

**Transcript of the Orange County Board of Education Meeting on September 20, 2022**

**SPARKS:** We need to wrap up the interviews. We are going to go ahead and get started with our panel. Okay. I'm going to call to order agenda adoption, and we will start with the invocation and then the Pledge of Allegiance. Are we going to do roll call first? Okay. Roll call.

**SISAVATH:** Trustee Valdes?

**VALDES:** Here.

**SISAVATH:** Trustee Shaw?

**SHAW:** Here.

**SISAVATH:** Trustee Sparks?

**SPARKS:** Here.

**SISAVATH:** Trustee Williams?

**WILLIAMS:** I am present.

**SISAVATH:** Trustee Barke?

**BARKE:** Here.

**SPARKS:** Do we have any public comment?

**HENDRICK:** Not at this time.

**WILLIAMS:** Can I make a motion to adopt the agenda?

**SPARKS:** Oh yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. So I will make the motion.

**BARKE:** I will second.

**SPARKS:** All in favor?

**BARKE, WILLIAMS, SPARKS, SHAW, VALDES:** Aye.

**SPARKS:** Okay, we pass 5-0. Now we will move on to the invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance. Do we have—did we get someone for the invocation? We had someone and then they didn't come at the last minute.

**BARKE:** All right.

**SPARKS:** Do we have any volunteers?

**BARKE:** First one to volunteer, come on guys, invocations.

**SPARKS:** Quick little prayer.

**BARKE:** Anyone? Going once, going twice?

**SPARKS:** Those of you running for office should take advantage of this public opportunity.

**BARKE:** Yes.

**SPARKS:** Come on.

**BARKE:** Come on Barbie George, come on up here.

**SPARKS:** And then, Reina maybe you could do the—? Right here.

**WILLIAMS:** Up at the dias.

**BARKE:** Yep. Then Reina, we are going to get her up here for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**SPARKS:** Yeah. Perfect.

**WILLIAMS:** Go get them girl.

**BARBARA:** If we can all bow our heads? Heavenly father, we come before you with open and humble hearts. Giving you thanks first and foremost for the gifts that you have given us, Lord. I ask that you take charge of this evening for you to be amongst us, Lord and that your will be done within all of the lives here. Basically, for us to keep our focus on what is the meaning of all of this here is our children, and we ask you to give us guidance, wisdom in all things and we leave this meeting in your capable hands, Lord. We give you all honor, all power, all praise forever and ever. In your name, Lord, amen.

**BARKE, SHAW:** Amen.

**HENDRICK:** Excuse me, can I have you state your name for the record? Thank you.

**BARBARA:** My name is Barbara George.

**SPARKS:** Thank you. Okay. Reina, would you come up and give our invocation please?

**BARKE:** No, our Pledge of Allegiance.

**SPARKS:** I mean our Pledge of Allegiance. Thank you.

**WILLIAMS:** And you may stand if you would like?

**REINA:** Everyone, please stand and face the flag. Put your right hand over your heart. Ready? Begin. I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and justice for all.

**SPARKS:** Thank you. So at this point, I'm going to transfer the meeting to our moderator, but let me introduce him first. We have Senator Bob Huff as the forum moderator. And actually, you know what, I'm going to let Tim Shaw do the introduction. Fantastic. Trustee Shaw.

**SHAW:** Thank you. I had the good opportunity in my life to work for Senator Huff as a member of his staff for seven years. When we were in need of a moderator for our forum, I said, I know the perfect person, Senator Huff. Bob Huff served on the Diamond Bar City Council for nine years and was mayor—you were mayor twice, right? Two different times as mayor? Senator Bob Huff then went on to serve in the Legislature for 12 years. From 2012 to 2015, he was the Senate Minority Leader working with the Governor and the three other legislative leaders to hammer out budgets, statewide bonds and other important legislative action. And the entire time he served in the Legislature, he was on the Education Committee in both the Assembly and the Senate for 12 years. Many of those years, he was the vice chair of the Senate Education Committee, along with the very capable chair of the Education Committee, Senator Gloria Romero. They are both here with us this evening and are a great team leading education in California for a long time.

Education accomplishments include working collaboratively as a joint author on the Parent Trigger Law, extending twice the school choice program known as District of Choice. He always worked to support charter schools and passed the Heritage School legislation that legalized after school education and cultural programs. Prior to Senator Huff's legislation, these afterschool programs were being closed by the state because they were categorized as illegal daycare centers and not educational programs. Counted among his most important achievements, Senator Huff passed a bill that allowed non-medical volunteers like teachers and school staff to administer foolproof, life-saving medication to children having epileptic seizures while at school. Senator Huff received recognition from over 40 organizations for his work that positively impacted their members in the state. Following Senator Huff's retirement from the State Senate in 2016, he and his wife Mei Mei formed a consulting firm Huff Strategies LLC, where they specialize in government relations, community outreach and business development. Why don't you come on up, Senator Bob Huff?

**SPARKS:** Welcome, Senator Huff.

**HUFF:** Very good. Important safety clue: When you are on a new microphone, you got to learn what is on and what is off. I found that very helpful up in the Legislature. Thank you, Tim for that recitation of things. It is a pleasure to be here tonight and to be filling in for Scott Baugh. I know he got drawn elsewhere, but I appreciate the opportunity to be back in front of friends and talking about education, which has been a passion of mine. Let me just say a couple of things. It is a pleasure particularly to see Senator Romero because she served as chair of the Senate

Education Committee and I was vice chair. We kind of changed the world those couple of years. We got a lot of good things done; reaching across the aisle, and I might say it would be helpful if they would figure out how to do that again.

See, okay. Sorry, Mr. Kiley, excuse me, Assembly Member Kiley. I was told I could speak candidly here, friendly audience.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, you can.

**HUFF:** Anyway, let me talk a little bit about the format of what we are going to be doing tonight. We are going to have a few comments from me. We are doing that now, but we will have the panel. I will introduce them. I will read them, probably longer than what Tim read about me. We will have opening remarks, 12 minutes per panelist. Then we are going to take a little break and then we are going to begin a Round Robin session, which will have six minutes per trustee. They will ask the panel questions and we will hopefully wrap that up within six minutes. We will take a break and then we are going to repeat it, only we are going to have closing comments at that point. Then I will turn it back over to the board president. So having said all that, introductions.

Senator Gloria Romero is a forceful advocate for education reform and parental school choice. She is a former California State Senator from East Los Angeles and is a founder executive director of the charter schools. Gloria has been consistent in her emphasis that California cannot fully compete in the 21st century economy if we fail to close the achievement gap and create an educational system that puts students first and fosters for students. Upon her election to the State Senate, she was recognized as one of the hardest working members of the Legislature, I will vouch for that, and quickly rose to leadership positions. She was elected by her peers to serve as Senate Democrat Caucus Chair, and a Senate Majority Leader, the first woman to hold that leadership position in the history of the California State Senate. Prior to serving in the Senate, she held the post as Majority Whip in the California State Assembly from 1998 to 2000 and served on the LA Community College Board of Trustees from 1995 to 1998 and the Los Angeles Elected Charter Reform Commission in 1998.

Additionally, she held the post of California Director of Democrats for Education Reform, a political action committee dedicated to making reforms in the Democratic Party. Romero served as chair of the Senate Education Committee, the Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee on Education and the Chair of Public Safety, making her one of the most influential voices on education policy in California. She believes that education is the civil rights issue of our time. Senator Romero is known as a tenacious reformer, willing to call out her own political party when it impedes progress. She writes on education reform and politics and teaches courses on education and politics. Please give a welcome to Senator Romero.

Our second panelist is Walter H. Myers III. Professor Myers is considered by the board to be a subject expert in education curriculum in parental rights advocacy. He is a frequent spokesperson on education reform in charter schools and the rights of parents to direct the upbringing of their children. As an advocate for parental choice in schools, he firmly believes in classical education

curriculum for K-12 grade levels. Walter is an adjunct faculty member at Biola University in the Master of Arts and Science and Religion Program, teaching on Darwinism, evolution and design.

He serves importantly as a board member of the Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based think tank that promotes thoughtful analysis on local, regional, national, international issues. He is a regular contributor to the Discovery Institute's scholarship mission. The Discovery Institute is home to an interdisciplinary community of scholars and policy advocates dedicated to the reinvigoration of traditional Western principles, and institutions and the worldview from which they issued. Discovery Institute has a special concern for the role that science and technology play in our culture and how they can advance free markets, illuminate public policy and support the theistic foundations of the West. Myers earned a B.S. in Mathematics and Computer Science, and a Masters in Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology-Biola University. Walter is an expert on curriculums that empower students and parents for the 21st century. Please give a warm welcome to him.

Our next panelist is Lance Izumi. Lance Izumi is senior director of the Center for Education at Pacific Research Institute. He has written and produced books, studies and films in a wide variety of education topics. Most recently, he is the author of the 2021 book, "The Homeschool Boom: Pandemic, Policies and Possibilities," and the 2019 book, "Choosing Diversity: How Charter Schools Promote Diversity Learning Models and Meet the Diverse Needs of Parents and Children." He is the two-term president of the board of governors of the California Community Colleges, the largest system of higher education in the nation and served as a member of the board from 2004 to 2015. From 2015 to 2018, Lance chaired the board of directors of the foundation for California Community College, the official nonprofit that supports the community college system. Lance served as a commissioner on the California Postsecondary Education Commission and as a member of the United States Civil Rights Commission's California Advisory Committee. Lance received his Juris Doctorate from the University of Southern California School of Law, his Master of Arts in political science from the University of California at Davis and his Bachelor of Arts in economics and history from the University of California at Los Angeles. Please welcome Lance Izumi.

Our next panelist is Ricardo Soto. Ricardo Soto oversees the legal facilities and special education teams at the California Charter Schools Association. They have the initial CCSA, but I wanted to spell it out for everybody there. He provides general legal counsel to the association, advises the association in relation to legal strategies targeted to support the association statewide and regional advocacy efforts, facilities and special education advocacy, the membership, the charter school community and the association's initiatives and strategic objectives.

Prior to CCSA, Ricardo served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. In this position, Mr. Soto provided senior leadership concerning enforcement, policy and operational activities. From 2005 to 2007, Ricardo served as Assistant Secretary and Legal Counsel in the Office of the Secretary of Education for California where he advised the Secretary of Education and Governor's Office on legal and policy issues related to elementary, secondary and higher education. Ricardo served as in-house counsel for the San Diego—did I say something? Excuse me, I can see the light thing up. That means I'm

off. Ricardo served as Assistant Secretary—we already went through that. Here we go. Ricardo served as House Counsel for San Diego Unified School District.

He was also a counsel with the law firm of Best Best and Krieger in San Diego, where he represented charter schools, school districts and community colleges. Ricardo started out his legal career at California in Rural Legal Assistance in Oceanside and represented migrant farm workers in education and employment issues. Ricardo graduated from the University of Wisconsin Law School and Marquette University. Ricardo is a native of Chicago and a lifelong Chicago sports fans. Well, in spite of the last part, please give a warm welcome to Ricardo.

Our final panelist we are pleased to have here tonight, with his busy schedule, is Assembly Member Kevin Kiley. Kevin Kiley was elected to the California State Assembly in 2016 and has twice been reelected by substantial margins. In the 2020 election, he received more votes than any Republican in California history. The son of a special education teacher, Kevin began his career as a high school teacher in inner city, Los Angeles where he chaired the English Department and led his students to significant academic gains. In five years in the Legislature, Kevin has authored groundbreaking new laws on freedom of speech, artificial intelligence, privacy, criminal justice reform and protections for sexual assault victims, along with introducing the most significant school choice legislation in recent years. For his work advancing economic freedom in 2020, he was named the National Legislator of the Year by the Association of Independent Workers. Kevin holds a Bachelor's Degree from Harvard, a law degree from Yale and a Master's in secondary education from Loyola Marymount. He has also served as an adjunct professor at McGeorge School of Law. Please give a warm welcome to Assembly Member Kiley.

Okay. I'm going to make a few comments right now and then we are going to get started on our 12 minutes per panelist, so you guys can take a break and think about it. I just wanted to say that in my 12 years in Sacramento in the Education Committee, I was fascinated with charter schools. We saw so many graphs about education performance and they were dismal and they needed more money. The solution was always more money, and yet charters tended to do more with less. And just so we understand, a charter is a contract. They are actually held accountable for performance. I like that. I like accountability. Regular public schools don't like accountability. We instituted the Local Control Funding Formula in 2012. We had heard from scholars that if we just gave more money to the poor district they would perform better, so we have piled in a lot of money in since that time and their performances stayed static or gone down. And the reason being, we don't really pay for good education. We subsidize bad education and there is a difference.

Charters on the other hand are held accountable. They don't get startup funding. They don't get facilities funding. They do get the teacher funding that follows. But if they don't do their job, they go out of business. If our public schools don't get out of business, again, we give them more money. So there is just sort of a fundamental difference. I have been a big fan—I was pleased under Governor Schwarzenegger to get some more funding for charter schools. I think the latest statistic is 1 out of 9 students in California attends a charter school. Parents clearly like choice, and charters give them something they can't find in their traditional schools.

