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June 9, 2013

Dr. Joel Medley, Director  
Office of Charter Schools  
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction  
6303 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-6303

Dear Dr. Medley:

Cabarrus County Schools (CCS) has received and reviewed the applications for three new charter schools currently before the North Carolina Charter School Advisory Council (A.C.E. Academy, Bradford Preparatory School, and University Public Charter School). It is our understanding that at your next week (June 10 and 11<sup>th</sup>) scheduled council meeting you will be considering whether or not to recommend these charter schools to the State Board of Education for action. We feel this information should be part of your discussion and deliberations.

This document is meant to provide our position on the impact this school will have on the Cabarrus County School system. As educators, we want the children of this county to have access to reliable and evidence-based educational services. We will address each school's organization/mission (evidence of need), pedagogical approach (educational plan), and financial impact. Our findings are based upon the review of each organization's application provided to us in March 2013.

### **1. A.C.E. Academy**

The **mission** of the academy is to “equip students from all backgrounds to succeed in the college and career of their choice by driving academic excellence, developing strong character, and instilling an entrepreneurial mindset.”

The “unique” mission of this school is totally encapsulated in the mission, vision, and belief statements adopted by our Board of Education, and therefore our system's guiding principles. Most importantly and as quoted in the application, the academy's board chose Cabarrus County “**because it adjoins Mecklenburg County and the city of Charlotte,**” Such a notion seems to lack true motivation to assist the population of Cabarrus County and rather is a convenient way to negotiate students out of Mecklenburg County without directly competing with existing schools and charters there. What is the true population (targeted) the applicant wishes to reach? In the **Evidence of Need** section, this applicant states that it will focus on the following areas of need based upon respondents to a survey:

*“Rigorous curriculums, athletic programs, foreign language, in school tutoring, character building, special education, personal responsibility, safe environment, and teach business skills.”*

All of these items are currently address by existing programs within the Cabarrus County School system and would not be unique to A.C.E. Academy. The applicant in fact states that the academy’s mission and vision resemble that of Cabarrus County.

The only difference in our mission and vision that is offered by the applicant is the entrepreneurship aspect (they state Cabarrus County does not have such a program). Our school system works with the Cabarrus Regional Chamber of Commerce on Entrepreneurship initiatives in our school system. We in fact offer courses through our Career Technical Education program at all of our high schools.

### **Pedagogical approach (educational plan)**

In the proposed curriculum outline for the first five years, there is no mention of any subject other than **Mathematics**. Furthermore much of the chart provided to demonstrate five year curriculum information is very confusing, filled with acronyms not identified or explained on the legend provided, and some items identified on the legend are not found within the chart.

### **Financial Impact**

Finally, based upon the financial projections provided by this applicant Cabarrus County Schools would have to transfer **\$1,120,936.80** in funds during the first year of operation alone.

It is our opinion that although the applicant seems to be well intentioned there is no true unique offering being presented to the citizens of Cabarrus County. In order to justify such a decrease in funding for an alternative to our traditional public schools an institution must truly offer something unique to our students and county. It is **our request that you do not approve and or recommend the approval of the A.C.E. Academy** charter school application at this time.

## **2. Bradford Preparatory School**

The applicants stated **mission** is *“Bradford Preparatory School is committed to ensuring academic excellence, nurturing personal relationships, and inspiring a growing passion for creativity and learning in all of our students. While encouraging our students to take personal responsibility for their future, we will support their development of life skills and encourage them to become compassionate and productive citizens.”*

The “unique” mission of this school it totally encapsulated in the mission, vision, and belief statements adopted by our Board of Education, and therefore our system’s guiding principles.

This applicant plans to locate its “facilities in southwest Cabarrus County, easily allowing students from both Mecklenburg County and Cabarrus County to attend the school.”

Such a notion seems to lack true motivation to assist the population of Cabarrus County and rather is a convenient way to negotiate students out of Mecklenburg County without directly competing with existing schools and charters there. This applicant expects 50% of its population to come from Cabarrus County and 50% to come from Mecklenburg County. What is the true population (targeted) the applicant wishes to reach? Only two of the board members of this institution reside in Cabarrus County.

### **Evidence of Need**

The applicant submits the following in its documentation *“They need (our student) a place where they are challenged to learn and solve problems. They need teachers, counselors and parents that guide them down the road to social and emotional maturity. And, they need to graduate with the skills and intellect to get and keep a long-term job, or pursue higher learning at the college or university of their choice so they can pursue a career in a field about which they are passionate.”*

The applicants are to be applauded for their desire to ensure a quality education for their children; however the very premise of their evidence of need is currently being answered by Cabarrus County Schools. Our teachers and counselors provide excellent support to our student population, overwhelming our students graduate and prepared to compete on a collegiate level. Several of our current teachers and or administrators are in fact the product of the Cabarrus County School system themselves.

### **Pedagogical approach (educational plan)**

There is no complete curriculum outline for the first five years of the school’s operation. As the applicant intends to start year one with grades K-8 with a total population of 404 and in year five have grades K-12 with 1644 students should there not be curriculum outlines provided for every grade for the first five years of operation (K-12, every subject).

