

Dr. Aaron L. Fleming
Superintendent



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To: North Carolina Charter Schools Advisory Board Members

One benefit of being a North Carolina citizen is the ability to choose the best educational setting for your child. As a supporter of school choice, I recognize the need in offering options to families that will best achieve the goals of their children. Recently, the Department of Public Instruction released the list of charter school applications received by the September deadline. It is clear that there is significant interest in opening new charter schools.

An application for a new charter school in Harnett County, Achievement Academy Charter, is on the list. It appears that this new school would open in the northwest section of the county. This is a fast-growing area that borders Wake County. If this application is approved, I look forward to working with the school leadership and board. The applicant has requested to have an accelerated planning year that would allow the school to open in fall 2018. The charter school application requires the applicant to "demonstrate a clear and compelling need for the accelerated planning year." It is in this section where my greatest concern rests. In justifying this need for acceleration, the application states, "there is dissatisfaction with the quality of education that children are receiving, particularly in the middle schools. The perception of parents that we have spoken with is that some schools are lacking structure and control and that there is inadequate responsiveness to bullying and other concerning behaviors." I am disappointed that the applicant and consultant would attempt to use this type of narrative as a means to convince the Charter School Advisory Board of a compelling reason for acceleration. I am aware of the strained relationship between traditional public schools and the public charter school communities, but I believe there is room for both. Claiming this unsubstantiated and false information does not help build relationships.

In recent surveys, 85% of middle school parents felt that their child's schools were a safe place to learn. When reviewing the area where this proposed charter school will operate (LaFayette Elementary, Harnett Central Middle, and Harnett Central High), 84% of parents felt that their child's school was a safe place to learn and 81% felt that their child's school provides a high-quality educational program. This is factual information that we would have provided if we were consulted. I do not understand why the facts were not researched before applying for a charter school, knowing the application would become a public document.

This communication should not be taken as opposition to the proposed charter school. The competition will make us all better. I do hope that the Charter School Advisory Board and State Board of Education do allow the applicant to edit their application to ensure truthfulness in reporting or not to allow the false reasons for an accelerated planning year to be considered. No process is perfect, but holding a prospective charter school applicant and operator to an ethical standard is imperative.

I appreciate the opportunity to address this issue with you, and I look forward to working with our partners to increase the educational opportunities for all students in Harnett County.

Sincerely,

Aaron L. Fleming, Ed.D.
Superintendent

cc: The Honorable Mark Johnson, Superintendent of Public Instruction
State Board of Education Members
Mr. Dave Machado, Director, Office of Charter Schools