



April 7, 2026

The Honorable Thomas J. Umberg
California State Senate
1000 E. Santa Ana Blvd, Suite 220B
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Subject: Objection to the Joint Legislative Audit of Orange County Charter Schools

Dear Senator Umberg,

My name is Miles Durfee. For nearly 30 years, I have worked within both the traditional and charter public school systems in Southern California. I have collaborated closely with the Orange County Department of Education and its Board, including Al Mijares, Stefan Bean, David Boyd, Jack Bedell, Linda Lindholm, Becky Gomez, and all of the current board members. Despite diverse political backgrounds, these non-partisan officials consistently prioritize student interests on charter issues over partisan friction. Their track record of approving or denying petitions based on merit, rather than ideology, demonstrates a prevailing commitment to student-centered oversight.

From this perspective, I strongly object to the unnecessary and unneeded Joint Legislative Audit you initiated regarding the charter school approval and oversight processes of the Orange County Board of Education. To be clear, I strongly support accountability. Every school, whether charter or traditional, should demonstrate academic improvement relative to its specific student demographics or face significant consequences, including consolidation and closure. However, every dollar spent on redundant political audits is a dollar diverted from the classrooms and teachers who need our support most. Rather than investing in a process that introduces unnecessary tension into a system demonstrating strong oversight, we should prioritize our limited resources for those who need them most.

The Orange County Board of Education and the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) provide rigorous, professional oversight. Charter petitions undergo detailed reviews of academic programs, financial sustainability, and governance. Beyond ensuring legal compliance, OCDE actively supports continuous improvement through professional development and ongoing monitoring, helping schools strengthen instructional quality over time.

This balanced approach contrasts with practices in some local school districts that

Community Leadership Strategies
Address: 20 S Encino, Laguna Beach, CA 92651
Phone: 858-663-1587
Email: miles@clstrategies360.com



restrict student options by denying facilities access or rejecting valid petitions. OCDE's model reflects a commitment to both accountability and access, ensuring families have meaningful educational choices.

The results are clear. Orange County has 48 charter schools serving students through innovative models, with 30 authorized directly by the Orange County Board of Education. Their success is validated by various markers, including the recognition of Oxford Preparatory Academy, Samueli Academy, El Rancho Charter, and Irvine International Academy as California Distinguished Schools in 2025 and 2026. These accolades indicate a system that consistently delivers high-quality opportunities.

We must maintain perspective regarding the scope of this audit. Charter students represent approximately 6% of the public school population in Orange County, while 94% attend non-charter schools. Since only 48 schools out of hundreds are charters, a targeted audit of this small subset is a distraction. While oversight remains important, our focus should not be on a targeted political distraction, but on improving outcomes for the 100% of students we serve.

Our collective efforts are far more effective when we work to bring people together rather than driving them apart. Our focus should be centered on improving the quality of education for every student in Orange County and advocating for the additional resources necessary to support all our schools and teachers.

Orange County has long benefited from a spirit of collaboration that prioritizes results over rhetoric. I hope any next steps will honor that foundation by choosing unity and constructive support over divisive political maneuvers. Our children's success depends on a system grounded in professionalism, shared purpose, and a clear commitment to every student.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Miles Durfee".

Miles Durfee
Founder

C: Superintendent, Dr. Stefan Bean
Members, Orange County Board of Education

Community Leadership Strategies
Address: 20 S Encino, Laguna Beach, CA 92651
Phone: 858-663-1587
Email: miles@clstrategies360.com