterson students themselves, continue working diligently on behalf of all our students and their families. I am proud of their efforts to provide the best education possible and help our children reach their full potential, especially during the past two years of the COVID-19 Pandemic. I know that our teachers, paraeducators, custodial and maintenance staff, campus security, nutrition service employees, our clerical staff and all who provide services to the children of Patterson are just as concerned as our administrators and board about the overcrowded conditions that will occur in our schools under current development plans approved by the City of Patterson. Contrary to what they may want to hear, developers – whether they live in Patterson or only do business here, also share this responsibility. Developers are obligated, by law, to mitigate their impact on our schools.

The anonymous developer allegedly told Ms. Maisetti that we have refused to meet with him or her. We have met with developers regularly, but there exist tremendous barriers to constructive dialogue. Currently, there are three separate residential developments moving simultaneously in Patterson. Unfortunately, each time we met there were different people at the table. From my count and recollection, we have conferred with at least 10 different individuals – some of whom have financial interest in more than one of these projects. I also know that our assistant superintendent, Mr. Jeff Menge, has responded to numerous emails and phone calls. There are also dozens of different limited liability corporations and family trusts representing various landowners with financial interest in each of these developments.

It has frequently been unclear who is speaking for whom and which person is authorized to make decisions on behalf of the groups involved with each project. We were informed by Patterson City Manager Ken Irwin, that one development consultant with extensive experience in governmental relations would be working with us and we have been communicating through him. However, just this past Friday he informed us that he doesn't represent the Baldwin Ranch development project. This was a surprise to us since both projects were approved together by the planning commission. Similarly, we were informed by city staff that a developer was no longer actively involved in Villages of Patterson, only to discover recently that this person is still very much involved. Subsequently, he actually provided more information on the status of the Hartley Road construction than any of the other developers or city staff supposedly overseeing this project. Throw in the mix rotating attorneys and various consultants of all types representing their aforementioned clients, and you get a better idea of the problem.

More importantly, throughout this process, our district has also sought to engage city staff and council directly in an effort to answer our questions and address valid concerns about the impact these residential projects will have on our schools. I want to make it clear that we are not against development, but we also don't want to go back to the days where families were forced onto year-round scheduling and shoddy portables to house students impacted by poorly mitigated residential development.

In the 14 years I've served the Patterson community as assistant superintendent and superintendent, we've made great strides in improving our facilities and developing innovative programming for our children. Our former superintendent, Dr. Patrick Sweeney, took great pride in our facilities and left the district in good shape, despite the rapid growth that occurred during his tenure and the onset of the Great Recession. We have built on this legacy by leveraging more than \$20 million in state funds to modernize our aging facilities during the past decade, relieving local taxpayers from shouldering this

responsibility all on their own. This could not have been achieved without a supportive board of trustees who are committed to educational excellence and care deeply for the children of Patterson.

As a district, we have also worked collaboratively with local businesses to develop meaningful Career and Technical Education programs that support economic development in Patterson. We were the first district in the State of California to implement a successful supply chain and logistics program and a ready workforce upon graduation from Patterson High School. We were also one of the first districts in the country to develop a commercial truck driving program. Both programs have been covered extensively by The Modesto Bee, ABC, NBC, CBS, NPR, CNN, Fox Business, Fox News, international news networks, and virtually every industry trade publication in the nation. The recent supply chain crisis has only amplified the need for such programs both locally and nationally. Our staff from these programs deserve our community's thanks for the work they are doing and for putting the City of Patterson in the national spotlight with these positive and uplifting stories.

We are also proud of the work we've done as a district in managing resources to bridge the digital divide that exists with many low-income families in our community. Arguably, lack of internet access among disadvantaged children is the most important civil rights issue of our time as both schools and workplaces have become dependent on technology. Even prior to the pandemic, we had digital devices for each student and received FCC approval to install LTE towers so students could access digital educational resources at no charge.

While we hope we never have to go back exclusively to distance learning, the Patterson Joint Unified School District was better prepared than almost any district in the State of California to provide this type of instruction for our children. When staff from the Los Angeles Unified School District, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest school district in the country, reach out to visit Patterson and learn from what we're doing, then I'd say we did something right for our students and our community. Our innovative efforts also drew the attention of the Wall Street Journal, again shining a promising light on the City of Patterson.

In 2015, our district hosted a trade association conference for supply chain and logistics in Patterson that brought industry experts from across the nation to our city. This event had never been held west of the Mississippi before. Some of the same developers who were involved with commercial development at the time, and are now pursuing residential development, were direct beneficiaries of our school district's efforts to provide much needed workforce development through our high school's CTE and adult education programs. Don't take my word for it. Ask managers from CVS, Grainger, Kohl's, Restoration Hardware, Amazon, Bronco Wine, Gallo, Morning Star Farms, and dozens of others who gladly sit on our advisory committees and jump at the opportunity to hire our students. I'd say we've done more than our fair share to promote community development. At the time, Patterson Planning Commission Chair Ron West wrote an unsolicited Op-Ed piece praising our school district's efforts to help fulfill the city's ambitious 30-year general plan to increase new employment opportunities for Patterson residents by 660 percent by the year 2040.

