


Worcester Education Collaborative



December 19, 2022

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street
Malden, MA 02148

Dear Commissioner Riley,

I am writing on behalf of the Worcester Education Collaborative to offer our thoughts regarding the application of the Worcester Cultural Academy Public Charter School (WCAPCS) to open in August of 2023. While we are in strong support of the ability of learners and families to have choice in schools, we do wish to raise several questions that we hope will be considered regarding the addition of a new commonwealth charter school, structured in this way, at this time, in our city.

Our questions are as follows:

Management:

1. We are concerned that the management contract creates overlapping and dual reporting of school senior leadership and Museum administration. How will WCAPCS avoid a situation of divided loyalties between what is best for the students and what is best for the museum?
2. The management agreement functionally cedes operations to Old Sturbridge Village (OSV, the Museum), and the dual role of Museum director and school Executive Director conflates those responsibilities. Does that not create an insurmountable and ongoing conflict of interest?

Funding:

3. The WCAPCS proposal includes a management fee for OSV and funds to partnering organizations. How will the public be assured that these funds are not being used for support of those organizations beyond their role with the school? According to the Director's letter in the OSV most recent annual report, "The Academies will provide reliable, contractual revenue to the museum, safeguarding us against fluctuations in uncontrollable factors that impact admission revenue such as weather and public health." How does reliance on a revenue stream from the WPS District to stabilize the museum budget serve the students of Worcester?
4. The proposal includes a foundation that will solicit funds for student field trips and other enrichment activities, thereby extracting additional funds from local philanthropies. How

will this need be met without diluting longstanding successful programs already existing in the community?

Community Impact:

5. In July of 2022, Worcester installed a new superintendent with a bold vision for the district. As a part of the work to actualize that vision, in the new year, Worcester Public Schools will begin the work with the community to develop a new strategic plan. How will the addition of a new school, whose existence will be determined outside of this process, affect the work to intentionally create a system of schools to support teaching and learning across the city?
6. Charter schools were envisioned to be islands of innovation that tested and disseminated best practices in public education. How will WCAPCS contribute to this goal in Worcester?
7. Charter schools were envisioned to offer choice to public school students. With an enrollment of 360 in the fifth year of operation, 1.5% of current WPS enrollment, how does WCAPCS contribute meaningfully to choice?
8. In 2016, 61% of Worcester voters weighed in against charter school expansion. How is this proposal consistent with community will?

Alternative Options:

9. The 1993 Education Reform Act includes a provision for Horace Mann Schools-- essentially in-district charters that provide flexibilities and autonomies to schools without extracting resources from the home district. Has WCAPCS considered this option? If not, why not?
10. The Massachusetts Academy of Math and Science housed at Worcester Polytechnic Institute is funded by a line item in the state budget. Has WCAPCS considered funding the school through that process? If not, why not?

While there is unquestionable benefit in having a variety of educational choices for children and families, we hope that the Department will consider the concerns that we see in and questions that arise from the Worcester Cultural Academy Public Charter School proposal.

Sincerely,



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