

Testimony to the School Reform Commission
Regarding Charter Renewals, April 28, 2016
Presented by Public Citizens for Children and Youth

My name is Abel McDaniels. I am a graduating from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in Urban Studies and Urban Education. I interned for Public Citizens for Children and Youth helping to prepare the data for its recently issued report on Neighborhood High Schools, Separate and Unequal.

Based on that research, I want to share with the SRC some additional information about the renewal applicants beyond what was provided by the Charter Office reports.

Of the renewal applicants, seven of the nine schools fail to enroll a reasonable share of ELL students. Only Aspira's schools at Olney High and Stetson Elementary do so. Both schools have slightly more than 20% and more than 50% of their students are Latino.

Neither of these schools were recommended for renewal. While I am far from a charter advocate, I am a devoted equity advocate and I am troubled by these non-renewal recommendations.

My research found that students attending these two schools have better outcomes than district-operated schools with similar demographics and the other schools recommended for renewal that serve far fewer ELL or Latino students.

For instance:

- Stetson had the same growth index as the middle school recommended for renewal. Further both schools met or exceeded the growth standard for the math and Reading/ELA PSSA's.
- Stetson's SPR score for School Year 14/15 was higher than that of the middle school recommended for renewal.
- Stetson was categorized as "Watch" for overall SPR performance (SY 2014-15). This is the same categorization received by the other middle school recommended for renewal.
- Finally, Stetson's percent of students performing proficient or better on the Math PSSA's exceeded that of its peer schools.

- Since none of the renewing cohort high schools has ELL or Latino populations that approach the enrollment share in Olney, we looked beyond the data provided in the Charter School Office reports. I looked at Edison which enrolls a similar percentage of Latino students. Olney High School ranks eleven times as strong as Edison in terms of climate.
- Olney also surpasses Edison academically. Olney's Keystone scores in math and science are twice as high as those of Edison
- Compared to the charter high schools recommended for renewal, Olney High School showed an 11% increase in the share of students entering college. That rate of increase is higher than the rate at either of the charter high schools recommended for renewal.

My conclusion is that 3000 mostly Latino students attending Stetson and Olney are receiving a better shot at a good education than what they would if their schools closed and they were enrolled in district-run or other charter schools. None of the charters in this renewal cohort have a track record of making progress with these students. As a result, I believe that from an equity perspective, it's in the best interest of these students that the two charters be renewed.

In closing I want to point out that the level of review of the renewing charters could offer the District lessons for examining the progress of the schools the District operates. As an intern when I reviewed the data on the performance of the neighborhood high schools. I found for instance, that

- These schools average 4 principals every 5 years, and
- Although neighborhood high schools serve more than half of the district's high school students, no one at a senior level, reporting directly to the superintendent, is singularly focused on the academic, student support or other issues necessary for turning around these high schools

At PCCY we used careful analysis to understand what was going on at these schools as best as we could and make tangible recommendations to foster their improvement. The Charter Office did the same as it reviewed the applications you are here to consider tonight. In my freshman year, this body voted to close 26 public schools with much less analysis than used to review these renewing charters. I encourage the SRC to carefully study district-run schools with the same level of scrutiny we are using today and use that analysis to improve them and keep them open.