

February 8, 2016

An Open Letter to LAUSD

As you know, the Los Angeles Unified School District is home to the largest, and arguably the highest performing, community of independent charter schools in the nation. Serving a student population that is 71% Latino, 12% African American, 78% low-income, 22% English learners and 10% students with special needs, Los Angeles independent charter schools empower students to achieve academic proficiency and graduate college-ready at rates that elevate the overall performance of our public school system.

As charter leaders whose schools serve roughly 57,000 students across the district, we're proud of this success. We're also proud of the partnership we've developed over the years with the district, whose strong authorizing practices have undoubtedly empowered us to succeed and to grow. On the whole, our experience has been that the district has reviewed new charter petitions with rigor but also with fairness and consistency.

We are concerned, however, that this fairness and consistency is not being applied as it once was. While two years ago the L.A. Unified Board of Education approved 89% of new charter school petitions, so far this year, the board has approved just 45%. This decline is dramatic. Given that charter schools are continually gaining more experience and sophistication, it is difficult for us to understand why and how the district finds charter petitions so much less credible than before.

After extensive discussions with each other, we are concerned that this district is looking for reasons to prevent new charter schools from opening, even those proposed by the most respected, successful charter operators. Issues that in the past were seen as minor or correctable are now elevated to significant issues that somehow warrant denial. In addition, we have found a great deal of inconsistency from one review to the next. Some petitions are granted the opportunity to make edits during a redline process, while others receive little communication throughout the process.

Worse, many of us have been pressured by board members and staff behind closed doors to withdraw our petitions without receiving findings of fact and before they can even be voted on publicly, regardless of the strength of our petitions or existing academic programs. Some of us have been pressured to sign extensions, with the promise of further review or even better results, only to receive an eventual denial recommendation, leaving us with less time to act on an appeal. From larger CMOs who are renowned for their outstanding college preparation for high-poverty students to single-site operators who are celebrated for their innovative approaches to special education, right now it seems no charter school is free from unwarranted and excessive scrutiny.

We are concerned that the current political and financial climate is impacting the district's ability or willingness to review new charter petitions objectively. We fear that as long as charters are unfairly singled out as the main cause of the district's financial troubles, the district could choose to respond by preventing new charters from opening. District leaders' outspoken intentions to block charter school growth, as explained in a recent op-ed by several board members who stated that they "stand together to counter efforts to move more than 250,000 students from LAUSD public schools to privately operated charter

schools,” only strengthen our sense that our schools are being punished for the alleged intentions of Eli Broad.

We do not raise these concerns lightly, especially given that the power to approve or reject our schools lies in your hands. But given the measurable drop in approvals for new petitions, the inconsistent and non-transparent review processes, and the backroom pressure to abandon our efforts to grow, we all feel it is appropriate to bring these concerns into the light of day.

We are not naïve to the fiscal challenges facing this district, or to the many complex factors contributing to these challenges. At the same time, we continue to believe that students’ right to a high-quality education trumps all. We remain deeply compelled to meet the needs of the tens of thousands of families across Los Angeles who bring us their children every year. These families plead for spots in our classrooms. They remain on our wait lists year after year until a space opens up. All they want is the right to choose the best possible school for their children.

As we have stated before, including at last month’s board meeting, we only want to enrich our collaborative relationship with the district that enables us all to serve students well. We can work together on our shared commitment to provide the best public education in the nation, but only if you support us when we succeed.

We respectfully request a meeting with Superintendent King and Board President Zimmer to address the hard truths of this situation, and to ensure that the charter community and the district are working in partnership to create the best possible schools for the students of Los Angeles.

Thank you,



Alfonso Paz & Cesar Arturo Lopez
Directors
APEX Academy
1 school, 465 students



Kate Ford
Superintendent
Aspire Public Schools
11 schools, 4,100 students in LA



Murad Rahman
Board Member
Center for Advanced Learning
1 school, 360 students



Christopher C. Bright
Executive Director
CHAMPS Charter High School of the Arts
1 school, 875 students



Dave Fehte
Executive Director
El Camino Real Charter High School
1 school, 3800 students



Oliver Sicat
CEO
Ednovate
2 schools, 580 students



Michelle Jasso and Ted Morris
Co-Directors
Endeavor College Preparatory
1 school, 600 students



Malka Borrego
Founder and CEO
Equitas Academy
3 schools, 850 students



Irene Sumida
Executive Director
Fenton Charter Public Schools
5 schools, 3,000 students



Brian Bauer
Executive Director
Granada Hills Charter High School
1 school, 4,600 students



Cristina de Jesus
President and CEO
Green Dot Public Schools California
20 schools, 11,000 students



Marsha Rybin
Principal
High Tech LA
1 school, 400 students



ICEF Public Schools
Parker Hudnut
CEO
ICEF Public Schools
10 schools, 3,800 students



Marcia Aaron
Executive Director
KIPP LA Schools
11 schools, 5,000 students



Caprice Young, Ed.D.
CEO & Superintendent
Magnolia Public Schools
11 schools, 3,700 students



Math and Science
COLLEGE PREPARATORY
Los Angeles
Emilio Pack, Ed.D.
Executive Director
Math and Science College Prep
2 school, 810 students



new
LA
Matt Albert, Ed.D.
Executive Director
New Los Angeles Charter School
1 school, 310 students



POLA
HIGH SCHOOL
Tom Scotti
Principal/ Executive Director
Port of Los Angeles High School
1 school, 1,000 students



Partnerships to Uplift Communities
PUC
SCHOOLS
Jacqueline Elliot, Ed.D
Co-founder, PUC Schools
Co-founder & CEO, PUC National
13 schools, 5,000 students



RENAISSANCE ARTS ACADEMY
a public charter school
SAPERE AUDE
PK Candaux and Sidnie Myrick
Co-Directors
Renaissance Arts Academy
2 schools, 420 students



VALUE
SCHOOLS
ENDURING DIFFERENCE
Gerry Jacoby
Executive Director
Value Schools
4 schools, 1,250 students



YPICS
YPI CHARTER SCHOOLS
Yvette King-Berg
Executive Director
YPI Charter Schools
3 schools, 800 students



VAUGHN
NEXT CENTURY LEARNING CENTER
Anita Zepeda
Executive Director
Vaughn Next Century Learning Center
1 school, 3,135 students