

Subject: | Concerns about merger

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From: Michael Beyer, Cara Kranz, and Stacie Chana (sent by Michael Beyer, Cara Kranz, and Stacie Chana <mbsbeyer=cps.edu@mail118.suw111.mcdlv.net>)



Dear Ogden International families,

In our efforts to continue to build a more unified and collective vision for Ogden International, we are providing this letter to acknowledge the valid concerns about the merger with Jenner Academy of the Arts but also to provide parents with the assurance that the merger will create a stronger community and provide excellent education for all students.

Since 2016, there have been nine public meetings which discussed the proposed Ogden International-Jenner consolidation. While it is clear that there are opponents and proponents to the consolidation, the public forums demonstrated that many families are somewhere in the middle, and have continued questions about how the merger will impact their children.

A natural result of impactful change is concern and worry. It is reasonable to have concerns about these changes given that parents seek stability in their children's education. However, as stewards of your children's education, we want to stress that our ultimate goal is to provide both outstanding educational quality while providing equity to all children who will be attending the consolidated school. We expect nothing short of excellence.

We are committed to continuing to listen to all parents. One of the most satisfying results of our public forums is the commitment from parents to actively assist the potential consolidation and more importantly, to ensure the

consolidation will be a success in the years to come. **If you'd like to lead on the creation of a parent group to discuss and plan activities regarding these matters, please contact us.** We intend to have a monthly town hall, starting in March, to discuss any and all concerns; we also recognize that more intimate settings (parent groups) can be useful for developing practical solutions to concerns. In both spaces (town halls and parent groups), we will establish norms and facilitate small groups so everyone, regardless of their opinion, feel safe sharing their concerns, questions and ideas.

We value all of our Ogden International students and families. Ogden International has become the school it is due to a diversity of opinions, values, and cultures; losing families is not what we want. However, if parents leave, we hope they leave because they know it is the best decision for them as a family, but also with a grounded understanding that leaving because of the merger based on rumors, half-truths, and other notions that have been spread over the past two years, is not reflective of the mindset to help our students become global citizens. It is natural to be worried about change, but some rumors are deeply troubling and with good conscience, we cannot let these continue to go unaddressed.

Again, while it is perfectly normal and acceptable to have concerns, the concerns listed below need to be understood so that we develop a common understanding:

Jenner test scores are low, therefore it will impact Ogden International student scores. Test scores are used to demonstrate attainment and growth. Attainment is very closely correlated with socioeconomic status, and is very difficult to change. If your child reads or does math in the 90th percentile in 1st grade, they will likely perform close to that level in 8th grade. Attainment is where you find the achievement gap between black and white students. Attainment is a stubborn metric because it is caused by wealth inequality as much, if not more, than formal education in schools. If it weren't, then the achievement gap would have been closed by now, since our country has been working to close it for over fifty years. When websites rank schools, they tend to use attainment, which begs the question, are these websites reporting on the quality of education, or are they describing income inequality?

Growth, as defined by test scores, is a more accurate measurement of learning in a school, albeit it is only a snapshot in time and can be impacted by many other factors. Ogden International and Jenner serve as good examples. In the 2015-2016 school year Jenner demonstrated higher growth than Ogden

International. In the 2016-2017 school year Ogden International had higher growth than Jenner. This begs the questions, which is the better school? Which are the better teachers? Anyone who is serious about understanding education would agree we can't answer such a question based on one year of growth, or even a couple years of growth. In the 2015-2016 school year Ogden International was adjusting to a new principal, while Jenner had a principal who had been there for two years. In 2016-2017 the tables had turned. Principal Croston at Jenner underwent serious health complications and from the start to the end of the year they had three different principals, along with complications due to lack of consistent leadership: supplies weren't ordered, books never arrived, etc. Schools are organizations, and just like any business that undergoes leadership changes, the bottom line can be drastically affected.

