

Superintendent
Patrick C. Miller, Ed.D.



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Leisa Edwards Batts
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301 Kingold Boulevard
Snow Hill, NC 28580

October 18, 2018

Dave Machado, Director
Office of Charter Schools
6307 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6307

Dear Mr. Machado,

I am writing in response to your letter of October 9, 2018 regarding the application of two charter schools in Greene County: Lighthouse Charter Academy and Griffin Leadership School.

There is a plethora of incorrect and inaccurate data/information in both applications. I will attempt to address the most glaring of those inaccuracies in this impact statement.

Lighthouse Charter Academy:

In Lighthouse Charter Academy's application, it states that "West Greene Elementary School [has] a 21.3 point achievement gap in 2015 and grew to a 40.2 point achievement at Greene Central Middle School in 2017." First of all, in 2015 West Greene's grade level proficiency in reading and math was 39.6%. In 2017, those same students were in grade 5 at Greene County Intermediate. Their grade level proficiency was 51.6%. This cohort of students increased their proficiency by 12 percentage points over this two-year period.

In 2015, the achievement gap in 6th grade between white and black students was 32.4 percentage points. The gap between white and Hispanic students was 16.8 percentage points. When this same group of students matriculated through eighth grade in 2017, the gap was 27.2 percentage points between white and black (the state gap was 30.1 percentage points) and the Hispanic gap was 14.2 percentage points (for the state it was 21.9 percentage points). The gap between black and white during that two-year span decreased by 5.2 percentage points and the gap between white and Hispanic students decreased by 2.6 percentage points. The gap between black and Hispanic decreased by 2.2 percentage points.

In 2017-18, the black, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged and English language learner subgroups all met their long-term goals in ELA and math at West Greene Elementary School. The long-term goals are set by the state under the federal guidelines outlines in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). At Greene County Intermediate School, the black, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged and English language learner subgroups met their long-term goals in ELA. The black and economically disadvantaged subgroups did not meet their long-term goals in math at GCIS. At Greene County Middle School, the black, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged and English language learner subgroups met their long-term goals in math. The



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black and English language learner subgroups met their long-term goals in ELA. In summary, the Black subgroup met all long-term goals in ELA and math at every school targeted by Lighthouse Charter Academy except for math at GCIS. The English language learner subgroup met every single long-term goal across the three schools (100%). In short, the subgroups in Greene County Schools are meeting their long-term goals at 72.6% in grades 3-8 which is an indicator of academic progress. These numbers are particularly impressive when you factor in that the vast majority of our students come to us in Kindergarten below grade level.

Additionally, in 2016-17, 94.8% of our teachers were deemed to be effective or highly effective according to EVAAS teacher effectiveness data. Only 89% of teachers across the state were deemed effective or highly effective. Additionally, 18.2% of our teachers were deemed highly effective (exceeded growth expectations) versus 11.8% of teachers across the state.

The Lighthouse Charter Academy's application references Gay's 1990 groundbreaking work entitled "Culturally Responsive Teaching." Gay notes that "disproportionate discipline problems with minority students is a tell-tale sign of a culturally monolithic education program." Greene County Schools does not prescribe to a culturally monolithic instructional model. In 2012, the all Greene County Schools' teachers received Research for Better Teaching's course entitled "Studying Skillful Teaching." This course, equivalent to a graduate school course at a university, focused on culturally responsive teaching, relationship building, growth mindset, and effective effort as well as high-yield instructional strategies. We have continued to focus on cultural sensitivity in our schools as evidenced by our focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), trauma sensitive schools, resiliency, and the effects of poverty on learning. The district has worked diligently to implement Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). We have realized a significant reduction in disciplinary referrals this far this school year. All the research supporting these topics is much more current/relevant than Gay's 1990 work.

In explaining the educational program, Lighthouse Charter Academy, "will incorporate active and project-based teaching styles..." Greene County Schools is highly regarded for STEM education in NC. Since 2011, project-based, hands-on inquiry learning has been a cornerstone of teaching and learning in GCS. A preK-12 STEM Pipeline has been established and provides students opportunities to develop skills necessary for success in school and beyond. Our STEM program is comprised of at least 50% female and 50% minority students as these populations are traditionally underrepresented in STEM career fields. Furthermore, in researching effective instructional models as part of the Leandro case, the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation has recognized our elementary literacy instruction as an effective model to be replicated. GCS hosts teacher academies during the summer to train teachers from across NC on how to replicate our STEM instructional model. In August 2018, Greene County Schools was named one of the 25 most innovative school districts in the United States by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the Successful Practices Network (SPN), and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH). Regional employers continue to applaud GCS for student preparation and career readiness. In 2018, Greene County Middle School joined Greene

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Central High School by earning recognition by the NC State Board of Education as a STEM Model School of Distinction. Less than 30 NC schools have earned this recognition since its inception in 2015. Former Governor McCrory, current Lt. Governor Forest, and current First Lady Kristen Cooper have visited and promoted GCMS and GCS as a model for future ready teaching and learning as have teams from other school districts, teams from NCDPI, and teams from the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation. Tremendous work has taken place to provide GCS students a high quality, relevant, educational experience that prepares them for success. GCS has a proven instructional model to deliver the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Our model is anchored in evidence-based practices and supported by ongoing professional development and coaching. Teachers and district leaders collaborate to design and implement lessons that meet district criteria for success.