Having said that, let's go ahead and start. I'm not sure how I should start, but I guess I have the microphone. Lance, I think we will start with you and just work across that way and end up with Assembly Member Kiley if that is all right? You got 12—oh, by the way, I specifically asked that we have a timekeeper. Who is the timekeeper here?

**SHAW:** That will be me.

**HUFF:** That would be Tim. Okay. So he is going to jump up and down. How are you going to let him know?

**SHAW:** I will yell at you. No.

**HUFF:** How are you going to let him know when he is getting to the end of his time?

**SHAW:** I will just say time. How is that?

**IZUMI:** Okay.

**SPARKS:** Why don't you give him a one-minute warning?

**SHAW:** Give him a one-minute warning. Okay.

**HUFF:** Give him a one-minute warning. Make sure you see his eyes all right? I know most of these guys up here. You give them a microphone and they can get a little engaged.

**SHAW:** All right.

**HUFF:** So Lance, please take it away.

**IZUMI:** Well thanks very much, Bob. I really appreciate that. First of all, I want to say how much it was a joy to work with you all the years that you were in Sacramento. You and I, were working arm and arm on so many issues. It was a real joy to be able to be in the trenches with you fighting the good fight, and also with Senator Romero as well. Those were the good old days.

**HUFF:** Yes.

**IZUMI:** I want to thank all the board as well for organizing this incredible forum, bringing so many people together to talk about something extremely important. We have talked a little bit about, you know, charter schools and why they are great. There are lots of reasons why we should all support charter schools, but what I'm going to be talking about is the diversity of learning models that charter schools offer. I think that one of the myths that comes up about charter schools is that there is only one way that charter schools deliver educational services, deliver learning to students and nothing could be further from the truth. Charters not only differ from the regular public schools, they differ very much from each other. And so I wrote a book called, which Bob mentioned, "Choosing Diversity, How Charter Schools Promote Diverse

Learning Models and Meet the Diverse Needs of Parents and Their Children.” It looks at different types of charter schools.

What I want to talk about are some of those different types that are here in California. For example, one of the myths that people believe about charter schools is they cream the crop of students, that they cherry pick the best students and that is why they may perform well. Nothing could be further from the truth. For example, the first chapter in my book is on Life Learning Academy, which is located on Treasure Island in San Francisco. And they destroy this myth of cherry picking because they actually educate the hardest to educate, the most at-risk kids in the state. Many of these students at the academy are former dropouts from the regular public school system. One student named Micah had dropped out for nearly a year from his previous traditional public high school before coming to Life Learning Academy. And he told me that he didn't have any goals and that things just looked bleak before he came to Life Learning Academy. In addition to many of the dropouts, many of the students at the academy are also homeless, and they often come from broken families that are torn by financial and personal upheaval. They are trying to escape abusive, violent crime ridden and/or drug-infested environments.

Terry Delaney who is the academy's executive director told me, we get kids that no one else wants, the kids who are lost in a big school system. One homeless student said, “When you are homeless, you are always worrying about where you are going to sleep, what you are going to eat.” To address the needs of such homeless students, the academy used its flexibility inherent as a charter school to build a dormitory, which made it the only publicly funded school in California to offer on campus housing. Terry Delaney told me, “I want a home where kids can wake up in the morning, feel safe, come out the door into their school, and they can stay here as long as they need to.” That dormitory has had an incredibly positive impact on the student's attendance, on their academic performance and on their behavior.

The academy also employs a wide range of innovative techniques to address the individual needs of their students. I think one of the problems we see with regular traditional public schools is the one size fits all mentality. Everything is cookie cutter. Everybody has to adhere to the same program. Whereas at this school and so many other charter schools, you have individualized learning plans that are tailored to each student's particular needs and circumstances. The school identifies the strengths of each student and then builds upon individualized strategies for students to address their strengths, and also compensatory strategies that allow the students to address their weaknesses. So this school integrates traditional academics with hands-on activities and ties this classroom experience to concrete workforce and life skills so that students can recognize the practical value of coursework. That is one of the problems students have and why they drop out . They don't see why they are doing what they are doing in school.

But here at Life Learning Academy, that combination has made the academy a national model for serving the most at-risk student population in this nation. And they have relationships with dozens of employers to provide work experience for its students and their workforce development program offers internships and paid employment for students. So the bottom line is that Life Learning Academy is helping these highly at-risk students succeed in the classroom and in life, which is why 9 out of 10 of the academy's students graduate, three quarters of its students



end up in higher education and virtually all of its students either end up in college or with a full time job at the time of graduation.

I also produced a film on Life Learning Academy and I interviewed a number of students on camera. And one of those students I interviewed was a young man named Carlos. There was a lot of violence in Carlos's life before he came to the academy. But in a really poignant moment on camera, he said that that charter school had literally saved his life. That is why we need the innovation of charter schools and it shows what they are capable of doing for the children that they are serving. Another myth that people have about charter schools again is that they only serve urban communities. In reality, charter schools are all over our state.

For example, one of the best charter schools in the state is a rural charter school out in Kern County called Grimmway Academy. And Grimmway Academy serves kids who are mostly, either immigrants themselves or they are the sons and daughters of immigrants. And when I visited Grimmway for my book, I interviewed four fourth graders. I interviewed Stacy, Noe, Edgar and Kaylin, who had been there at the school for a number of years.

And I asked them, why did they come to Grimmway Academy? And three of the kids, Stacy, Noe and Edgar, all said that their parents sent them to Grimmway Academy because their parents were worried about their safety at their previous regular public school. Edgar for example, described an incident at his previous regular public school; when a man came onto campus, tried to get into the office, he was chased by the police and was eventually shot. Listening to Edgar's voice and looking at his facial expression as I was interviewing him and he told his story, underscored what a lasting impression that incident made on that child. He was acutely aware of safety measures like locked gates. He said that he liked Grimmway Academy because he feels that the school is more secure and it allows him to focus on learning.

So it cannot be stressed strong enough that these children feel safe at their new charter schools. Regardless of academic performance issues, and charter schools do improve the performance of kids, parents should be able to choose the school for their kid solely on whether that school provides a safer environment for their child.

Also, I went to other charter schools. For example, talking about this theme of diversity, choosing diversity. Charter schools are not just diverse from other charter schools as I said, they may actually be diverse from within themselves. Many charter schools actually serve as umbrellas, and there may be individual academies located on their charter school premises that address different needs for different kids. For example, I went to Natomas Charter School in Sacramento and they have five different academies that have different focuses. They have, for example, an academy that focuses on the performing and fine arts and they have an academy, for example, that works with homeschoolers.

I interviewed a student named Ally who attended the Performing and Fine Arts Academy. And she told me how she blossomed at the Fine Arts Academy at Natomas Charter School. And that she found out that she was actually good at art. She was able to discover her love of painting, ceramics and writing. Her senior project, and I have a photo of her senior project. She made this unbelievable mural of a seascape and painted it in the counselor's office. If you ever get there, it

is a beautiful thing to see. She said that her education at the school made her a different person because it addressed her individual needs. She would not have had those needs addressed had she attended a regular public school.

Natomas Charter School, and I know I'm running out of time, but I will just say that their homeschool academy, and I have written another book called, "The Homeschool Boom," which is on this phenomenon of homeschooling in the United States. In the United States, there are probably double the amount of homeschoolers now than before the pandemic. In certain communities, the number of home schoolers have quintupled. For example, in the African American community, where you have perhaps 3% before the pandemic, to now 16 to 18% of the community is now homeschooling their children. And at Natomas Charter School's Homeschool Academy, they get the opportunity to both homeschool their kids and also send their kids part of the time to a class at this campus. Whether it may be art or drama or forensic medicine, veterinary medicine, foreign languages, they have that opportunity to have a few days in class but also spend the rest of the time homeschooling their child.

The parents also get the opportunity to check out the curriculum library that the school maintains so that they are not, again, tied to the one-size-fits-all that a regular public school might offer. There is a wide variety of different curriculum that these schools can offer to meet the individual needs of the child at that school.

**SHAW:** One minute.

**IZUMI:** I would just say, I might get into some of this in my closing, that charter schools fill an incredible niche. Especially for kids who have been failed by the regular public schools and oftentimes for no reason because of the evilness or anything like that, it is just the way the structures of the regular public schools are set up. They are not set up to address a lot of these individual needs of the kids. Charter schools are set up that way. They have the flexibility to do this. They have the opportunity to give people wider ranging choices. And because of that, that is why they do better. If we want to know why charter schools do better, that is why they do better.

**HUFF:** Awesome. Thank you, Lance. We appreciate it. Let's give him a round of applause. Not only do the speakers appreciate that, but it gets your blood circulating a little bit. Second speaker, Walter Myers if you would please make your presentation?

**MYERS:** Testing. Okay. I think we got it here. Thank you to the, we will say Board of Education, and thank you so much, Senator Huff for moderating today. I'm going to speak from a recent article I published along with some additional notes that weren't in the article it was in. It was published in a real clear education website just this past week. And the name of the article was, "Addressing Misconceptions of Charter Schools." Since our humble beginnings in 1992 with City Academy in St. Paul Minnesota, charter schools have expanded to 44 other states, as well as the District of Columbia. And they now enroll over 3.4 million students, roughly 8% of all students nationwide. But while charter schools have been around for 30 years, many Americans remain unfamiliar with or confused about the basic concept. What many don't understand is that charter schools are public schools funded by federal and state funds, but they are privately run.

Charter schools serve as an alternative to public schools that often fail students, as in the case in virtually every major urban area with predominantly minority children. In many cases, charters deliver significantly better educational outcomes than public schools in terms of standardized test scores and graduation rates. The advantage of charter schools is that they are exempt from state and local regulations to a substantial degree, giving them the flexibility on autonomy to innovate and meet the needs of students. In exchange for this freedom, these schools are held publicly accountable, as Senator Huff noted to their charter.

Generally, a legislative contract with the state or district. Charter schools are reviewed periodically by their granting entity. If the conditions of the charter aren't met, their authorization can be revoked. A common misconception about charter schools is that they siphon off the best students from public schools and leave the remaining students to suffer in underperforming schools as Lance had just mentioned.

This isn't the case however. Charter school admission is based on an open lottery system, which provides equal access to all students until capacity limits are reached. Now it is true that parents who are more involved in their children's education will be more likely to pursue enrollment in a charter school, but their chances for success are the same as all other parents who apply. Now some charter schools do choose to serve more specifically the needs of their communities. Charter schools can prioritize admissions to students who live in a particular area or district they would like to serve. Other charters indicate specific missions. For example, the Holla School in the Rockwood community of Portland, Oregon, state said its mission is to serve black, brown and indigenous youth. This does not mean only minority students can attend the school. As admission is by law open to all since charter schools cannot discriminate even if they target specific communities.

Another common misconception about charter schools is that they drain money from traditional public schools. This doesn't make much sense in my view since charter schools are, as I noted earlier, they are public schools. If a traditional school is losing enrollment to a charter school then it is for a reason, and it should be a wake-up call to that school that they need to improve. Nonetheless, in most statements, adjustments are made to compensate districts for enrollment losses to charter schools. And besides, the mission of charter schools has always been to provide an alternative within the public school system itself. Often a sorely needed alternative considering the one-size-fits-all approach typical of traditional public school systems.

Now I would like to be clear that charter schools are no panacea. Not all are equally successful with respect to educational outcomes and not all are right for all students. As with any schooling decision, parents must determine what is best for their children. Rather than a competitor to traditional public schools, charters are more of a model for how public school systems could be more responsive to student needs while also producing better outcomes. Since they can lose their authorization if they don't effectively serve their students, charters are accountable in ways that traditional public schools, even failing ones, are not. Many parents would love to have a charter school alternative to their underperforming local public school. But in some states, they limit parental options.

In California, teacher unions make huge campaign contributions to legislators who cripple charter schools by imposing (inaudible) regulations and giving them considerably less funding than traditional public schools. In California, where teachers can gain tenure after two years, pay increases automatic regardless of performance and full pension benefits starting at age 62, there is little incentive to innovate. Charter schools by contrast track teachers who favor merit pay increases based on student success in the classroom and retirement plans that resemble those of other private entities, 401k, 401b.

Finally, there is another reason parents seek charter schools that has little to do with traditional school academic performance. Traditional schools, particularly those in California, have become laboratories for content that many parents feel is either objectionable or inconsistent with their values, such as Critical Race Theory and age-inappropriate sexual and mental health content and surveys that include asking children about their sexual histories. Often this type of content is hidden from parents, done without their consent. The truth is charter schools do more with less and focus solely on their mission, which is to deliver academic achievement, outperforming their traditional public school counterparts. If traditional public schools want to retain students, instead of complaining they should learn from successful charter schools and seek to raise the quality of education they provide so that parents won't seek alternatives. Until that happens, concerned parents will continue to gravitate to charter schools. Thank you.

