



Cherry Hill Public Schools

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October 4, 2011

Senator Jim Beach
1309 Route 70 West
Cherry Hill, NJ 08002

Dear Senator Beach :

The NJ DOE recently approved the application of the Regis Academy Charter School to open in September 2012. The Cherry Hill School District provided a response to the application in May, arguing against charter approval for a variety of reasons. Chief among these was the lack of educational need for a charter school in a community where students are well served by our existing public schools. Both the charter school application and our response are enclosed.

In a DOE release announcing the approval, Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf stated: "Charter schools serve a critical need in New Jersey not only by providing high-quality options for students where they otherwise do not exist, but also by serving as laboratories of innovation."

We find this statement particularly egregious. Cherry Hill students are getting "a really good education," as Governor Christie acknowledged in a recent speech on urban education reform. In fact, the Cherry Hill School district was designated a high-performing school district through the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) review process.

So was the Regis Academy Charter School approved to serve as a laboratory of innovation? If our public schools want to implement an innovative program that requires additional revenues, we have two options: eliminate existing programs to keep our budget growth below 2% or go to our voters for approval.

Preliminary guidance from the NJ DOE from May 2011 (attached) regarding potential charter school aid for Regis Academy indicates that the Cherry Hill School District would have to set aside approximately **\$1.9 million** for a projected enrollment of 169 Cherry Hill students. The district faces the very real possibility of eliminating programs, laying off teachers, and raising class sizes as a direct result of a loss of funding should Cherry Hill students opt to attend Regis Academy. Because the Cherry Hill students are not likely to come from a single school or grade level, we can't simply close a school or close a classroom; rather, we will have to reduce the number of teachers and raise class sizes across the district. Based on the initial projections, our district could be faced with having to cut about 29 teachers to meet the funding obligation for a charter school that simply isn't warranted in our community.

The Charter School Program Act was written in 1995. At the time, no one could foresee that suburban school districts like Cherry Hill would be largely self-funded in 2011. There is growing awareness of the potentially negative impacts of charter schools on successful suburban school districts, as evidenced by the following:

- In June 2011, the NJ Assembly overwhelmingly approved a bill that would require local approval for the establishment of new charter schools. A3852/S2243 was referred to Senate Education Committee in July.
- A Rutgers-Eagleton poll conducted in June 2011 indicates that New Jersey residents overwhelmingly support requiring voter approval before new charter schools are approved. As with the Assembly bill, support was broad and bipartisan.

We believe that Cherry Hill students are well served by our public schools. In an era when school districts and municipalities are being urged to share services and identify cost efficiencies, we have serious concerns about the creation of a charter school that will duplicate services, increase administrative costs and divert resources from our successful public schools.

We respectfully request your support in appealing the Commissioner's approval of the Regis Academy Charter School and urge a moratorium on all charter school approvals until the Senate takes action on A3852/S2243.

Sincerely,



Maureen Reusche, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Cherry Hill Public Schools