



Bob Nelson Defends 'Militant Positivity' in His Farewell Speech as Outgoing FUSD Superintendent

By Nancy Price, Multimedia Journalist

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Bob Nelson's last official act as Fresno Unified School District superintendent came during Wednesday's School Board meeting when he delivered his final Superintendent's Report.

Not surprisingly, Nelson spoke at length about his gratitude to his family, friends, and the Fresno Unified community for their support and encouragement during his more than seven years in the district's top job, which included the challenges of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

Very few big school districts survived with its leadership intact after that tumultuous time, Nelson said.

"We represent the third largest, third longest tenured governance team of the 70 major urban school districts that comprise the **Council of the Great City Schools**," he said. "In fact, the number of governance teams that actually remain intact on both sides of the pandemic was fewer than five across our entire nation."

Nelson, who spoke for more than 15 minutes, said he would not have been able to perform his job as successfully without the support of his wife, children, mother, and in-laws, who watched from the first rows of the board room.

Militant Positivity: 'Having Resilience and Grit'

He addressed the criticism he has faced about his adherence to the concept of “militant positivity,” a phrase that he has used repeatedly.

“So people make a lot about military positivity, and I’ll finish with this: Militant positivity should never be confused with wearing rose-colored glasses and pretending things are good when they aren’t good. Militant positivity is about showing up every day, ready to be giving your best self, even in the face of blinding difficulty or aggressive resistance. It’s about having the resilience and the grit to just refuse to stop doing what you believe to be right in the name of support of children,” he said. “You don’t stop because others don’t like it. Leadership involves alienating some people at times. If everyone thinks you’re a good leader, you’re probably not doing anything of significance in this life.”

Nelson is leaving Fresno Unified on July 31 for a faculty job at Fresno State. In the meantime, he will serve as a “special advisor” to both Interim Superintendent Misty Her and the School Board, according to his revised employment contract that the trustees approved Wednesday night.