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## RESPONSES TO SDUSD INQUIRY FINDINGS:

August 28, 2017

Maya Srikrishnan  
Voice of San Diego

Dear Ms. Srikrishnan:

Thank you for your inquiry. As context for the responses to your questions, it is important to provide some information as to Iftin Charter School's (ICS) history. ICS was founded in 2006 as a K-8 program to serve some of San Diego's most vulnerable citizens. A concerned group of parents, mostly refugees from a war-torn Somalia, met to create ICS. They chose the word "iftin", which means enlightenment in Somali, to call attention to a new beginning of hope and support for their children. Iftin expresses its core values by teaching its students the IFTIN Way: Integrity, Focus, Tolerance, Independent and Nurturing.

There is an ongoing influx of refugees coming into City Heights every year from refugee camps in Africa, Asia and East Europe with no prior formal education. ICS takes pride in welcoming and meeting the educational needs of these students as well as students from all of San Diego County. Over 95% of ICS's student population qualifies for free/reduced price meal and 83% are EL students from the City Heights area in San Diego.

One of the reasons charter schools were created was to allow more flexibility and to provide an alternative to district schools. The Charter Schools Act expressly states that one of the reasons for charter schools is to create new professional opportunities for teachers. One way in which charter schools accomplish these two objectives is through the makeup of their boards of directors. It is not unusual for a school employee also to be a member of the board of directors. Many schools, such as ICS, permit it while others actually require that there be a certain number of employees on their boards. Further, decisions by the Board are made by the Board as a whole. The employee board member's vote on the evaluation of the Executive Director is only one vote among the group. All of the members of ICS' Board of Directors, who are volunteers, continue to work tirelessly along with ICS' employees to carry out the school's mission and to comply with their fiduciary duties to the school.

### 1. Employee Complaints

ICS adamantly denies that it acted improperly in terminating any employee and further denies any of the individuals' allegations of wrongdoing. Although ICS' cannot discuss the facts behind personnel decisions out of respect for its employees' privacy and because there is pending legal action, it can say that it makes all decisions for the best interests of ICS and its students.



ICS looks forward to the opportunity to respond factually to the complaints as a part of the EEOC's administrative process and is confident of prevailing.

Finally, ICS notes that one of other the EEOC complaints was not filed by an employee but rather was filed by a consultant to ICS who voluntarily terminated her contract with ICS.

## 2. Alleged Failure to Enroll

ICS is committed to a program that is free of discrimination of any kind. As a public charter school, ICS is committed to prompt enrollment of all students. Of the three cases cited as evidence of discrimination by SDUSD (special education, foster student, homeless student), ICS administration denies that any such incidents occurred. ICS acknowledges that there may have been misunderstandings that might have contributed to concerns. For example, in the case of the disabled student referred to by San Diego Unified School District ("District"), ICS was willing to enroll the student. It advised the parent that while it currently did not have the necessary staff to meet the student's needs, it would hire the necessary employees. The parent responded by informing ICS administration that he would see if there were other schools that offered a specific program since ICS did not yet have such a program in place. ICS believed that the parent was making a voluntary choice to select another school. The parent in question was a personal friend of a member of ICS' Administration, and at no time registered any objection to the enrollment process as presented. ICS was subsequently surprised to learn that the District identified this incident as an alleged refusal to enroll.

ICS denies that any students who identified as Homeless or Foster youth (children and youth in transition) were denied enrollment. However, to address any concerns, ICS is in the process of adopting separate policies addressing each type of students which commit to the speedy enrollment of these students in compliance with state and federal mandates. Pursuant to these policies, ICS will appoint a liaison to ensure a smooth and easy enrollment process.

## 3. Special Education Services

In the 2016-2017 school year, ICS hired an Instructional Leader experienced in oversight of Special Education (SPED) services. The Instructional Leader immediately began to conduct an internal review of student files and identified areas of concern that had developed under the leadership of former Principal Amal Hersi. The Instructional Leader immediately began to remedy these issues. Due to the proactive approach of ICS, all student Individual Educational Plans were brought into compliance by May 24, 2017.

To ensure this issue does not recur, ICS Administration has arranged to have two external audits conducted each year to ensure that all special education services are being properly provided and the program is operating in full compliance. An initial audit has already been conducted in preparation for the upcoming school year. Additional audits are scheduled for the middle and end of the school year. Additionally the ICS board completed the first reading of an ICS special



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education policy and set of procedures at its August 25, 2017 board meeting. The goal is for the ICS board to adopt this policy to further strengthen the school's special education programs.

#### 4. Nepotism Concerns

ICS has employed individuals who are related by blood or marriage. While that is not illegal or uncommon, ICS understands that it may, at times, create concerns over perception. For example, former Principal Amal Hersi was related to several ICS employees whom she supervised. While ICS continues to employ three staff members who are related by blood or marriage, subsequent to Ms. Hersi's departure, no ICS employee directly supervises a family member. Further, the ICS Board has adopted an anti-nepotism policy to prevent future concerns.

#### 5. Irregular Hiring Practices

ICS denies that it has engaged in any irregular hiring practices. Of the more than fourteen employees hired since March, 2017, all of the positions were advertised online with EdJoin and all of these applicants went through an objective interview process. Two of the positions were filled by the ICS Acting Principal shortly after he took over. At that time, due to the transition and time constraints, the Acting Principal hired the two employees without an interview committee. Subsequently, ICS' operations manager was hired using the support of outside consultants as well as an interview committee made up of these consultants and representatives of classified and certificated staff. The remaining employees were hired after interviews by panels of ICS' staff.

Although ICS denies any irregularity, to assuage any concerns over the perception of such practices, ICS is in the process of capturing its hiring processes in a written policy to be utilized for all future hiring. ICS anticipates this policy will require, at a minimum, posting open applications on EdJoin, a similar forum and/or through a recruiter, a process for reviewing applications and resumes, and a procedure for selecting members of the interviewing panel, which will consist of at least two individuals. ICS believes this will address any misperceptions regarding its hiring practices.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your questions.

Jama A Yacub  
Interim Principal  
Iftin Charter School