



June 3, 2019

North Carolina State Board of Education
Eric Davis, Chairman
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601

Dear Chairman Davis,

The Wake County Public School System would like to support and highlight recent comments from parents in our district requesting that five additional charter schools in Wake County not be approved at the State Board of Education meeting June 5, 2019.

While specific objections are listed below, the thrust of the parents' comments are accurate. Charter schools are having a destabilizing effect on traditional schools and school communities in Wake County where parents and PTAs are actively working to help all students.

At the May meeting of the State Board of Education, Board Member Jill Camnitz questioned whether charter approvals had reached a saturation point in Wake County, especially in northeastern Wake.

Her assessment is quite accurate.

Based on the supplementary materials from the Office of Charter Schools dated May 15, 2019, there are 10 schools within five miles of the proposed location for Wake Preparatory Academy in northeastern Wake County.

Five of the 10 schools are charter schools enrolling more than 4,000 students. The five traditional public schools within five miles of the proposed location for Wake Preparatory Academy enroll about 5,200 students. Four of the traditional schools are not operating at full capacity.

The saturation of charters is also contributing to de facto segregation in northeastern Wake County. White and Asian enrollment exceeds 80 percent in the five charter schools. In comparison, White and Asian students make up 50 percent of the students in the five traditional schools.

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Given the statistical overlap between race and income, similar breakdowns would be predicted if complete economic data were available for charters. Additional charter approvals in this area will magnify the divide.

The proposed location for North Raleigh Charter Academy would be just a short distance from the proposed location for Wake Preparatory Academy. It is so close that the supplementary materials provided to the State Board of Education list several of the same schools within the five-mile radius for both proposed charters.

There are 10 traditional public schools within the five-mile radius of North Raleigh Charter Academy. Seven of the 10 have enrollments of less than 100 percent. Enrollment at one of those schools is approximately 60 percent. All 10 have greater diversity than the current charter schools.

The statements in the applications for Wake Preparatory Academy and North Raleigh Charter Academy suggesting the area needs more classroom seats is simply not true. There are thousands of charter school seats already offered and traditional seats that are available.

In fact, growth in general can no longer be claimed as a reason to approve new charter schools in Wake County. In January 2019 the Wake County Board of Education was provided revised enrollment projections showing the number of births had declined significantly the past several years, a trend that is expected to continue throughout the state and nation. (See attached for January 2019 Wake County Board of Education materials.)

While it is clear charter schools attracted more students than WCPSS in 2018-2019, the number of new seats in the five applications before the State Board of Education are expected to outnumber *all* new children enrolling in *any* Wake County school in 2020-2021. This is without considering the planned expansion for many of the 24 existing charter schools in the county.

Claims of innovation and choice beyond that already offered to families -- measures that are at the core of the six legislative purposes of a charter school -- are also dubious. This is especially true given the national reputation of Wake County's magnet program and the ability of its non-magnet schools to offer a wide range of program enhancements.

The application of Doral Academy of NC, for example, places it within five miles of 22 schools. Two of those schools are charter schools. Twenty are traditional public schools. Of the 20 traditional public schools, 10 are magnet schools.

These magnet schools have themes as diverse as University Connections and Leadership, Gifted and Talented, Museum Magnets, Computer Science and an International Baccalaureate Programme at the elementary level. In addition to providing innovative and expanded educational opportunities, the goals of all school districts belonging to Magnets Schools of America include reducing high concentrations of poverty, promoting diverse populations and maximizing use of school facilities.

Given that 16 of the 20 traditional schools within five miles of the proposed location of Doral Academy are enrolled at less than 100 percent, and some struggle to reduce high concentrations of poverty, a charter school built on a STEM theme that has no obligation or expectation of promoting socioeconomic diversity would likely have a large impact on many of the traditional schools committed to innovation and diversity.

Despite the fine reputations of the Doral Academy charter schools in their home state of Florida, a similar school in this location offers mostly risk in an area of the county that already offers an abundance of choice, innovation and efforts to keep schools from re-segregating.

Wendell Falls Charter Academy, which is also before the State Board of Education June 5, similarly offers seats where they are not needed. This can be traced directly to the operation of the second-largest existing charter school in Wake, East Wake Academy, which draws heavily from throughout eastern Wake.

East Wake Academy, which enrolls a student body that is approximately 78% white, sits about 10 miles from the proposed location of Wendell Falls Charter Academy. For practical purposes, Wendell Falls is adjacent to the existing traditional public school Lake Myra Elementary.

Lake Myra is a diverse school (55% white and Asian) and operates at 85% of capacity. Both its diversity and its operational efficiency would be negatively affected if a Florida-based Education Management Organization (EMO) was approved to run a charter school in such close proximity.

Of the five Wake County charter school applications before the State Board of Education on June 5, perhaps the least problematic is CE Academy. The proposed location is in an area that actually is growing rapidly.

It is difficult to argue, however, that a K-8 Chinese Immersion school is needed given that WCPSS already operates one Chinese Immersion school and has several schools where significant portions of the instructional day are provided in Chinese.

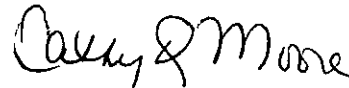
In all of these applications, it is not difficult to see how the proposed charters would increase de facto segregation, decrease efficient utilization of public facilities and add no significant variety or innovative instructional programs in a county where parents already understand and strongly support traditional public schools. Charter saturation is an appropriate way to describe the situation.

We thank you for your support of our schools and apologize for providing this insight so late in the process. As the largest district in the state of North Carolina, it has always been – and will continue to be – our intent to provide families with the educational choices they want and deserve. Our decision to provide this information now can be traced to a culmination of parent involvement, leadership changes and the significant changes in enrollment projections mentioned above.

Your consideration of our viewpoints and willingness to delay or deny approval would be greatly appreciated.



Dr. Jim Martin
Chair, Wake County Board of Education



Cathy Moore
WCPSS Superintendent