**HUFF:** Thank you, Walter. We appreciate it. Senator Romero, you are up.

**ROMERO:** Okay. Thank you so much. It is an honor to see you once again, Senator Huff. Thank you to the Board and really to this very distinguished panel. According to your website, there are 35 diverse charter schools in Orange County and you serve about 21,000 kids. Most people know that this board of education, this county board of education is one of the most pro charter school boards in the state of California. Of course that means a number of challenges, including as well in the political arena. It means of course, that we have always got to be on our toes. There is always means by which some nefarious characters will try to shut down charters at different levels, whether it be the school district or the county boards. I want to applaud what you are doing and urge you to keep fighting that good fight.

I thought what I would do tonight is rather than talking about the merits of charter schools, which I'm a strong advocate supporter of written laws, etc., with Senator Huff. I will advocate. I thought I would talk a little bit about what it feels like to be somewhat in the weeds. Since having been in the Legislature, working on political reforms as you know, I have started charter schools, most recently here Explore Academy, Orange County, very innovative. We are excited about that project going forward. So I thought I would talk a little bit about what you can do perhaps to take it to additional levels. Some of the experiences that I think we need to work on. I would encourage this board to really take a look at it.

Let me start with, because one of your goals is to educate parents. We typically will go to a website. I would urge you, you know, it is a wonderful website, but I will tell you I have a Ph.D. and it took me a while to find information about charters. It is not an easy process. What I found finally, I had to push a bunch of tabs and everything, and I found charter schools, unlike other districts, they simply say charter school division. I found charters nested under something called

Community Partnerships. Well that sounds great. I mean they are, but it is like, what is that? One thing I would encourage you is to get out your good information and really to pull that out. I'm not necessarily saying you have to have a separate division. But certainly on the website, just to simply list, you know, to put charter schools, petitions, etc.

And then one thing that I would strongly recommend and this is something, and I don't often give praise to L.A. Unified, but you are going to hear about L.A. Unified a bit tonight. They actually post not only the listing of all charter schools, but actually the petitions so that this is helpful to others going forward. We can take a look at it, review it and also parents can take a look at the model. I would strongly encourage you to list the approved petition. You might even want to include the material revisions as well. I think that would go a long way for parent understanding.

Other things that I think are very important. In the actual charter process itself, of course we are always happy when we get the vote and we are approved, but I will tell you, having been in the weeds, it is not a happy process. I have been in three different counties, I have experienced this even in this very pro-charter county of Orange County. It has been really difficult at times. It is sad to say that charters, the original intent of charters, was really to come up with innovation, etc. To enable parents, teachers, community groups, to also really begin to develop charters. Looking back on it now, it has become very legalistic. It really is something where it has become a niche industry. And those are some of the, I believe, legitimate criticisms about charter schools. It takes money, a lot of money. You have to have the bureaucracies, the legalese, the consultants. I am appalled at when I have heard some of the industries that have cropped up around charter schools. I heard not too long ago, that one consultant was going to charge a group that was interested in starting a petition here in Orange County, \$100,000 to write the petition. That is madness.

That was not the spirit or the intent of the law. I think the more that you can do to really make it feasible and I know you can't do everything. But you kind of look out for it and maybe think about resources overall. Maybe there is some way to also develop perhaps a donor fund or something, or to bring charter folks together with vendors. CCSA of course is always here to help. But I think that the more that we can look at that, because what we are doing is we are really pricing people who would want to do a charter school, out of essentially the market. I think in Northern California, I have seen a lot more sort of rank and file, everyday people who have had charters. I think it has become much more difficult here in Orange County. I say that with a heavy heart.

Again too, in terms of the legal issues, even with the last charter petition that we ran through Orange County, ultimately we did get it approved. Your staff it is really great to work with, but we had to really battle on the legal issue, the interpretation. We hired one of the top notch firms. I would go to them, Young, Minney and Corr, over and over. But you know what, you pay for what you get. It is a good, strong team, thousands and thousands and thousands of debts basically before you can even hope to start. It is something that I have experienced and I would encourage you to really think about that when there are different interpretations of the law. And sometimes the law is gray. I get that. But I would, you know, really urge you to take a look at that process of the argumentative stage of the interpretation of law.

The MOU, you have heard from me before, I would urge you get rid of those. There is nothing in charter law in the state of California that mandates MOUs. And I have always felt if it is not law, don't invent new law at the local level. All you are doing, in my opinion, is you are putting barriers in place. It is that nose under the—what is it?

**HUFF:** Under the tent.

**ROMERO:** Yeah. The camel's nose under the tent. Thank you. And you start giving up your right to a— there is nothing. If you want to have MOUs, then go to Sacramento. Then once again, you got to bring in the lawyers. We love lawyers, but I don't want to pay for more lawyers once we have gotten approved. And some of those templates, I mean, they are 28 and 30 pages. I wrote law, but I'm not a lawyer. And so you have to hire the firm. You have to argue it out, etc. I would park the—you could become the lead county that says, *lla basta*, it is over. We are not going to do it. And Assembly Member Kiley if you are interested in making it, you know, to force MOUs, then you can initiate that bill. But I doubt he is going to do that. I would urge you to—and there is some way to kind of figure out, okay, let's sit down and just say, these are certain things that we can agree upon. I would really urge that.

Policies, oh my God. We got to file this policy, and that policy, and this policy and Epicenter. It becomes really bureaucratic. We oftentimes, you know, behind closed doors, we say, read the charter. It is in the charter. You may want to think about what has to be filed over and over. Can we just say, go to pages 20 to 30? Because we paid all that money. We wrote the charter. We argued for it. You approved us. And then all of a sudden we have got all this administrative stuff. I could say other stuff. But anyway, I would urge that.

So once we get approved, I would also urge then to hold us more accountable. And I'm going to say this as a charter advocate. We have great charters. And even in the state of California here in Orange County, but I'm going to be honest. We have some pretty crappy charters too. Let's not make any mistake about it. I have seen charters approved and their academic outcomes, and I'm very strong on making sure that it matters—we are putting ourselves up as you know, we are an alternative for the district. Why should we be operating if we are not doing as well in educating children? I believe in a healthy competition. I do think, even though it is sometimes painful, you got to move a school, etc. But I would really urge us if that school is not performing, it is the parents and the kids that are being short changed. I would urge you to really scrutinize and take a look at these.

One way that you could do this as well is, you know, recently I was on Home Depot, their website. I was trying to figure out which dishwasher to order. And you can have, you have this comparison chart where you get to compare and contrast. It is not just Home Depot, but a lot of them do it. If they can do it, I would urge this board to start thinking about your own quote-unquote “Dashboard.” Not mandated or anything like that, because the state Dashboard on the Department of Education, it looks like a Twister board with all those colors and nobody knows what it means. So you might just want to highlight, look, these are some of the scores, etc. That way, parents can compare. You have great district schools. I would encourage you that if there is a charter, maybe to take a geographic area and to highlight, you have got this school and this school within a geographic area, maybe two miles, three miles, whatever you think is feasible

and just list them and sort of what they are, etc. I think that that could be really helpful to parents.

Then I really urge people that, you know, if you get a charter that is coming up for renewal, I will put it L.A. Unified, I remember I was sitting in the audience one time and charter after charter was being approved. This is not exactly a charter friendly board in L.A., but I was thinking, oh my gosh, because those charter schools, if I were sitting on that board, I would have said no. No way. The neighborhood school is much better than the charter and why put that out? It is something to think about.

I do want to say as well too, I'm going to be honest, I think it is a little bit easy to game the system here in Orange County because people know that Orange County is pro-charter. So once we get approved, there is sort of you fall on, well they are going to like us. They don't want to shut charters down, etc. I think it is important. If there is the mission and vision of a school, then hold them to it. For example, if you are going to do—and I have experienced this as well, if we are starting a school for foster youth, how many foster youths do we have enrolled?

**SHAW:** One minute.

**ROMERO:** If you have only got eight kids or 10 kids out of 500, is it really meeting it? Or is it part of a gaming the system? Because you know, what will happen is out in the real world, that is where charters get dinged. I think it is important to really hold that petition, kind of, do what you said you were going to do. It sounds great on paper. Now go out and do it. I think it is something important.

Wokeness, as I heard you talk recently as well too, it is creeping up in Orange County. I would urge you to really take a look at that as well. I think it is important as well, too, and L.A. Unified once again, they do this. If the school is sued, especially if there is a file of discrimination against a board member or the executive team, that is reported to L.A. Unified, along with documentation. I think that is important. I think when you start looking at it, again, the lawyers get involved. But that is taxpayer dollars. I would urge this board to at least have some kind of mandatory reporting to you.

This is something that is personal to me. In my career, I can legally say, in my career, I have filed a claim of gender and age discrimination. I have written a book about it called, "Just Not That Likable: The Price All Women Pay for Gender Bias," available on amazon.com for anybody who might be interested. And it does talk a little bit about the, and especially in my case, experience of women in academia, in leadership and in looking at some of these issues of leading while being a woman and sort of stereotyping, etc. I think it is important to look at that.

Fiscal issues are very real. I will be honest. When we were trying to find a new facility for our charter, I won't name any names, but we ran across a few landlords who would identify a particular charter and just say, are you like them, etc.? They haven't paid the rent. I don't know the details. But it is issues that for other charters coming forward, we face that. The sooner you deal with the fiscal issues, I think it really makes it a good point for all of us overall. And of course, finding a facility is very difficult. That could be something as well, too. If the Board

could maybe compile a listing of available resources or schools that might be shutting down, or areas, or even have relationships with realtors who might say, these buildings are available. I think that would be really, really good.

**SHAW:** Your time is up.

**ROMERO:** Okay. That is it overall and thank you for the forum that you have. There is so much that can come out of this.

**SHAW:** Thank you.

**HUFF:** Thank you, Senator. Appreciate your comments. You always give thoughtful commentary and that is really valuable. Ricardo Soto, please. The floor is yours.

**SOTO:** Thank you very much. Good evening, everyone. Just to reiterate, I wanted to thank the Board for inviting California School Association to present tonight. Much of what has already been said, I would just support and ditto in terms of all the challenges and the strengths of charter schools, both the challenges that they face, but also the strengths that they provide. I did want to just say that it is appropriate that we are having this conversation tonight. Tomorrow, September 21st, is actually the 30th anniversary of the California Charter Schools Act. Thirty years ago, the law was signed and enacted. It created a revolution to a certain extent for some communities and for some students and families in terms of their public education, access.

One of the things that is a challenge, especially in the political dynamics that charter schools face throughout the state of California including in the Legislature sometimes, is that folks forget what the purpose of and the goal of the Charter Schools Act was. If you look at the Charter Schools Act, it is right there in the first section of the Education Code. It was the intent of the Legislature to create public schools that operate independently from the traditional school district system. One of the things that if you are—I'm a legal nerd, a Charter Schools Act nerd. One of the things that we talk about, we say it all the time, it is called the mega waiver. The mega waiver is a provision in the Charter Schools Act that essentially says that charter schools are exempt from all laws that are applicable to school districts, except for those that they are specifically required to follow. Much of those laws are in the Charter School Act, but occasionally we will see other provisions of the Education Code that do incorporate or refer to charter schools that they have to comply with. That is really the heart of the charter school flexibility in California. It is that they are exempt from the voluminous laws that apply to the traditional public school system. It provides an opportunity for educators who are really focused on students and families to try to develop innovative programs, different instructional models and policies to serve their students. Much like what was described earlier tonight in terms of how they are doing it.

But there is some additional goals that were articulated in the Charter Schools Act about what the Legislature was trying to accomplish. That includes improving pupil learning, as was stated earlier, increasing learning opportunities for all pupils, but with a special emphasis on expanding learning experiences for pupils who are identified as academically low performing. This is really important. There has been mention by one of the county board members about restricting access



to a public school based on zip code. Charter schools don't do that. Charter schools, any student in California can attend a charter school. I had a nephew that lived in Orange County. He attended a charter school in San Diego County, so that is the kind of flexibility that charter schools provide for serving students and families across the state.

One of the other purposes of the Charter Schools Act was to encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods. Professor Izumi has stated about the schools that he studied have provided to the students that are desperate for opportunities to look for better school programs that support all their needs, not just the cookie cutter model that supports a standard or the perceived typical student.

Then lastly, and this is one of the things that I think is often forgotten about the Charter Schools Act, it wasn't only designed to provide these unique opportunities to students and parents, but it was also passed to provide professional opportunities for teachers and educators to develop new and innovative models in serving students. Too often, I have heard, I come from a family of educators both on my wife's side and in my immediate family. Educators in some schools in particular traditional public schools are frustrated by the processes and the bureaucracy that they confront in trying to do something different or unique for individual students. The charter school model is a way of offering professional opportunities for educators to kind of follow their passion and their hearts in serving students.

