

First Draft

Board Testimony: Creative Approach Schools Memorandum of Understanding

My name is Jack Whelan. I was one of the plaintiffs in the suit brought against the district regarding this Creative Approach MOU. I am a supporter of the Creative Approach Schools, and I don't like being so negative about efforts to establish them, but I urge you to vote NO on the amended MOU and instead to rework the framework for Creative Approach Schools carefully, transparently, and thoughtfully in the context of the upcoming CBA negotiations.

Here are the issues that concern me:

First, Destabilization. Are Creative Approach Schools neighborhood schools, or are they options schools? How will Creative Approach Schools impact the new student assignment plan? What if 90% of schools submitted applications? Are you going to accept them all if they meet basic criteria? What if large percentages of the families in the school's neighborhood don't want that program for their kids? Where do they go? Is this something that can be worked out on the fly? Haven't we seen this movie before?

Which brings me to the second concern: the Families. There is not adequate provision for family involvement in the development of the application, especially if they are either going to be forced to make a choice of attending or changing schools if they don't want the Creative Approach program for their children.

I realize the involvement of families is a complex issue with lots of moving parts, which brings me to my third concern: Undue haste. It's clear that this MOU, while well intended, is not near where it needs to be. It's also clear that these schools have a huge potential for unforeseen and unintended consequences. Conservatism and slow movement ought to be the guiding principle, and yet this vote tonight, as the vote earlier this year, despite known problems, is being rushed through again. Why? What's the rush? Why not get this right now instead of later?

And my last concern is that the process has not been transparent and open. My understanding is that this amended MOU if passed tonight will not be voted on by teachers. We were told in January that the MOU could not be amended because it would cause undue delays as it would have to be brought before SEA members for another vote. Which is it? You can't have it both ways and expect to be taken seriously.

I've been reassured that these problems are recognized by a majority on the board, and that they will be remedied later. Excuse my skepticism. There are always good reasons to do the wrong thing. If there are good reasons for not fixing it now, there will surely be good reasons for not fixing it later. The history of this school district is littered with broken promises.

Vote No, and work to develop this new program within an open process in negotiating the next CBA.