Dear Members of the County Board of Education,

I am very passionately in favor of the establishment of Spark Charter School in Sunnyvale. I attended the hearing yesterday but did not speak because the meeting was running long. Below please find the speech that I had prepared, for your consideration.
Thank you,
Lisa Ferino

Hello, thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue. I’m Lisa Ferino, the parent of a kindergarten-aged boy in Sunnyvale. I grew up in Palo Alto in the seventies and attended two radically different elementary schools: a school heavily influenced by William Glasser’s book, “Schools Without Failure,” where circle discussions and independent thinking were emphasized; and then a school that focused on sitting at a desk, discipline, and the “3-Rs.” And both were good public schools; they just worked well for different types of children.

Different educational approaches work well for different kids. But right now in Sunnyvale, there is really only one public school approach, that is supposed to work for all kids: an under-resourced, overly-vague Common Core approach that is somehow supposed to solve the problem of bored children sitting in overcrowded classrooms, with one teacher working almost entirely without help, handling twenty-four to thirty-two very diverse kids. We need a new approach—a program like Spark that seeks to take some of the basics of the Common Core program and really run with them; and we also need parents in the classroom to implement thoroughly and successfully the hands-on, project-oriented learning model, not just once in a while, but every single day. And I can’t emphasize this enough: Sunnyvale schools are overcrowded. That is such a fundamental problem that adding not just one school, but three or four more, to the public school landscape in Sunnyvale, would make sense to me.

I feel strongly that my son, who is somewhat introverted but who loves machines and hands-on projects of all kinds, would flourish at a school like Spark. And he should be accorded the opportunity to do so.
Dear Members of the Board and Staff of Santa Clara County Board of Education,

We are parents of two children going to school in Sunnyvale School District. Our family attended the hearing on Sept 3rd for Spark Charter School. We thank you for giving Spark Charter and supporters a fair hearing last night.

We'd like to add our thoughts in support of Spark Charter.

There are 3 aspects of Spark Charter that are appealing to us (in no specific order)

1. Project based learning
   In pre-school, we noticed that our children were a lot more enthusiastic to learn through activity based learning. For example, they learnt counting and addition while sharing water melon pieces during lunch. We believe hands-on learning is an effective and enjoyable way to develop a deeper understanding of concepts. With Spark Charter, we hope to bring them back to project based learning, every day in the classroom.

2. K-8 program
   Middle school is the toughest of schooling years. Children are going through the emotional and physiological changes. Their curriculum load is increasing. Instead of moving them to a completely new environment called middle school during those transitional years, we would like them to continue to thrive in the familiar environment where they played tag during recess under the watchful eye of teachers who taught them how to read.

   There is no school in Sunnyvale that offers a K-8 program or project based learning.

3. Parent participation in child's education
   Parent participation gives us an opportunity to take an active role in our children's education in/out of classroom. Spark Charter is providing us the flexibility to participate outside of classroom or through other family members. This enables us to continue working while being involved in our child's education.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to convey our thoughts in support of Spark Charter.

Sincerely,
Mayuri and Kiran Vemuri
From: G Mah <grmah2001@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, September 05, 2014 11:51 AM
To: Carmen Aminzadeh
Subject: Fw: Regarding Spark Charter's Appeal

Sent to the board. Grace

Sent from Yahoo Mail on Android

From:"Niti Madan" <nitimadan@gmail.com>
Date:Fri, Sep 5, 2014 at 11:32 AM
Subject:Regarding Spark Charter's Appeal

Dear President Beauchman Board Members, Superintendent Gundry and Staff Members,

I wanted to reach out to you as I couldn't convey everything I wanted to say during the allotted 1 minute during the appeal hearing.

When we found out that our son's learning style is more visual spatial (VSL), we were told that a traditional school environment will be hard on him and he will best thrive in a project-based hands on learning school. These kids learn through pictures and whole context. You can see more about this learning style here: http://visualspatial.org/vsλasl.php

A leading researcher Dr. Silverman's validated research of kids ages 9-13 suggests that approximately 60% of kids have a preference for VSL from a slight preference to a strong preference. Her research also suggests that a higher percentages of VSL learning style preference exists in minority populations such as Hispanic, African American, Native American and Asian.

(http://www.brightkidsworld.com/Visual_Spatial_Learners_by_Lauri_Robins_s/743.htm)
Spark's curriculum is ideal for such learners as it has whole context learning as well as Singapore math which is very visual.

We were really banking on Spark to open this year and him to start Kindergarten there but that didn't happen. For the next 1 year, we are sending him to a private school (Helios) which does authentic hands on learning. In only 2 weeks of school, he has been immersed in birds project. He has learned about different types of bird beaks, nests and built one nest too and went on a field trip already to see birds. The joy for learning is getting fueled each day.

But sending him to this school, requires a great deal of our financial sacrifices. There are very few private schools that implement project-based learning and they all are very expensive. My son's school tuition is $25,000+. I am worried how we can sustain this in the long haul and with 2 kids. I feel even more frustrated that while we can still try this out for a year, there are many socio-economically disadvantaged children in Sunnyvale who would never get a chance to experience this kind of education if Spark doesn't open and who don't thrive in school because of their learning style. I don't want to see these children fall through the cracks and instead get labeled just because they don't fit into the traditional learning environment. I sincerely hope that you support Spark and give Sunnyvale families a choice in their child's education.