Of course, charter schools provide expanded choice and provide a variety of options for them to serve families. But as has been mentioned consistently tonight, charter schools because they are freed from the voluminous Education Code, the bottom line for them is how are they serving students? They are accountable to ensuring that students are making progress and that they are learning. As an organization, California Charter Schools Association, we take this commitment very seriously. We think that charter school should be delivering higher quality educational options for families and students. And it is important, as Senator Romero mentioned, that if they are not meeting their objectives, and their goals academically and also just in terms of how they are serving students, then their authorizers whether they be the county board or school districts should be looking at not renewing them and letting students have other options and families have other options.

Charter schools provide vigorous competition with the public school system. It is about trying to improve all education for all public school students. This is one of the areas that—competition doesn't mean you do your thing. We do our thing. Whoever gets more students and parents wins. But it is also figuring out how to work together collaboratively. What are the innovations that charter schools are driving and how can those innovations potentially be incorporated into the traditional public school system that serves most of the community and most of the families in an area?

I wanted to kind of wrap up my comments by saying a little bit about, what does the landscape look like for charter schools? Senator Huff mentioned charter schools serve about 1 in 9 students or approximately 700,000 students across the state. If you look at the demographics of those students, it very much mirrors the traditional public school system population. So, 56% of those students are low income, 52% are Latino, 15% are English language learners, 10% our students

with disabilities and 7% are Black. A lot of people think that charter schools are skimming; that they are only targeting the best students or the high achieving students. But especially in some of our most challenged communities, the charter school students that attend those schools reflect the communities where those schools are located, so they are not really skimming.

And in fact, a few years ago, we believed so much in the fact that charter schools are willing to serve any student that comes through the doors that we incorporated into the Charter Schools Act that a charter school will take any student that comes to their door to be served. In Orange County, over 22,000 students are served by charter schools. While we have seen a lot of growth in Orange County, the student population of charter schools in Orange County was 7,000 in 2010. Now it is over 22,000. Interestingly, Orange County saw that growth over a longer period of time. Some other parts of the state that growth was pretty exponential. But in Orange County, you are starting to catch up.

Then finally, and I think you all know this, the Orange County Board of Education authorizes more charter schools in the county of Orange County than school districts combined. That is a record I think that this board should be very proud of in terms of making sure that if school districts aren't providing the kinds of options that students need, the county board will make sure that those options are offered.

Then lastly, and I will talk about this more in my final comments, there are lots of challenges that our charter schools still face. Senator Romero talked about several of them, the MOU, facilities, but there are ways that the county board can lead on some of those challenges by thinking of ways to provide more facilities, ensuring that there is funding equity for charter schools and that there is not excessive overreach and oversight by school districts or by county staff concerning charter schools. Educators want the freedom to be able to serve their students, and that should be protected. Too often we see authorizers require MOUs or policies with charter schools that, personally, I don't think is permissible under law, but that also hampers how charter schools can serve their schools. I will provide a little bit more information in my closing remarks about addressing some of these areas. But these are the areas that this county board should be leading on so that you set the example of how county boards can really encourage and support, not only charter schools but the programs that schools that students and families need. Thank you.

**HUFF:** Thank you, Ricardo. For our last panelist, we have Assembly Member Kiley, please.

**KILEY:** Well, thank you very much for the chance to say a few words tonight and to join these outstanding panelists in discussing a matter of the highest importance to many students and families throughout California. I thought I would give you just a sense of what it has been like inside the capitol during the last several years dealing with the wars over public education in this state. I have been in the Legislature for just about six years now. I was on the Education Committee for five of those years. I believe I was vice chair of the Education Committee for four of them, much like Senator Huff was vice chair of the Senate Education Committee. Unfortunately, I did not have anyone resembling Senator Romero to work with as chair. I would have loved that, but I also want to just say a couple prefatory remarks to keep a sense of perspective as I discuss what we have been dealing with at the capitol. I think it is—I try to always keep in mind the perspective of the constituency that legislation is going to affect. In this

case, it is the charter school students and families, and administrators and teachers and school leaders. And if you talk to any charter school leader, and there are several in this room I know, they will tell you that their mentality is just one of, what is next? What next is going to come our way that is going to interfere with my ability to provide a quality education to the families that have opted in to the school that I'm running? It is just one thing after another that makes life more difficult.

The second thing is kind of the overarching political perspective on this. It has been mentioned before that the fundamental issue here is the power of the teachers union, California Teachers Association, primarily. And to just kind of state the obvious, the reason that they don't like charter schools is that it is a threat to their business model. Their entire business model is to take a cut of every public school teacher's paycheck and then to use that money to elect politicians who will sort of, further advance that business model. The reason charters are a threat to that business model is because unionization is optional for charters where it is automatic for traditional public schools. The CTA is 100% behind the attacks on charters that we get from the state capitol, and they cannot be reasoned with. They will stop at nothing short of the total extinction of charter schools in the state of California. That is, I think just is the reality that we should be aware of in discussing these issues.

I would break my kind of relatively short tenure at the capitol into three phases when it comes to the nature of these battles over chartering. The first would be my first two years in 2017 and 2018 when Jerry Brown was still governor. Governor Brown you know, I did not agree with on a lot of things, and I didn't entirely agree with him on education or charter schools. But he, at the very least, was somewhat more favorable towards them than other governors have been. There was a sense that the worst impulses of the Legislature were tamed by Jerry Brown's unwillingness to do anything too extreme.

The Legislature kind of took a more subtle approach in those years, which had been going on since before I got there, which was kind of the death by a thousand cuts approach where every bill that imposed any sort of regulation on schools would automatically then be extended to charter schools. It was the reregulation of charter schools, which of course undermines the entire premise of charter schools, which is this mega waiver. The idea was to chip away at the mega waiver bit by bit and to interfere with that freedom that allows for the diversity of offerings that charter schools provide. So, O'Donnell who is the chair of the Education Committee, every single bill that would come there, if it didn't apply to charter schools, they would immediately put an amendment saying, you know, this applies to charter schools. If the chair of the committee says that he wants you to take an amendment, you have to take it; otherwise, they are going to kill your bill or they just won't even hear the bill.

That is kind of the strategy that they were pursuing. All the while waiting to take in a more aggressive strategy when there was a change in personnel in the Governor's Office, which of course happened starting in 2019 and then it was kind of open season. So you had a number of anti-charter bills that were introduced that year. What was it 1505, 1506, 1507? Yeah, which different approaches to this issue. These bills were condemned by civil rights groups throughout California. There were condemned by chapters of the NAACP and the Urban League. There were thousands and thousands of students and charter school parents who came to the capitol to

testify against them. By the way, they have since limited public testimonies. You can't do that anymore. They have limited it to 10 minutes because it would take hours. There were so many people there to speak out against these bills.

At the end of the day, the most damaging one that made it through was 1505, which I'm sure that this board is very familiar with because, among other things, it widened the discretion of school districts to deny charters by saying you could do so—before there was specific reasons that you had to cite in order to deny a charter petition. But this made it so you could just cite the financial impact on your district and arguably that is the case in any charter. It basically just gave districts carte blanche to deny charter petitions, and then it also, the bill went after the role of county boards of education as well. Some of the worst aspects of that were at least taken out by the time the bill passed the Legislature. But the reason the county boards are a target is because, in a lot of cases of course, this county is the leading example of it, county boards are a lot more reasonable when it comes to decisions about charter petitions. Because there isn't quite the same inherent conflict of interest that a school district has. Where you are, and I agree with the point that they are not competitors, we are talking about public schools here of one kind or another, but a lot of school districts don't really see it that way, especially those where the union has been successful in controlling the membership.

There were a number of other bills dealing with charters, but those were really the main ones. And it was kind of like a new era where charter schools were under attack like never before. And then sort of the third phase would be when COVID began. Immediately, interests that opposed charter schools tried to seize the opportunity to advance that agenda. So it was a matter of weeks I think when UTLA, which is the largest CTA affiliate, United Teachers of Los Angeles said, “We need a moratorium on charter schools.” Like, what does that have to do with COVID? It was the exact same thing. They just had this massive strike the year before when there was no COVID. And then they decided that COVID was a reason to have a moratorium on charter schools as well.

I think this was also in their sort of hostage note they put out with a list of demands before schools could reopen, saying no more charter schools. Then we had what was one of the most despicable things that I think happened throughout this whole experience. The Legislature and Newsom hashed out this trailer bill that just kind of appeared without any warning, without any vetting, anything, that said we are going to deny funding to growing charters or school districts. We are going to kind of get rid of this basic principle of per pupil funding. And of course, the story there was that schools had been shut down. We were into the Zoom school era and a lot of charters were doing a lot better with that; either because they had already had well developed personalized learning platforms, or because they were more nimble and could respond to the demands of the moment, or maybe they just had a greater incentive because their families would go elsewhere if they didn't provide a good offering. So you had a lot of families that were enrolling in charter schools to get at least a modicum of a decent education for their kids.

So the response of the Legislature was: oh, we need to stop that. We need to keep them trapped in their closed, failing local traditional school that isn't even offering Zoom school in the moment. This is actually what they did. And so the Governor signed the bill. There was a lawsuit that was led by John Adams, which is actually in my district. He is somebody that is going to be

featured in Lance's book, "Choosing Diversity," as well as Margaret Fortune's schools, the Fortune family of schools. She said at the press conference, announcing this, that the whole reason she started her schools was to close the African American achievement gap and this bill interfered with that.

Long story short, they ended up changing it and mitigating the impacts of it to some degree, although there was still a lot of harms done by that bill. There were a lot of things that happened. There was 1316, which we were just talking about, which was basically an existential threat to homeschool based or independent study based charters. That actually passed the Education Committee, but I believe it died on the floor of the Assembly. By the way, I didn't mention, I was a high school teacher myself as Senator Huff mentioned in the introduction. I was part of the Teach for America program, which I'm sure many people are familiar with. On two separate occasions, a bill to ban Teach for America from the state of California has passed the Education Committee. The first time the author, her name is Christina Garcia, literally just put the words, (TF) Teach for America in the bill and said, "You are not allowed to operate in California." It never passed the Assembly, but this just goes to show you the disposition of our Education Committee. One of the reasons they don't like TFA, the teachers unions, is because a lot of the students are placed, or a lot of the teachers, are placed at charter schools.

I see I am nearing the end of my time. In terms of what do we take from this whole experience of the last couple years? I would say that there are new sort of opportunities that have opened up because you have a lot of parents throughout California who have gotten a real window into the dynamics that have been shaping our public education system and how it is really never about the kids when it comes to education politics in California. And I think that could be channeled in some really positive directions. I would love to see reform when it comes to the authorizing process. I would like to see a larger role for county boards of education. I also think, kind of a final point, maybe we could try to move towards school boards and districts actually operating more like charter schools do? In a perfect world that would emanate from the state providing much greater liberation from the lengthy Education Code and providing additional points of accountability. But I think that what you are seeing a lot of school boards discover across the state is that you don't necessarily need to take the approach of always following in the strictest possible way, whatever the mandates are that come down from the state.

District staff are always are often very risk averse. They will kind of give you the most prescriptive possible set of recommendations. On boards that are controlled by the unions, they will just simply kind of rubber stamp those; whereas, we have seen in many school boards now across the state and this board is a leading example of that, elected trustees saying, well, actually, no, we are elected representatives ourselves. We are representatives of the community. Our obligation first and foremost is to respond to the community. That is going to be sort of you know the way that we approach our role. And we will of course follow the law, but we will search for whatever avenues we have available to serve our community and what our parents want in the process. And so I think that is the way that you are going to see a lot of newly reconstituted boards sometime soon, approach their job as well.

**HUFF:** Thank you Assembly Member. Let's give them warm applause. It is both disturbing and humorous listening to the chaos that is going on under the dome and it sounds very familiar.

Doesn't it, Senator Romero? Our next portion of this will be what they call the Round Robin. I don't know who is the robin here, but each of you will take six minutes and ask questions. Tim, are you going to time that too?

**SHAW:** Sure.

**HUFF:** You going to time yourself? Do I need to time you?

**SHAW:** Yes, I will.

**HUFF:** Yeah, actually, we will just try to keep to it. And then following that, we will have a break. But I'm going to go first. Excuse me, you need to go?

**SHAW:** No, he wants to go.

**HUFF:** Oh, you want to go first? I'm going to get—

**VALDES:** I always like to go first.

**HUFF:** You are the rookie, so I'm going to let you think a little bit. We will start with Trustee Barke and we will get to you. You are not going to be the last one to speak.

**BARKE:** All right. So refresh me. I have so many minutes and I can spread the questions amongst whomever I want?

**HUFF:** Yeah, or you can talk for six minutes if you want.

**BARKE:** No, no, I would rather ask questions.

**HUFF:** The floor is yours.

**BARKE:** Well, thank you. I will go in reverse. I will start with Assemblyman Kiley. We hear this so often from district board members that their hands are tied. They can't do anything about the restrictions. Yet I know that a lot of boards, especially in your part of this state, are doing differently. What is your recommendation to local board trustees? I know we have quite a few candidates in the room. What can they do once elected to meet the needs of the community that elected them while staying within the law? How far can they go or what advice would you give them?

