



November 1, 2019

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NC Department of Public Instruction
Office of Charter Schools
Mr. Dave Machado, Director
6301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, N.C. 27699-6301

Dear Mr. Machado and Advisory Board Members:

Wake County Public School System appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the charter school application for RISE Academy in Wake County. Wake County Public School System opposes the approval of this charter school.

We submit the following points for your consideration.

1. According to the application, Rise Academy selected Torchlight Academy Services *"because of their history of exceeding growth every year, their accomplishment as operating a school with the highest academic growth of any charter school in the state, their roots in North Carolina, and their willingness to invest in our success [...]"* (page 19).

Last year, two of the three charter schools led by Rise Academy's proposed management, Three Rivers Academy and Essie Mae Kiser Foxx Charter, received an F letter grade by NCDPI and failed to meet growth. This year, Essie Mae Kiser Foxx Charter received permission from the State Board of Education to sever their agreement with Torchlight Academy Services. Cited in this request were failures to account for expenditures, failures to pay operating costs, failures to follow policies, rules and regulations and failures to adhere to the curriculum adopted by the school's governing board.

Despite failing academic results and history of poor fiscal and operational management, Torchlight Academy Services is seeking approval of five new charter schools, including Rise Academy in Wake County.

Based on their lack of success, we have considerable concerns regarding Torchlight Academy Services' ability to successfully manage a franchise of charter schools.

Increasing our concern is Rise Academy's aim to target economically disadvantaged and especially vulnerable students from the Garner community. We simply cannot risk these students' futures on inexperience.

2. According to the application, "*[Torchlight Schools'] vastly outperform [Garner] schools' percentage of grade proficient students among Black and economically disadvantaged students*" (page 19).

This statement is untrue. In fact, RISE's application was selective with the schools in which they choose to compare. They neglected to include two Garner schools: Bryan Road Elementary (Exceeded growth in 2018-19) and East Garner Elementary (Met growth in 2018-19). They also neglected to include two schools under the same management in their comparison chart: Three Rivers Academy and Essie Mae Kiser Foxx Charter.

With these additional schools included, it would be correct to state that WCPSS' Garner area schools outperformed Torchlight Academy Services percentage of grade proficient students overall and among Black and economically disadvantaged students.

3. According to the application, "*Students in Garner are performing well below the Wake County average and is in dire need of a local, high-quality school of choice*" (page 22).

This statement is misleading. In fact, Torchlight Academy School also performs well below WCPSS' average.

Many students in Garner come from lower income families and as such, perform on average below the Wake County mean on standardized state tests. This is no surprise as research shows us that test scores tell us more about the socioeconomic status of students than the quality of schools.

Despite this, nine WCPSS schools in this area met or exceeded growth last year among Black and economically disadvantaged students: Bryan Road Elementary, Creech Road Elementary, East Garner Elementary, East Garner Middle, North Garner Middle, Rand Road Elementary, Smith Elementary, Vance Elementary and Vandora Springs Elementary.

These results are not indicative of a community that is in dire need of a local, high-quality school of choice.

4. According to the application, "*RISE Academy will distinguish itself from the local school district by its STEAM focus, its use of active-based learning, its teacher training in Culturally Responsive Teaching, its foreign language program, its leadership and ethics education, Teach Like a Champion, and the school's distinct school culture*" (page 21).

This statement is misleading. While these ideas can be the backbone to a successful school, they are not unique to RISE and do not distinguish Rise Academy from local schools.

- Garner's Aversboro Elementary, North Garner Middle and East Garner Middle have comprehensive, schoolwide STEAM programs.

Page 3

- International Baccalaureate programs are offered at Smith Elementary, East Garner Middle and Garner High.
- All WCPSS schools, with the adoption of our strategic plan in 2014, have classrooms founded in project-based learning, integrated through the 4 C's: collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking.
- All WCPSS schools are trained in Culturally Responsive Teaching and our district has been recognized as a leader in this work.
- WCPSS has an award-winning magnet school program that includes 12 proximate schools with world language programs, including nearby Smith Elementary.
- All WCPSS schools incorporate character education programs, reflecting eight character traits (Courage, Good Judgment, Integrity, Kindness, Perseverance, Respect, Responsibility and Self Discipline) and focused on curriculum, school climate and community involvement as core components.

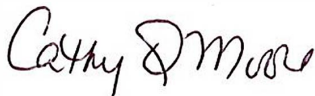
We do not believe supporting a charter school that provides duplicate programs and services is in the best interest of our community.

Thank you for your service to the students and families in North Carolina. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need additional information.

Respectfully,



James D. Martin
Board Chair



Cathy Q. Moore
Superintendent