



COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 16

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January 8th 2015

Panel for Educational Policy
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Members of the Panel for Educational Policy,

We, the members of the Community Education Council for District 16, are writing to express concern that our District now has 44 percent of its total K-8 enrollment in charter schools. We believe it is important that you consider this figure as you review the proposal to place a 450-seat K-4 Success Academy in our community for the fall of 2016.

According to District 16 administrators, current enrollment in traditional public K-8 schools is 5,098 students. The Department of Education's Office of School Design & Charter Partnerships recently reported to us that charter enrollment for K-8 is at 3,923 students. If additional charter schools are sited in District 16, we will likely become a community that reaches the tipping point of having more students in charter schools than traditional schools.

It should be noted that representatives from Success Academy shared in a recent meeting with our members that District 16 is not a community that they ranked as a priority for expansion. This is logical as Success Academy already operates four schools in Bedford Stuyvesant with one additional school that was recently approved by the Panel for Educational Policy. While these sites are not in District 16 - which is comprised of portions of Bedford Stuyvesant and Crown Heights - several sites are within a short walk of our schools. This information confirmed for our members that Success Academy is being placed here solely because of underutilization in traditional public schools. We understand that the State of New York has mandated that charters be placed in available public school space but we believe that our District is shouldering too great of the burden.

As the Panel for Educational Policy and SUNY review the application from Success Academy, as well as future charter applications, we would respectfully ask that you consider the impact of such a decision on the future of traditional public school education in District 16.

Not every child thrives in a charter school environment and therefore we must work to preserve and improve traditional school options in our community. Additionally, please understand that District 16 is in the midst of significant transition due to shifting demographics and increasing charter school placements at this time could hinder the good work of improving enrollment at traditional public schools that is now underway.

While our Council is not unequivocally opposed to charter schools and thus has not written a resolution opposing this proposed Success Academy, we do believe that all charter schools should reflect the District's needs. For example, nearly 25 percent of District students have Individual Education Plans. We also have one of the highest concentrations of homeless students and students living in homes with multiple families and these students also have special needs. Charter schools should seek to actively engage and enroll these students and track their success by including questions about special educational needs and housing status on school application forms. In addition, every effort should be made to retain these students, regardless of the overall impact on test performance.

Furthermore, charter schools should be true partners in education, which means not simply meeting legal requirements but developing a specific plan to support overall District education goals. One example is the Uncommon Impact Grant, in which Uncommon Schools shares its best practices with traditional public schools. Another example is cooperation in co-located buildings. If the charter school is providing a service to its teachers, such as a shuttle to the train at night, the charter should consider sharing that resource with the teachers from the traditional public school.

We thank you for considering our concerns. Please feel free to contact our President, NeQuan C. McLean, at (917) 705-7849 with any questions or concerns that you may have regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

The Members of the Community Education Council for District 16