

May 31, 2020

Dear Live Oak Charter School Board of Directors,

I am applying for one of the open seats on the school board. My family is wrapping up our eighth year at LOCS, with children finishing 4th and 6th grades. Our kids have loved their adventures and education at Live Oak, from the first days of T-K to their most recent experiences with distance learning.

I can make significant contributions to the board of directors in several ways. First, I have a long professional background in the field of education, including a doctoral degree from the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University. Although I am a staunch advocate of public education, when I was working on my degree I became quickly convinced that the traditional model of public schooling in the United States fails most children for a variety of reasons. Sadly, models of holistic education and alternatives like Waldorf and Montessori pedagogies have remained largely the provenance of private schools in the US. I was thrilled when my own family landed in Northern California and discovered that there is a serious movement to marry public schools with holistic education through the opportunity that charter schools provide in California. For the last decade I've been applying both my professional and parental viewpoints to news and developments about the legacy and future of charters in California, and Petaluma specifically.

In addition to having had a deep professional study of the field of education and education research, my personal research specialty is how children learn when they're at home. As part of a curriculum development team for a nationally distributed science curriculum, I designed a series of at-home science activities for children to do with their parents in conjunction with the classroom curriculum. As part of my research on how children learn at home, I designed another series of at-home activities for families to do together and spent years analyzing the ways that parents and children interacted around those activities. Wrapped around all of those studies and research was participation in additional research on issues in child development and how culture and issues of equity affect learning. Now I've added to that list a deeper concern about how trauma impacts learning, and how to address trauma and distressed kids in classrooms. What should "school" look like in the future for a generation of kids who have experienced the trauma of a pandemic? How can a school cope with the variation in trauma that its students have experienced?

Aside from my professional background in education, I've spent the last eight years as a parent watching the fortunes of LOCS wax and wane. As much as I'd like us to be the star of our own show, our school is an actor in a much bigger play. We're reliant on statewide political whims regarding charter schools, our budget is determined at the state and local level, we are chartered by Petaluma City Schools, and we lease our physical facilities from the fairgrounds organization. Thus, in addition to the board of directors having oversight on issues impacting our educational programming, the board also has to contend with the issues and problems arising on all of these

external fronts. Discussions with current LOCS board members have provided me with a front row seat to the complexities of accomplishing our goals as a public educational institution balanced with the impacts from these external forces. Although I have not yet served on the board myself, I'm well versed in many of the areas that will be critical in ensuring that LOCS continues to have a bright future.

Lastly, I offer the years of volunteer service I have provided LOCS as a qualification for joining the board. Through my two kids, I've been able to experience and assist with countless festivals, assemblies, field trips, auction projects, and classroom programs at the school. Each grade level unfolds new adventures and new trials for kids and their families. When we started our journey at LOCS, I applied my professional curiosity towards learning all that I could about what holistic and Waldorf education meant, and have been able to experience and enjoy it firsthand as a parent ever since. It has been a blessing in my life that my schedule has remained flexible enough to allow deep participation in the daily life of the school.

I see the years ahead of us as a time filled with serious challenges for LOCS. Continuing to flourish as a school and as a community will require everyone to lean in and commit to working together. I would like to offer my service to the board, to bring whatever experience and expertise I can to taming the dragons that are confronting us.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jessica Umphress