**KILEY:** Yeah, I'm glad you asked that because that was sort of the point I was ending on there and this gives me a chance to expand on it some. In my area, I'm from Placer County. We had some great people that came in and were part of some of our biggest school boards in early 2021. They sort of had a commitment to getting schools open, so they warded off every obstacle the state threw in their path and opened their schools as early any place in the state. And then, kind of to your point more directly, when it came to the issue of masks in school, which obviously was a matter of great concern to many parents throughout California, the sort of thinking was

well the state has mandated this and if you don't do it then you are going to be in big trouble and maybe you will lose your funding and maybe you will lose your insurance, so you just need to do what the state says. Well, we had one district in my Assembly District that said, "Well, you know, we are going to do our own thing here." They passed a resolution that said, we are going to give the option to each student/parent to make the decision that is right for them. And so I think that they were able to word that in a way that fell within at least their interpretation of the law. Other districts took a different approach, but ultimately got to the same endpoint. Like in El Dorado Union School District, also an area that I represent, they said, "Well, okay, this is the policy, but there is going to be no consequence if you don't wear the mask." That was effectively a mask choice school as well. And by the way, I will say that after this happened, you had a lot of dozens of other districts that also adopted the same approach and the Governor rolled back the statewide order after that. So sometimes you can get change to happen from the local level and it will percolate up.

I guess the broader point here is, as I was saying before, it is in the nature of the administration to always be conservative in its interpretation of what is required, or to mitigate, or to minimize legal risk and so forth, which is not even necessarily a criticism. In some sense, that is properly their job. But you as an elected board member, your role is to make decisions that take into account all perspectives, right? And I think that you have too many boards where the elected members are really just there to serve particular interests. And so they only consider that one perspective and they don't balance that perspective against other perspectives, against other possible interpretations of the law, against what the community is looking for. I think what I am really encouraged by is I see more board members who are stepping into that role and saying, I am an independently elected representative for this community. I'm not just someone who is there to rubber stamp decisions that are made by bureaucrats in Sacramento.

So specific examples of where this might come up going forward, you mentioned some of the curriculum that we have at our schools, which is pretty appalling to a lot of people in certain cases around sex ed., around this new ethnic studies or CRT or whatever you want to call it, mandate that has been passed. That is now going to be implemented at the district level. I think that you are going to have some districts that say, well, we want to be really careful here just to do exactly what the state wants us to do. So they are going to take the model curriculum and adopt it wholesale and search for whatever extra resources they can provide to make the state even happier and to make it even more extreme. You will have districts that will do that; whereas, you will have other districts that will say, well, let's see if we can work within the bounds of the law, but tailor this into something that is actually right for our community and that actually serves the interest of kids.

**BARKE:** Thank you. Those comments I think are so important because that is such a huge question, not just here in Orange County, but across the state. I have had board candidates, board member candidates reach out to me and elected trustees saying, what do we do? Our community is really upset and we don't think we have any power, so thank you. I remember you made similar comments when we testified at Tustin Unified several months ago. So I'm glad that we have a national, or at least a statewide audience listening tonight, and I hope your comments will encourage them. So thank you very much.

**HUFF:** Thank you. Next will be Trustee Williams followed by Mr. Valdes

**WILLIAMS:** Again, a reach out and a big thank you for being here, each and every one of you. This is a very successful, very entertaining, wonderful information. I'm learning. Each and every one of you have said something that has touched me. I'm going to throw out a question. It will be for all five of you. And it has to do with an issue that this board will be facing in the next meeting. One of our charter schools that is coming for approval through us, we have had parents come up to us and complain about the wokeness, about the inculcation of Critical Race Theory, about teaching of Marxism. And it is not from an academic historical perspective, but it is inculcating aspects of Marxism and indoctrination. It is more of a political perspective, and there is lots of other concerns with the curriculum that parents have been complaining about. My question, and I will throw it out to anyone who wants to answer, our board stands, at least I do, I probably speak for many of my colleagues here. We are for direct academic instruction, we are for inculcating facts and knowledge in the kids and not political indoctrination. Being that that is my governing philosophy and I believe every single person here, does this board have the right to say no to this charter?

Gloria, can you start opening? What would you do? A parent comes up to you, they are unhappy with teaching of the pronouns. Our kids don't even know what adverbs and sentence structure, or phonemic words; a pronoun, is that she/him is that he/him? What should our board do if we are to stand against us and a public charter school wants to implement this curriculum?

**ROMERO:** I'm actually going to flip it. I'm going to say, look, a charter school means choice. And so basically, parents can vote with their feet. That is the first thing I would say. Basically again, like the old fashioned boycott, if I don't like what is going on, articulate my views and then bye, bye, I'm going to go look for another place. I would caution the Board to not necessarily get entangled in the actual curriculum itself. I think you want to think about what role do you want to play. But I think that it is important to hear those parents and to urge them probably first and foremost, that really they are the customers. They are the ones who really should be addressing this with their board and telling them if we don't like this. If we don't like it, you change it or we are out of here. That is actually where I would start.

**SOTO:** I would second Senator Romero's comments. I do think that each charter school, the charter school petitioners have the opportunity to offer the program that they believe will provide an opportunity or serve a particular community. I do think that the law in California provides them a lot of latitude in terms of what curriculum they can use. Charter schools don't have to use the state adopted curriculum. They have flexibility to use alternative curriculums, provided that they can demonstrate the academic results on the assessments. And as Senator Romero said, just because this board approves a particular charter school that has a particular curriculum, that doesn't mean any student or parent has to choose to go there. They just don't need to choose that school. They go to their neighborhood school or they go to another charter school. In fact the Charter School Act is very clear. No parent or student can be forced to attend a charter school. It is their choice. It is what the parent or their guardian chooses and it is what serves that student the best.

**WILLIAMS:** Lance, what do you think about this situation?



**IZUMI:** Well, I think that one of the things to consider, and I agree with both what Ricardo said and what Senator Romero said, yes, it is choice. One of the things though that I think a board like you would consider is that when you think about cases that have involved charter schools with woke programming, you know, CRT type of curricula or influence curricula, whether those schools make doing exercises in those classes mandatory so that you cannot opt out of them. If you think about, for example, a case that is going on right now involving a woman in Las Vegas, African American woman named Gabs Clark who has sued in federal court a charter school in Las Vegas for requiring a course that is basically a CRT course that has a lot of requirements for students to engage in without the ability to opt out. She sued the school. Because her child refused to engage in those activities, the school denied that son of hers a diploma. And because of that, she sued in federal court. And the judge in that case, at least preliminarily, said that the parent was likely to win on the merits. The school then gave the son a diploma, but that had screwed up all of the college application process, etc., so that mother is continuing to sue.

I think those are the kinds of considerations too. When Gloria had said, “you got to look in the weeds” on some of this stuff. And so it is not just like the philosophy of this school, but what exactly are they requiring in this school?

**WILLIAMS:** How much time do I have left?

**SHAW:** None.

**HUFF:** Thanks for asking. Maybe somebody will seed time to you before we are done here. Trustee Valdes?

**VALDES:** Senator Romero and Attorney Soto, I want to follow up on this exact point. We clearly have a charter school that is coming back on October 5th. And we are getting a lot of negative feedback from the parents, and I can tell your recommendation is well, walk with your feet, right? Which is essentially an economics argument, I fully believe in that. But on the flip side of that, we have parents who are complaining and it looks like the school just isn't listening. They are not minding their customers. Would this board not be turning our backs on those parents by simply saying walk with your feet? And honestly, I just want to open up that dialogue again.

**WILLIAMS:** Good question.

**ROMERO:** I will have you go for it. You are the lawyer. I just wrote laws. That is all.

**SOTO:** I did want to just say that I'm familiar with the case that Professor Izumi raised. In that case, I think a big, like a really important fact, is that the curriculum that was instituted was after the student started that school. So the parent and the student, he was attending the school and then that additional change in the curriculum occurred. That is part of the issue in that case. Again, I mean, I think it is important obviously to listen to parents and students in terms of how they are feeling about a particular program model or curriculum. But again, charter schools are independently operated from the traditional public school system. They have the flexibility to offer a curriculum that they believe will address—

**VALDES:** But Mr. Soto, don't we have the authority as this board to comment on their charter?

**SOTO:** Oh, yes.

**VALDES:** Perhaps limit it if we don't like the curriculum?

**SOTO:** Well, we have this—I'm a lawyer. I support our charter schools and this argument can be made on both sides. The law is very specific and this is one of the things we have always stressed with authorizers. You have very specific findings that you have to make in order to be able to deny a charter. Charter schools are supposed to be part of the educational system within the California K system. They are encouraged. Unless you make very specific findings and they are enumerated in the Act that justify a denial, a governing board is not supposed to deny that charter. I believe that charter schools provide choices. Not every parent will choose a particular school to send their child. In the end, charter schools are accountable for academic outcomes. The big limitation, the overwriting limitation is obviously this board could deny a charter if it violates the law. If it is discriminating, if it violates a particular constitutional right, but other than that—I mean, if the program is sound and the charter meets all the elements of the petition in the law, then, and I would say this to school district also, the school district and this board should be approving the charter.

**VALDES:** The next question I have is—well, just a mention. The night I was appointed, I said I was going to start walking charter schools and public schools in Orange County and I have done that. Boy, have a lot of people taken me up on that offer. I wanted to just make a comment and then a quick question. A comment I have is about a charter school that I walked a few weeks ago. It was called Scholarship Prep, 59% Latino. It is in my district. The suspension rate is zero. The expulsion rate is zero. The attendance rate is 96.6. I walked the school with the Executive Director Jason Watts. As I got to one of the back rooms I saw there were laundry machines, dryers in the back. And I just very casually asked the executive director what they were for. He told me that fully 20% of the students enrolled in that school are either homeless or in foster homes. And they actually provide laundry services for their school.

So I wanted to mention that just as a follow up, that is happening in my district. And I thought that was a very powerful thing for me to hear about the good work that they are doing. The other thing and here is going back to my question. Facilities procurement of the charter schools is clearly a significant issue. All the charter schools are telling me the same thing. They can't get the right facility or they can't work through the local council, so question to the politicians in the room. How can this board help the charter schools work through the local councils to get the facilities that they need?

**HUFF:** There is only one politician I see out here, we have a former politician.

**KILEY:** So how can you work through local councils to get the facilities you need? That is the question?

**VALDES:** What can we do to support the charter schools getting through the local councils and the red tape?

**KILEY:** Councils, I see.

**VALDES:** Because it seems to be like a local—

**KILEY:** Mobilize parents. That is the number one way. That is the most powerful tool. We have an issue like this going on actually in one of the counties I represent with a very popular charter school. It has a huge waiting list and they are having difficulty procuring the facility that they need. But if you are talking about approvals that you need from a board of supervisors or a city council, these are elected bodies that are going to have overlapping constituencies with you. And so, if you mobilize enough parents, then that will have an impact. And, you know, when we are talking about charters that are serving a lot of families, it is not that hard to do because they will stand up and fight in order to allow their child to continue getting the education that they think is right for them.

There is a lot of probably better advice that maybe you could give from kind of a legal perspective as to how to navigate the process. But I think that when you have that kind of leverage, political leverage, that will tend to make the decision makers look at things a little differently.

**HUFF:** Thank you, Assembly Member. You are out of time, so I'm going to time you Vice President Shaw. You are up now.

**SHAW:** I started myself. Don't worry.

**HUFF:** Okay. That is fine.

**SHAW:** Well, I was thinking about some of the misnomers. My sister-in-law is a teacher at a charter school. She is a member of the California Teachers Association. I'm glad we mentioned that. There is an idea that teachers at a charter school are not necessarily in the teacher's union. Do any of you know what the percentage is that are in the teacher's union?

**SOTO:** We estimate about 40% might be unionized in charter schools. It is higher among teachers and certificated staff than the non-certificated. That is a lower percentage, probably closer to 20% or so.

**SHAW:** Okay. See, I bet that is surprising to people I think. Another thing I hear from critics of charter schools that I thought I would like to try to clear up if at all possible. There seems to be a notion that charter schools get open and it is a for profit. It is a money making opportunity for somebody. Somebody is getting rich. Someone is lining their pockets. Can we speak to that a little bit? Who is getting rich out there by opening a charter school?

**AUDIENCE:** The lawyers.

**SHAW:** Is it the lawyers?

**SOTO:** Yeah. I can address that. A few years ago, the Legislature adopted a law that stated that every charter school either can be run by a school district, so school districts have their own charter schools, or it has to be operated by a nonprofit public benefit corporation. It can't be operated by a for-profit organization. I just would want to say, prior to that law, the vast majority of charter schools in California were not run for profit. Less than 10 schools in the state of California may have been operated under a for-profit kind of structure. And, you know, we are talking about over 1,200 charter schools in California, so the law was adopted just to kind of reinforce what the existing reality was.

