



## **FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: What Unionization with UTLA Means for Your Alliance School April 30, 2015**

As independent charter schools, Alliance schools are schools of choice for students and families, and for teachers and staff. We intentionally opened as a system of charter schools to be free of the bureaucratic constraints of the traditional district, and, yes, that district's union – UTLA.

The flexibility we are afforded as a charter school – across the network, at the school site and, most especially, in the classroom – is a central part of our success. Our teachers and school leaders are encouraged to identify problems and work together collaboratively to quickly change when something isn't working. This is core to our success in achieving superior academic results for our students.

Given the escalation of UTLA's campaign to organize Alliance teachers into their union, our teachers and counselors are faced with some serious and long-lasting choices – choices that could fundamentally change much of what you have come to appreciate and value in your schools. We want to make sure Alliance staff have a full set of facts to help you make a decision regarding unionization.

### **DUE PROCESS AT ALLIANCE**

Alliance strongly values teacher voice in shaping the direction and the culture of our organization. We place a high priority on supporting our educators, helping them improve in their craft and meet the needs of their students. And we have a robust due process rights for our school staff.

Recently, concerns have been raised that Alliance – on its own accord – removed due process rights from our charter applications, petitions and renewals. That is false. We were required by our authorizer, Los Angeles Unified School District, to remove the language. We have confirmed that recently approved charter petitions for other local charter organizations including Aspire, Green Dot, KIPP, ICEF and PUC also do not include language outlining due process rights in their most recent petitions.

It is important to note that while due process language is no longer included in the referenced petitions, which take effect on July 1, 2015, it is referenced in employee agreements that all certificated employees will sign and is included in the Employee Handbook that all employees will receive once their agreement is finalized in early June. See here for a [memo](#) that explains the due process guarantees residing in the employee handbook, including the exact due process language.

### **UTLA NARRATIVE OF “WHAT IF” VS. “WHAT IS” REAL TODAY**

UTLA has begun a new line of reasoning to push unionization – the “what if”'s of another school and the unknown future. There are two narratives that have emerged:

#### ***Standing in Solidarity***

- **The UTLA Pitch:** “You work with a great principal at a great school, but we've heard that teachers at other Alliance schools have bad experiences. Sign this petition to stand in solidarity with teachers at other Alliance schools.”
- **Consider the FACTS:** First, consider the facts of your own experience because that is what voting for unionization with UTLA will change. Right now, Alliance teachers have flexibility and autonomy to work directly with their principals on issues such as scheduling, collaborative time, and professional development. Under unionization with UTLA, it is highly unlikely that we would be able to continue to

have these direct conversations. Those will all be conducted via a union intermediary – one that has been opposed to charters and the Alliance for years, despite recent attempts to hide that opposition. UTLA has very little understanding of the freedom and flexibility that charters bring to staff, families and students. The union has, in fact, fought hard against this model of autonomous school design. They lobby aggressively for maintaining the traditional model that is rooted in restrictions and bureaucracy.

### ***Hedging Against Uncertainty***

- **The UTLA Pitch:** “What if your principal were to leave, or what if there was another change with home office leadership? Sign this petition to hedge against uncertain leadership in the future.”
- **Consider the FACTS:** Unionization does not guarantee more stability in leadership positions, nor would unionized teachers and counselors have any say over who future leaders would be. Unionization could, in fact, create more instability in leadership positions because of the additional rules and restrictions that are placed on how principals can structure the school day, schedule teacher collaboration and professional development time, and handle staffing issues.

### **UTLA FALSE NARRATIVE OF COERSION**

Perhaps of all the narratives created by UTLA, the accusation that Alliance is “coercive” and teachers should fear “retaliation” is the most unsettling, unfair, and damaging for all of us – teachers and counselors, school leaders and home office employees. It is simply a false narrative that shows a complete lack of respect for the Alliance community and our values.

We have repeatedly stated that teachers have the right to decide for themselves free from coercion - by anyone - if they want or don't want a union. Last week, UTLA held a press conference and circulated another email denouncing Alliance. UTLA released an “internal memo” that they say implicates the Alliance for using coercive tactics. In fact, the said document was a Q&A for Alliance principals who asked for guidance to make sure they handled unionization efforts properly and legally in their schools. Several Alliance teachers who witnessed that press conference have shared their reaction with their colleagues. You can read their opinions [here](#).

Not only was this Q&A document vetted by our legal counsel, but it also accomplishes what we have always said was our goal: to educate school leaders and teachers about the impact of unionization. Just as we respect UTLA's right to state their case, we stand by our right to share our viewpoints. We believe a fair process is one in which all sides are aired and the full implications of unionization are understood, not just the point of the view of UTLA. See one Alliance teacher's response to UTLA accusations [here](#).

### **FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION**

Given the heightened rhetoric and accusations by UTLA, we ask Alliance teachers and counselors to consider a few questions before making a decision on unionization:

- Are you ready to fundamentally change the direct and collaborative relationship with your principal that you now enjoy in favor of a hypothetical “what if”?
- Are you willing to give up your flexibility in the classroom for a more rigid set of controls negotiated by a third party?
- Are you willing to give up the autonomy and independence that your school now experiences to be subject to the rules and constraints of massive, bureaucratic organization that represents more than 31,000 teachers and has a 350+ page union contract?
- Are you willing to give up your power to negotiate and advocate for yourself and turn it over (along with annual membership dues of \$689) to an organization that has openly fought against Alliance schools?

Whether or not you decide to unionize with UTLA is your choice, and your choice alone. We want to make sure that we are all clear that none of us can coerce, intimidate or retaliate against any staff member for his or her position on unionization – in any way. Not only is it illegal, but it is also not the culture of our organization.

Unionization, while designed to potentially protect some, impacts all. Don't sign anything without knowing the facts. Don't sign anything without considering the full impact of eliminating the flexibility and autonomy that have been at the heart of Alliance's identity and essential to our success in improving educational opportunities for the children of Los Angeles. For more information, please see [www.ouralliancecommunity.com](http://www.ouralliancecommunity.com).