

Princeton Charter School

100 BUNN DRIVE, PRINCETON NJ 08540 | WWW.PCS.K12.NJ.US
Phone: 609 924 0575 | Fax: 609 924 0282

To: Kimberly Harrington, Commissioner of Education
From: Princeton Charter School
Date: February 10, 2017
Re: Princeton Public Schools' Opposition to Princeton Charter School's Application

On January 30, 2017, Princeton Public Schools (PPS) submitted a document opposing the Princeton Charter School's (PCS) proposed Access & Equity Plan to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). PPS's claims are rife with the same misleading arguments, misinformation, and erroneous data and statements of law that have been used to inflame public opposition. As this response documents, the misinformation by PPS and its experts concerns each of the following issues: financial impact, weighted lottery, demographics, school performance, and charter school law.

In the 20 years since Princeton Charter School's founding, PPS has flourished as a district and its submission to the New Jersey Department of Education highlights the many wonderful improvements that it has already accomplished — all of which were done while coexisting with Princeton Charter School. There is no reason why the two districts should not continue to flourish even with Princeton Charter School's proposed modest expansion. Indeed, the weakness of PPS's position is betrayed by the fact that despite the considerable heft of its submission, it abjectly fails to address the central contentions made by PCS in its application and in the course of public discussion of the proposal:

(i) PPS's response does not acknowledge the enrollment spike it is experiencing, nor provide a scintilla of data or analysis as to the grades in which enrollment is spiking, despite having commissioned a demographic study in the recent past and having commissioned a new demographic analysis in December 2016;

(ii) PPS's response does not acknowledge that it sought and received a cap waiver for increased enrollment through 2015, and does not suggest that it would not be eligible for and seek cap waivers for the acknowledged enrollment spike since 2015, even in the absence of the PCS application;

(iii) PPS's response does not acknowledge that it has publicly discussed its need for new or expanded facilities to handle Princeton's growing student population, and retained an architect in November 2016 to undertake that analysis.

PPS's silence on these central issues speaks volumes about the lack of credible evidence for their contention that PCS's request to amend its charter would have any real or substantial

financial impact to PPS, much less threaten its ability to provide a thorough and efficient education. PPS's silence is especially deafening given that PPS in fact retained demographic and architectural professionals to quantify the size, grade level, and space needs for the additional enrollment at the same December 2016 board meeting at which it voted to oppose this application. Yet it has failed to offer any information from those professionals in its opposition. PPS's failure to proffer either preliminary information — or to suggest that it needs additional time to provide that analysis — confirms the emptiness of PPS's rhetoric.

Furthermore, both with respect to the financial impact and multiple other issues, many factual assertions made by PPS are inaccurate, speculative, and challenge NJDOE standards without rational justification. On several occasions, PPS has chosen Julia Sass Rubin, the leader of one of New Jersey's most radical charter school opposition groups, to represent PPS at district-sponsored public meetings and has cited her unsubstantiated claims in correspondence with the public and in official correspondence with the NJDOE. In this regard, the Department should be aware that the PPS Board President at the time the application was submitted, the Mayor of Princeton, and Sass Rubin are each founders and leaders of Save Our Schools New Jersey (SOSNJ). PPS's public campaign against PCS is based on dissemination of inaccurate and misleading information which has created a highly contentious atmosphere in Princeton. Ironically, PPS cites the very animosity that it has fomented as a reason for the NJDOE not to approve PCS's charter amendment application. We respectfully ask that the Department recognize that the community opposition received is based on a campaign of disinformation against the proposed expansion by charter opponents.

The January 30, 2017 letter to Commissioner Harrington cites three main points of PPS's opposition to Princeton Charter School's application: compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA); the merits of the request; and broad public policy implications. Many of PPS's false and inaccurate claims have already been addressed in PCS's memo dated January 30, 2017 (Exhibit 1) to Commissioner Harrington. This memo focuses on the remainder of PPS's claims that have not been previously addressed. A response to the objections related to OPMA and other procedural issues are addressed by PCS's legal counsel under separate cover.

