February 28, 2019

To the Newport-Mesa Educational Community,

A controversial issue is being discussed at the March 6 meeting of the Orange County Board of Education (OCBOE) that will negatively impact everyone in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD). As a member of the NMUSD educational community you need to know that we are working diligently to expose and stop this misguided effort.

Last September, a questionable petition was presented to the NMUSD Board of Education seeking to create a taxpayer funded charter school called the International School for Science and Culture (ISSAC). After careful review against the legal standards, our trustees could not in good conscience approve the petition. NMUSD unanimously voted it down.

In a 16-page resolution of denial, we provided a detailed critique pointing out the major flaws and deficiencies in the petition. Its financial plan was unsustainable and its educational plan was unsound. Sure, it had a fancy name, but it couldn’t be backed up with anything but vague promises. The petition sought to use taxpayer funds taken from our community as “venture capital” in a highly speculative, flawed proposition.

Resolution of Denial – Denying the Charter Petition for International School for Science and Culture

This charter school is a bad idea that keeps coming back

This was not a new petition, but a repackaging of the failed Adrian Hands Academy Charter application that had been previously denied three times by a neighboring school district. Just like Adrian Hands, the ISSAC charter was riddled with errors, false assumptions, inaccurate data, and faulty projections. Furthermore, the so-called Spanish translated version was so rife with translation errors as to be rendered meaningless.

The Charter school simply could not substantiate its business or educational plans. Our findings pointed out essential defects that the charter needed to correct, if possible. They could have done their homework and resubmitted a revised petition, but instead they went over our heads and submitted it to the county in a deliberate choice to end-run local control and seek a more favorable “pro-charter” audience with the OCBOE. It is significant to note that the state charter advocacy organization has been ramping up its participation in local elections to build an infrastructure of pro-charter elected officials in Orange County and across the state.

OCBOE appears to have made up its mind despite the facts

It is up to elected trustees of local district and county boards of education to be prudent stewards of public funds. At the same time they have to protect the educational needs and interests of all students and their families. In this situation, the NMUSD Board has fulfilled that mandate. We can only hope that the OCBOE will do the same.

Frederick Navarro, Ed.D., Superintendent
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The most recent OCBOE meeting was frustrating, troubling, and disrespectful. A positive decision appeared to be pre-ordained despite the fact that OCDE staff found many of the same defects as had NMUSD. The OCBOE so limited the public comment period that our parents who had genuine concerns that needed to be heard were not allowed an opportunity to speak. It is telling that in all of the five public meetings to date on this charter, only parents of two potential students have expressed interest in this proposed school.

Our parents don’t want this charter! In fact, many vehemently oppose it. The final approval was put off by OCBOE at the last minute to allow the charter petitioners to attempt to fix the charter. It is coming back to the OCBOE for final action on March 6.

What’s at stake?

The ISSAC charter wants to strip millions of dollars from the Newport-Mesa tax base to pay for their start-up. This is a lot of money that would otherwise be spent on valuable NMUSD programs and services to students. It would be unfortunate for these funds to instead be diverted to finance an unsound educational program. The defects in the proposal also put at risk the educational opportunities that would be afforded to students who enroll at the charter school.

What can you do?

First, read up on ISSAC so you can get past the rhetoric and promises and see it for what it is . . . an unsound educational proposal.

Second, email the members of the Orange County Board of Education to express your concern about their support of ISSAC.

Third, come to the March 6 meeting to tell county decision makers in person that you don’t want an inferior charter school trying to market itself as a quality alternative to our excellent public schools.

Parental choice and educational options that enable students to find their best pathway to success are important values we support in Newport-Mesa. This charter petition is not a quality choice for parents and students.

We appreciate your continuing support. We know you have high expectations for your students and our schools. We strive every day to deliver an excellent educational experience for every child.

Sincerely,

Dr. Fred Navarro
Superintendent