



Testimony

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As the School Reform Commission considers whether to renew the contracts of the 16 charter schools up for renewal, we recognize that state law has specific parameters which you must operate under to make your decision. While the some aspects of the state law may not explicitly give you the powers to consider the financial implications of renewing charters, you are also required by state law to ensure the financial stewardship of this district and to take actions that will enable you to pass a balanced and responsible budget that supports the 200,000 kids in traditional and charter public schools

The School District informed PCCY and others that it would not release the number of new charter seats requested through renewal and modification requests. The lack of transparency runs counter to the Superintendent action plan goal of being a high quality authorizer and raises more questions than it answers. I urge you to direct the district to release this information now because it is essential for the public's ability to be informed and afforded the opportunity to provide input on the fiscal and academic impact charter renewal process.

I make this point because the district suffered a state budget cut of nearly \$200 million and as a result it faces an enormous structural deficit. Budget cuts have caused the closure of twenty-three district schools, a reduction in funding for the district's Promise Academies and the loss of critical summer programming for thousands of students who are below grade level. The district is in no position to give charter schools a blank check or even sufficient funds to support limited enrollment expansion at this time. We believe that charter expansion should occur only when the district can afford to expand seats in its own high quality schools as well.

PCCY recently conducted an audit of the renewal charter schools and found that many charters are below district averages in critical areas. While PSSA data alone is far too narrow a dataset to gauge school performance, it is one of the few indicators available to inform our analysis. We found that one of the charters seeking renewal has not demonstrated the capacity to meet the academic benchmarks of the school district on a city-wide or neighborhood catchment area basis. One additional charter has academic achievement levels that are consistent with the district, but not much better. The renewal requests from the charters with weak academic performance should be considered from the perspective

of Stanford University research which found charter performance within the first three years of a school's operation is a very likely to continue as they age.

The challenge in reviewing charters' academic data is compounded by the fact that most charters seeking renewal under enroll vulnerable student populations. Nine of the 16 schools have lower rates of poor students, 13 of the schools have 2 percent or less English Language learners compared to the district's 8 percent average, and only seven of the charters have special education enrollment rates that are comparable to the district's. As a result of these disparities it is not possible to accurately compare the academic performance of these charters with the district or with other charters serving higher rates vulnerable students.

However, Hostos, Pan American and Young Scholars have enrollments that reflects the diverse student body of the district or some cases even higher concentrations of students vulnerable students. In these charters, based on the PSSA results of the last two years, students are doing significantly better than the district's average results.

We have submitted the results of our research which includes the academic and demographic analysis of each charter and an analysis prepared jointly by the Education Law Center and PCCY summarizing by charter barriers to admission. Finally we have also submitted our recommendations, endorsed by other organizations, for how we think the SRC should proceed with respect to these renewal requests.