Imagine our shock when just three years later, the City of Patterson filed suit against Stanislaus County over the commercial development of the old Naval Air Station in Crows Landing. I don't pretend to know what politically motivated turf war between city and county prompted this suit, nor do I care. But what I can tell you is that the lawsuit claimed that a commercial project would generate 9,500 students for the Patterson Joint Unified School District and the Newman Crows-Landing School District. These figures were a fabrication. At no time was either district asked about the project's impact or provided

input on this project at the city's request. At the time, I contacted the superintendent of the Newman Crows-Landing School District who confirmed that he knew nothing of the suit. The first time either of us knew about the city's claim was when we read it in The Modesto Bee on December 5, 2018. Businesses produces jobs, homes produce students. Not the other way around.

Less than three years later, the city's general plan was quickly rewritten and rezoned to add more residential housing. The plan was rushed through the planning commission and then the city council. This time we did submit formal written concerns about student generation and provided our concerns to the City of Patterson through City Planner Joel Andrews in 2020. City staff didn't even bother to include our input in the Environmental Impact Report provided to the commission and council. To my knowledge, the first time our elected council and our planning commissioners received our concerns was this past Tuesday when Mr. Menge provided them via email. More than thirty years of city leaders promising to bring jobs along the I-5 corridor for Patterson's residents suddenly shifted in the blink of an eye.

Former Community Development Director, David James misled the council and commission by telling both there had been "robust conversations" with the school district, but again never providing our written concerns to either the planning commission or the council in the city's final report. These concerns were not addressed publicly, other than with a verbal statement that our concerns had been "taken into consideration". While it is not our place to say whether or not this rezoning best serves economic development and the housing needs of Patterson residents, it is absolutely our responsibility as a school district to ask where we will put the students generated from the additional homes in the Baldwin Ranch development.

The current plan, crafted entirely between city staff and developers would require transporting all children from the 471 homes in the Baldwin Ranch development into an already overcrowded Apricot Valley Elementary School. This simply is not feasible. Anyone who has tried to navigate the narrow streets of Walker Ranch during morning drop-off or afternoon pick-up around Apricot Valley knows this. In fact, Councilmember Homen brought this constituent concern about traffic congestion around Apricot Valley to our attention through City Manager Ken Irwin. We explained that the school district did not design the streets around Apricot Valley, the city did. This was in August 2021. She then proceeded to give final approval to the Baldwin Ranch plan without raising this issue.

For the sake of our community and our children, we must develop a better plan. I'm glad that the city apparently has what it needs from developers to move forward, but the school district does not. We will not allow our staff, parents, and children to be steamrolled by this unorthodox and highly questionable process.

Over the past six years with City Manager Irwin, and previously with City Manager Rod Butler, school district and city staff have met occasionally and informally to discuss items of common interest. While discussions about non-development items were mostly productive, when it came to residential development, information was routinely vague and simply gleaned from staff reports that had already gone before the council. We asked but were never provided the opportunity to meet with city staff and developers together as the city negotiated its agreement first.

I have attended several city council meetings and planning commission meetings related to this topic. It has become evident that District concerns are either ignored entirely or downplayed by city staff. Because of this, I informed Mr. Irwin that we needed to include a council member and a board member in future conversations so our elected officials who represent our community could hear our questions and concerns directly and unfiltered by city staff. Initially Mr. Irwin was hesitant to do this, but eventually agreed. Our first meeting was held in September with Board Members Segoviano and Bays, Mr. Menge, and me. Mr. Irwin selected Mayor McCord to represent the council.

Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond either agency's control, we have not met again. We are scheduled to resume these meetings on February 22nd with Mr. Irwin and Vice-Mayor Farinha. I'm hopeful we can bring some resolution to issues with the Village of Patterson project since a school must be built there before we can even think about discussing the Baldwin Ranch project.

In researching past development issues in Patterson, I came across a very interesting article from 1994. The article reported how our school district was at odds with the city and developers over inadequate developer fees for our schools – the very same issues were dealing with today, and that previously resulted in schools going on year-round scheduling, bringing in shoddy portables, and kindergarten students housed in old World War II military barracks in Patterson. At the time, Mayor Maisetti recommended that a committee be formed with council members and board members to discuss the issue. What a great idea – transparency.

In 1994, it was the school district superintendent, Dr. Keith Daniel, who rejected the idea of holding joint meetings. Let's not make that same mistake again. The needs of the city and school district should not be mutually exclusive. We deserve a seat at the table as well. Not a backroom, not a private lunch meeting with unnamed developers, but with the respect, collaboration, confidence, and transparency our community demands of the elected leaders. We've all been entrusted to make decisions for the benefit of the entire community, including its most vulnerable citizens – our children. As the late Nelson Mandela so eloquently stated: ***"The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children."*** It's about time we improve the character of this community.