

Dear Mr. Medley:

Guilford County Schools (GCS) has a long and extensive commitment to providing families with choice and option schools within a public school framework. Governed by the Guilford County Board of Education, which has 11 members elected by voters to represent their interests in public education, GCS currently offers families the choice (with transportation, child nutrition, special education and English language services provided) of 45 choice and magnet schools with 52 different programs, including single gender education options, early/middle colleges, the arts, STEM, traditional, gifted and talented, International Baccalaureate, visual and performing arts, technology, etc.

In fact, thanks to the generous support of our business community, we opened a middle college focused on health sciences at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro this past fall, and will open the STEM Early College at North Carolina A&T University this coming fall. GCS' overall graduation rate is 83.1 percent – an extraordinary accomplishment given the diversity of our minority majority school system, which serves students from 100 countries who speak more than 123 different world languages/dialects. Currently, 56.6 percent of GCS students are considered economically disadvantaged. Eight of our high schools – all choice schools – posted 100% graduation rates.

Our traditional public schools are thriving as well, with 14 GCS schools named Honor Schools of Excellence or Schools of Excellence, and 29 schools named Schools of Distinction. No GCS schools were named low performing in 2011. GCS students earned a record \$119.9 million in college scholarships last year. In 2012, our students will earn the district's (and possibly the State's) first Service Learning Diplomas for their volunteer commitments to their communities, as part of our district-wide emphasis on character development, civics education, and service learning. The district also offers robust and extensive programming in career and technical education, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, the arts, etc.

We share this information with you, and with the Charter School Advisory Board and the State Board of Education, to express our concern that the six new charter schools proposed for our County are duplicating public school choices, programs, curriculum, and services already available in Guilford County. And, we question why the State would duplicate existing choices and services when funding for traditional public schools has been cut dramatically since 2008-09.

Typically, charter schools that open in Guilford County do not reflect the diversity found in our public schools in terms of student enrollment. It remains to be seen whether new charter schools will continue this trend, although the locations of proposed schools in Summerfield, Oak Ridge, and other portions of Northern/Northwest Guilford County, and lack of transportation and child nutrition services, would clearly make it more difficult to attract minority and low-income students. Students with disabilities and English language learners also are often left out of the equation, or served minimally. To help the various Boards in their decision-making processes, we have provided the following GCS student statistics, per our 20th day enrollment figures:

American Indian - 0.57%
Asian - 5.67%
Black - 40.80%
Hispanic - 11.21%
Multi-Racial - 3.71%

Pacific Islander - 0.16%
White - 37.89%

Currently, more than \$4.1 million flows from GCS' budget to charter school students. As the numbers of students enrolled in charters increases, and as funding for traditional public school students continues to shrink through State budget cuts and legislative decisions, GCS and other local school systems will begin to lose the critical mass and depth of resources needed to serve all children well. Taken together, these concerns about duplication of effort, diversity, and diminishing resources for traditional public schools and services raise serious questions regarding whether the approval of additional charter schools will constitute the level playing field desired by the GCS Board of Education in its 2012 Legislative Agenda.

Sincerely,

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