



**Testimony Presented to the School District of Philadelphia Board of Education
on the proposed ASPIRA Bilingual Business, Finance and Technology
Charter High School**

**Public Citizens for Children and Youth
PA Charter Performance Center**

January 29, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the charter application for the ASPIRA Bilingual Business, Finance and Technology Charter High School.

Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) deeply respects the effort that ASPIRA is making to improve equitable access to a quality education for all students, especially those who are Hispanic. In 2016, PCCY advocated for the charters of ASPIRA Charter School at Olney (9-12) and ASPIRA Charter School at Stetson (5-8) to be renewed against the school district's decision due to the high share of Hispanic students it served and how those students performed compared to their peers in the district.

In this case, regrettably, we oppose this application because ASPIRA is showing signs of struggling to demonstrate that it can live up to its commitment to educational quality for all the students it currently educating in its city authorized charters. Specifically, we see that in some ASIPRA charter schools it is not meeting their stated goal of providing a comprehensive learning experience to additional students or that its programs will enable students to meet the academic standards under 22 Pa. Code Chapter 4.

ASPIRA currently operates four brick and mortar charter schools. We note that two of the charter schools are performing at or above the level of their peers. Yet the outcomes for students at the remaining schools - ASPIRA Charter School at Olney (9-12), ASPIRA Charter School at Stetson (5-8) - indicate that ASIRA is struggling to reach desired levels of performance.

ASPIRA Charter School at Olney is on the District's watch list

The ASPIRA Charter School at Olney (9-12) was founded in 2011. A review of recent School District of Philadelphia annual evaluations reveals that the school's performance has consistently ranked below both comparable charter school and district averages.

For example, on the Pennsylvania School District Performance Profile between 2015 and 2019, ASPIRA at Olney significantly lagged behind other Philadelphia charter schools and district schools each year. In the most recent year, 2018-2019, the school received a 43.5 compared to the Philadelphia charter school average of 58.6 and the Philadelphia district school average of 54.1.

Additionally, on the 2018-19 Keystone Exams, student performance at ASPIRA at Olney was far below comparable benchmark schools. In English, only 19% of students were proficient compared to 27% at similar schools and 51% at district schools. In math (Algebra 1), only 8% of ASPIRA at Olney students were on grade level compared to 17% of students in similar schools and 40% in district schools.

While we recognize that teaching ELL students requires more effort, the outcomes here are very troubling, as they are for all charters and the district. One-third (33.6%) of students at ASPIRA at Olney are English language learners. Only 4% of ELL students reached ELA proficiency compared to 3% at similar schools and 9% at district schools. Only 2% of Olney ELL students were proficient in math compared to 3% in similar schools and 6% in district schools.

According to the school's most recent 2018-2019 School Progress Report, the annual measure the school district uses to determine how schools are doing for students on academic achievement progress, school climate and safety and college and career readiness, the school received a 35% out of 100%. Schools with scores between 25% and 49% fall into the "watch" category, meaning that they need intensive support to improve. In fairness, this was a significant improvement from the year before, when the school received a 12% the lowest possible score signifying that change was required.

ASPIRA Charter School at Stetson is also on the District's watch list

It's noteworthy that the performance at the ASPIRA Charter School at Stetson (grades 5-8) also raising significant concerns about ASPIRA's ability to open and effectively manage a new charter school. On the 2015 to 2019 Pennsylvania School District Performance Profiles, Stetson's rating was below comparable charter school and district school averages. In the most recent year, 2018 -2019, the school received a 50.5 compared to the charter school average of 58.6 and the district school average of 54.1.

Additionally, on the 2018-2019 PSSA Exams, student performance was far below similar schools and district schools. In English, 13% of Stetson students were proficient compared to 23% at similar schools and 38% at district schools. In math, only 4% of students were on grade level compared to 7% of students in similar schools and 22% in district schools. And for Stetson students, English language learners, also struggled more than many of their peers. Only 4% of these students reached proficiency compared to 11% at similar schools and 21% at district schools in English. Only 1% at Stetson did in math compared to 2% in similar schools and 15% in district schools.

Finally, the school's 2018-2019 School Progress Report raises significant concerns. Stetson received a 47% out of 100% which places Stetson in the "watch" category.

According to ASPIRA's application for the Bilingual Business, Finance and Technology High School, it aspires to serve some of the neediest students and have them at 25% proficiency in English and 16% in math after three years. We applaud the vision of ASPIRA and the determination to make a significant contribution to educational equity in Philadelphia, but we urge the rejection of this application so ASPIRA can focus its talent and resources to improve the outcomes of the students currently educate.

If the Board of Education chooses to authorize new seats in any new charter schools, we urge you to do so in a manner that will not result in a net increase in total charter school seats as this would negatively affect the availability of funding to educate students attending schools operated directly by the District.