Responses to PPS Claims Related to Exaggerated Financial Impact to the District

Claim: Granting PCS's expansion request will have a significant financial impact on the district that will unnecessarily harm and threaten the district's ability to provide an excellent education for its students (p. 40).

Princeton Charter School's modest proposed expansion will have a minimal financial impact on the PPS district — one of the five most expensive school districts in the state as determined by per pupil cost.

In its January 30, 2017 letter to the NJDOE, PPS purposefully neglects to address the impact of the recent substantial increase of new students entering the District at the elementary level. PPS also neglects to justify or explain the tax levy waivers for enrollment growth that it seeks and fails to mention that district officials are planning to seek bond referenda to accommodate this spike in student population.

Continued population growth

- According to published news reports, 759 new housing units are opening in Princeton this year: Merwick-Stanworth Apartments, 326 units; Copperwood Apartments, 153 units; AvalonBay Apartments, 280 units. None of these developments is fully occupied and as of September 2016, only 10% of Avalon Bay was occupied.
 - Even with these units not occupied, PPS's school population grew by 4.5% between September 2015 and September 2016.
 - Importantly, PPS does not contest that the majority of new students to the district to date have been in grades K-5.

PPS public plans for expanded facilities and bond referendum

- PPS underestimated the number of students coming to the district and the need for facilities relief in district elementary schools. In November 2016, Spiezle Architectural Group was commissioned by the district to explore the use of its Valley Road facility, which is across from Community Park Elementary School, for classrooms. Upon information and belief, it appears the district contemplated moving a portion of the K-5 Community Park classrooms to Valley Road. Consistent with this study of facilities expansion, the PPS Board President has publicly discussed the likelihood of a bond referendum.
- PPS's Facilities Committee reported to the public on December 13, 2016 that "after an architectural study, it was decided that it would be too costly to renovate the Valley Road building into additional classroom spaces and move administrative offices to the soon-to-be-vacant Princeton Packet building. The Board is continuing to look at other possibilities for managing space concerns in the district due to enrollment growth. Supt. Cochrane shared that one recent possibility the district is considering is using the facilities that Westminster Choir College may be vacating."¹
- Further illustrating this point, PPS Superintendent Steve Cochrane stated publicly in October of 2016 that to accommodate the growth, the district needs both new space and new teachers. "We now have very few unoccupied classrooms across our elementaries, so even if we budget for additional teachers, we will have very few places

¹ PPS Meeting Highlights, December 13, 2016;
http://www.princetonk12.org/HR/HR_News/S057C2E4B-057C2E8B?Templates=RWD&display_mode=1&printversion=4&noclosebutton

to create new sections,” stated Cochrane.²

- Although the district’s response states in conclusory fashion that its space problem is primarily at the high school, at no point in its response or otherwise has it ruled out the need to expand its elementary or middle schools to accommodate the enrollment spike.

PPS enrollment growth waivers and other waivers for spending

- In 2015, PPS received approval to exceed the 2% cap by \$1.7 million for enrollment growth and by another \$400,000 for health care costs. PPS has implemented some \$800,000 of that enrollment growth waiver, and retains another \$900,000 in banked waiver from that period.
- District officials have advised that the waiver covers enrollment growth the district experienced *prior to 2015*. Undoubtedly, the significant enrollment growth commencing in 2016 will warrant further cap waivers equal or greater than the \$1.7 million waiver granted in 2015.
- The enrollment growth cap waiver covers the variable costs of the increase in students across all grades. *It is inherently contradictory for PPS officials to assert that there are such significant variable costs for increased enrollment to warrant a waiver of the 2% cap and at the same time to claim that there are little to no variable savings to the district for decreased enrollment if PCS is authorized to accept 76 additional students.*

PPS budgeted spending/surplus

- PPS has budgeted \$5,050,122 for the Charter School for 2016-17³. The most recent DOE aid report projects a total cost to the district of \$4,745,777⁴ so that in effect PPS has \$305,000 or 50% of the year 1 cost increase already budgeted, in addition to the \$900,000 in reserve from the tax waiver and a \$2.48 million Unassigned Fund Balance.
- PPS is the 5th highest spending district in New Jersey for a district of its size behind three SDA districts and Teaneck. In that context, the claim by Princeton Public Schools that the district cannot absorb a 1% adjustment phased in over two years given these available funds is false and unsubstantiated.