**SHAW:** Thank you for that.

**ROMERO:** Can I add to that though? We have seen some examples and I would say some scandals in Southern California, for example, where there have been questions, including the prompting of district attorneys looking into this. Where you have sort of a backroom shell organization - these directorates, people, family, etc. I don't think it is as clean and that is something that I think has caused a lot of concern. It does, rightfully so, raise the issue of, all charters are not necessarily pure and free, so that is something. I think also too, this board has looked at salary, compensation for example of the elected superintendent. That has also been an issue of some criticism. And I'm going to be the first to acknowledge this as well, too, in terms of what are the salaries of executives in, especially some of the larger charter networks.

I think those are issues that could be looked at, that do come up and that you might take a look at as well. There has also been concerns that I have raised in the past about outside employment contracts. If you are working here, then, are you able to run the gig that I had talked about before in terms of where you are suddenly now brokering, you know, writing petitions, doing other charter stuff. So I think there is a bit of a world there that is a bit messy. I have concerns about it. It might be something that you might want to take a look at, because at some point it is going to blow up I think.

**SHAW:** Thank you. Real quickly I know I'm going to be low on time. But I thought about as we have had charter schools kind of getting started, there seems to be that initial growing pain of getting their financing in order. If we could quickly suspend our disbelief? What would be the ideal way of getting their financing in order as a school were to get started? What would be the ideal scenario there? Maybe we could even advocate for it at the state level, because I'm not sure that the current model or the current system is ideal? Maybe I'm wrong.

**ROMERO:** I would jump again to in the weeds over here too, but sort of that bridge funding. I mean, we get the petition approved, but for example, Explore Academy starting now, we will not see a check coming in from the state until maybe next October. In the meantime, there is all this stuff we have had to put up, basically out of pocket, etc.. You have to look for donors, etc., blah, blah, blah. Again too, there is a niche market there too that has jumped in at rather exorbitant interest rates. Almost payday lenders for the charter industry to say we will give you this amount, but you give basically your first born child. But I think if we could figure out the niche funding, I don't think personally, I don't think Sacramento is going to change that quite frankly. There is no reason for them to do it, but you are sort of on your own.

So looking for again to, if there is some way that within a county, maybe to try to find business people, etc., philanthropists. You kind of put together some kind of a fund. I think a fair interest rate that is appropriate, but some of the gouging really hurts people. I saw you thinking about this as well. Did you want to speak up on this?

**MYERS:** No. I haven't really looked into that, but thank you.

**ROMERO:** Okay.

**SOTO:** I did just want to add on that I agree with Senator Romero. When the pandemic first hit, there was a lot of concern that we would see school funding decline. There were in fact deferrals for that first year, which impacted both traditional schools and charter schools. The California School Finance Authority developed a program to kind of provide some funding in the interim at low interest rates to get all schools including charter schools through that period of deferrals with low financing rates. But the counties can do that also. So, you know, there are opportunities for county offices of education and for county boards to provide that kind of financing to public school districts and charter schools. And I think it requires you working with the county treasurer to set those up, so those are other ways that you might be able to do it.

**WILLIAMS:** Terrific.

**HUFF:** Thank you. We shall move on to our final trustee. President, would you please take the mic?

**SPARKS:** I would be happy to. Thank you. Given all that we are learning today, I want to really thank the audience, and the parents and the charter school leaders who have taken the time to come here tonight. You all are really in the front lines of this fight. Listening to all the hurdles that charter schools have to deal with to take that next step and to either be created or be renewed, it takes Herculean efforts. We really appreciate all the work you guys do in that regard.

My first question is to Dr. Izumi. I'm very curious about your results in your newest book about Zoom school. There is some misconceptions. The research that I know about it is that it really hurt K-12 students, particularly the youngest. The younger kids were really hurt and are very far behind. There was also some disparities in terms of socioeconomic status in terms of the lagging being behind relative to higher ed. But you are the real expert, you have the newest research in that regard. What is it that charter schools did and were able to pivot? What were some good models of that and what were some models that we could see for improvement? Hopefully we never have to go there again, but I would like to hear what your findings said.

**IZUMI:** Well, actually, my findings go over several of my books. I actually had done a book on this issue of, for example, blended learning, which is actually part computer assisted learning also with traditional bricks and mortar learning. One of the problems that regular public schools had, and this is before the pandemic, is that their teachers were not trained. I interviewed a teacher who had actually written a book on this blended learning, teaching methodology. She actually taught at Windsor High School in Sonoma County. I asked her, "In your school, what

percentage of the teachers there are able to teach using this computer assisted learning technique or instructional technique? And she said, “We are lucky if we have 5%.”

When you think about that, right, and then you have to go to a situation where a lot of technology you may be having to use through Zoom schools. The teachers actually don't know how to do that. In fact, I had one parent who told me that their 12-year-old, this is at the very start when they were starting to do Zoom classes, went on to a Zoom class early. It was just her and the teacher. The teacher then asked her, oh, I'm so glad that you are on early. Could you tell me how to operate this? If you think about that, right? It is unsurprising that the regular public schools will be ineffective in delivering this education through that type of technology, which they are not used to using.

Secondly, I think that what you mentioned about the charter schools pivoting, I think several of the folks here on our panel have mentioned this, I think Assembly Member Kiley mentioned, about the ability of charter schools to pivot. One of the reasons they were able to pivot quicker is because actually a lot of them were using technology as the basis for their instructional program. If you have, and one of the schools that I profile in my book, “Choosing Diversity,” is a place called Design Tech High School, which is actually based on the Oracle Corporate campus in Redwood City. And they already had a model that used a lot of technology in the delivery of their education services. When the pandemic hit, they were really in a position so that they were able to turn the switch on basically. That ability of a school like that to do that was not just unique to that school. You saw in the research that came out in the months following the start of the pandemic. The University of Washington at Bothell came out with a study that looked at hundreds of school districts versus dozens of different charter school networks to see how did they pivot to this different environment. And it showed that the, unfortunately the regular public schools, were almost wholly ineffective in pivoting; whereas, the charter school networks were much more effective in doing it because a lot of their schools were already using that type of technology to begin with.

**SPARKS:** So I'm hearing innovation, innovation, innovation.

**IZUMI:** That is right. My last question is, I have the opportunity to have dinner with Betsy DeVos the former secretary of education. I was wondering if you were in my shoes, what would be your top three questions or priorities that you would want to discuss with her? Go.

**KILEY:** Wow. Okay. Interesting. I'm looking to potentially be involved at the federal level.

**AUDIENCE:** (Inaudible).

**KILEY:** Thank you. It is a very different sort of educational environment, I guess, then the state level you know. Education really is not a federal issue or at least it shouldn't be. It really shouldn't be that much of a state issue, in my opinion, either. I mean, that is kind of the idea of charters that that is the most local level of control you can have is at the actual level of the school site. Vesting as much discretion there as possible, produces the best outcomes.

I think I'm one of the people who has looked upon the growing role of the Department of Education warily. I think that Secretary DeVos probably was of a similar mind in a lot of the things that she wanted to do. I do think that there are unfortunately some of the threats to good education policy have in fact come from the federal government of late the attorney general of the United States targeting parents, likening them to domestic terrorists. You have had the current administration that is actually deprioritized funding for charter schools.

I guess you asked for three things and I'm giving you kind of a rambling answer. But I would maybe summarize them as number one, limiting the encroachment of the federal government on local discretion. Number two, to the extent that the federal government is involved using its influence to promote charter schools and other elements of school choice. If I had to pick a third, I don't know, I guess I think those two about cover it.

**SPARKS:** Okay. Maybe somebody else has a third? Yes.

**IZUMI:** Let me just say that I actually just a few weeks ago interviewed former Secretary DeVos on a webinar that the Pacific Research Institute sponsored, so I have had an opportunity to talk with her. If I were you, and especially given what the subject of tonight's forum, the federal government under the Biden Administration has implemented some very onerous charter school regulations, so I would ask her about that. I would also ask her about the amount of federal COVID dollars that were supposed to be going to public schools to, a lot of it was supposed to help address the learning loss issue that resulted because of the school closures. Most of that money still hasn't been spent. The money that has been spent for the most part has been spent on status quo programs that have done nothing to improve the learning or kids, and certainly not to bridge any gaps.

Thirdly, I think that given the fact that you have a large amount of COVID dollars from the federal government that have not been spent, you know, why isn't that money being backpacked, for example, onto kids so that they can go to the private tutors or wherever they can get a service that would better meet their needs, especially given the fact that they have lost so much learning during the last two years?

**SPARKS:** Very good. Thank you. Oh, Walter, yes.

**MYERS:** I would say with respect to funding, what I think should never occur is that funding should depend on the local tax base. The problem with funding depending on the local tax base, is because if it depends on a local tax base, then the schools with local tax bases that are higher are going to get more money. The schools with less are going to get less. To me it seems probably county level is probably the best way to allocate the funds. And I would say, that would be across the board; whether it be a charter or a public school, the funding should go with the child. The funding should go with the student, right? So if you have got a charter school, they get their funding. A public school gets the same level of funding. But it should never be a case where your zip code, as we have talked about all night, it should never be the case of your zip code determines the quality of your education.

**ROMERO:** Can I turn in a couple of questions? Thursday, I'm going to be involved with the Manhattan Institute on a round table on looking at religious schools and funding. You are going to be there too? Oh my gosh. Okay. The two of us are going to be there. I'm a Democrat. I am a Democrat who believes in opportunity, scholarships. Dare I even say vouchers as well, too. I believe in what is best for the child, a wide variety overall. But I would be interested in hearing her thoughts, now that she is out of the big bubble in Washington D.C., about means by which there can be, even again, in the private sector, the quote-unquote "opportunity scholarships" to basically identify children in low income, failing schools. And to basically provide these scholarships for them to go into a charter, or religious school or something else. A fascinating program in Denver that I toured some years ago. That is one thing.

Second thing is I would ask her if she would be willing to come out to Orange County and meet with us?

**SPARKS:** Yes, I'm going to ask that question. Thank you.

**HUFF:** Thank you, President Sparks, and thank you panelists for some interesting and thought provoking answers. We are at the time in our program where we are going to take a 15-minute break so you can get your blood circulating again and take care of anything else that needs to circulate. We will be back here and at, let's call it 8:15.

**SPARKS:** Perfect.

**HUFF:** Okay. So folks, if you could hold it down? We need to get started in wrapping up. We are at the point in the program where we will be doing our close and each of the panelists will have 12 minutes just as they had in the beginning to open. We are going to start from my left to right. Since Kevin Kiley is not here, we will start with Ricardo Soto and then move on. We will insert the assembly member when he gets back in here. Start the timer. You got 12 minutes. All right.

**SOTO:** All right. Thank you very much. Again, I just want to thank the County Board of Education for the opportunity to speak tonight. I do want to just begin first, my closing remarks, by highlighting some of the recent polling that I know that Board President Sparks mentioned during the press conference. But CCSA recently conducted a poll of parents in California concerning charter schools and education in California. What we learned, and this has been reinforced by other polls that have been done more recently including by USC, is that California voters have become increasingly skeptical about public education in California and that a majority of parents want major change, more influence and more public school choices for their children. Parents who want major change and made more influence are strong supporters of charter schools.

I know that Board President Sparks said that over 70% of parents support charter schools in California. We consistently see this across the board. What the numbers tell us is that 55% of California voters favor charter schools. That is up 8% from 2020, 70% of parents support charter schools, 59% of parents want major changes in public education; 65% of parents say that they have too little influence over California public schools. And 72% of parents say that they want



more choices, more public school choices. So for all these reasons, the work that you are doing here in Orange County is critical to ensuring that, not only are the demands of parents and the needs for students being met, but also that you are promoting innovation and options for families and students so that they can be successful.

And there is some really important ways, and I will be very brief. In fact, I won't take up my whole 12 minutes. In terms of like the areas, the critical areas where this board can be supporting policies to support charter schools. First, facilities; as was mentioned, facilities remains the major obstacle for charter schools in operating. They, unlike the traditional school system, their facilities have to come out of—any costs associated with their facilities usually comes out of their general fund budget. They don't have a separate facility budget for their funding and they can't go to voters to get additional funding at very low cost for their charter schools. Coming up with solutions, partnering with organizations, maybe even with other public agencies to make facilities available for charter schools is a real critical way that this board can support charter school growth.

I know that Board Member Shaw mentioned city councils. How do you think about working with city councils? That is a really important question. Because unlike school districts which have the authority to waive zoning requirements in order to purchase a property and to build a school, charter schools have to comply with local zoning requirements and they have to comply with the California Building Code. In some cases that can really constrain and limit the options in terms of where they can serve their students. Too often charter schools are targeting communities that are underserved with their public school options. And sadly, these communities also have some challenges from a land use perspective from an environmental perspective, and charter schools are constrained by those. Even though they want to go in and serve these communities that are underserved, they are limited by city councils and by local zoning ordinances. Working with those cities and counties that have these ordinances to provide some preferences for charter school programs would be a real big way of supporting charter schools.

