

Educators

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Northgate CAPS?

We are a non-profit community group seeking greater local control for our public schools. Our goal is to create a smaller, separate public school district for the Northgate area that is more responsive to the unique needs of our community's students, teachers, and families.

What is the attendance area for the proposed new school district?

The Northgate Unified School District (NUSD) would comprise the current attendance areas for Northgate High School, Foothill Middle School, and the Walnut Acres, Valley Verde, and Bancroft Elementary Schools.

- All NUSD schools would remain free public schools run for the benefit of the neighborhood students who attend them now.
- NUSD would have about 4,600 students, instead of the more than 31,000 students now in MDUSD. (98% of all school districts in CA are smaller than MDUSD.)
- Our goal is for all teachers, staff, and administrators currently in Northgate schools to be able to retain their positions in Northgate.
- NUSD would manage approximately 425 people district-wide, instead of the approximately 3,500 employees currently managed by MDUSD.

What does NUSD Change?

Teachers and site administrators would no longer have to go through the Dent Center to get approvals for the instruction and policies that they feel are best for their schools. Teachers and staff would choose their union representation and negotiate contracts directly with the new local, and smaller, school district administration.

What would stay the same?

Northgate teachers could choose to remain at their current school in the new district, or stay with Mt. Diablo School District and teach at another MDUSD school. Any families living within the attendance boundaries of one or more of the five current Northgate schools would be able to send their children to NUSD for all K-12 grades.

How will NUSD be governed?

NUSD would be governed by an elected School Board, following the same laws governing all other public school districts in California. That school board would be chosen by NUSD voters among candidates who would stand for election on the same ballot that would approve the establishment of the new district.

When could this happen?

The process is subject to approvals by the County and the State, with time for due diligence at each approval level, but the earliest that NUSD could be operational would be for the 2018-19 school year.

What are the benefits of a smaller district?

Administrators at smaller districts can focus on fewer school sites, allowing for more trust and faster decision-making. For example, at the high school and middle school levels, where students spend over half of their school-age years, NUSD would have only one site each, enabling educators at Northgate and Foothill to essentially provide *all* of the educator input for policies affecting those years. There would be no other sites promoting other policies specific to middle and high school instruction in the district. Educators at the elementary schools could cross-collaborate more easily to promote actions that would be best for the students in their three schools.

What have been the disadvantages of a large district?

We believe that the teachers and administrators at each school are most qualified to meet the needs of students at their site, but a large bureaucracy makes it even more difficult for educators at a site to make their needs known. Too often, one-size-fits-all district policies and risk-averse central administrators have interfered with a school's educational mission, with decisions that are not in the best interests of the site. This problem could grow worse, with the addition of thousands of new students when the former Concord Naval Weapons facility is re-developed with large residential neighborhoods. MDUSD needs to focus on the students it is most prepared to help.

How does this proposed reorganization benefit the rest of MDUSD?

As one of the largest districts in CA, MDUSD has been challenged to serve the very wide range of the learners' needs in the district. We believe a smaller, more focused district will allow MDUSD to better serve the students who most need help. In addition, new local funding formulas in CA will improve support for targeted student populations, which will improve per-student funding for MDUSD.

Won't NUSD draw money away from MDUSD?

Every school district in California is funded primarily with state money on a dollars-per-student basis, according to formulas developed in Sacramento. The new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) specifically targets funding to schools and districts with higher proportions of students with greater needs (primarily English language learners and students from less-advantaged economic circumstances). MDUSD already has significant populations of students with greater needs, and those proportions will increase slightly without the inclusion of NUSD students. Those higher proportions should actually *increase* MDUSD per-student funding above what it would be for those students if Northgate remained within MDUSD.

Is this being done to increase property values in NUSD areas?

No. In fact, the California Department of Education guidelines on district reorganizations or boundary changes *specifically prohibit* consideration of impacts on property values in considering creation of a new district. The Northgate area already has some of the highest property values in Walnut Creek, so there is no reason to think that NUSD would increase or diminish property values. The new district is being proposed so that the Northgate neighborhoods will have schools that are locally run and responsive to the specific needs of our community.

