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***** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE *****

Community Rallies for Ethnic Studies Outside PVUSD School Board Meeting

WATSONVILLE, CA, May 8, 2024 – Nearly a full school year has passed since the Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) School Board in a shock move declined to renew its contract with Community Responsive Education (CRE), which had been guiding the district in its realization of ethnic studies as both a curriculum and a mode of community engagement. CRE is an ethnic studies consulting firm headed by Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, an ethnic studies professor and a nationally recognized educator who teaches at San Francisco State University. Since that time, the Watsonville community, which is almost ninety percent people of color, the vast majority of whom are Latinx, has repeatedly turned out at school board meetings to advocate for ethnic studies and a renewal of the CRE contract.

What started as an outcry from teachers who worked closely with Tintiangco-Cubales and Watsonville community members against a hasty decision made by four trustees—Kim De Serpa, Georgia Acosta, Oscar Soto, and Olivia Flores—has turned into a broad and protracted community struggle for ethnic studies that has only gained in strength. Hundreds of local high school students, parents, teachers, community organizers, and allies have packed PVUSD board meetings, transforming public comments into an indictment against an unyielding board, which has refused to return their phone calls, respond to their emails, or meet with them to hear their concerns. They have asked for proof of any substance behind spurious charges of antisemitism that were leveled against Tintiangco-Cubales yet received none.

“I have been to 14 straight board meetings to defend ethnic studies,” stated Bobby Pelz, an English teacher at Watsonville High School who teaches ethnic studies. “I keep showing up to hold the board accountable.” Pelz described how FIELDS, the ethnic studies curriculum that Dr. Tintiangco-Cubales developed to honor the farmworking history of Watsonville and the struggles of migrant labor of color for dignity and equal

rights, “transforms young people who are uninterested in school into students who are fully engaged in their education.”

Local parent Gabriel Barraza, whose two children have taken high school ethnic studies, indicated that an education that centers the struggles of historically marginalized communities against systems and structures of racial violence is long overdue. Of his own experience as a Mexican American in the United States, he stated, “Even though my family was in touch with our heritage and I grew up in a diverse community, there was never any real information about how systems shape our perception of ourselves and others.” His advocacy for ethnic studies stems, he explained, from a desire for his children to be equipped with what was missing from his education. “Ethnic Studies allows them a framework to empower themselves, uplift community, and navigate power structures that pose obstacles to their success.”

Today’s meeting signals the first time that new PVUSD superintendent Heather Contreras, who has long ties to the area through the McCandless ranching family, will be attending in her new role. Having indicated that she intends to “look, listen, and learn,” Contreras will be met with a community that has repeatedly expressed support of ethnic studies at board meetings over the past year yet feel fundamentally unheard.

Nat Low, an Aptos resident and a local Asian American community organizer, pointed to the hypocrisy of PVUSD’s recent vote to recognize May as AAPI Heritage Month while refusing to bring back Tintiangco-Cubales, a Filipino American who has family ties to farmworking histories in the area, and actively ignoring the Asian American community groups like the Tobera Project which have called for a reinstatement of the CRE contract. “Over 100 Asian American community members have signed a letter urging the board to reinstate the CRE contract, and the Tobera Project has been fighting for the contract reinstatement for the past eight months,” stated Low. “The fight for Ethnic Studies is actually a core part of Asian American history going back to 1968. If the board truly wants to honor our histories and heritage, it needs to support Ethnic Studies by renewing this contract.”