My son wanted to speak too and he wanted to tell you that the part he loves the most about his new school is "Imagine Lab" where they build all sorts of cool projects.

It was refreshing to see how fairly board meetings are handled at the county level. I was disheartened to see the one-sidedness in Sunnyvale BOE meetings and always left those meetings with a sense of helplessness. Thank you for listening to our voices without any biases.

Sincerely,
From: G Mah <grmah2001@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 10, 2014 6:59 AM
To: Carmen Aminzadeh; Jon Gundry
Cc: Heritage Garden
Subject: Fw: SPARC Charter and their methodology of intimidation

This was sent to the whole board. Grace

On Tuesday, September 9, 2014 4:38 PM, "donald.pearson@sesd.org" <donald.pearson@sesd.org> wrote:

Dear Board Members,

There was a situation that happened this morning on my campus (Cherry Chase Elementary, Sunnyvale School District) regarding one of the supporters of the Spark Charter. His name is Mr. Brunemeier. When I opened the door Mr. Brunemeier approached me and accused me of false testimony at the Santa Clara County Board meeting. He said I had mislead people by not identifying myself correctly and making false testimony about the Chart. I informed him that this was not the appropriate time or place for this discussion and I had 30 students to teach. Instead of acknowledging my comments, he continued questioning me about what I had said, I informed him that what I spoke was the truth and reiterated that I had students to teach and if he would like to discuss this later we could.

At first I was taken back by his approaching me and did not feel threatened, but as the conversation went on I felt a little more uneasy about the way the conversation was going. I do not feel it is appropriate for Spark supporters to be on campus addressing teachers who spoke against the petition.

Regards,

Donald B. Pearson
Fifth Grade Teacher, Cherry Chase Elementary
http://www.sesd.org/education/staff.php?person=5150

If your plan is for a year, plant rice
If your plan is for a decade, plant trees
If your plan is for a lifetime, educate children
From: G Mah <grmah2001@yahoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 11, 2014 2:55 PM
To: Carmen Aminzadeh
Subject: Fw: spark charter appeal - parent participation info
Attachments: Parent_Participation_Parent_Agreement.pdf

Sent to the board. Grace

From:"Shashi Guruprasad" <shashibg@gmail.com>
Date:Thu, Sep 11, 2014 at 1:37 PM
Subject:spark charter appeal - parent participation info

Dear President Beauchman Board Members, Superintendent Gundry and Staff Members,

My name is Shashi Guruprasad. I'm a Sunnyvale parent who spoke at the public hearing related to spark charter school conducted by the County Board of Education last Wednesday Sept 3rd 2014.

Thank you all for conducting a thoroughly professional and balanced public hearing. I was truly impressed by all the incisive questions that the board asked during the hearing. I truly wish that other boards were as good in doing their research and being fair and balanced towards all parties.

Even though I already made my point during the public comments section regarding parent participation, I did not get a chance to pass on the relevant materials. I have attachments that underlines important lines in both spark charter and Sunnyvale school district (SSD)'s parent participation agreements. You can clearly see that Spark charter says that parent participation is not required, and this will not be used as a criteria for any disciplinary action.

On the other hand, SSD actually says it requires parent participation and there is no mention of what happens if a parent is unable to participate. This is both hypocritical and unfair. Not only that, SSD wrongly used parent participation as one of the main reasons to deny spark charter which is wrong.

When I asked Sarah Tellez, Fairwood Elementary’s principal, she said that parent participation was not required. However, the language in the agreement did not clarify this. At the same time, Fairwood has converted all kindergarten classrooms into parent participation ones. When I mentioned these inconsistencies about parent participation at SSD’s public hearing back in April 2014, the response was that a parent in SSD can be accommodated in any of its other schools if they are unable to participate in Fairwood. And they said the same is not true for spark charter because spark is both a school and a district. I'm unable to see this technicality/distinction. Spark charter is also a public school within SSD. I’m not sure why SSD is not considering this.

Thank you again for your fairness.

Best regards,
Shashi
Spark Charter School Parent Agreement

As the parent(s)/guardian(s) of (Please list all students applying to Spark Charter):

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

I/we desire to have our student(s) enrolled in Spark Charter School ("Spark"). We recognize and agree that parent participation is an integral component of Spark's philosophy, and is essential to the successful functioning of Spark's educational program. In signing this Agreement, we agree to support the Spark Charter School educational philosophy and program in the following ways:

Initials

1. To ensure that the developmentally-based small group learning environment of the Spark Charter School can be effectively implemented, we agree that we will participate in a regularly scheduled shift of two (2) hours per week per child (with a maximum of 6 hours per family). In the event of family needs such as pregnancy, family emergency, or illness, an accommodation may be negotiated with the Executive Director.

2. To ensure that Spark may provide an enriched educational experience to our child and all Spark students, we will serve on one school-wide committee in addition to our regularly scheduled classroom shift.

