



## WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING MSAT PARENT TESTIMONIALS

“When I walked into the library at MSAT last night, I still had hope that something could be worked out to save our school family. Soon after the meeting began, I realized in my heart what my head had figured out some time ago: no matter what NUSD says, it will not act on its promises. There are no solutions that will let us stay in Novato for 2007-08. This year has been like living in the "Peanuts" comic strip: the NUSD is Lucy, perennially holding up that football for Charley Brown, then yanking it away at the last moment. That realization brought me quickly to despair.

It got worse. I watched and listened as our leaders, both staff and parents, talked about the death of their vision, our vision, and I began to cry. Then they began to cry. I have never seen so many grown men weep in public before. And that was even before the students rose to speak about how MSAT was life-changing for them.

In over 30 years of going to school meetings, this was the most emotional time I had ever spent. My eyes fill up as I sit here at my computer the next day. MSAT is so much more than a job to our staff, so much more than a school to our kids.

I try to focus on our symbol, the phoenix. The mythical phoenix, when wounded by a foe, dies and rises from the ashes, becoming immortal and invincible. And it only has to do it once every 500 years! So we've had our blow, and it is time to move on. I am made hopeful by the graciousness of Envision Schools in welcoming us to Metro. My husband has already written "MSAT in Exile" on our cars. We will never again have the experience of starting a high school on the beautiful IVC campus, but we do have an opportunity to begin a new chapter of MSAT's book, using what we have learned. May it be 500 years before we have to write "The End.”

- *Christine C. Sleight, Ph.D., CCC-SLP*  
*Speech Language Pathologist*

“Those of you who worked so long and so hard to bring the MSAT dream to fruition should be proud of yourselves, esp. the way you acted this past year. At all times you conducted yourselves with integrity. You always took the high road, never allowing yourselves to sink to the level of our adversary. While the tangible result may not be what you wanted, the intangible results will show up in years to come, as MSAT students think about how you behaved, and conduct themselves with the same integrity. I hope it is also comforting to be able to sleep at night, and to look at yourselves in the mirror, and know you did the right thing. Thank you for representing me with integrity. I wouldn't have it any other way.”

- *Christine C. Sleight, Ph.D., CCC-SLP*  
*Speech Language Pathologist*

“We wanted to thank the leadership team and Envision for the Monday night meeting. Although we assembled for an unhappy reason, the manner in which you organized the meeting allowed us as parents and students to begin to process what still seems to be incomprehensible. As we walked into the group, it was as if we were at a funeral - in a way we were. We were feeling a tremendous sense of loss, mixed in with anger, disbelief and profound sadness.

It was touching to see everyone who led the meeting equally deeply affected by this experience. It was particularly moving to hear Bob Lenz talk about what MSAT meant to him and how it evolved into this incredible school in four short years, in spite of the hostile environment perpetuated by NUSD. Hearing both the parents and students talk was also deeply healing. Many good ideas were brought forth by those who spoke. At times we cried and other times we laughed. But through it all, a small flame of hope and optimism slowly kindled inside us. In spite of what we felt when we arrived, and the emotions that flowed through us during the meeting, we left in a very different state of mind.

We walked out feeling much more hopeful that the spirit of the school will live on, but just in another incarnation - METRO. We felt a great deal of relief that many of our questions were answered. But more importantly we felt a kinship to the community and had the faith that it will continue to be a source of support and inspiration as we move into this new phase. The meeting was transformative. Contrary to what we expected, we all went to sleep that night beginning to feel a sense of completion and hope for the future. Thank you leadership team and Envision for putting together an excellent meeting - in the MSAT way!”

- Daniel J. Sonkin, Ph.D.  
Mindy S. Rosenberg, Ph.D.

“As I shared at the meeting Monday night, I'm a Marriage and Family Therapist intern, working at a local agency and a local private school. MSAT has been an excellent referral for my families with middle-school children. Many of my families have children who could benefit from an alternative learning environment, due to different styles of learning, or a desire to be challenged in a fresh way. I am not only deeply moved with emotion because my own son is affected, but grieving the loss to many families in Marin county that can no longer benefit from this wonderful opportunity. I believe NUSD is making a grave mistake in losing this expression of education in our community.

I am also filled with much gratitude to Bob Lenz for his vision and hard work, Stewart for taking the vision and running with it, all the MSAT staff for caring, you Ruth for committing your life to this purpose, and all the parents who have worked so hard. I do not see this as a failure, but a great success, because we have a graduating class, and most fall 2007 seniors, many juniors and sophomores, and possibly freshman, will continue at Envision schools. The character that has been encouraged and promoted in these children will have eternal value, as children continue their education in college, enter the work force and influence their own children. We are sure to have teachers birthed in this school, who in turn will influence the education system, and future generations.”

