



**WAKE COUNTY**  
BOARD OF EDUCATION

CROSSROADS BUILDING 1  
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August 16, 2022

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Office of Charter Schools  
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Dear Mr. Machado and Advisory Board Members:

We are writing to oppose - in the strongest possible terms - the charter application for the American Leadership Academy in Garner.

The proposed charter school would be virtually identical to American Leadership Academy - Coastal (ALA-Coastal), located in Wilmington and operated by Charter One. Based on the track record of that school, the proposed charter school in Garner would contribute greatly to de facto segregation in surrounding schools. The ALA model appears designed to ensure a student body that is disproportionately white and affluent.

Furthermore, the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) schools in Garner have plenty of room to accommodate population growth and offer excellent opportunities for the development of the whole child, making a new school in this area completely unnecessary.

Please consider the following facts:

**Demographics:** The application states: "Like all Charter One managed schools, ALA-Garner is a school for all students and is expected to thus mirror the local LEA's student demographic data."

However, the demographics of ALA-Coastal indicate this is an empty promise.

Only 16% of students at ALA-Coastal are classified as Economically Disadvantaged in 2021-22, compared to 31% in New Hanover County Schools. All but one of the 13 WCPSS schools in Garner (Vance Elementary) are well above 16% Economically Disadvantaged.

In 2020-21 ALA-Coastal was overwhelmingly white, 87%, in contrast to 59% in New Hanover County Schools. That's 623 white students at ALA-Coastal

compared to just 24 Black students and 31 Hispanic students. All but two WCPSS schools in Garner are majority-minority, ranging from 36% minority to 92% minority.

Additionally, while the application pledges to recruit students with disabilities, only 6.5% of the student population at ALA-Coastal have a disability, compared to 13% in the surrounding LEA. Only one WCPSS school in Garner has fewer than 10% students with disabilities, with the rest ranging from 12% to 20%.

Given those stark contrasts, it is impossible to believe that the proposed ALA-Garner would be any different than ALA-Coastal, regardless of the plan for an *optional* weighted lottery laid out in the application. Bottom line: this proposed charter undoubtedly would exacerbate socioeconomic disparities in Garner schools, and should be rejected on those grounds alone.

**Transportation and meals:** Like other charter schools of this ilk, ALA-Garner would achieve its skewed demographics in large part by making access to reliable transportation and reduced-cost meals difficult if not impossible for working-class families.

Its transportation plan would require most parents to drive their child to a designated drop-off site. The application explicitly infers that their target family is one who has the advantage of a flexible schedule: "...[E]xperience has taught us that most of our students will be transported by their families to school using ALA-Garner 's efficient car line system."

Its plan for assisting families with lunch costs is designed to discourage low-income families from attending. "If a specific family truly cannot afford lunches, they may request a waiver from lunch fees from the School Director," the application states. "The School Director will have the authority to waive fees based on documented evidence of need. The ability to waive fees is at the discretion of the School Director."

A school like this, with policies aimed at making sure only families with the means can attend, would be a detriment to the Garner community and our school district.

**Accommodating population growth:** The application states that future population growth in Garner is a "cause for concern."

Thanks to the long-range planning of Wake County leaders and funding from the community, WCPSS schools in Garner have more than adequate building

capacity and available seats to serve current and future students, even as the population grows.

**Educational model:** One of the stated legislative purposes of charter schools is to “Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods.”

There is little in the application that is different or innovative.

The application says the school would infuse “moral and wholesome leadership principles,” implying that traditional public schools are somehow neither moral nor wholesome.

In Wake County, character education is an important part of the culture at each and every one of our public schools. All of our staff members create learning environments every day that are inviting, respectful, inclusive, flexible, and supportive. In this regard, American Leadership Academy’s application does not demonstrate an unmet need of the community.

We have created healthy learning environments, in part through the use of research-based programs such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). (The latter ALA-Garner claims it will employ, again begging the question of what they are offering that is new.)

Recently we also have placed a special emphasis on the importance of relationship-building with students to build trust and respect. We know that teachers need to connect with students on a personal level to get the most out of their classroom performance, and we have provided training and resources to ensure that.

As for innovation, the application cites the use of Classical Education, stating that “children regenerate knowledge and meaning through development of an individual’s intellectual reasoning abilities, such as the mental processes of recognition, recall, analysis, reflection, application, creation, understanding, and evaluation.”

Well, yes. But that is no different than the teaching and learning that happens every day in every WCPSS school.

We also know that students will need to have strong 4Cs skills (collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and communication) to succeed in a 21st economy.

That is why project- and inquiry-based learning is integrated into all subjects at all grade levels in WCPSS.

As for innovation, several Garner schools offer unique choices for families. Smith Magnet Elementary, for example, offers an International Baccalaureate program, which stresses global perspectives and inquiry-based learning. The school also recently added a Spanish immersion program, in response to parent demand for more language immersion options.

For another example, the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) focus at Aversboro Elementary in Garner incorporates the engineering design process into all instructional delivery.

The application cites other Charter One schools' success on standardized tests. However, this has almost everything to do with those schools' skewed demographics than any innovative educational offerings.

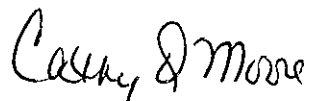
In closing, we hope the above factors demonstrate that this proposed charter would harm our school district, particularly our Garner schools. Rather than offering anything new or innovative, this school would promote white flight from traditional public schools, sowing division in the Garner community and siphoning resources from students who need them the most.

We implore you to unequivocally reject this charter application.

Respectfully,



Lindsay Mahaffey  
Chair  
Wake County Board of Education



Cathy Q. Moore  
WCPSS Superintendent