



One Vision. One Durham.

Dr. Eric J. Becoats
Superintendent

COPY

March 26, 2013

Joel E. Medley
Director of Charter Schools
NC Department of Public Instruction
6303 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6303

**RE: Charter Fast-Track Applications for the following charter schools:
Antonio Academy, Excelsior, Expedition, Pinnacle, Reaching All Minds, and Southpoint
Academy**

Dear Mr. Medley:

As the State Board of Education begins to contemplate applications for new fast-track charter schools, we would like to give you some information about the current impact of existing charter schools in our district as well as respond to the applications for charter status for Antonio Academy, Excelsior Charter, Expedition Charter, Pinnacle Charter, Reaching All Minds Charter, and Southpoint Academy Charter School.

Our district currently operates 56 schools to serve our 32,484 students and is the eighth largest district in the state. Our students are socioeconomically and racially diverse: 50.7% African-American, 24.1% Hispanic, 19.3% White, 3% Multiracial, 2.5% Asian, 0.3% Native American and 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Over 62.5% of our students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. 20.2% of our students qualify for Academically and Intellectually Gifted services, 14.2% qualify for Limited English Proficiency services and 13.84% qualify for exceptional children's (EC) services.

Currently, there are 9 charter schools operating in Durham County serving over 4,155 students. In addition, because Durham is located in the heart of the Triangle region, Durham students attend 17 additional charter schools that are located in neighboring counties (4,436 charter school students total in 26 charter schools). Per National Alliance for Public Charter Schools tracks student "market share" the Durham County has the highest market share of all 100 counties in the state of North Carolina and our updated 2011 numbers indicate a rate closer to 9.3%. In addition, we estimate that 1,303 of Durham students are homeschoolers and approximately 12% attend private schools.

As of Month 1 of the 2012-2013 school year, Durham had 4,436 charter school students with 4,155 of them from Durham based charter schools.

Durham Public Schools wishes to collaborate with the nine existing Durham based charter schools rather than compete. The planned opening of expansion of Antonio Academy, Excelsior Charter, Expedition Charter, Pinnacle Charter, Reaching All Minds Charter, and Southpoint Academy Charter Schools makes it difficult financially for Durham Public Schools to provide programs for our children. Currently over \$14M of local funding is passed through to charter schools. With this planned expansion of Durham based charter schools, the first year's effect on local funding is over \$5M with a five year effect of \$7.9M. This added to the current \$14M being paid out to charter schools would be \$19M and \$21.9M respectively. The loss of this amount of local funding compounded with the state funding impact of this growth severely impacts DPS's ability to provide a sound basic education to its students. Durham Public Schools is currently aggressively reengineering the delivery of instruction in DPS and the steps we are taking are resource intensive.

We encourage the State Board of Education to carefully review the charter school applications for Antonio Academy, Excelsior Charter, Expedition Charter, Pinnacle Charter, Reaching All Minds Charter, and Southpoint Academy Charter School since existing Durham based charters as well as Durham Public Schools are already providing the same opportunities for students that the new schools propose.

Durham Public Schools' analysis of each charter application is below:

Antonio Academy Charter School Application

The proposed charter lacks support structures for targeted populations (at-risk academically, socially, and economically). For example, there is no reference in the application to extended learning opportunities and robust professional learning for staff. This proposed charter school also lacks depth in instructional strategies. There were no unique learning experiences referenced that differs from the current offerings in Durham Public Schools. There was no evidence of planned corrective instruction and interventions. It appears that this is primarily driven by state assessments only as there are no forms of formative assessments referenced to address interim and on-going instructional planning to support student needs. The instructional plans do not address special populations such as students with exceptionalities and second language needs. The parental involvement requirement may exclude working families. There is no final facility – currently, this school is using a church. There is no mention of transportation being offered to students. The proposed instructional model (Robert J. Brown Leadership Academy) has not been established.

Excelsior Charter School Application

The implementation of core knowledge replicates the program at RN Harris Elementary School in Durham Public Schools. It is unclear how the school will attract students of all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Teachers will be expected to understand differentiation strategies and inclusion and will receive training in these areas. However, there is no detail provided regarding research based or evidence based practices or interventions or how inclusive practices and co-teaching will be supported. There are no details regarding what methodologies or RBI's will be used for tutoring and interventions for struggling students. The application states that they will provide the services in Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for Exceptional children and that they will only have one EC teacher and 2 teacher assistants at first. It is unclear as to whether this level of support will be appropriate to meet all continuums of IEPs they will

receive-regular, resource, and separate. If the school receives a separate student with intense needs, one EC teacher cannot provide that support and the level of resource/co-teaching needs that will be needed from other identified students. Teacher assistants support instruction but cannot provide the direct special education services needed in IEPs

Expedition Charter School – K-8 STEM in Orange County (Possible students from Durham and Alamance-Burlington)