- Lori Conroy

“Although I consider myself to be one of the "fortunate" parents because my son, Sean, has had the honor of finishing 4 full years at MSAT, will be graduating next week and has been accepted into the

college of his choice, I felt absolutely compelled to attend last night's meeting. My son and I have participated in the ongoing struggle with NUSD for the last several years and I wanted to attend last night's meeting because I was hoping that I could help figure out the next plan of action to keep MSAT alive. I was ready to continue the fight. However, once Stewart began to speak I realized that there was no more fight, no more struggle. My heart became heavy and tears began to flow. All I could think about for a few minutes was the fact that my son was not at my side hearing the news, the emotions, or his fellow community express their fears, concerns, anger, and sadness. I wanted him next to me so badly.

As the evening went on I felt everything... heart break, anger, grateful... and particularly so bad for the people I know who have put in SO much hard work to make MSAT happen. It was truly heart breaking to hear many of them speak last night. To see tears in Bob's eyes, Justin holding back his speech to get his composure, and the sadness, frustration, and anger from others was overwhelming. To listen to students speak from their heart about how much their school means to them was inspiring but reinforced my disappointment and sadness. Especially listening to students who felt scared and abandoned.

I went home last night to break the news to my son and my daughter.... after the silence, after the expression of anger, we were all what I called "MSAD".

Today, the day after, I feel sad and mostly angry at NUSD (which is not a new emotion for me at all). I have been holding my tongue for years and hope that now I will have the opportunity to tell them all how I really feel. I haven't been able to work much today. I would like to find a way to get the word out to the community in which I live that paints a true picture of what has happened.”

*-Pam Manning*

### **Charter School in Novato California Shut Down by School District**

“Marin School of Arts and Technology is a charter high school in the Novato School District in Northern California. My wife and I had examined this school as a possibility for my daughter in her Freshmen year. This was last year at this time. However, the rhetoric around the parents and with kids in Terra Linda High school district, which is where most kids in our area would be going, was that the kids that went to MSAT were losers or druggies. This along with the fact that many of my daughters friends had planned to go to Terra Linda high, convinced my wife and my daughter that she should go to Terra Linda.

So she did. This year has been a very disappointing one for us as parents and for my daughter. Her math teacher was fired half way through the year. My daughter claims it was for sexual harassment of one of the students. But the administration insists it was for ineffectiveness. The replacement has not been much better. She ends up watching movies in class most of the time learning very little. Her English teacher, who was very good, quit for personal reasons (having nothing to do with the school). The 1st replacement quit because she did not feel safe (student harassment). The 2nd replacement has resorted to showing movies as well. In summary, teaching has been ineffective due to lack of concern for the students welfare and students themselves who are dispassionate about learning, and care little for each other.

My daughter and a small group of her close friends had all planned on switching to MSAT for their sophomore year. We had signed her up and were making all the necessary arrangements for transferring her to MSAT. Last week we learned that after losing their lease on facilities on the

campus of the Collage of Marin, and through relentless efforts of the Novato school district to revoke the charter status of MSAT, that they will be closing after the end of this school year.

I, along with my wife, my daughter and 2 of her friends attended a meeting last night where we heard the whole story of how the Novato school board, through shameful, misleading and underhanded actions led to the demise of this wonderful charter school. What struck us all was the passion that the Administration, the Teachers, the Parents and especially the students had for learning, and for the school. Also, the respect and admiration they expressed for each other.

The kids, although typical teenagers, all showed kindness and support for one another, in spite of the fact that some were very emotional and at times awkward in expressing themselves over the fact that their school was closing. This is not typical of what we have seen at Terra Linda High.

I urge any of you who read this post to visit the Envision Schools web site and take a look at what they are doing. An emphasis on small school size, genuine care for the welfare of the students, project based learning and dedicated administration and teachers, has produced some of the most respectful, tolerant, bright and articulate kids I have seen in a long time. Kids who would be shunned or outcast in other schools have found a haven in which they can thrive at this school. Where success has eluded them in other types of schools they reach unprecedented levels of achievement in tests and grades.

The school itself had had it's charter renewed based on the achievements of it's students and quality of education for another 6 years. In the end, it was competition for students and funding and perhaps jealousy of their success, that led the Novato school board to do what they did. Of all places in the United States, Marin County should be capable of sustaining a charter school like MSAT. It is shameful that this goal could not be attained.

We plan to send our daughter to a sister school of MSAT called Metro in San Francisco. It will be difficult for us to arrange transportation, but we will make it work. Now it is about the principal of having this kind of education available to students who will benefit from it, and in the best interest of our child. We feel we must pursue this. This is another example of tributary currents that need to be sustained, in spite of mainstream efforts to pull us back into the mediocrity of what constitutes normalcy these days.

By the way, this story has received all too little press. Even local papers have shown a bias and shunned the truth of how MSAT has changed the lives of parents and students in the district, and how it eventually met it's demise. It deserves national exposure. This is part and parcel of what is wrong with our education system (and the media) today.”

*-Blog by Charles Bergeman  
<http://philosophmoric.blogspot.com/2007/06/charter-school-in-novatocalifornia.html>*