



Northgate Residents Submit Petition for New Community-Based School District

Volunteer Campaign Exceeds Signature Goal

February 22, 2017 Walnut Creek, CA – Today Northgate CAPS, Inc. presented a 6,137-signature petition to the County Superintendent of Schools, requesting the County Committee on School District Organization to approve a ballot proposal to create a new Northgate Unified School District (NUSD) comprising the attendance areas of the five Northgate-area public schools (Northgate High School, Foothill Middle School, and the Bancroft, Valle Verde, and Walnut Acres Elementary schools). The petition campaign began on September 1 and involved over 100 community volunteers walking neighborhoods, staffing signing booths, and following up with interested residents.

With a goal of 4,946 signatures (25% of registered voters in the proposed NUSD territory), the initiative collected a total of 6,742 signatures, which, after intensive vetting against the registered voter rolls, was reduced to the 6,137 screened signatures presented today. The campaign reached its goal within five months, instead of the permitted six months, and even after soliciting ceased, requests to sign continued to come in.

After the County Superintendent of Schools has verified the petition and the signatures are validated by the County Board of Elections, the County Committee on School District Organization will have 60 days to schedule hearings to hear from the consultant hired to review the petition, as well as to hear input from the public. If the Committee votes to approve the petition, it will go before the State Board of Education, whose approval is needed to allow the proposal to come before local voters.

Capping a Two-Year Outreach Effort

The petition campaign culminates a two-year period of outreach to involve all members of the community through public meetings, receptions in organizers' homes, one-on-one meetings, presentations to civic groups and local government authorities, meetings with political organizations, and communication through email lists, phone banks, and social media. "This petition provides another impressive example of the Northgate community's commitment to supporting our local schools and improving learning opportunities for our students and teachers," said Linda Loza, President of Northgate CAPS, the all-volunteer organization that sponsored the campaign. "We owe a great deal of thanks to all of the residents – current and former parents, community leaders, educators, and other concerned citizens – who came together to make this campaign a success."

Although the campaign attracted criticism from a small group of educators in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District (MDUSD), it also attracted volunteer support from current and former employees of the district. “We understood the need to protect the privacy of the MDUSD teachers and administrators who supported us,” said Alisa MacCormac, former president of the Northgate HS Parent Faculty Club and a co-founder and past president of the PEAK Educational Foundation that provides financial support for programs in the Northgate-area schools. “Those current and former educators see the potential in our schools, and they deserve extra appreciation for the risks that they took to support positive changes for our students and teachers.”

Widespread Support

To succeed, the petition organizers had to collect signatures from 25% of registered voters within the proposed NUSD boundaries. “That was a very high bar to clear,” according to Jared Asch, who led the corps of volunteers staffing the petition campaign. “Normally, a ballot initiative requires signatures equal to only 5-8% of the ballots cast in the last gubernatorial election,” he said. “That might be only a few percent of registered voters. With almost 20,000 registered voters in our area, we had to reach deep into the electorate,” he said. “Fortunately, there were such strong feelings around this issue, we were able to get signatures from 31% of registered voters, and pass the goal more easily than we’d anticipated.” Asch also noted that support was widespread. “Most neighborhoods signed up over 40% of registered voters,” he said. “Interestingly, support was strongest among parents of upper-grade students and recent graduates – the people who have had the most years of experience with the district.”

The current campaign represents the third effort by Northgate residents to separate from MDUSD over the past 30 years. The residents behind Northgate CAPS say the district, with over 32,000 students, 3,000 employees, 56 schools and a \$330 million budget, is simply too large to serve all of its constituencies. “MDUSD is too big to function effectively,” says Loza, “and it shows up in underperformance across the board. Our Northgate schools underperform schools serving similar communities across the state, but that’s only one comparison. MDUSD’s students in poverty, English learners, and students with disabilities also perform below County and State averages. We believe this campaign offers a first step in getting MDUSD down to a manageable scale, where it can perform better, for all students. Other communities in the district may wish to decide if they want to take the same step.”

About NorthgateCAPS:

Northgate CAPS, Inc, is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization established by the residents of the Northgate area of Walnut Creek to create a new, community-based public school district for the area. Founded by long-time school volunteers and community activists, the organization brought together residents, current and former parents, civic leaders, and educators from local schools to address long-standing concerns about MDUSD’s management of area schools. To learn more, visit northgatecaps.org on the web, Northgate CAPS on Facebook, or follow @NorthgateCAPS on Twitter.

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