Based upon the documentation the collegiate preparatory component of this school would not begin until the student enters high school. Currently in Cabarrus County Schools all students are being taught at a level that would prepare them for college work and are also prepared to enter the workforce. It is our position that a collegiate preparatory charter school duplicates the efforts and programs of existing Cabarrus County Schools.

## **Transportation Plan**

We have grave concerns that this applicant wanting to ensure that its school is economically and racially diverse will have major impediments from doing such and not providing formal transportation for its students. We understand that providing transportation is not a requirement under the Charter School Act, but we believe it is imperative to provide access for those students who would come from low wealth homes and not have the ability to reach the carpools that this applicant would coordinate.

## **School Lunch**

We have grave concerns that this applicant wanting to ensure that its school is economically and racially diverse will have major impediments from doing such and not providing formal lunch program for its students. We understand that providing lunch is not a requirement under the Charter School Act, but we believe it is imperative to provide access for those students who would come from low wealth homes and not have the ability to bring lunches every day or purchase lunches from the applicant's future vendors. We are concerned the allotted \$5,400 in the first year of operation may not be enough to supplement those students who cannot bring their lunch, what will be the applicants alternative is such a cases arises?

## **Financial Impact**

Finally, based upon the financial projections provided by this applicant Cabarrus County Schools would have to transfer **\$1,269,806.66** in funds during the first year of operation alone.

It is our opinion that although the applicant seems to be well intentioned there is no true unique offering being presented to the citizens of Cabarrus County. In order to justify such a decrease in funding for an alternative to our traditional public schools an institution must truly offer something unique to our students and county. It is our request that you do not approve and or recommend the approval of the Bradford Preparatory School's charter school application at this time.

## **3. University Public Charter School**

### **Organization/mission (evidence of need)**

The University Public Charter School's mission is to provide students with an educational foundation that includes self-awareness, literacy, and understanding of core academic concepts, global perspectives, the arts, financial literacy, and technology by use of the Montessori teaching philosophy.

The “unique” mission of this school is totally encapsulated in the mission, vision, and belief statements adopted by our Board of Education, and therefore our system’s guiding principles. The applicant states that this school “*plans to serve all students eligible for enrollment in any North Carolina public school (particularly the residents of Concord, Kannapolis, and Mount Pleasant). The school however plans to have emphasis on the Logan Community of Cabarrus County (an economically disadvantaged community with a high African American and Hispanic population which is within 0.2 miles of the proposed location of the charter school)*”

This is in fact a unique approach, currently Cabarrus County schools does not have a school that is focused on serving this population (what was formerly known as a community school). Where it is our position to ensure all students reach their maximum potential we do not currently have academic programs in place that target this population.

This applicant has a board of directors that is totally composed of Cabarrus County residents and in fact are representatives of the population they wish to serve. The board includes the director of the local Hispanic Learning Center, faith based members from the community, and the city councilwoman (mayor-pro tem) of the targeted district. The applicant is to be applauded for assembling a true cross-sectional group of stakeholders. The applicant has also noted it will locate its facility within the community of the targeted population.

### **Pedagogical approach (educational plan)**

The applicant has elected to use the Montessori approach for its educational plan. Currently Cabarrus County has no intentions of future plans to introduce such pedagogy in our magnet program offering, nor is the Montessori approach a current method of instruction.

The applicant clearly demonstrates in its curriculum outline the correlation of Montessori principles to Common Core and the Essential Standards as were available at the time of our receipt of these documents.

The Montessori Method will also require this applicant to provide a multi-age classroom which is currently not offered by our school system. This applicant plans to extend the school year to 200 instructional days as an approach to mitigate the summer learning loss; this is unique to this applicant.

### **Transportation Plan**

Although the applicant has elected to locate its facility within walking distance of the targeted population, they did identify their intention to purchase school buses to accommodate those students who do not live within walking distance of their facility. Such a plan will not present a barrier to potential students.

## School Lunch

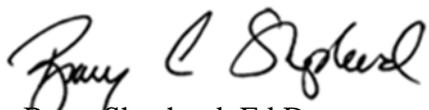
The applicant has recognized that its target population is notably comprised of households in low wealth neighborhoods with a high free and reduced lunch percentage. The applicant has demonstrated its intent to ensure that lunch (meals) is not a barrier to the targeted student population by contacting the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Regional Consultant for Child Nutrition in order to determine the requirements for participation in the Federal Breakfast and School lunch program.

## Financial impact

Although this applicant has a demonstrated unique educational plan, has answered our concerns regarding school lunch, and transportation programs, we as a school system still are cognizant of the financial impact of this school opening in Cabarrus County . Finally, based upon the financial projections provided by this applicant Cabarrus County Schools would have to transfer **\$1,091,129.70** in funds during the first year of operation alone, this number represents the smallest financial impact of the three applicants for the 2014-2015 in Cabarrus County.

It is our opinion that the applicant will offer a truly unique educational program to the citizens of Cabarrus County. The applicant in fact has a true focus on Cabarrus County students as demonstrated by its admissions projections, the projected location of the facility, and that the applicant has demonstrated support from the community it plans to serve (based upon letters of support from the Hispanic Learning Center and Concord Housing Department); Cabarrus County Schools **does not object to the approval** of the University Public Charter School. We believe that such a school can complement the educational opportunities in our county.

Sincerely,



Barry Shepherd, Ed.D.  
Superintendent