Note further that the representation of the cost impact to the district as “ruinous” has contributed to a great deal of hostility in the district. The district has put forth an analysis presented at its Board meeting and at two other meetings for parents. In this analysis, Julia

²*Town Topics*, October 12, 2016, “Princeton Schools Address Widespread Challenges of Crowding,” <http://www.towntopics.com/wordpress/2016/10/12/princeton-schoolsaddress-widespread-challenges-of-crowding/>.

³ Princeton Public Schools April 26, 2016 Budget Hearing for 2016-17.

⁴ NJDOE Division of Field Services, Office of School Finance, FY 2016-17 State Charter School Aid, Projected Enrollment Count.

Sass Rubin essentially asserted that, controlling for variables, the Charter School and PPS have relatively close per pupil costs. Ms. Rubin made multiple errors in her presentation, including with respect to special education, that bias the PPS and PCS costs in ways that would favor PPS. (See Exhibit 2, RESPONSE TO DECEMBER 13, 2106 PPS PRESENTATION p. xiv of the Exhibits section.) These errors were subject to public discussion and yet the district invited Ms. Rubin to make the same misleading, error-riddled presentation to its parents on 1/10/17 and 1/11/17. This is similar to the information that the district document cites in its objection. Exhibit 3 uses the Taxpayers' Guide to Educational Spending, available on the NJDOE website, to construct a table of accurate data regarding the gross disparity in spending between PPS and PCS.

In sum, by its own report, PPS continues to thrive by all of the measures that it cites at length in its document (pp. 30-38) while coexisting with Princeton Charter School. PPS has one of the highest per-pupil spending ratios in the state. It is experiencing substantial and unanticipated K-5 growth for which it has not yet sought tax cap waivers or taken on the large fixed costs required; indeed, our proposal precedes any official request on the part of PPS for the facilities bond referendum it acknowledges is forthcoming. Moreover, the PPS response, by skirting the issue of substantial K-5 population growth, tacitly acknowledges that this growth negates any realistic claims of significant financial harm.

Responses to Claims Related to Weighted Lottery and Demographics

Claim: PCS's proposal to expand must be denied until PCS can demonstrate that a weighted lottery will address the inequitable and segregated nature of PCS's enrollment and has a record of successfully educating a representative student population (p. 20).

PCS's rationale for requesting permission to institute a weighted lottery is precisely so that prospective students from economically disadvantaged families (as determined by the four criteria outlined in the request for charter amendment) will double their chances of getting a seat at PCS. In addition, PCS has already undertaken an aggressive community engagement campaign to encourage more socio-economically disadvantaged students to apply for its enrollment lottery. Tactics to engage Princeton's ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged community include, but are not limited to, staffing community events, a door-to-door program, hosting informational meetings in community rooms of residential buildings, direct parent engagement at day care facilities, and a paid advertising and marketing program. We have also always backfilled any openings midyear.

Since 1999-2000, when K-2 were added, 46% of our students on Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) at some point during their time at PCS entered in these earliest years even though the percentage of total students in K-2 has only been 19% of the School. The PPS response, which appears to be based on claims by Julia Sass Rubin, asserts that only 2 students who entered PCS in kindergarten were on Free and Reduced Lunch. FRL records, school directories, and PowerSchool records contradict those data by more than a factor of 500%. While FRL records are difficult to come by for privacy reasons, unfortunately this is

not a one-time error but rather is representative of the numerous and flagrant misrepresentations made to both NJDOE and the Princeton community at large.

