



Gaston County Schools
shaping our future

W. Jeffrey Booker
Superintendent

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November 10, 2016

Deanna Townsend-Smith, Ed.D.
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Office of Charter Schools
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Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-6303
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Dear Dr. Townsend:

Please allow this letter to serve as an official expression of opposition from Gaston County Schools concerning the approval of the proposed Ridgeview Charter School in Gaston County. We oppose this charter school for several key reasons, primarily because of the direct negative effect on the student population at our schools, funding for the Local Education Agency (LEA) in Gaston County, and duplication of program offerings.

The charter school's proposal outlines programs that duplicate programs and services already provided in Gaston County Schools for children and their families. In our assessment of the school's proposal, the instructional design proposed by Ridgeview Charter is significantly less rigorous than what is currently offered in our schools for children in grades K-8. For example, the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) cluster has been expanded to all middle schools in the county, which is similar to best practices in other public school districts. However, the charter school's application asserts that the school will not adopt a STEM or STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) curriculum, which would directly deny children engagement in STEM or STEAM. We, like other education professionals, feel STEM/STEAM is vital to the curriculum as we strive to teach, grow, and prepare students for careers of the future in these subject-related areas.

Our students have a wide range of academic resources to assist in their growth and development. One notable resource is the availability of technology to enhance teaching and learning. In the past three years, Gaston County Schools has invested significantly in increasing the amount of technology for use by teachers and students. Now, our student-to-

computer ratio is 1:1.7, which is better than where we were a few years ago, thanks to the addition of thousands of Chromebooks, iPads, and other computing devices. It is our belief that children in Gaston County Schools have better access to up-to-date technology than what could be provided at the charter school.

Another area of duplication is the implementation of best practices outlined by the Department of Public Instruction. Gaston County Schools already offers job-embedded professional development for teachers and other personnel that is conducted by local, regional, and national experts in the K-12 education field. Each school is given a minimum of one day per month for professional development from a nationally-known expert - this is in addition to professional growth programs provided by district leadership at least three times a month. While Ridgeview proposes to use distributive leadership, we already have full implementation of Professional Learning Communities with fidelity.

One significant and concerning plan in the charter school's application is the concept of relying too heavily on a third-party transportation provider such as the Gaston County Government Access program, the City of Gastonia bus transportation program, or other provider for student use. This idea has the potential to compromise the safety of children because of lack of supervision from education personnel. Another point of concern is the limited access to city bus transportation beyond the Gastonia municipal limits. Further, the lack of flexibility in the city's bus schedule would hinder the school's reliability on city bus transportation for after-school and extracurricular activities and other enrichment programs that take place outside of the typical daytime/business hours.

It is most important to note that Gaston County Schools does not have an interest or the resources in providing bus transportation for the students who attend the charter school. Like most school districts in the state, our school bus transportation system is already under strain because of the continued lack of drivers, which has forced us to consolidate routes and run second and third routes at some schools. Providing any type of bus service for students outside of Gaston County Schools would not be possible.

Above all else, the establishment of another charter school in Gaston County would have a detrimental effect on the number of students attending our schools, which would lead to a decrease in funding for Gaston County Schools. There is no question that the charter school students would come from Gaston County Schools. The proposed enrollment of 345 would represent a decrease in our Average Daily Membership for grades K-8. This translates to a negative financial impact of \$2,586,120 in the first year of the charter school's operation and \$4,655,016 by the fifth year of operation. Without question, taking money from the public school system to offer programs and services at

the charter school that are already available in Gaston County Schools is an inappropriate and irresponsible use of taxpayer funds.

While we support the concept of providing school choice for students and parents, this concept should not be fulfilled solely at the expense of Gaston County Schools, especially when the proposed charter school programs and services are already available in the traditional public schools. Again, Gaston County Schools opposes the establishment of Ridgeview Charter School, and we respectfully ask the Office of Charter Schools to deny the application, which is in the best interest of public education in Gaston County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Jeffrey Booker', written over the printed name.

W. Jeffrey Booker
Superintendent of Schools