And then finally even funding. If there are ways that you can encourage local school districts to include charter schools in their bond measures. I live in San Diego County. The San Diego Unified School District is a real role model in terms of how to support charter schools. They have another bond on the November ballot. If that bond passes, charter schools will have been guaranteed more than \$1 billion towards their charter school facilities in San Diego. And that is more than the state has ever provided to charter schools, one school district. And that is because there is a partnership between charter schools and the school district in including charter schools in their bond measures. That can be a real important way of encouraging local districts here.

Outside of the facility funding, funding is a big issue for charter schools. State Senator Romero mentioned how they are trying to start their school. And they are essentially trying to borrow to be able to kick off with the initial cost. Thinking of ways, as Board Member Shaw mentioned, about establishing financing locally to support charter schools so that they can open with low amounts of debt and can be guaranteed that they can get started with the right opening is critical; thinking of how you can encourage your state officials to look at state options to also do this. The California School Finance Authority helps, not only traditional school districts, but also charter schools in looking at their financing options and just encouraging local legislators to

think of programs that they can propose in legislation. The CSFA would go a long way to helping charter schools also have the resources, the financial resources that they need to open.

And then lastly, thinking of, not encouraging overreach and onerous oversight of charter schools. From my perspective, the Charter Schools Act is self-executing. It has got everything you need in there in order to ensure that charter schools are proposing sound programs to meet their communities and the children's needs. And the oversight is also in there. There are provisions around what kind of oversight and reports charter schools need to do. And really the requirements of school districts, county boards, in some cases, county offices of education of MOUs and additional language that must be embedded into the charter school to essentially require them to be more compliance oriented than outcomes oriented is a way of undermining the charter school model. Looking at pulling back, if necessary, as a county board or through the county office is another way to foster innovation, flexibility and autonomy so that charter schools can meet their needs.

The work that this board is doing is so important. You can set a model for the rest of the state in terms of what good authorizing looks like, and what good oversight looks like and at the same time encouraging innovation and ensuring that students are receiving high quality programs. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you tonight.

**HUFF:** Thank you, Ricardo. Before Assembly Member Kiley makes his concluding remarks, President Sparks had an important notice.

**SPARKS:** Yes. I just wanted to make a quick comment. We do have an option now. Some people want to give public comment. At the very beginning we made the announcement, but then some people came in late that do want to give public comment. If you do want to give public comment, we will take that at the end of our session tonight. We have a couple cards already. But for anybody else who wants to submit a public comment card, please just bring it up here. We will handle that after the end of our event. Thank you.

**HUFF:** Thank you very much. Next, we will ask Assembly Member Kiley to make his concluding remarks.

**KILEY:** Well thanks so much for the chance to be here. This has been a really fantastic discussion. I have learned a lot as well from the fellow panelists here and the members of the Board. I would just say as a concluding remark, please keep doing what you are doing. Continue to lead by example. As we just heard, you can be a model for the entire state and can work with other county boards of education as well to try to show them what you are doing and how they can step into that role of being an effective authorizer to maximize the potential for chartering and quality education options within their jurisdiction.

I guess maybe a second point is I think that there is this tremendous constituency of charter school parents throughout California that we can do more to do outreach to in order to be a real counterweight to the influence of the interests that lie on the other side of some of these battles. I know that CCSA and other charter school groups have done good work there. How many charters are there in Orange County now? Is it—?

**SPARKS:** Thirty five.

**KILEY:** Thirty five, so you have lots and lots of charter school families just here in this county, which can be an army of spokespeople for the benefits of charter schools and how actually the existence of charter schools is good even for families that don't utilize charter schools. Because this has been shown time and again, when there is some level of choice, it actually lifts all boats. It changes the incentives from the perspective of the district and has a number of salutary effects.

I think that, yeah, that is a second sort of point. That, especially at this time when there is a level of engagement on the part of parents and citizens on issues of education, there is really an opportunity to strengthen that grassroots coalition so that it will be there to grow and to be deployed as necessary in the years ahead. But you know I am pretty excited actually about some of the things that are going on across the state right now. When I see boards like this one stepping up and taking—and I know that you have had to deal with a lot because of the choices that you have made to take a stand, and to do what is right for your community and what is right for kids and what is right for parents. That takes an extraordinary amount of courage. I know that it is not easy, so thank you for what you have done. It is done, and I'm sure that there are countless people in this county who are very appreciative.

**SPARKS:** Thank you.

**HUFF:** Let's give him a round of applause. Thank you, Assembly Member. Senator Romero, your concluding remarks.

**ROMERO:** Thank you so much once again for hosting this forum. Again, too, I really enjoyed and learned from the other panelists. It really is quite distinguished and I look forward to the public comment. I would emphasize, and we talked about charter schools, it really is a movement. You talked about the army. You talked about the anniversary tomorrow. I think for a lot of us, we have seen it. Senator Huff, you and I have seen it in the capitol along with Assembly Member Kiley, the battles that go on under the dome. Here in this very building. You have seen it as board members, as well in terms of trying to stand up for charters.

I have been in front of other authorizing agencies as well, and with other charters, and it is a battle. It is constant. But you know, when you are talking about your kids' education, it is the fight worth fighting for. I think it is important to always think about it as a movement, and we are only 30, so, wow. That is pretty good I think. I'm not going to reiterate some of the points that were emphasized. But I stand by what I have said and what others—but I think a lot of it is fiscal, really holding the accountability. Authorizing the charter, but then holding the charter accountable. It is about student achievement. It is about outcome. It is about ultimately how well does that student fare. I do want to emphasize as well too, to really think about eliminating that administrative bureaucracy that has crept in at all levels of the chartering process. I think this board could really be quite profound in standing up to saying, we are getting rid of all this stuff. Because it does become stuff that you have got to deal with and pay a lot of money for overall.

Then finally, I would just say as well, too, while I'm a strong advocate for charters, it is not the only answer. It is just one in the toolbox. Senator Huff, you recall when we did our—? I think it

was the crowning piece of legislation, the Parent Empowerment Act of 2010. It provided for actually a couple of options. One of them was of course open enrollment overall. We were able to get through, even in a very difficult situation, for low income parents to be able to move out of—we had to identify the lowest performing schools in California. We had 1,000. So to be able to identify these and for parents to be able to opt out to another district, a higher performing district, or to another charter school. And a lot of parents just don't know, they don't know what the laws are. They don't know what is available. I would even submit to you that probably most parents still have no idea what a charter school even is. So there is a lot of education that has to take place and using some of these other tools.

Under the Parent Trigger Act as well, too, it is possible to convert a failing school into a charter, so you don't have to go through the chartering process traditionally. Although we have seen a lot of retaliation and fight back there as well. I'm a strong advocate for homeschooling as well. I'm a strong advocate for looking at religious schools. I believe it is parents' choice: my child, my choice, and what works for me may not work for you. So when I look at public education, one thing that this board can really do is really help, as we say, reimagine public education. To really emphasize that the public dollar, the tax payer dollar, it is public education. That tax payer dollar goes with the kid.

In higher education, we allow Pell Grants, etc., to be used at private universities and nobody has a heart attack over that. Again, looking at this again to how do we enable parents to take those dollars and to go to the school of their choice? I think that is something that is going to be very important. And then ultimately, you stand for office. You have to go through and face at the local level the fight backs for standing up for parents. Senator Huff, myself, Assembly Member Kiley, we could probably show you our battle wounds, right? But it is worth the fight. I just encourage you to keep doing that and to just always remember the why you are in the movement after all, so thank you for inviting me to participate.

**HUFF:** Thank you Senator. Thank you, Senator Romero. Walter Myers, your closing comments.

**MYERS:** Thank you. I would like to take the next few minutes to highlight the current status of K-12 education in California, because I think we should all know what is at stake here. The numbers are sobering and truly indicate there needs to be dramatic change in K-12 education. According to the recent Heritage Foundation Education Freedom report card, California ranks 29th overall among the 50 states in the District of Columbia; 31st in school choice; 36 in regulatory freedom; and 36 in spending. At least California scores high in transparency. It is 14. But while California's Governor Newsom has only bad things to say about Florida, guess who ranks number one? Florida is number one, followed closely by Arizona and Idaho in second and third.

Now, according to EdSource, which is a California organization that provides information, research and analysis to the public with the goal of enhancing learning success according to their website. California does little to ensure that all children can read by third grade. EdSource notes that California fourth graders trail the nation in reading and half of its third graders including two thirds of Black students and 61% of Latino students do not read at grade level. Other states, such as Mississippi, North Carolina, Florida, Connecticut, Colorado, Virginia and New York City

have adopted comprehensive plans to ensure that all students can read by third grade. K-2 is critical to establishing a foundation for later school years. And without critical reading skills, students are at a huge disadvantage when they fall down at those early ages. Regarding public school standardized test scores in California, in 2019 about 51% of the students who took the exam administered to high school juniors and students, and grades 3-8 had mastered the state's reading standards.

In math, about 40% of students who took the exam earned a passing score. What is particularly sobering about the statistic is that Black and Latino students significantly trail White and Asian American students in meeting the states reading and math standards. In 2019, 77% of Asian students, and 65% of White students met state reading standards, while 41% of Latino students and 33% of Black students met state reading standards. In 2019, 70% of Asian students and 55% of White students met state math standards, while only 28% of Latino students and 20% of Black students met state math standards.

Now it is argued that what is driving these disparities in California is poverty as a primary cause, as opposed to racial composition. But this view is challenged when looking at the results of charter schools in New York City. Twenty three of the top 30 schools in New York in 2019 were charter schools. These charter schools are made up of more than 80% Black and Latino students. The Success Academy has 47 schools in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens boroughs of New York City. The Success Academy in Harlem is the highest performing free public charter school network in New York City rated top 1% in both math and English among all schools, not some, all schools in New York, which is an incredible achievement. Children across all demographics, racial and economic including homeless are achieving outstanding results in New York City charter schools. Charter schools demonstrate that disadvantaged economic backgrounds can indeed be overcome even with enrollment dominated by low income minorities, thus closing the Black/White education gap.

So there is much that California can learn in knowing that highly segregated schools are not a recipe for low student achievement. Regardless of the racial makeup of a school or the presence of poverty, academic achievement as noted by the Success Academy itself is more about the environment in which students learn, teachers who are passionate about teaching, a focus on continued teacher improvement, active partnering with parents and innovations and effective classroom management that make all the difference. Thank you for having me today.

**HUFF:** Thank you, Walter. Providing cleanup for the panelists is Lance Izumi. I know you are up to the task.

**IZUMI:** Well I appreciate that, Senator Huff. Again, thank you very much to all the members of the board for inviting all of us here today. Especially, I personally want to thank my good friend, Mari Barke who was the one who extended the invitation to me to participate in tonight's forum. I really appreciate that and I appreciate your friendship, Mari. What I wanted to do and actually, it is almost as if Walter and I thought this through about how to end this event. Walter talked about the improvement or the success of the Success Academy Charter Schools in New York City and how they were serving a very under privileged group of kids, and yet they are able to do so much with them.

Now, I want to emphasize what Success Academy has been able to achieve in New York City is not limited to New York City in terms of charter schools. And this is what I want to make sure that we put in the official record for this forum. That we have been talking a lot tonight about the improvement of student achievement because of charter schools. I think it is important to be able to actually cite actual data that shows that type of improvement, instead of just talking about it anecdotally. If you look for one of the biggest studies that most recently has been done on charter schools versus regular public schools in terms of student achievement, it was done by Harvard University. Harvard came out with a study in 2020 that tracked students from 2005 to 2017, so a dozen years. They compared the performance of charter school students with regular public school students. What they found was that they saw a larger increase in student achievement for students at charter schools than for students at district schools. Well how large an increase? Half a year's improvement for charter school students versus regular public school students. It was even more pronounced in certain demographic groups.

Walter was talking about African Americans and their improvement at Success Academy. For African American eighth grade charter schools, now around the country in this national sample from Harvard, they found that the average math scores improved by an amount which was four times larger than students attending the regular district schools. In reading, the average scores for African American charter eighth graders improved by an amount twice those of students attending the regular district schools. And so given the importance of closing the Black/White test gap, this much steeper upward trend at charter schools, it is particularly meaningful. And it is a phenomenon that occurs across the country. If you look aside from race and if you look at income categories, so low income kids around the country, what you find is that eighth grade charter school students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile made more progress in reading and math from 2005 to 2017 with an equivalent of an additional half year of learning, so those are really important statistics.

Those aren't just tweaks at the margin. When you are learning a half a year's worth of learning, more, simply because you went to a charter school. That makes what we are talking about here tonight so much more important. I think one of the most important findings of this Harvard study was that when they looked at, how do you explain this improvement at the charter schools? Could it be this factor or that factor? When they held constant various factors, what they found was that they improved teaching and learning environments in the charter sector account for most, if not all, of the improvement not explained by background characteristics. So it is what is going on in the charter schools that is making that difference. I think that is one of the important things we have got to take from tonight. That what you are doing here in terms of encouraging good charter schools to be established in Orange County is going to have this type of effect for the students in this county.

