

March 6, 2016

An Open Letter to LAUSD

Last month we raised serious concerns about the significant decline in L.A. Unified's approval of new charter school petitions, as well as the lack of consistency and transparency being applied to the reviews of those petitions. We appreciate that the Board expressed an interest in more closely examining the consistency of the criteria that has been used to review charter petitions and we look forward to the results of that inquiry.

We also shed light on a troubling practice that is increasingly common: charters schools being pressured behind closed doors to withdraw new petitions. We noted that in some cases, charters are quietly asked to delay their petitions with the promise that they will later be approved, but ultimately those schools are recommended for denial.

This is exactly what has happened with WISH, as it seeks to open a high school and continue the bold work it has done for its elementary and middle school students. One of the most progressive and effective public schools of any kind in Los Angeles, serving a distinctly diverse student population, WISH is a model educational environment. It represents the highest ideals of the charter school movement: innovation, inclusiveness, and a commitment to students whose academic and emotional needs have been unmet elsewhere.

The students at WISH charter schools are mostly non-white and highly integrated. At WISH middle school, for example, the student population is 35% black, 33% Latino and 28% white. The percentage of students with special needs at WISH schools – 13% at the elementary school and 23% at the middle school – is far higher than the district average. WISH's inclusive model, in which students with special needs learn alongside their peers, is one of a kind in Los Angeles. Academic performance at WISH schools is excellent, especially when comparing students with special needs to their peers in other schools. After the first administration of CAASPP, WISH elementary school students met or exceeded state standards at a rate of 13% to 39% higher than district schools across all grade levels in both ELA and Math.

It is not surprising that the district found zero problems with WISH's proposed educational program for its high school. It is also not surprising that WISH received glowing praise from Superintendent Ramon Cortines, who said, "There is not a better instructional program in this district, more inclusive with all children, children of diversity, children of color," or from Board President Steve Zimmer, who said that "WISH is the type of innovation that the charter movement was supposed to be all about... a very important inclusive model in dealing with children, addressing the needs of all children."

What is surprising and deeply upsetting is that WISH now finds its petition recommended for denial. This denial is ostensibly based on the school's past financial struggles that have long been resolved and unsubstantiated concerns about enrollment challenges, which, according to the district, trump the school's overwhelming success with high-need students. This is unacceptable. It reinforces our grave concern that the credibility of the district's charter petition review process is being undermined.

When this happens to one of us, it happens to all of us. We do not want the tens of thousands of families who choose and rely on our schools to believe that this is a political and biased process. So we are speaking out to let you know that as the founders and leaders of 30 diverse charter organizations serving over 60,000 students across Los Angeles, we are united as we continue to call on the district to work with us to ensure

clear, consistent, transparent reviews of charter school petitions. Our teachers, staff, and the students we serve deserve nothing less.

Given its impressive academic track record, its sensitive instruction and innovative program for high-need, hard-to-serve students, its immense community support, and its leadership's eagerness to partner with the district, WISH deserves your support as it seeks to create four more grades of learning for students with no other options that compare. We urge the Board to approve its petition.

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



Ana Ponce
Executive Director
Camino Nuevo Charter Academy
6 schools, 3400 students



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



Erin Student
Executive Director
CHIME Institute
1 school, 750 students



Valerie Braimah
Executive Director
City Charter Schools
3 schools, 500 students



Matthew Wunder
CEO
Da Vinci Schools
4 schools, 1650 students



Oliver Sicat
CEO
Ednovate/ USC Hybrid High
2 schools, 580 students



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



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



Alison Suffet-Diaz
Founder and CEO
Environmental Charter Schools
3 schools, 1,100 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



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



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



Linda Lee
Executive Director
Los Feliz Charter School for the Arts
1 school, 400 students



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



Gayle Nadler
Executive Director
Multicultural Learning Center
1 school, 400 students



Richard Thomas
Principal
New Horizons Charter
1 school, 250 students



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



Lynn Izakowitz
Principal
Our Community Charter
1 school, 400 students



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



Jacqueline Elliot, Ed.D
Co-founder & CEO
PUC National
13 schools, 5,000 students



Emilio Pack, Ed.D.
Executive Director
STEM Preparatory Schools
2 school, 810 students



Robert Burke
Executive Director
Valley Charter Public Schools
2 schools, 500 students



Gerry Jacoby
Executive Director
Value Schools
4 schools, 1,250 students



Anita Zepeda
Executive Director
Vaughn Next Century Learning Center
1 school, 3,135 students



Vahe Markarian
Executive Director
Vista Charter Schools
1 school, 400 students



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