

Information on Uplift Contra Costa Charter School [Draft]

The petition for Uplift Contra Costa Charter School presents a number of problems, including an educational program that is unlikely to succeed, inadequate descriptions of the elements of a charter petition, and a troubling connection to a for-profit virtual education company based in Virginia, K12 Inc.

Who is K12 Inc?

k12 Inc. is a for-profit education company based in Virginia that manages a number of online schools in California. The company has a troubled history in California, including a recent settlement with the California attorney general that cost millions of dollars. For more on the settlement: <http://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-edu-state-settles-with-cava-online-charter--20160708-snap-story.html> and <https://oag.ca.gov/news/press-releases/attorney-general-kamala-d-harris-announces-1685-million-settlement-k12-inc>

The company has also run into trouble for low graduation rates, inflated attendance numbers, and other issues. See the investigative series by the *San Jose Mercury News*: <http://www.mercurynews.com/2016/04/16/california-virtual-academies-is-online-charter-school-network-cashing-in-on-failure/>

As described below, people associated with founding Uplift have worked for other K12 Inc. associated schools, including California Prep and California STEAM. There are other indications of the connections between Uplift and k12, including that: the website listed for Uplift Contra Costa goes to a k12 Inc. website -- <http://www.k12.com/content/fts/uca/en.html>; the phone number listed on the site is a k12 Inc. number; and enrollment occurs through the k12 Inc. parent portal (https://k12parentportal.force.com/portal_createaccount?SchoolID=7576), which asks "Are you the Legal Guardian of a student who has previously applied or been enrolled in a K12 Inc. school?"

Who is managing Uplift?

In the charter petition, the Academies of Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics, d/b/a Uplift California, is the non-profit corporation which will run Uplift Contra Costa.

The Academies of Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics (Uplift) previously listed Eli Johnson as CEO, CFO, and Secretary. A more recent filing lists Sean McManus as CEO, CFO, and Secretary. Robert J. Williams filed the paperwork for the corporation.

Johnson, McManus, and/or Williams are also affiliated with the following corporations:

- California STEAM Sonoma
- Uplift California Charter Schools

- Academics, Arts, and Action Charter Academy
- The California Prep Sutter Charter Schools

As the following article from the Washington Post outlines, McManus and Johnson have a history of subverting the normal charter authorization process. For example, they obtained a charter from one school district and set up that charter school in a completely different school district, without the knowledge of that district. See the following for more details:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/10/14/in-californias-charter-world-a-tangled-web-of-for-profit-companies-and-nonprofit-schools/?utm_term=.65787ca92174

The involvement of McManus in other scandal-ridden schools raises serious questions about Uplift and its ability to successfully implement the charter.

Founders

The founding group of Uplift Contra Costa is listed as:

- C Ceriman
- Robert Williams
- Eric Johnson
- Darrin Erb
- J Shrock

Robert Williams, along with the rest of the founding group (except for Ceriman) are connected to the corporations listed in the previous section. J Shrock (presumably Jason Shrock) was the CFO of the California Prep Sutter Charter Schools in 2015. Jason Shrock and Eric Johnson are also listed as board members of Ohio STEAM Columbus, a charter in Ohio whose primary contact person was Eli Johnson. Darrin Erb currently works for California Prep.

There's already one Uplift in the state – Uplift Monterey.¹ The contact person listed on the CDE website is Lou Rigney, who is also the person who got the teacher signatures for this petition. At least half of the teachers who signed the petition currently work for California Prep.

Virtual Education

An increasing body of research is showing that virtual schools are not adequately educating students. Given that the population Uplift is targeting is already behind in their schooling, it seems unlikely that the school's educational program is adequate.

Recent studies on the ineffectiveness of virtual education include:

- 2012 study from the National Education Policy Center
<http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/understanding-improving-virtual>

¹ Uplift Monterey is authorized by Bradley Union Elementary School District, which according to numbers from the CDE for 2015-2016 had an enrollment of 81 students and no high school students.

- 2015 study from CREDO at Stanford
<http://credo.stanford.edu/pdfs/Online%20Charter%20Study%20Final.pdf>
- 2016 report from the National Education Policy Center, which showed that graduation rates at virtual and blended schools are declining:
<http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/publications/RB-Miron%20Virtual%20Schools.pdf>
- 2017 study from RAND and NYU
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0013189X17692999>