

Public Schools of Plainfield New Jersey

Office of the Interim Superintendent of Schools

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April 15, 2019

Dr. Lamont Repollet, Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner of Education
NJ Department of Education
100 River View Plaza; PO Box 500
Trenton, NJ 08625-0500

Dear Commissioner Repollet:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and submit comments regarding the application for the Vocational Technical Regional Charter High School (VTRCHS) in Plainfield. As your office reviews the charter school's vocational plan, please keep in mind the ultimate decision will significantly affect every member of the Plainfield community representing the Plainfield Public Schools. Many residents have voiced their thoughts to me publicly and privately against VTRCHS. We have detailed a series of concerns regarding the VTRCHS's vocational plan for your review. Many of my comments are virtually the same as the previous objections to this charter school's application from last year.

- The VTRCHS estimates an enrollment of 240 students the first year, with an eventual increase to 450 current residence students who will be enrolled in the charter school. We have a formula-based tuition that essentially amounts to approximately 90% of our per pupil tax levy. This will be a loss of approximately \$10,000 for every student who leaves our public school for a charter school. If 240 students leave the District, we will have to accommodate for a loss of \$2,400,000. At 450 students, the amount will rise to \$4,500,000. In addition, the District has to divide a per capita share of our federal and state categorical aids for students to count towards each of those calculations. The diversion of funds would be a tremendous financial burden to the District due to a previous loss of \$62 million in state aid.
- If the application gains approval, the District stands to lose 240 students along with \$2.4 million. To reduce the budget by that much, the District would have to reduce

its technology and curriculum and instruction accounts by \$1,000,000 and cut approximately 20 staff members. When the enrollment at VTRCHS reaches 450 students, it would be necessary to reduce the budget by an additional \$4.5 million and cut an additional 40 staff members. This would result in the loss of programs to all remaining elementary and high school students in the District. This would also put a serious halt to our current reorganization plan to bring back vocational programs to the high school and increase the remedial staff by 30.

- We also realize that our increase in Equalization aid is tied into charter school funding; therefore, the charter schools receive an additional \$900 per student due to an increase in our state aid. The irony of this situation is our state aid increase of \$8,594,435 is now reduced by \$4,704,925 for charter schools per pupil (2,500) an increase of \$900 and increased enrollment, along with \$5.5 million in employee salaries and benefits, not one cent of the state aid increase will enhance instruction to help our students. This creates the perfect storm for the Plainfield Public School District as we continue to struggle to improve student achievement.
- There are five existing charter schools in the District, which takes approximately \$28 million from our current expense budget. With the loss of state aid over the years and the continuing growth of charter schools, Plainfield will never stop the bleeding and be able to provide a quality education for the students that remain. Furthermore, budget reductions due to the losses I've stated have already impacted services including reductions in reading instruction, guidance services, library services, world language instruction, after school and summer programs among many other cuts which target our at-risk student population.
- In general, the application does not provide information about how the VTRCHS proposes to address students with special needs.
- The parent surveys are seriously flawed. There is no explanation of how many surveys were taken, or if there was duplication of people in the same household taking the survey.
- The property at 7-9 Watchung Avenue in Plainfield does not seem suitable without major renovations.
- The lottery section is ill-defined; is it based on academics, a true lottery or a combination of both?
- I question the definition of vocational education, which the VTRCHS seems to believe is a computer program, surrounded by educational jargon. A true vocational program, especially the one that Plainfield's students need, is based on a job-results program

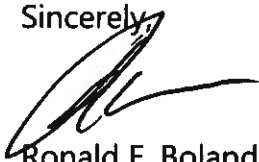
such as cosmetology, auto shop, metal shop, wood shop, drafting, dental and medical assistants. Plainfield already has an extensive computer education program and does not need to have another school dealing with computer education.

- We have a state-of-the-art building renovated and equipped less than six months ago, and I am sure the charter school could never duplicate that effort.
- VTRCHS defines STEM as a hands-on approach to learning when our District has a state-of-the-arts STEM lab that opened this school year. We offer the following vocational courses at Plainfield High School: Robotics, Environmental Science, Wood Technology, Allied Health and Cisco. The Board of Education is also reviewing a potential referendum to bring back Automotive, Cosmetology, Drafting and other vocational programs to the high school.
- In addition, they fail to mention that Somerset County already has an established and well-respected vocational program. In a conversation with administration from the Union County Vo-Tech, the stated numbers for its acceptance level are again inaccurate.
- From what we can ascertain, none of the founders are parents of school-age children in the District.
- The application states the special education population is 10% when in fact it is 17%. To provide a FAPE to all students requires a much more comprehensive plan. The special education numbers are inaccurate, there are approximately 151 students presently enrolled in charter schools.

For the reasons stated, the application for the VTRCHS should be denied.

Thank you for your consideration, we are willing to meet with you and/or your representative to discuss this application further at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Ronald E. Bolandi,
Interim Superintendent of Schools

c: Members Plainfield Board of Education
Office of Charter and Renaissance Schools - NJ Department of Education