



A 21st Century Learning Community

Dr. Maria Pitre-Martin
Superintendent

Board of Education:
Kevan Callicutt
Belinda Clark
Keith Raulston
Wendy Sellars
Andrea Walker

December 1, 2014

Mr. Joel E. Medley, Director
NCDPI/Office of Charter Schools
6303 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6303

Re: **Impact Statement for Thomasville City Schools
Charter School Application filed on behalf of Fortis Academy, Inc.**

Dear Charter School Advisory Board Members and State Board of Education:

Thomasville City Schools appreciates the opportunity to give the Boards feedback on the recent charter application submitted by Dylan Parkes on behalf of the Fortis Academy group.

Thomasville City Schools has one of the highest percentages of free and reduced lunch in the State of North Carolina. If recent trends continue, it is projected that the Thomasville City Schools will have a substantial amount of dollars cut from its budget for the 2015-2016 school year. As indicated in their application, Fortis Academy projects that 10% of their enrollment will be made up of students domiciled in the Thomasville City Schools' attendance area. As a result, the Thomasville City Schools will experience an additional decrease of State operating dollars from its budget during the residual downturn in the economy and in the future when it is nearly certain that the school system will be required to operate with fewer dollars. If the Fortis Academy recruits students from the Thomasville City Schools as projected in their application, the Thomasville City Schools will continue to experience an ongoing drain of operating dollars from its budget. Additionally, there is certainly the potential to affect the end-of-grade test scores and related district performance levels of Thomasville City Schools. Based on its projected enrollment in the first year of operation of 49 students from the Thomasville City Schools attendance area, the cost of Fortis Academy to the Thomasville City Schools could reach a high of more than \$300,000 in state, local, and EC funding.

Curriculum and Instruction:

- Areas of Strength:
 - Improving health and wellness
 - Incorporating motion and exercise
 - Utilizing Response to Intervention, which is currently being used by Thomasville City Schools
 - Providing services to ELL students utilizing the Home Language Survey and the WIDA Access Placement Test, which is currently being used by Thomasville City Schools
- Areas of Concern:

Classical Education Model:
Trivium, which is the classical model being suggested for use by the Fortis Academy, is comprised of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and does not speak to what students will actually be learning at the Fortis Academy. Currently, there are numerous definitions for the classical education model and the instructional strategies suggested in the Fortis Academy application, such as "clapping out timelines and science facts" are not evidence based and do not align with the philosophy of the new NC Standard Course of Study. The new NC Standard Course of Study does not support the "clapping" method, which is a rote memorization strategy. Also, students in the 5th, 6th, and 7th grade classes will debate their instructional coaches, which again is not an evidence based practice. Also, the focus of the early grades is grammar and language acquisition; though the Common Core State Standards has expectations beyond that of grammar and language acquisition. Additionally the Logic focus in grades 5-7 also does not meet all of the expectations of the Common Core State Standards.

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Physical Fitness Pillar Area of Concern:

The conditioning pillar of the Fortis Academy plan will provide assessments for students by trained strength and conditioning staff that will lead to personal goal setting for students. This strategy will not be welcoming to all students since many students are not open to physical assessments that could provide a negative impact on a student’s self-image. Also, any physical assessments that could lead to significant changes in physical appearance may not be appropriate for youngsters who are in the midst of physical development. Also, the phrases “student athlete” and “player” are used in the Fortis Academy plan, which suggests that all students will be expected to be student athletes who are required to document their fitness and health progress regardless of age or personal desire. Finally, there is no evidence in the Fortis Academy Plan stating how the physical fitness pillar is aligned with the NC Standard Course of Study.

High-Quality, Nutritious Foods Area of Concern:

The Fortis’ education model has stated that the most important aspect of the plan is increasing knowledge of and providing access to high quality, nutritious food for students; though there is no suggestion that this focus is aligned to the NC Standard Course of Study. Also, in order to provide students with access to high quality, nutritious foods, the Fortis Academy will be required to access food preparation services that can provide these foods in a timely manner while also meeting the federal and state guidelines.

Professional Development Area of Concern:

All faculty will be considered “coaches”, but the Fortis Academy plan lacks clarity on the difference between a teacher and coach and the expectations for coaches, as opposed to teachers. Also, it appears that all “coaches” should see students as “players” and it appears that all coaches will need to begin, maintain, or accelerate personal wellness programs. The focus is not on metacognition, but rather physical fitness. There is no evidence based professional development for coaches mentioned in the Fortis Academy plan that shows the significance of becoming certified trainers and nutritionists and its impact on increased student achievement.

Economic Advancement Area of Concern:

The average median income for Thomasville City Schools is less than \$30,000 per year. Parents and students are seeking educational experiences that will provide college and career readiness skills that can lead to the world of work, the community college, a 4 year institution of higher learning, or the military. The pillars of the Fortis Academy do not speak to college or career readiness. The three key curriculum areas of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, plus the focus on wellness, nutrition, and physical fitness do not directly link to college or career readiness as defined by the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, the ACT, and the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce, which has established a three-tiered strategy to drive North Carolina's jobs agenda.

Sincerely,



Dr. Maria Pitre-Martin, Superintendent
Thomasville City Schools