The “Los Puentes” two-way immersion program, started in 2003-04, is one of the older Spanish immersion programs in North Carolina. This highly successful program is not required; rather, students are randomly selected by lottery. Parents decide if they wish to have their child’s name placed in the lottery. Usually, there are two classrooms of “Los Puentes” per grade level. Students in this program significantly outperform their peers on all state-mandated assessments. In a typical “Los Puentes” classroom, 50% of the students are native Spanish speakers and 50% are native English speakers. Students in this program receive half of their instruction in Spanish and half in English. This program was noted by AASA/SPN in the case study that accompanied the designation of GCS as one of the 25 most innovative school districts in the country.

Greene County Schools is a small, rural, low wealth district. Nothing proposed in Lighthouse Charter Academy’s application offers options not already available within Greene County Schools. Greene County Schools has lost enrollment over the past several years; therefore, capacity to serve these students is not an issue. The economic impact of this charter will have a significant negative effect on the ability of the school system to continue to deliver a quality learning experience for the students attending Greene County Schools.

The projected enrollment of 342 students in Year 5 represents 11.7% of Greene County Schools’ enrollment. Using \$8,989.34 as the per pupil expenditure (\$7,886.23 state and \$1,103.11 local), 342 students would create a negative financial impact of \$3,074,354.28 – approximately 9% of GCS’s annual budget.

Griffin Leadership School:

In Griffin Leadership School’s application, the instructional emphasis is vague but refers multiple times to direct instructional programs. Again, Greene County Schools is highly regarded for STEM education in NC. Since 2011, project-based, hands-on inquiry learning has been a cornerstone of teaching and learning in GCS. A preK-12 STEM Pipeline has been established and provides students opportunities to develop skills necessary for success in school and beyond. Our STEM program is comprised of at least 50% female and 50% minority students as these populations are traditionally underrepresented in STEM career fields. Furthermore, in researching effective instructional models as part of the Leandro case, the Friday Institute for Educational

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Innovation has recognized our elementary literacy instruction as an effective model to be replicated. GCS hosts teacher academies during the summer to train teachers from across NC on how to replicate our STEM instructional model. In August 2018, Greene County Schools was named one of the 25 most innovative school districts in the United States by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the Successful Practices Network (SPN), and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH). Regional employers continue to applaud GCS for student preparation and career readiness. In 2018, Greene County Middle School joined Greene Central High School by earning recognition by the NC State Board of Education as a STEM Model School of Distinction. Less than 30 NC schools have earned this recognition since its inception in 2015. Former Governor McCrory, current Lt. Governor Forest, and current First Lady Cooper have visited and promoted GCMS and GCS as a model for future ready teaching and learning as have teams from other school districts, teams from NCDPI, and teams from the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation. Tremendous work has taken place to provide GCS students a high quality, relevant, educational experience that prepares them for success. GCS has a proven instructional model to deliver the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Our model is anchored in evidence-based practices and supported by ongoing professional development and coaching. Teachers and district leaders collaborate to design and implement lessons that meet district criteria for success.

The model for assessing student progress proposed by Griffin Leadership Schools is comparable to practices currently in place in Greene County elementary schools. The schools used as comparisons do not come anywhere near matching the demographics of Greene County Schools. For example, one comparison school in Nebraska has 78.8% White students, 5.3% Hispanic, and 11.3% American Indian. That school has 40% of its students deemed as economically disadvantaged. Greene County Schools is comprised of 36.8% Black students, 31.7% Hispanic students, and 29.0% White students. Furthermore, the assessments in Nebraska are not comparable to the assessments used in North Carolina.

Leadership opportunities are embedded in the daily learning experiences. Additionally, groups such as the Young Men's Club, the Young Ladies Service League, the Student Government Association, Day of Code, STEM Expo, and other opportunities promote leadership through organizing and participating in community service projects and engaging role models on a monthly basis. These opportunities set the foundation for these students to move into more formalized leadership opportunities in middle and high school.

The projected enrollment of 540 students in Year 5, if all 540 came from Greene County, represents 18.4% of Greene County Schools enrollment. Using \$8,989.34 as the per pupil expenditure (\$7,886.23 state and \$1,103.11 local), 540 students would create a negative financial impact of \$4,854,243.6 – approximately 14.3% of GCS's annual budget.

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Summary:

In short, we are extremely concerned about the quality of the education students will receive at either proposed charter school. Furthermore, there is no mention of student support staff and/or wrap-around services in either application. We provide services for students outside of direct instruction including mental health, medical, housing, and sadly, suicide interventions. Our schools provide a safe and stable environment for our students that, for many students, may be their only safe and stable environment.

We are also concerned about the financial impact of these two charter schools on Greene County Schools. If both schools pulled their maximum number of students from Greene County, GCS would lose 882 students in 2023 when the schools reach their full projected enrollment (30.1% of total enrollment in GCS). The financial impact would be \$7,928,597.88, which represents 23.3% of Greene County Schools' annual budget.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or need additional information from the Greene County Board of Education.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick C. Miller", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dr. Patrick C. Miller
Superintendent