



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Parent-Led Napa Foundation Launches Effort to Save Popular Middle School**  
*Campaign will seek independent charter option to fill gap caused by River closure*

**NAPA, CA - July 30, 2021** - Following a string of controversial and unpopular school closures in the Napa Valley Unified School District (NVUSD), a coalition of parents, educators and concerned citizens is raising their voices and fighting to save a community school. The Napa Foundation for Options in Education (formerly the River School Foundation) is mounting the “Save River, Support Our Charter” campaign to open a new independent charter middle school, managed independently from the NVUSD staff and board of trustees, to preserve educational options in Napa Valley.

Originally conceived and operated as a dependent charter school, River Middle School was authorized by the NVUSD Board of Trustees for over 20 years but operated with some important autonomy that allowed it to offer a middle school program distinct from other NVUSD schools. In 2019, the NVUSD board of trustees threatened to close the school within a matter of weeks if the then-River School Foundation did not relinquish the school’s charter and become a district school. The Foundation acquiesced, but in 2021, NVUSD voted to close the school in its current form permanently following the 2021-22 school year.

“I am terribly disappointed by the decision to close River Middle School”, said Chuck Meibeyer, former NVUSD trustee and Advisor to the Foundation who served on the NVUSD Board when the River School was founded. “This action appears to have been taken abruptly, and without sufficient public input and without consideration for the many Napa Valley families who have made the school so successful and highly regarded that it had annual waiting lists for a number of years.” Meibeyer added, “The River School provided an educational opportunity not otherwise available in the District and the Board’s action in closing a fully-enrolled school without a thoughtful and extensive investigation of possible alternatives to closure is truly short-sighted, particularly when the recent pandemic funding would have permitted more time to discuss a way of retaining such an important program.”

“The Foundation wants to ensure that Napa Valley has the best options in education for our families, including the unique integration of Social-Emotional and Project-based learning that we are hard-wiring into the new charter school model” said Jolene Yee, Co-President of the Foundation. “Our children have benefited greatly from the model used at River School, and while we can’t continue River School in its current form, we’d like to see the model live on and even improve in a new charter school and continue to be offered to all students in Napa Valley in their middle school years,” Yee continued. “We’re very excited to announce that we will be partnering with the New Tech Network, allowing for a K-12 pathway of current New Tech

Network schools that actively utilize project-based learning methodology to Napa families who choose to pursue it,” said Lauren Daley, Co-President of the Foundation. “The New Tech Network Resources, coupled with some outstanding tools we will be using, plus the planned 9am start time, are all things that are highly-suited to middle-school learning and development”, said Daley.

River Middle School is currently the only no-cost, publicly-funded middle school offering a unique combination of SEL and project-based learning delivered with distinctive teaching tools to NVUSD students.

The campaign is focused on providing area families with important information about the success of River school as well as the real consequences to students who need an SEL-based academic approach in order to thrive academically. The Foundation is in the process of creating the charter petition that will be submitted to the NVUSD board for consideration.

“For more than two decades, River Middle School’s status as a dependent charter was a compromise that worked well for everyone: students, families, school staff and the district,” said Daley. “River served as a great example of collaboration leading to success and a unique program not found anywhere else in NVUSD. We would have preferred to continue in this spirit of cooperation as a part of NVUSD but that’s no longer an option. However, we remain hopeful for the future and the benefits a new unique charter middle school can bring to Napa.”

For more information about Save River, Support Our Charter please visit our [Facebook](#) page or our website <https://www.napaoptionsforeducation.org/>.

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#### **About Save River, Support Our Charter**

Save River, Support Our Charter is a collaborative group of parents and concerned citizens who are seeking to keep educational options in Napa by seeking a new charter middle school and by speaking out about accountability in the public school system amongst both administrators and elected Trustees.