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October 5, 2016

John Crabtree, Board President
Members of the Board
Todd Oto, Ed. D., Superintendent
Visalia Unified School District
5000 W. Cypress Ave.
Visalia, California, 93277

RE: Sycamore Valley Academy and Blue Oak Academy Petition Staff Findings

Board President Crabtree, Board Trustees, and Superintendent Oto:

As an educator, a parent, a resident of the Central Valley, and an advocate for high-quality school choice, my mission is to work in collaboration and in trust with district and charter public education leaders to increase high-quality school options for every Central Valley student.

The Sycamore Valley Academy and Blue Oak Academy petitions **have met all of the state requirements necessary for approval** as set forth in the *California Education Code § 47605-47606.5 for new petitions, and § 47607 a-b* and the *California Code of Regulations, Title 5, § 11966.4 a-b* for renewal petitions. District demands that numerous conditions be met in order to be approved are inappropriate and unwarranted. VUSD district staff findings rely largely on conjecture and misinformation, revealing what appears to be an improper bias against Sycamore Valley/Blue Oak Academies, a flawed authorization process, or perhaps both.

The Visalia Unified School Board *has already affirmed the soundness of the educational program* when SVA was approved 5 years ago. Since then, the school has academically and operationally *demonstrated and affirmed VUSD board's original approval*, and more than merited renewal in looking at API, CAASP, and benchmark data. SVA also *has had clean audits every year* and no notices of concern or violation from the district over the course of their operation. Based on such clear success, BOA's duplicated model gives no cause for denial and **clearly meets the state's threshold for approval of a new petition**.

Additionally, the district representative on the SVA board never expressed concern or provided ANY feedback for continual approval. The assertion that the school does not merit renewal is shocking and disappointing.

In many places the district findings *acknowledge* that SVA and BOA *are in compliance and/or have met expectations* yet go on to apply, not a quantifiable standard, but *opinion and conjecture* about whether or not the proposed strategy will be effective, or if it has been to date whether it will continue to do so. Applying such an impossible expectation without means to prove or disprove is highly inappropriate and does not adhere to the intent of the *Charter Schools Act of 1992*.

Given that the SVA governance structure is highly effective and engaged, and the programs and operations are financially sound, ***then meeting the state threshold is the primary consideration for renewal.***

In fact, at this late hour to claim to not have knowledge of, or to misrepresent, the operational, programmatic and fiscal elements of SVA suggests that the district has not fulfilled its fiduciary duties as an SVA board representative; its oversight duties as an authorizer; or established a fair, factual, and transparent authorization process. VUSD has had a district representative as a member of the SVA school board since the school's inception, and there have been innumerable opportunities for the district to communicate its expectations and to witness first-hand many of the programmatic elements it claims to be unaware of in the findings.

Again I must restate: ***both SVA and BOA petitions far exceed minimal compliance required of a petition by Education Code*** and the reasons used to reach a recommendation to deny the petition *greatly overreach what is required by the state.*

I respectfully urge the board to reject the district's inaccurate findings and to *approve the Blue Oak Academy petition and the Sycamore Valley Academy renewal without conditions.*

I invite members of the board and Superintendent Oto to discuss any of the specific concerns stated therein regarding the district's authorization process and specific finds to recommend denial of Blue Oak petition and conditional approval of the Sycamore Valley renewal petition. In spite of potential disagreements on this matter, I am hopeful that we can work toward creating a more positive working relationship between the district and existing and future charter public schools. I invite you to contact me at (559) 312-3616 or jsands@ccsa.org.

Sincerely,



Jeff L. Sands
Regional Director, Central Valley
California Charter Schools Association