



**Comments on the New 2020-21 New Charter Application for the Proposed  
Pride Academy Charter School**

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My name is ML Wernecke and I am the Director of the PA Charter Performance Center, a new initiative of Public Citizens for Children and Youth. The Center is dedicated to producing unbiased, accurate, and timely information to advance sound state-level charter school policy and I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the application for the proposed Pride Academy Charter School. My comments fall into two areas.

**First, the application does not sufficiently demonstrate that the Pride Academy Charter School will provide comprehensive learning experiences to students or that its programs will enable students to meet the academic standards under 22 Pa. Code Chapter 4.**

The applicant outlines 21 ambitious academic goals but fails to demonstrate that the school leadership has the capacity to meet these standards. The school leader, Dr. LaToya Johnson, is currently principal at West Philadelphia Achievement Charter School and was previously a literary coach at Chester Community Charter School. In addition, Dr. Benita Jessup is Director of K-8 English Language Arts at Chester Community Charter School.

Because no other board members appear to have experience as educators, achievement data from the Chester Community Charter School is the best available evidence of the applicant's ability to enable students to meet academic standards. These scores are among the lowest of any school in the state. From the most recent Future Ready PA Index:

**English Language Arts/Literature**

- 16.3% of students scored proficient or advanced
- 1.2% of student scored advanced
- 14.5% of third graders were reading at grade level

Mathematics/Algebra

- 6.4% of students scored proficient or advanced
- 1.2% scored advanced
- 6.0% of third graders were performing math at grade level

Finally, only about half (51.3%) of students attended CCCS regularly, indicative of systemic problems at the school. The dearth of educational experience among the leadership team and the troubling record at CCCS raises doubts about their ability to deliver at a new school.

*Note: Appendices to the application are not posted on the Charter School Office website, complicating efforts to evaluate leadership qualifications. PCCY has previously requested that appendices be posted on the website and we respectfully renew this request.*

**Second, the proposed school risks destabilizing established schools that are already demonstrating high academic growth.**

The applicant states that it will recruit students from five zip codes: 19119, 19126, 19141, 19144, and 19150. As shown below, 10,098 students attend 22 charter and traditional public schools in these neighborhoods. Adding new seats at a new school will inevitably reduce enrollment at existing public schools, destabilizing schools that are making progress.

Pennsylvania’s PVAAS growth measures are reliable and validated indicators of improved school performance. PVAAS uses PSSA test results to gauge student academic growth and assess whether schools are making more progress than other schools in the commonwealth. As the table below shows, *over eight out of ten schools (86%) in this applicant’s recruitment zone are at or above the norm for the state.* This means students in these schools are progressing at or more than would be expected based on statewide trends. Authorizing new schools at the expense of schools that are already making progress does not support the goal of enabling students to meet academic standards.

		Number of Schools			
	Enrollment	Exceed PA Standard for Growth	Meet PA Standard for Growth	Below PA Standard for Growth	Total Number of Schools
19119	1223	2		1	3
19126	1221		3		3
19141	2693	4	2		6
19144	3701	4	3		7
19150	1260		1	2	3
Total	10098	10	9	3	22
Share		45%	41%	14%	100%

Source for Growth Tiers: Philadelphia Schools Partnership, *K-8 School Quality, Choice & Access in Philadelphia*, January 13, 2021 and author calculations

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.

Thank you for the opportunity to add this statement to the record.