

Testimony Presented to the School District of Philadelphia Board of Education
April 30, 2020
Tomea Sippio-Smith, K-12 Policy Director
Public Citizens for Children and Youth

Good evening,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

First, I commend Dr. Hite and the School Board for ensuring that none of Philadelphia's students go hungry throughout the Covid-19 crisis.

Second, I applaud the Dr. Hite and the School Board for getting technology into the hands of students so that when online learning commences next week, Philadelphia's students have the tools on which to learn.

Third, I address the matter which has prompted me to submit this testimony.

Universal Charter School at Bluford and Universal Charter School at Daroff are up for renewal. The Charter School Office does not recommend that the charter for either school is renewed. We support the office's recommendation given the consistently poor performance by both schools and their record of student failure.

Between 2015 – 2019, Universal Bluford Charter School's performance has been abysmal. Not only did the school score below the charter school average for three of those four years and it had lower performance than similar schools in the district for half of those years. In fact, a majority of the students who took the PSSA failed to master grade level work in English, math and science. For English and math, Bluford's students did worse than their peers in district schools - with only 35% of students reading on grade level and 22% of students doing grade level math during their best years of performance. Those numbers represented a high point. Last school year, only 30% of were proficient in reading and an appalling 14% made the grade in math.

To make matters worse, according to the district's Renewal Recommendation Report, the school failed to meet standards on organizational compliance and

viability, financial health and sustainability. In short, the school itself does not have the processes, protocols and resources in place to support students as they aspire to learn.

Similarly, at the Universal Daroff Charter School, students are struggling. During the same four-year period, most of the school's students performed below the charter school and district average in English and math for **all** four years. 3rd through 8th grade proficiency rates in English averaged less than 20% and in math, students fared even worse. Last year, 9% of students could do grade level work – and that was an improvement over the prior three years.

Additionally, Daroff's students went to school less than their peers did. Last year, only 35% of students had strong attendance – falling below the district and similar school average. And like Universal Charter School at Bluford, according to the district's recommendation report, the school failed to meet standards on organizational compliance and stability, financial health and sustainability. In fact, in violation of the school's charter, it scheduled school board meetings that were not properly noticed, and minutes did not contain required information like votes on budgets, personnel salaries or on the calendar.

The Charter Office's reports point out glaring concerns with both charter schools as to student performance and in their management. Now, more than ever, the district must consider whether the investments it makes are wise, given its projected \$1 billion dollar deficit. And considering the effort, tools and resources it will take to get students' learning back on track, the district cannot afford to pay tuition bills for schools that consistently fail its students.

PCCY supports the Charter Schools Office's recommendation of non-renewal for both schools and commends the district's actions to improve the quality of its schools by recommending the closure of two charter schools that have clearly failed to make the grade.