Can NUSD operate efficiently with only 4,600 students?

Orinda, Lafayette, Moraga, and Walnut Creek Elementary districts are much smaller – with only 1,800-3,500 students each – yet they are all well-regarded districts, with high rates of satisfaction among the educators who work in them.

Will NUSD need a parcel tax?

The extra resources and improved teacher compensation that we see in the districts around MDUSD have been possible, in part, through parcel tax revenue. Yet MDUSD has not succeeded in creating a parcel tax, in some cases because the district administration, for its own reasons, has not supported such a tax. The Northgate community will have a choice in whether they pursue a parcel tax.

Will NUSD bring about curriculum changes?

Curriculum must still conform to California's Common Core State Standards for K12 students and prepare students for state achievement tests. But it is possible, perhaps likely in some cases, that NUSD will, over time, make different curriculum choices within that framework that are more appropriate for Northgate students. Final curriculum decisions will rest with the governing school board, as in every other district. But in a smaller district, individual educators can, and should, have more input into the curriculum decisions that will impact their own instruction. In NUSD, we expect

that educators at the three elementary school sites will have significant influence on the choice and direction of curriculum. In the upper grades, most of the district's expertise for curriculum decisions in Grades 6-12 will likely be found within the Foothill and Northgate schools.

What policy changes are likely?

Many school district policies are governed by California's Education Code and union agreements, and those cannot be changed at the discretion of an individual district. Policies that are subject to district discretion will be decided by the future elected school board.

How is the Eagle Peak charter school impacted?

Public school property in California, including the Eagle Peak campus, is owned by the State. California law requires that each public school district administer all of the public school property within its attendance boundaries. Eagle Peak lies within the proposed boundaries of NUSD, and therefore, that property would have to be administered by the new district. Eagle Peak is currently an MDUSD-supervised charter school, and MDUSD is not permitted to supervise schools outside its district. So Eagle Peak could choose to keep its charter with MDUSD and move to a facility within the boundaries of MDUSD, or assign its charter to NUSD and remain at its current campus. In either case, there would not have to be any changes in the makeup of the school's student body. Any student resident in the State of California would still be eligible to attend that charter school.

What happens to the MDEA teacher's union members and non-certificated union members in NUSD?

Teachers and staff in NUSD would have the right to choose their union representation or form another union organization to represent their interests. The same would apply for the non-certificated union members in NUSD.

What happens to the seniority of MDEA members and other union members in NUSD?

Seniority of all union members would be negotiated with the newly elected NUSD Board. However, since NUSD likely will want to retain the existing teachers and staff in the five Northgate schools as much as possible, we do not believe the seniority process will change significantly in NUSD.

What happens to salaries and benefits?

We are acutely aware of the importance of recruiting and retaining the best teachers and staff for our schools, and we understand the key role that compensation and benefits play in that effort. We expect that the new NUSD administration would continue the basic policies used by most successful

California districts, with the objective of improving the overall competitiveness of the compensation and benefits.

Given the low funding basis in California, the best ways to improve compensation and benefits are: 1) to minimize administrative overhead that does not directly benefit classroom instruction, so that more funds are available for student-facing personnel; and 2) to pass a parcel tax, which generates funds that can be used entirely within the district. Historically, the MDUSD administration has not been a strong advocate of a parcel tax. In the adjacent San Ramon Valley Unified School District, a \$144 parcel tax generates almost \$210 in per-student funding. In the Acalanes Union High School District, a \$112 parcel tax generates almost \$700 in per-student funding annually.

How will pensions and pension vesting be handled?

The funding of pensions and the pension process is managed by the State. As a result, pensions will be handled the same way for MDUSD and NUSD. It is important to note that the State is addressing the under-funding of pensions for all State employees. This will increase costs for all school districts in the future.