



Cumberland County Schools

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the newly proposed charter schools requesting to locate in the Cumberland County Schools (CCS) attendance area. From review of the applications for First Impressions Academy and Kingdom Performing Arts Academy we find it necessary to express opposition to the approval of these potential new charter schools. The charter schools' proposal outlines programs that duplicate offerings and services already provided in Cumberland County Schools for both children and families, inadequately addresses the continuum of educational supports for potential students, and potentially creates a financial burden on the district.

Duplication of Services

First Impressions Academy and Kingdom Performing Arts Academy both outline S.T.E.A.M. as their instructional approaches. In our assessment of the First Impressions Academy and Kingdom Performing Arts Academy the instructional design proposed is significantly less rigorous than what is currently offered for our elementary and middle schools students. Our students have a wide range of academic resources to assist in their growth and development. Currently, CCS uses the S.T.E.A.M. hands-on approach at 52 elementary schools in our makerspaces and in 17 of our middle schools. Our students have access to numerous extra-curricular S.T.E.A.M. activities such as robotics teams, Science Olympiad, LEGOs, Regional Science Fair, MathCounts and numerous visual and performing arts opportunities. Additionally, over the past three years, Cumberland County Schools has invested significantly in increasing the amount of technology for use by teachers and students. At this time, our student to computer ratio is 1:3. It is our commitment and belief that children in CCS have access to up-to-date digital tools that enhance learning experiences and align with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. We support the concept of providing choices for families and we provide an array of options such as:

Language Immersion (Spanish and Chinese)	Montessori
Global Communications	International Baccalaureate
Science and Math Academies	Classical Studies
Arts and A+ Arts	

Limited Educational Supporting Services

Educational support services are important to aid in the educational development of students. In each application the operation supports are not as robust as the continuum of services within our district. Areas of concern follow:

Transportation

More than half of CCS students utilize transportation services. Kingdom Performing Arts Academy appears to rely heavily on a third-party transportation provider, the Fayetteville Area System of Transportation (FAST), the city of Fayetteville's public transportation system. This proposal has the potential to compromise the safety of children due to the lack of supervision from educational personnel. Furthermore the limited flexibility in the FAST service areas may prevent students from all across Cumberland County from participating with the limited plans for third-party transportation. All CCS school buses have cameras and tracking devices that allow us to adequately provide supervision and monitor the location of students on buses. In the First Impressions Academy application, the carpool method is the only model that has been detailed to provide students with transportation.

Lunch Services

With more than 65% of students in CCS qualifying for free and reduced meals, the First Impressions Academy plan for meals lacks inclusiveness. The delivery service paid proposal model does not appear to be inclusive of all students who currently have access to CCS meals. The options shared for the meal plan does not outline an option that addresses the needs of all students who may need to participate in the federal lunch program.

Discipline Supports

Many of the supports and practices outlined for student conduct and discipline mirror the practices already in place and are dependent upon the partnerships that presently exist in the Cumberland County School System.

Lottery Services

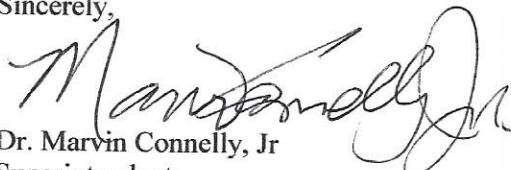
Priority seating in the lottery process is designed to focus on preferential access to children of Board members. This causes concern for transparency and equitable access.

Financial Burden

Without question, taking money away from the public school system to offer programs and services at charter schools that are already available to all CCS students would prove to be redundant. As you are aware, Cumberland County Schools is considered a low-wealth district. Managing resources and reducing duplication is essential to ensure resources are maximized. If the two newly-proposed charter schools open this translates into 1.6 million dollars in reduced resources for the first year of the operation of these schools.

In closing, the establishment of another charter school in Cumberland County would have a detrimental effect on the students in Cumberland County Schools. We respectfully ask that the Office of Charter Schools deny these applications which is in the best interest of public education in Cumberland County Schools.

Sincerely,



Dr. Marvin Connelly, Jr
Superintendent