

Statement to the HUSD BOT
The Rev. Dr. Arlene K. Nehring, Senior Minister, Eden United Church of Christ
Wednesday, October 23, 2013

The recently revised HUSD Volunteer Policies now require all school volunteers to participate in a Department of Justice (DOJ) background checks, which include finger printing, a Social Security number, and paying a fee of \$60-\$90/person, and a TB test.

The districts volunteer policies and implementation are unclear, and they are being unevenly implemented. I've spoken with five different administrators in the past two weeks, and no two explained the policies in the same way or were implementing them in the same way.

These revised policies unfairly bar low-income families, and undocumented parents from participating in their children's classrooms, because these parents cannot afford the fees, and/or because they fear deportation and permanent separation from their families if they participate in these screenings.

Previously, under the MAGIC program, parents and grandparents in our district could volunteer up to 10 days a year in their own child or grandchild's classroom without submitting to this higher level of screening.

We are ALL for safe schools in the district, and we agree that there is value in screening volunteers. However, we do not feel that a volunteer policy that is solely based on DOJ screening will make our schools safer. In fact, this approach is having the inverse effect. It is driving away many dedicated volunteers from our schools—particularly low-income and first-generation families—and it is creating a false sense that we are "safe" because we have run background checks.

Background checks are not a panacea. They only flag people who have been convicted. Screenings need to be coupled with professional education for school employees and healthy lifestyle education for students and families.

For equity reasons, screenings also need to be affordable for our whole school community.

Furthermore, there are other approaches to screening that could be used to promote safety in our district and more parent participation in our children's schools. There are other approaches too that are more affordable for school districts such as ours, and that are more practical for school employees to implement.

The HUSD Volunteer Policies need to be reviewed, improved, and implemented in a clear, equitable, and hospitable manner for our entire school community.