

Dear Willow Creek Community:

First off, welcome to the 2019/2020 school year! We are so excited to have all our new and returning students join our new head of School, Emily Cox, and the entire Willow Creek team on a new educational adventure together.

During the orientation sessions last week, due to the news concerning the California Attorney General's action, many parents asked me to provide more information and background. I am happy to do so. Below find a "cheat sheet" on our student make-up, budget issues, and background on District history.

Willow Creek is the only public school that has made progress in unifying the Marin City Sausalito community in the last 20 years. Evidence of this is found in the social-justice mission of our school leaders, teachers and staff as well as what's written in our charter: a mission to promote and celebrate diversity and inclusion. Most importantly it shows in Willow Creek's 410 public school students:

- Most Marin City and Sausalito students go to school together at Willow Creek:
  - 172 students live in Marin City
  - 167 students live in Sausalito
  - 71 students live in neighboring districts, most of them children of color
- Most low-income students in the District go to Willow Creek:
  - ~165 students (40%) of our students qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch: annual income less than \$27,014 for a family of 3
- Most English Learners in the District go to Willow Creek:
  - ~85 students (20%) students are English Learners. Another 40 (10%) were EL's and are now designated fluent, demonstrating strong work by students and staff
  - Nationalities: ~120 (30%) speak a language other than English at home.
- Students represent the diversity of the Marin City Sausalito community:
  - Willow Creek has no racial majority
- Special Education: ~50 students(12%) receive special education services on our campus.
- Today 80% of all public school students attend Willow Creek.

As you can see, the community integration and desegregation the California Attorney General (AG) has demanded of the District Board has already been achieved at WCA.

Regarding the District's budget, historically the District allocated funding according to need, not on a flat per-student number. Students needing more assistance due to greater challenges are funded at a higher rate on each campus, which we support completely and which is required by the California Department of Education. As a result, in every year of its existence, WCA has received significantly less per-student funding as is allocated to Bayside Martin Luther King, Jr.

Academy, the traditional public school. Through smart spending and a great education team, our students continue to show academic improvement, year after year.

Because our community collects high real estate taxes, the District receives excess funding (Basic Aid) beyond state per student minimums. That funding, which equals millions of dollars (this year will be over \$3 million), is subject to discretionary allocation by the elected District Board in a way that ensures all public school students (traditional or charter) receive full and fair funding.

However, for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 the District Board voted that Willow Creek students be excluded from any share of that \$3 million excess. Their decision created the most inequitable funding gap for Willow Creek students than any prior year. Examples include the following:

- For students who attend WCA the District Board has budgeted the minimum funding only, including those WCA students who live in Marin City, low-income students, and English learners.
- WCA students receive less per student funding than that allocated to the students at Bayside/MLK (WCA \$10,700 per student vs. BS/MLK \$34,000 per student in 2018/19; WCA \$8293 vs. BS/MLK \$45,000 in 2019/2020) and less overall funding from the District (\$3.4M vs. \$5.4M in 2019/2020) even though WCA educates ~410 students and Bayside/MLK educates ~110 students. [Here](#) is a link to charts showing the discrepancies on slide 11.
- The current District budget allocates 100% of that excess funding (~\$3-\$4 million) solely to Bayside/MLK. For example:
  - The District Board voted to not provide any excess funding for Special Education students at Willow Creek - even low-income students.
  - In fact, WCA must reimburse the District, from its minimum funding, for the value of the special education services those students receive from the District.

The 2019/2020 budget the District adopted does not comply with the law. The Charter School Act requires “full and fair” funding for public charter schools, which it defines as funding comparable to what a similar traditional school would receive. In addition, the budget violates the equal protection clause of the California Constitution because public school students whose families choose a charter school are treated as a lower priority than students whose families choose a traditional school by funding our school at the legal minimum and charging at or near the legal maximum while providing 100% of discretionary resources to Bayside/MLK. That is why we have asked the Marin County Superior Court to decide that issue. You can read our petition for writ of mandate [here](#).

For more historical context, I recommend reading the following:

- 1997 LA Times Article:  
<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-05-16-mn-59369-story.html>
- 2007 Grand Jury report about the status of things in 2007 BEFORE the building of MLK (also note the response by Orlando Lobo, then President of WCA):  
<https://www.marincounty.org/depts/gj/reports-and-responses/reports-responses/2006-07/charter-schools>

- 2008 Grand Jury recommendation to increase funding for WCA given its performance and relative lower funding and merge Bayside with MLK given the improvement of performance at Bayside and isolation/poor performance of MLK.  
<https://www.marincounty.org/depts/gj/reports-and-responses/reports-responses/2007-08/sausalitomarin-school-dist>
- 2014 SF Gate Article:  
<https://www.sfgate.com/education/article/Tiny-Marin-County-district-clings-to-struggling-5378122.php>
- [WCA's response to the FCMAT report:](https://www.willowcreekacademy.org/Page/571)  
<https://www.willowcreekacademy.org/Page/571>
- [WCA's presentation on the 5-year Memorandum of Understanding with the District, which expired July 1, 2019:](https://www.willowcreekacademy.org/Page/586) <https://www.willowcreekacademy.org/Page/586>

Regarding the District's Board's plan to implement solutions to the AG's judgement, we are pleased that the new Superintendent of the District, Dr. Itoco Garcia, has agreed to engage WCA participation in the planning of a solution. More information will be forthcoming in the near future about this.

We have our challenges, but these are hurdles which we are confident we will clear. We have received an outpouring of support from the community, are launching a capital campaign and will continue to communicate with you as we move forward. We also feel positive about working with the community and District representatives to solve these issues, while providing each and every child the absolute best education possible!

Please reach out ([board@willowcreekacademy.org](mailto:board@willowcreekacademy.org)) if you have ideas or want to help. In addition, a WCA Board member will conduct a Q&A at the upcoming Parent Council meeting on August 29. Please attend.

Thanks,

Kurt Weinsheimer