3. To ensure that Spark may deliver a hands-on learning environment which will include a minimum of five (5) field trips per classroom per year, we will drive or chaperone on at least two (2) field trips per year for each of our enrolled children.

4. To ensure that we will be effective partners as classroom aides and on yard duty, we will attend the social-emotional intelligence training, "Positive Connections," at Spark. This is a one-time only training.

5. To ensure that we will be effective partners in our child's education at Spark, we will attend the classroom volunteer training sessions.

6. To ensure that we will be effective partners in our child's education at Spark, we will participate in all community-wide and classroom parent meetings.

7. To help ensure that our child's school has an environment conducive to learning, we will participate in at least one Campus Work Day per year.

8. To help maintain a safe and healthy school environment, we will submit TB test verification prior to participating on campus.

9. To ensure a safe school environment for the children attending Spark, we agree that prior to participation, each volunteer will submit to be fingerprinted and have a background check made by an agency authorized by the Spark Board. Results of such background checks will, at the discretion of the Executive Director, be a basis for determining the scope and terms of participation.

10. In order to respect the privacy of the students, parents, and staff, we agree to abide by the confidentiality policies of Spark Charter.
Spark Charter School Parent Agreement  
(continued)

The Executive Director of Spark Charter has the responsibility for the administration of this Agreement, including how and when we participate in the classroom or in other forms of participation.

In the event of inappropriate conduct by any of us on campus or during a school-sponsored activity, the Executive Director has discretion to make an alternative plan for any volunteer’s participation.

I/We understand that we may designate any adult to volunteer on behalf of our family, provided they submit to the fingerprinting, background check, and TB test requirements for all on-campus volunteers.

I/We understand that this Agreement applies to all individuals volunteering on behalf of this/these student(s), and I/we will communicate its content and expectations to all such volunteers.

I/We also understand that this Agreement will be renewed annually to encourage family participation and to ensure the safety of Spark's students.

In the event that any of the above expectations creates a hardship on a family, the Spark Board encourages that family to seek assistance from the Executive Director and/or a Spark Board member in finding alternative ways to meaningfully contribute to the Spark community.

Spark Charter does not require parent or family participation, but encourages parental participation. A parent’s and/or family’s inability, unwillingness, and/or failure to volunteer or participate in Spark or its educational program shall not serve as a basis for admission, denial of admission, continued enrollment, or any form of discipline.

I/We, the parent(s)/guardian(s) of

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

understand the Spark Charter School Parent Agreement.

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Parent/Guardian                  Date

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Parent/Guardian                  Date
Dear Parents,

Congratulations, your student has been given placement in the Fairwood Elementary School Explorer Program. To confirm your intent to attend the Fairwood Explorer Program please return the enclosed participation contract within two weeks of this notification. The Fairwood Explorer Program requires two hours of parent (or family volunteer) participation per week, per child. Please return your agreement to Fairwood School or the district office.

Your home school has been changed to Fairwood Explorer. If you do not wish to participate you must contact Linda Moore at the district office to re-register for your home school. You are no longer on their attendance lists and your student will not receive a seat assignment at your home school unless you notify the district office that you do not wish to attend the Fairwood Explorer Program.

Again, congratulations, and my best wishes for your student’s educational success in the Fairwood Explorer Program.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Bruce Selker
Director of Educational Technology and Student Information
Sunnyvale School District (408) 522-8200

Fairwood Contract Enclosed

Board of Education
Sandy Agbayani • Jeffrey Arnett • Anita Herrmann • Reid Myers • Nancy Newkirk
819 West Iowa Avenue, Sunnyvale, CA 94086 (408) 522-8200 www.sesd.org
Fairwood Explorer Participation Preference

I understand that the Explorer Program at Fairwood Elementary School offers project-based, hands-on learning, made possible, in part, by family participation in the classroom and school activities.

As the parent or guardian of a Fairwood Explorer student, my preference for family participation is as follows (select as many as apply):

- [ ] I commit to 2 hours of volunteer time for my child's classroom every week. I understand that any adult may satisfy the family's commitment but that all adult volunteers must attend all volunteer trainings.

- [ ] I commit to attend regular program/classroom meetings.

- [ ] I commit to perform one classroom job or participate on one school-wide committee. Volunteer for one classroom job or school-wide committee.

- [ ] I would like to be contacted to discuss alternative means of participation in the classroom and school activities.

If you agree to these program participation expectations please indicate your acceptance by signing below and return to Fairwood Elementary School within two weeks of notification to confirm your student's placement in the Fairwood Explorer Program. You may also confirm by phone (408) 523-4870 or email sarah.ferizzi@snesd.org.

I accept the opportunity to enroll my child in the Fairwood Explorer Program for the 2014 – 2015 School Year.

______________________________
Parent/Guardian Printed Name

______________________________
Parent/Guardian Signature

RETURN PARENT PARTICIPATION CONTRACT to Fairwood School within 2 weeks of notification

Board of Education
Sandy Aghayani  •  Jeffrey Arnett  •  Anita Herrmann  •  Reed Myers  •  Nancy Newkirk