There are many benefits of socioeconomically and academically diverse classrooms. [HERE](#) is just one article on this topic.

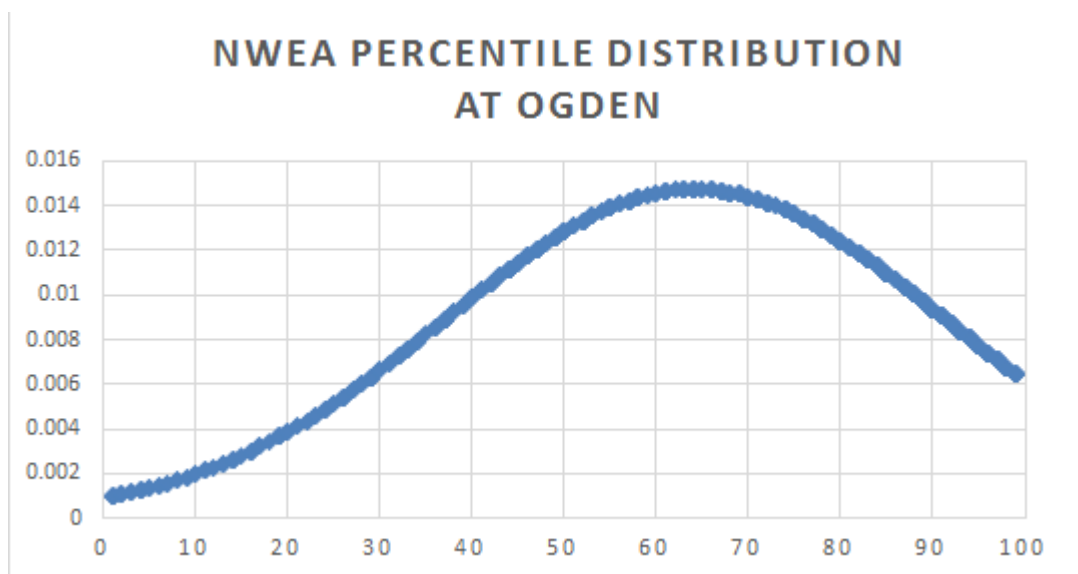
Concern that Jenner teachers may not be as effective. We've heard this concern raised by Ogden International parents. This is a very hurtful comment to the professionals at Jenner. All teachers in CPS have the same requirements placed upon them for certification and employment. Each school in CPS is unique. Yes, at Ogden we have the IB programmes that require additional training, but all new teachers to Ogden go through growing pains. Discounting the teacher's skill based on the school in which they teach is simply offensive. One can also consider the concern related to the test score concern, as described above. Suggesting that test scores are low because the teacher is to blame is not productive. The same Jenner teachers aren't given credit when their growth surpassed Ogden International's, which suggests this fear might be based on bias.

Opponents of the merger have suggested Jenner teachers are more tenured and will bump out our newer teachers; and will therefore be "stuck" with teachers who might be less than qualified, again based on test scores. I've (Dr. Beyer) has spent nine years as an administrator and never have I judged a teacher based on test scores alone. To do so would be malpractice. Would you want your child to be judged solely on one type of test?

Under my leadership, every teacher, regardless of tenure, will be held accountable for upholding high standards of teaching and learning. In my first year as principal at Morrill, 40% of the teachers were replaced, many of them tenured. Hiring and retaining highly effective teachers is the single best strategy

to improve a school. Getting the “right people on the bus” is the single best strategy for any organization -- including schools. **Anything less than excellence will not be tolerated, no matter what school the teacher came from.**