I also think, there is one last thing I would like to mention too, though. I work for a think tank, so I like research. I like data, that sort of thing. There is a lot we can prove with that and a lot of arguments that we can use that data to support. But I think it is also important to realize that when it comes to charter schools, the reason why we support charter schools is not only because of statistics like I just quoted, it is also because charter schools give parents the freedom to choose the values which they want their children to be instructed with and to be influenced by. Kevin Kiley earlier today mentioned a charter school called John Adams Academy, which is in

his district. It is a classical education charter school. When I was writing my book, "Choosing Diversity," I happened to run into Kevin near the state capitol. I told him what book I was writing about charter schools. He said, "Well, have you gone to John Adams Academy?" And I said, "Well, no. I haven't even heard of it." He says, "You got to go. Before you finish your book, you have got to go to that school." So I said, "Okay, you are the assemblyman. I'm going to go."

So I went and I couldn't believe it. That school moved me so much. It has good academics, but it moved me in terms of the values I hold dear. Those were the values that were being promoted by this school. If you look at the mission statement of the school, it said that John Adams is about restoring America's heritage by developing servant leaders and defenders of the principle of freedom for which the founders pledge their lives, fortune and sacred honor. This school is located in an area which is supposed to have good public schools, regular public schools. And yet when this school had an initial meeting for parents to inquire about whether they wanted to go to this school or not, the staff, the people who established this school, thought that they might have a couple dozen people show up. It turned out, they had 1,000 people who showed up. In fact, there were so many people who showed up at the founding meeting of this school, that there was a traffic jam that went from the parking lot of that school all the way out to the exit on Interstate 80. The police had to be called in order to clear up this traffic jam. What is going on here?

The reason why those parents lined up like that to get to this school, to hear about this school, is because they were dissatisfied with what was happening in the regular public schools. It may not have been the academics. It may have been a lot of other things that were going on that they were dissatisfied. John Adams Academy gave them a choice of where they wanted to place their kids based upon the values that they and their family hold dear. And I think that we have to look at charter schools in both ways, both in terms of the academics, the student achievement, the improvement in performance, but we also have to look as to what other almost intangible things that they bring to the table as well.

With that, I'm going to thank you again and thank all my fellow panelists here who have done such a great job in making the case for good charter schools in California.

**HUFF:** Thank you, Lance. You did a credit to your panelists by doing an excellent cleanup. Let's give all of our panelists another round of applause. President Sparks, you certainly assembled a good panel tonight with a lot of depth of experience, knowledge and capabilities. And hopefully your board has learned from this and can reach back on some of the things you heard tonight and guide you as you make the policy for Orange County. You're tasked with one of the most important jobs around, the education of our kids, so congratulations. Thanks for letting me be part of it. I'm going to step off the dias while you take public comments. I have done my duty with public comments.

**SPARKS:** Thank you so much, Senator Huff. I just want to give the credit to Trustees Barke and Williams who actually were the ones that did the heavy lifting in putting this panel together. I, of course, was very supportive, but these guys are the ones who really deserve all the credit. Thank you all for your hard work. I'm just blown away with what we have heard tonight. This has been

amazing. Let's go ahead and get to our public comment and then we will wrap up for tonight. So Tim who do we have?

**SHAW:** Thank you. I will call a name and then the person on deck as well. So we will start with Cindy, followed by Madison. We will give them three minutes. Three minutes. Okay.

**CINDY:** Good evening, board trustees and distinguished guests. Thank you for providing this very informative meeting this evening. I felt compelled to speak because I'm passionate about school choice and also love, love, love my charter school, OCCA. They have been a saving grace for me during the pandemic. When the pandemic initially started back in 2020, I have four school-aged kids and it was difficult for me. I'm an essential worker, so I was required to go into the office. My kids transitioned to Zoom. What I saw was happening in public schools was just outrageous. My high school student was being taught things, such as CRT. My junior high school student was early sexual education. He told me when he was coming home from school that he was asked what his pronouns were. Then as far as my elementary school students that were on Zoom at their elementary school, their instruction was reduced from six hours in-classroom instruction to two hours in Zoom.

The rest of the time they were supposed to be independent study. Okay. I can't do this. Expecting a single mom, working full time—I cannot do this. I was looking at different options, and I'm so fortunate that we found Orange County Classical Academy. It has been a blessing. My kids love it. And just to talk about all the misnomers out there to dispel the misnomers, I have heard critics say that the parents are a group of cults. That is not true. Okay. We are very supportive of our school. We appreciate our school. We will do anything to support our kids. And just by way of example, approximately a week ago, when we experienced the heat wave here, our kids in their lunchtime they did not have any coverings at their benches. Parents got together and bought popup tents for all the kids. We came with our popup tents and we raised it up for all the kids so that they could be covered during lunchtime. That is just the community that we have. We love our school. We will do anything for our kids.

The second misnomer that I would like to dispel is that the charter school, the curriculum is subpar to public school. And as we heard from Mr. Myers, I believe, right there, California education is failing. I think we are number 48 right now out of 50. Okay. Our education standards is failing. OCCA, their test scores beat the state test scores last year. Our English and math scores were above state level last year. Anyone that says charter school curriculum is failing, they need to go and do their research and look at the state test scores. More important than the curriculum is that we teach the individual as a whole. We teach the individual about the character and character counts, and we have the seven pillars at OCCA. My kids come home and recite the seven pillars. It is more than just the curriculum. It is about integrity. It is about character counts and it is about the individual as a whole.

**SHAW:** Your time is up.

**CINDY:** Okay. Thank you. Thank you.

**SHAW:** Thank you. All right.



**CINDY:** I can go on and on because I'm so passionate.

**SHAW:** You are on a roll though. You are doing great. We are going to have Madison followed by Windi.

**MADISON:** Cindy stole some of my words. I'm not going to lie. I'm just going to put my phone over there, not that far. My name is Madison. I am a mom of four kids. I have three of them, one of them is at home. She is little. But three of them are at a charter school. I pulled them from typical public school just because I wasn't happy with the things they were getting taught. I felt like it was unnecessary. It was not back to basic learning. They needed to learn how to read. They needed to learn how to do proper math and Common Core Math was not working for our family. My husband is an engineer. He is very smart. He looked at Common Core and said, "My kids aren't doing that."

Anyway, rewind to couple of years ago, I started going to board meetings. As a mom of four kids that is now sending three of the four so far to charter school. My family, my husband and I, we made the decision I'm now running for board. I am running for a school board position. Thank you. And I'm crazy. Mr. Kiley, thank you for your endorsement.

**VALDES:** Which school board?

**MADISON:** Which, I'm sorry? Whoa.

**VALDES:** Which school board?

**MADISON:** Thank you for your endorsement too, Orange Unified School District, just a couple minutes down the road. This thing is wiggly. I'm overwhelmed. I'm excited, but I'm overwhelmed. I'm not a politician. There is nothing political in me except that I'm a mom. I think school choice—I loved what you said. I think school choice goes beyond political affiliations. I think the ability to choose where your kids learn best is important. I think that parents should have that right. I think it is ridiculous that there is so many people that are telling us that our kids can only go to public schools if they want to get funding. I don't understand that.

Back to what Cindy was talking about, I actually have the exact statistic. For English language learners, especially at our school, because my kids go to the same school. Our CAASPP ELA standards were at 33% for special ed., while it was below 15% at the California state level. And then for—which this one blows me away. Our exceeding CAASPP ELA standards for English language learners was 50% at our school and just above 10% in California. When people say that charter schools don't work or that they are below standard, statistics don't lie. And I'm not saying it is the only way. I'm saying let parents choose where they send their kids. If it is private school, great. If it is homeschooling, you are crazy, but great. I tried it, not great at it personally. But good for you if you are. If it is a charter school, wonderful. If it is a typical public school, it is where you want to send your kids. That is all I had to say.

**SHAW:** Thank you, Madison. We are going to hear Windi followed by Michelle.

**MICHELLE:** Did you say me?

**SHAW:** Oh, I had Windi first.

**WINDI:** I have four.

**SHAW:** Oh, I'm sorry. Did I get out of order?

**WINDI:** Okay. Sorry. Let me go to my notes. Okay. Hi, I'm Windi Eklund, homeschool mom and leader in the non-classroom based charter school community. I appreciate this board, and the forum and thank you for hosting. I just wanted to point out how our non-classroom based charter schools play a huge role in helping parents take the education of their children back. They are the last public school option for children who are not fully vaccinated. They are an important charter model and they have been under the most attack by our legislators. Funding to this model was drastically limited during COVID when parents were trying to enroll in this model when schools closed. Legislators also extended the two year moratorium on this model for three more years, no new non-classroom based schools can be authorized in California. We must protect and fight for this model.

Parents have a legal right to opt out of state testing, but laws punish our schools for parents exercising their right. Charter law was developed to test new methods of education and we support those strides. But the measure of success is still tying our children to an antiquated model of assessment. We need to explore and support alternative methods of measuring student success. Thank you again.

**SHAW:** Thank you. Michelle followed by Marissa.

**MICHELLE:** Good evening, Board. Thank you so much and welcome new Trustee Valdes, so nice to meet you. I really appreciate you putting this forum on, but I want to say I think we are preaching to the choir. We all here are here because we believe in charters. We have got an audience we have to reach and that is the folks that have no idea just what having a choice in education can do to accelerate their own children's learning and make it a positive experience. What I would love to suggest to you all is that you do this again maybe twice a year; and then maybe move it to another venue. Maybe a charter school would be happy to host it in one location one year and maybe a different charter school in another part of the county would host it and another piece. Let's do things like market out towards the library. Because parents who care about their kids have their kids—I have seen them in the libraries and a lot of them don't know what charter schools are.

Maybe we really set up a marketing campaign to reach beyond our own choir here and see if we can't get some more folks out. I just love this. I'm thankful that you have recorded this because I'm going to be sending out clips to a lot of people because there is a lot of good information. Grateful to you panelists. You have all done a great job to help enhance what is going on in the charter world, so thank you so much.

**SHAW:** Thank you. And concluding speaker, Marissa.

**MARISSA:** Hi, thank you to the Board. My friend, Mari Barke and then some of my other friends, Lance, Kevin. Charter schools I wish was available when I went through K-12 because the, I guess fifth grade through like my sophomore year, mostly my junior high career was not that great. It is like memories that I don't want to remember, because those were years that the public school, how our teachers were and how the system was, made me want to send myself to a morgue. It was that bad. And mind you, these were schools in my town that had like their cute little blue ribbons, they are distinguished schools. But it is like, when you talk to a student about the insides of it, it is a little different too. It is like, it could look very beautiful on the outside, but you don't know what is really going on.

Like you have the curriculum issues with the woke stuff, CRT, stuff like that. That is one thing. It was very crazy thinking back on it. We should have quality education. We shouldn't have kids wanting to drop out by the time they reach high school. They shouldn't be going to continuation high schools. They shouldn't be doing stuff like that. They shouldn't be suspended early because of grades and like absences in their K-12. It doesn't make any sense why we can't have good education in California and why there is so much prevention for that, and why we rank nearly last on everything in concerns of education.

As a K-12 graduate, survivor more like, I talked to some of the high schoolers who are part of like organizations who like try to advocate for policies to somehow better K-12. But I talk to them and they are like, oh, we partnered with this group for this policy. And you know, I read through it. I'm like, this is going to make your problem much worse. It really will. And so I think one of the concerns you guys should have in the future is that there is a lot of kids who want to get involved in politics. And so they are going to get swept up by interests that are not so great for their own education and the future education for your kids and your future and your grandkids. Just be wary about kids in activism as well. That is why also we need good public education from charters and our regular public schools as well so that they know what to look out for when they get into the adult world.

**SHAW:** Thank you.

**SPARKS:** Thank you.

**SHAW:** And I just wanted to make it clear. Madam President we will have this on our website right away. Everyone should be sharing this and you know this is a great way to—we had so much good information here. I want to encourage everyone to feel free to email, post away and we can spread the good things that we learned here that way.

**SPARKS:** And I will just say as I wrap up and adjourn the meeting, there is so many wonderful ideas that have emerged today. And you know, I heard many of you say, I'm not a politician. None of us are politicians either. We stood up because we saw a need in our community and each of you can do the very same thing. There is so many amazing ideas that came out of here. So I point each of you to be in charge of your own committee for your own ideas and to be community organizers and we will show up. If you organize us and you say, “Hey, let's do this at this library. Let's do this at this high school, let's do this wherever,” and you gather us together, we will be there to back you.

I encourage each of you to realize your convictions and stand up. Just showing up today is the first step, right? Just showing up is the first step as they say. I, again, I really appreciate our speakers. I appreciate you guys as organizers to bring our amazing speakers and my fellow trustees. We have an amazing board. We are here because of you, the parents who voted us in. Thank you so much. Everyone have a great evening and I will adjourn the meeting. All right, we will see you next time.