

May 2, 2018

Commissioner MaryEllen Elia
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Dr. Edwin M. Quezada
Superintendent of Schools

Dear Commissioner Elia,

The purpose of this correspondence is to express the **Yonkers Public Schools strong opposition to the Charter School of Educational Excellence (CSEE) Material Revision Request for High School Expansion and Regionalized K-12 Program**. CSEE's application proposes the following: transition into a regional K-12 school; expand to serve students in grades K-12; and expand enrollment from 729 students to 1,129 students.

It is with a high level of frustration that, once again, the Yonkers Public Schools must defend that **the City of Yonkers simply does not need a ninth high school**. As stated in my September 15, 2017 letter (attached for your review), I provided evidence that CSEE's application lacked research-based pedagogy and it failed to demonstrate community needs. These facts have not changed.

In fact, District data demonstrates our continuous increasing success across high schools and the results are magnificent for our students and the community. Yonkers eight (8) comprehensive high schools provide 25 specialized college and career readiness programs, unique magnet themes and P-Tech programs recognized as New York State models.

Yonkers graduated 86% of the Class of 2017 (2013 Cohort), and as you publicly noted, the first Big 5 school district to graduate over 80% of its students and above the State average of 82%. Significant progress is evident across subgroups: English Language Learners, Students with Disabilities, Economically Disadvantaged, Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students. See attached Media Release dated February 14, 2018. Examples of our successes:

- 4% Drop-out rate lower than the State average of 6%, which decreased by 49% over three years.
- Seven Yonkers high schools are in Good Standing, one is a Focus School with an 82% graduation rate.
- Increased SAT scores districtwide by 15% in Reading and 12% in Mathematics over three years.
- Yonkers My Brother's Keeper (MBK) movement is flourishing, receiving national attention and considered a leader and model in New York.
- US News & World Report's 2018 Best High Schools of the Nation once again included Yonkers Middle/High School, Saunders Trades and Technical High School and Lincoln High School.

CSEE's current application is duplicative to their August 2017 high school expansion submission and continues to be void of research-based pedagogy necessary for grades 9 through 12 as noted in our letter submitted in September 2017. Yonkers Public Schools provide quality high school programs; the data supports it.

CSEE fails to demonstrate regional or Yonkers community need. Last year, Governor Cuomo signed the legislation (Senate Bill S.6400-A / Assembly Bill A.7788-A) authorizing additional aid to continue the progress made under the Yonkers City School District Joint Schools Construction and Modernization Act. The first phase designated to rebuild a new innovative Gorton High School, which will increase the school's capacity by an additional 150 students. CSEE expansion anticipates two hundred (200) Yonkers high school students – 0.03% of Yonkers high schools total enrollment. Clearly, the District's high schools can continue to seamlessly integrate two hundred (200) students into our eight (8) high schools. Reducing 50 students per grade spread over eight (8) high schools translates to maybe twenty-five (25) students per school or 6 students per grade. Additionally, CSEE misrepresents the District's capacity issues; seats are needed in our elementary schools not the high schools.

CSEE's request to "regionalize the K-12 program which will support students from Westchester, Bronx and Rockland County," is flawed; it is based on data from the New York City Charter School Center. To validate the needs of Westchester and Rockland counties with New York City data is akin to research malpractice. What is more concerning is CSEE's 65% retention rate of Yonkers students. Eighty-one (81) students enter in kindergarten, by fourth (4th) grade the number declines to 68 and by eighth (8th) grade only 53 Yonkers students remain. **Why would the State allow CSEE to expand and include grades 9-12 when their Yonkers students enrollment declines by thirty-five 35% over the testing grades?**

There are significant unaddressed implications for the City of Yonkers in CSEE's request to expand to a regional kindergarten to 12th grade school, with an increased enrollment from 729 to 1,129 students as well as building a new school in proximity to their current facility.

1. What is the impact on the Warburton and Lamartine Avenues community imposing 400 additional students and the construction of a new school? In CSEE's application there is no evidence that CSEE communicated with or sought input from this community.
2. What is the impact from additional traffic on an already very busy thoroughfare from as many as 564 students transported daily from communities outside of the City of Yonkers?

Finally, the financial burden for the City of Yonkers is unconscionable. For the 2018-2019 school year, the Yonkers Public Schools faces a \$45 million budget gap that includes the annual \$10 million allocation for Charter School tuition. To close this gap without additional revenue requires the Board of Education Trustees to consider using the District's entire unassigned fund balance, significantly reduce services and layoff potentially 300 employees.

Our fiscal struggle for sustained recurring revenues will persist in 2019-2020 and beyond, based on what we know today. The annual gap could persistently be \$45 million or more, and with no significant additional revenue and no unassigned fund balance available to absorb some of the shortfall, the only option will be more employee layoffs.

While the Charter School allocation increases annually, the District is forced to layoff employees and drastically reduce services. CSEE is guaranteed the over \$15,000 per student allocation regardless of the revenue available to the sending district. Currently, 90% of their tuition comes from Yonkers. Moreover, based on CSEE's application, Yonkers Public Schools will be required to increase its allocation to CSEE by approximately \$500,000 annually. CSEE's proposed 50/50 formula for enrollment in no way guarantees a reduction in the number of students enrolled from Yonkers. It provides for, "50% of the open seats made available to Yonkers students and 50% open seats made available to students outside of Yonkers." The 50/50 formula may only reduce Yonkers allocation in 2027-2028. If the available seats are not filled with students outside of Yonkers, will they be filled with Yonkers children? If yes, then the savings for Yonkers will not materialize. Therefore, the financial impact for the District can potentially grow. Also, our projections do not include the additional growing costs for transportation, special education and nurse services.

Is this equity? The answer is NO - less for the public school students and more to their charter school counterpart.

This is not about the students at CSEE, 90% are Yonkers children. Our opposition is about transparency, accountability and equity. The facts are clear, our public school students are deprived a sound basic education because the Yonkers Public Schools does not receive sustained recurring revenue. Our children deserve better.

Respectfully, until these circumstances are addressed, the Charter School of Educational Excellence's application for high school expansion and a regionalized K-12 program is an insult to the Yonkers community. Thank you for your support of the Yonkers Public Schools.

Sincerely,



Dr. Edwin M. Quézada

C: Rev. Steve Lopez, President and Members of the Board of Education
Mike Spano, Mayor, City of Yonkers
Mike Khader, President, and Members of the Yonkers City Council
Dr. Betty Rosa, Chancellor, New York State Board of Regents
Judith Johnson, Regent, New York State Education Department
Board of Regents – 9th Judicial District
Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senator, New York State
Shelley Mayer, Senator, New York State
Gary Pretlow, Assembly Member, New York State
Jhone Ebert, Senior Deputy Commissioner, New York State Education Department
David Frank, Executive Director, Charter School Office,
New York State Department of Education