There is no mention of Section 504 special accommodations coordinator or processes for identification or reevaluation for 504. There is no RtI or SAP processes identified or defined. There is no mention of behavioral supports through PBIS or FBA/BIP training or implementation/knowledge. There is also no mention about what transportation and other related services students may need through their IEPs (audiology, nursing services, teachers of deaf/hard of hearing, vision teachers, orientation and mobility, counseling, etc.) The school will “poll” students to see if they currently have an IEP or 504 plan. We question how reliable this “polling” will be. When differentiation and in-class intervention (both undefined) are determined not enough to meet the students’ needs, the teaching team will determine if the process for Exceptional Children (EC) identification should be implemented. There is no reference of pre-intervention processes that include Research Based Interventions (RBIs) or EBPs; This can result in inappropriate identifications with no system in place to rule out lack of appropriate instruction in reading, writing or math. Regulations require documentation of research based interventions prior to identification. The team meets to determine if psycho-educational testing is needed. There is no mention of parent or state/federal referral process or the use of RBIs that are needed for EC determination. There is no mention of Student Assistance Process (SAP) or RtI (Response to Intervention) processes. There are no definitions of least restrictive environment, inclusion programs, or differentiated instruction as the “special education” services provided. Free tutoring is offered for all students but there is no mention of how students can access this before/after school tutoring – transportation is not mentioned. Teacher qualifications are a bachelor’s degree and certification in grades taught. STEM qualifications are not required although this is a proposed STEM school. The job description for the counselor does not articulate qualifications like other personnel job descriptions included in the proposal.

Pinnacle Charter School Application

Since the owner is seeking to open the same type of charter school in several other counties throughout North Carolina, raises the question as to whether this is a “for profit” corporation. There are no programs, curriculum, strategies, etc. that distinguishes this school from what is currently offered in Durham Public Schools. The application states that it expects most parents to drive their students to school. There will be no formalized transportation offerings – the school will assist parents by coordinating car-pooling options. There is no mention of a breakfast program. There are no details as to what specific arrangements will be made for students who would normally qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Reaching All Minds Charter School Application

The proposal states that there are no elementary STEM offerings in Durham Public Schools. This is incorrect. WG Pearson Magnet school has a STEM focus and engineering design curriculum. There is no data on the current impact of Reaching All Minds as a supplemental

educational provider. The staff allocation of exceptional children staff does not sufficiently meet the needs of the 13% predicted with disabilities. In order to provide a full continuum of services required by IDEA, more staff is needed. There is no reference made in the application of research based interventions or evidenced based practices. There is limited explanation on Response to Intervention plans. There were no unique learning experiences referenced that differs from the current offerings in Durham Public Schools, The portion of the application that addresses Student Conduct did not include information on ensuring student rights, due process, and/or a grievance process for students and parents. The program promotes strong punitive measures such as long-term suspension and expulsion for elementary aged students. In the proposal, PEPs would be provided after a full year of academic failure which violates state statute. The proposed school does not include a provision of transportation beyond carpooling.

Southpoint Academy Charter School Application

This school is within close proximity (5 miles) of an existing charter school. It does not have a unique offering from what Durham Public Schools already provides. It is currently a private school that is unable to attract enough students to remain open. It blames the lack of enrollment on the economy and wants charter status so it can remain open. It touts teacher support but does not mention mentoring, pedagogy, etc. There is no plan to provide transportation for students other than carpooling. Students are encouraged to bring their lunch or pay \$5 per day for a hot, catered meal. The application does state that students who qualify will eat lunch for free.

In conclusion, Durham Public Schools requests that the State Board of Education deny the charter school applications of the Antonio Academy, Excelsior Charter, Expedition Charter, Pinnacle Charter, Reaching All Minds Charter, and Southpoint Academy Charter School since these opportunities are currently available to students within Durham Public Schools. In the current economic climate extending already scarce resources even further for programs already provided to students is not financially prudent and severely impedes the state's ability to move public education forward.

Sincerely,



Eric J. Becoats

C: ✓ Dr. William C. Harrison, Chairman
✓ Philip Price, Chief Financial Officer – DPI

Attachment: Charter School Expansion Effect

Charter School Applications 26-Mar-13

Current Charter Students 4436
 Durham Based Charters 4155
 % of Durham Students in all charters 94%

	<u>Grades</u>	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 5</u>	<u>94%</u>	<u>Amt per Student</u>	<u>Year 1 Effect</u>	<u>Year 5 Effect</u>
Antonio Academy	K-3	160	320	150	3165.49	474,824	952,812
	K-5			301	3165.49		
Excelsior Classical Academy	K-3	280	560	263	3165.49	832,524	1,665,048
	K-7			526	3165.49		
Expedition School	K-6	300	364	282	3165.49	892,668	1,082,598
	K-8			342	3165.49		
Reaching All Minds Academy	K-3	144	250	135	3165.49	427,341	743,890
	K-5			235	3165.49		
Pinnacle Charter School	K-6	729	929	685	3165.49	2,168,361	2,763,473
	K-8			873	3165.49		
Southpoint Academy	K-2	80	220	75	3165.49	237,412	655,256
	K-5			207	3165.49		

Total Effect on DPS 4,074 5,033,130 7,863,077