

Superintendent's Open Letter on the JFK & Simon Sanchez Campus Situation

Dr. Kenneth Erik Swanson, Superintendent, Guam Department of Education

Parents, students, faculty, and members of our community,

We are here because of a difficult reality—one that has required shared sacrifice, patience, and resilience from two school communities. For two years, students from Simon Sanchez High School have been guests on the John F. Kennedy campus due to circumstances beyond their control. Their school building is unsafe. The damage is not their fault. And yet, through necessity, we have asked them to adjust, to make do, and to share a space that was never designed to hold two student bodies.

I have heard the concerns, frustrations, and outright anger from some in the JFK community who are calling for immediate solutions—who want the Simon Sanchez students off this campus now, no matter the cost. I understand that frustration. I do. But what I cannot and will not accept is any proposal that is driven by the belief that one group of students is more deserving of a school than another. That is not leadership. That is not education. That is not who we are as a community.

The Reality of the Situation

Let's be very clear: There is no simple fix to this. There is no unused high school waiting in the wings to welcome hundreds of displaced students. There are no available facilities that meet the requirements for a safe, functioning, and sustainable high school environment for Simon Sanchez students. If there were, we would already be there.

We recognize that the most viable temporary solution is to move the Simon Sanchez student body to the F.B. Leon Guerrero campus, which is currently undergoing renovations. However, this transition has been delayed due to funding constraints and labor shortages. Despite these setbacks, work is progressing, and the goal remains to complete renovations by the end of the calendar year, if not sooner. This will provide the Simon Sanchez students with a dedicated space while their new campus is being built. This option is still viable and is not to be discounted.

Yet, despite knowing this, some voices are pushing for a "task force" to explore solutions. But what are those solutions? If a plan exists that provides a safe, immediate alternative for these students, let's hear it. But if the only goal of this task force is to push students out with no destination in mind—then that is not a solution. That is an eviction notice.

The Consequences of a Reckless Decision

Let's consider the true impact of forcing Simon Sanchez students out of JFK without a viable alternative:

A divided and displaced student body: Would they be scattered across multiple campuses, losing their sense of school identity and community?

Overcrowding at other schools: Would we disrupt other schools to the point where their educational quality suffers too?

Safety concerns: Would they be placed in temporary spaces that do not meet health and safety standards?

Transportation chaos: Would students be forced into long commutes to attend makeshift classrooms far from home?

Forcing Simon Sanchez Students into the GDOE Headquarters Building: Some have proposed relocating Simon Sanchez students into the GDOE Headquarters building. However, this building was never designed to accommodate a full student body. It lacks the necessary classroom spaces, adequate restroom facilities, and electrical infrastructure to support hundreds of students and faculty. Moreover, it would likely fail safety and occupancy codes, making it an unviable solution that creates more problems than it solves. Displacing our headquarters staff would not only disrupt essential district operations but would also fail to provide a safe, long-term home for these students.

Displacing Tiyan High School Students to Make Room for Simon Sanchez: Another suggestion has been to remove Tiyan High School students and repurpose the campus for Simon Sanchez. However, Tiyan was originally developed as a temporary facility to support schools undergoing renovations, not as a permanent replacement for another high school. Over the years, Tiyan has evolved into a high-performing STEM school with award-winning programs that serve its students exceptionally well. Forcing them out would simply shift the burden to another student body, repeating the cycle of disruption instead of solving the root issue.

These proposals are not solutions—they are temporary, reactionary measures that disregard the well-being and stability of our students. We need real sustainable solutions, not band-aids that create more harm than good.

These are real consequences. And as Superintendent, I refuse to make decisions that prioritize short-term discomfort over long-term harm.

A Call for Leadership and Unity

Let me be clear: No one wants this situation to continue indefinitely. I am committed to finding a long-term solution that provides both JFK and Simon Sanchez students with the school environments they deserve. But leadership is not about giving in to pressure or making decisions based on who complains the loudest. Leadership is about doing what is right.

I call upon the community, the parents, the students, and the members of our legislature: If you want to form a task force, then let it be one that asks the **right** questions. Not “How do we get them out?” but “How do we ensure every student in our public school system has access to a safe and stable learning environment?”

To the students of JFK—I understand your frustration. But remember, you are not just students; you are leaders of tomorrow. The values you show now—compassion, fairness, and resilience—will define you long after high school.

To the students of Simon Sanchez—I know this is not ideal, and I know you feel unwelcome by some. But you belong here just as much as any other student in our system. You deserve stability, dignity, and respect.

And to the parents who are pushing for immediate action—ask yourselves: Are we demanding a solution, or just demanding that these students become someone else’s problem?

Because I can promise you this—these students are not a problem. They are our responsibility.

And we will not abandon them.

Respectfully,

K. Erik Swanson, PhD