



1 March 2019

Senator Robert Jackson
5030 Broadway, Rm #702
New York, NY 10034

Charter Schools Committee
SUNY Board of Trustees

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Robert Jackson, and I am the Senator for the 31st District. While I believe every parent has a right to choose the best educational options for their own child, I firmly and unequivocally stand against the expansion of charter schools in Districts 3, 5, and 6, all of which are situated within the confines of the senatorial district.

The merits of each individual charter school application is irrelevant against the backdrop of a severely underfunded school system, one that I have personally fought to remedy for more than 20 years via the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. When I walked 150 miles for each child, I did it so that every child could have access to a sound, basic education. It was and continues to be about equity.

The spirit of that struggle continues to through today as we fight on two fronts. First, for full funding according to the Foundation Aid formula: as of 2018, the State of New York remains in debt in the amount of \$1,459,181,316 Foundation Aid to New York City. Second, for greater accountability and regulation of charter schools: NYC seats 39% of the state students but houses 71% of the state charter schools, way more than a fair share of the impact from the charter school experimentation.

I recognize the need for a diverse ecosystem of schools to serve a community's diverse learners, but that diversity of schools cannot come at the expense of our public schools. As it stands, the charter system in New York State is rigged against public education, with charters receiving up to three times more taxpayer dollars per student than our public schools but facing no parallel accountability mechanisms or transparency requirements.

The charter school experiment was intended to use public dollars to spur innovation and academic gains benefiting all children's public education. It has failed. Instead its expansion has perpetuated the inequities in our public school system, siphoned precious funding from public schools, exploited parents' fears, and divided communities that would best be served united in building strong communities around strong public schools. Every charter application makes its case by providing misleading and discrediting information about district public schools' statistics and progress. They narrow in on an unhealthy over emphasis of test scores and omit information on their practices in counseling out those students with special needs, living in foster care or shelters, with a dominant in a language other than english, or needing additional interventions in positive guidance. These charter applications fail to mention the injury placed on the students left in a system deprived of resources due to a lottery that blindly effectuates winners and losers. The charter school applicants here of Amber, Minisink and KIPP are no exception.

These charter schools go to great lengths to undermine the district schools' efforts to provide sustainable learning environments for all students. They have incomparable access to marketing ads and promotional materials that land in families' mailboxes, luring parents to apply to their schools. As a result, enrollment drops at the district school and taxpayers' dollars travel to the charter school. When students are "counseled out," the district school absorbs the student while the charter school keeps the funding. Most of these students fall under the categories of ELLs, Special Needs, or both.

Despite the challenges offered by their demographics, Districts 5 and 6, collectively, have experienced steady academic gains, increased the number of dual language programs, successfully implemented restorative justice programs, provided administration and teacher professional development, increased partnerships with community based organizations to provide wrap around services, implemented progressive pedagogy, peer mentoring, and district wide community events such as District 6's United at the Palace event showcasing students' artistic talents and District 5's Super STEM Saturday where students work all year on innovative and advanced projects to present them at one of the prominent educational events in the community. District 6 serves the highest number of students who are both english language learners and have IEPs. District 5 has the highest rate of students living in foster care or shelters and a significant special needs student population.

It is ironic to see yet another application for funding for a charter school in District 6, the original home of CFE activism. Authorizing Amber Charter school would only add to the incursion of charters accompanying a wave of displacement and housing insecurity, different symptoms of the same gentrifying impulse.

The aggressive expansion of charters within District 5 has left children with special needs and those experiencing homelessness with fewer and fewer viable options, given the charter schools' strategic "counseling out" of children who don't serve their bottom line. Minisink Charter

school, already rejected by the Board of Regents in 2018, will lead to greater disparity, not greater choice.

Specifically, the application before us from KIPP Beyond poses to correct the existing flaws of Middle School admission process by providing an unscreened admission to high-quality educational opportunity to families who reflect the racial and socioeconomic diversity of the district. This claim has a major flaw. How can this district-wide problem be fixed when many families who end up on their allegedly long wait list together with those who are "counseled out" are absorbed into a district whose funding would be drastically reduced? District 3 has worked diligently and valiantly for over two years to develop a plan that would address racial and socio-economic inequalities among its schools to ensure every school has a proportional number of students with diverse abilities and socio-economic background. KIPP's timing, location, and proposed application is highly suspect and gives credence to the concern that charter school operators exploit the needs of districts. In District 3, the community has come together numerous times to listen, inform and research a plan to integrate and bring diversity to the schools within the district. The plan is informed by public school parents and educators and is scheduled to be implemented in 2020. There is no evidence that KIPP can do it better. A responsible and conscientious operator would step away from disrupting this public process in the works. Approving the KIPP application would reward an opportunistic approach that is more at home in corporate America than in our public schools where children's education are not part of a bottom line.

I have grown increasingly concerned at the lack of due diligence and cavalier approach the SUNY Charter School Committee takes in approving applications that will have a detrimental impact on school districts. There is also a distinct lack of accountability and transparency that is allowed to go rampant among approved SUNY charter schools. Ultimately, these practices hurt all children. I ask you to consider the impact of your decision on public education in the affected districts. Districts 6, 5, and 3 are doing very good work. I recommend the Committee begin to change its reputation of towing the line to privatize public education; reject the applications for Amber, Neighborhood and KIPP in districts 6, 5, and 3, respectively.

In Unity,



Robert Jackson
New York State Senator
District 31