

**Opening Statement of Cynthia (Cindy) Marten
Nominee for Deputy Secretary of Education
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
March 24, 2021**

Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as Deputy Secretary of Education.

My name is Cindy Marten, and I am the Superintendent of the second largest school district in the State of California, San Diego Unified. The District is home to more than 100,000 exceptional students, where I have been honored to serve in this capacity for the past eight years. While I have worked in many roles in education, the most important job I've held in my 32-year career is that of classroom teacher. My 17 years as a teacher provided me with the foundation and stance for all my decisions as a leader.

I am joined here this morning by my son, Andrew, a proud recent college graduate, and my mother Fern Siegel. My passion for public service comes from my mother who has dedicated her life to serving others. She instilled in me the values of selflessness and service as I watched her care for my siblings, her two children with special needs: my brother Charley who was born with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and my late sister, Laura who in her early twenties was diagnosed with Paranoid Schizophrenia.

I also want to mention my late father, Donald Cohen who taught me the value of honesty, integrity and accountability and my beloved husband of 33 years, Sergio, the love of my life, whom I recently lost. Sergio taught me the power of unconditional love. He always believed in me and my dream to become a teacher. I would not be here today without them.

My commitment to education comes from my brother, Charley, who I am proud to say is living independently and thriving with a team who supports him. Charley, I know you're watching today, and I want everyone to know that you are the best brother in the whole wide world.

Charley's success was based on my family's core belief in focusing on what Charley can do, instead of what he can't do. In 1975, when the typical course of action may have been to put him in an institution or separate setting, Congress passed the Education for all Handicapped Children's Act which eventually became Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It was this law that changed Charley's educational journey forever. I can say from first-hand experience that my brother's success in life was based on our commitment to see his strengths and the law that guaranteed him a free and appropriate education and the protection of his and my parent's rights.

I understand this is a critical time in our nation for public education. As our country continues to struggle with the effects of this pandemic, we face the challenges that come with getting our students back in school. President Biden has set a goal of reopening schools in the first 100 days of his administration.

I am proud to report San Diego Unified will meet this goal, and we are on track to reopen on April 12. Our path to reopening our schools in San Diego Unified was paved by consulting with scientific and medical experts. Following the best recommendations and thanks to funding provided by Congress, we installed the latest air filtration equipment, implemented a COVID19 testing program, and created smaller class sizes. If I am honored enough to be confirmed, I will work to use my experiences in San Diego to help support efforts across the country to reopen schools safely and bring children back to classrooms.

The pandemic did not create the inequities in our education system, but it has highlighted just how much work remains to be done. I have dedicated my life as an educator to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for all students. In the past decade, San Diego Unified has pushed to accelerate growth in reading and has seen results. This success is because of hard working students and relentlessly dedicated teachers, support staff and administrators who have worked tirelessly and are beating the odds.

If confirmed, I would work to deliver on the hope and promise of public education in America. I would work to create the conditions in every single classroom where all children grow and learn to become actively literate, contributing, participating members of society. And I would work to create improved outcomes for all students. I have learned first-hand that equity means each and every student receives what they need, when they need it, and in the way they need it.

We have experienced tremendous heartbreak and loss as a result of our collective and individual experiences over the past year. Our losses are deep, personal and difficult to quantify so we must do what every good teacher knows how to do: gather ourselves, assess the strengths and needs of our students, families, staff members and communities, and then develop a plan and implement it.

If confirmed, I would work with Dr. Cardona and all Members of this Committee to find solutions and work in a bipartisan manner so we can learn and grow from one another. I will take lessons from this year and apply them to the mission before us as we build back better. Our future depends on how we pull together as a nation, and—as President Biden said at his inauguration—“My Whole Soul is in This.”

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.