Opponents have suggested that if Jenner students have lower test scores or struggle overall academically it will become more challenging for teachers to differentiate. This suggests a misunderstanding of teaching, and of Ogden International. Ogden International has always been diverse, including academically. Below is a chart demonstrating the distribution of NWEA percentile (attainment) at Ogden International. Although Ogden International’s distribution curve is above average, there are a significant number of students who are ‘below’ average. And this is what makes Ogden International a special school. Children have the opportunity to learn side by side, and this pays dividends as they get older and have to work with people from a wide range of abilities, lifestyles, races, and genders. Most academic researchers suggest tracking students, which segregates based on academic ability, is only beneficial in high school, and can have significant drawbacks in elementary and middle school. If ‘gifted’ students are only exposed to other academically advanced students their entire lives, will they have the social and emotional maturity to work with, even supervise, people of a lower academic ability? Imagine if one day your child is supervised by someone with lower academic abilities, after a lifetime of being told they are superior and deserve special privileges, including a separate class or school?



Currently, Ogden International teachers promote differentiated strategies in every classroom. Parents might not notice all the ways our teachers differentiate, since they do so through content, process, product, affect, and learning environment, based on students' readiness, interest, and learning profile. For many years Ogden International has been well known as a leader in the co-teaching inclusion model for diverse learners. In classrooms with students with IEPs there are typically two teachers and additional classroom assistants. This model will continue after the merger, and will get stronger. Currently there is a group of Ogden teachers who are examining our inclusion strategies to ensure we continue to improve, for the benefit of all students.

Behavior and discipline has been raised as a concern. This largely stems from the stereotype of families living in public housing, and the stories of Cabrini Green from twenty and even thirty years ago. Some have suggested families struggling with poverty don't emphasize or value education as much as middle and upper class families. Yet the majority of Jenner families don't live in the attendance boundary, and choose to travel in some cases an hour and a half in each direction to attend Jenner. They believe Jenner is better than their neighborhood school and have a deep connection with the Cabrini Green "soil". This alone demonstrates a dedication that surpasses some Ogden International families, especially those that do not value regular attendance and whose children come tardy to school regularly, while living within our attendance boundary. Where you live doesn't define a good or committed parent. Invested parents not only support their child getting to school, but care about how they behave at school. This is not a problem simply at Jenner.

Lastly, there has been a concern that Jenner parents harbor anger for Ogden International families. Some Jenner parents and teachers have expressed negative feelings at the community meetings. What Jenner families have expressed isn't anger towards Ogden International specifically, but frustration with the historical and systematic inequality their families have suffered through.

Our city has a long history of segregation. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s our district fought federal efforts to desegregate. Public housing, once created to give affordable homes to people left out of redlined, racialized real estate boundaries, became a failed policy to house and segregate poor black families. For centuries black families in America have tried to be treated as equals and with every turn, our government and our people have denied them the opportunity.

Their anger and frustration is towards the status quo. Their anger and frustration is towards those that support and defend the status quo. The question you have to ask yourself is, will you defend the status quo? Or will you help break it down? Or, will you leave so as not to have to face the change?

We hope you stay. It isn't an easy choice, given the fear mongering and divisive language that has occurred on both sides. We are in this together with you. None of us, the Ogden International or Jenner leadership, can walk away. Our careers are tied to this merger. Many of you have the means to leave if you want to, and some of you will make that choice. We hope that should you decide to leave, you leave with grace and support for those that are staying and invested in the change.

We are sincerely grateful and respect and thank those families who choose to stay and stand to demonstrate that the status quo cannot continue. All children, regardless of race, class, gender, language, or ability, have the right to a robust, engaging, and life-filling education.


Sincerely,
The Ogden International administration



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Dr. Michael Beyer, Principal

Mrs. Cara Kranz, Head of East Campus, grades K-5

Dr. Stacie Chana, Head of West Campus, grades 6-12



An Ogden International School education engages a **K-12 diverse** student body with **inquiry-based** learning experiences fostering **empathy, critical thinking** and **global mindedness** for the world of tomorrow. Ogden International's globally-recognized IB programmes provide **concept-based, academic frameworks**, and **student centered learning by inquiry** grounded in **global context** and **real life situations**.

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