This misleading information and erroneous data is consistent with PPS's demand that PCS should somehow show proof of attracting a diverse student population prior to having access to the very enrollment procedures needed to increase enrollment of that same population.

Claim: PCS should have implemented a weighted lottery sooner and this proposed weighted lottery is designed to benefit families who do not meet the Department's definition of economically disadvantaged (p. 22).

In a shocking abdication of the principles of diversity and inclusion PPS claims to stand for, PPS objects to PCS's weighted lottery proposal because PCS should have done it sooner, in violation of the law, and because we now propose to provide a lottery preference for children who live in public or subsidized housing, or who qualify for SNAP (food stamp) benefits. In effect, PPS would deny struggling families an enhanced opportunity to attend PCS because they are not poor enough. PPS's position demonstrates the lengths to which its fear of losing more students and tax dollars to PCS have caused it to lose sight of fundamental values most Princeton residents hold dear.

PPS also makes outrageously incorrect claims about PCS's legal obligations to serve a cross section of the community, as well as its ability to implement this weighted lottery sooner and without NJDOE approval that are objectively wrong as a matter of well-settled law. The district's disregard of the law on weighted lotteries in order to drum up public opposition is all the more troubling given that the district's opposition was drafted by and submitted under the signature of its legal counsel, who most certainly knows, or should know, the law.

First, as to the matter of who should be given a preference in the lottery: PCS's proposal to provide the 2:1 preference to Section 8, public housing, and SNAP beneficiaries in addition to FRL-eligible students is based on the weighted lotteries approved by NJDOE for HoLa and Red Bank Charter Schools in 2015. This is hardly a "novel definition" of economic disadvantage, as PPS claims (p22). It is taken directly from NJDOE precedent. As well, eligibility for other forms of public assistance are proposed as a proxy for those families who may not yet have established eligibility for FRL. There can be no doubt that the criteria proposed are lawful, within the authority of the NJDOE to grant, and well established.

According to PPS, a family of 4 making \$45,000 is "poor enough" to warrant a preference, but a similar family making \$50,000 or \$60,000 is not poor enough. In a town in which median house prices approach \$800,000, median annual tax bills approach \$20,000, and median family incomes approach \$200,000, it is hard to see how a child eligible for other forms of public assistance should not also have an enhanced opportunity to receive a PCS education.

Second, PPS attacks PCS (i) for not satisfying its alleged “statutorily required enrollment of a cross section of the community’s school age population,” (p. 20 and throughout) and (ii) for not changing to a weighted lottery “years ago” so that it could now “submit evidence that the weighted lottery had its intended effect” and then be considered for expansion. (p. 30) This argument is not only sophistry; it ignores the law and history of weighted lotteries recounted in our application that PPS’s counsel surely knows.

As NJDOE is well aware and PPS counsel is undoubtedly aware from its selective quotation of the statute in question, the law does not mandate that PCS’s enrollment mirror district demographics. Throughout its submission, PPS repeatedly makes a glaring misrepresentation of law to the public, omitting the key language preceding this selective quote. Though NJDOE undoubtedly knows this well, we recite the full sentence in question for the benefit of the public reviewing our position and seeking to understand PCS’s legal obligation. The legal obligation of any charter school is that:

“The admission policy of the charter school shall, to the maximum extent practicable, seek the enrollment of a cross section of the community's school age population, including racial and academic factors.” N.J.S.A. 128A:36A-8(e).

Charter schools are not “required” to mirror district demographics. They are required to seek an enrollment representative of the community through the use of a fair process and community outreach. Prior to the institution of weighted lotteries, this meant charter schools were required to admit all comers, and to the extent oversubscribed, give all an equal chance at admission by way of a blind lottery having no preferences, and inform the entire community of the availability of seats and its lottery process. This is precisely what PCS did, and has scrupulously done, for two decades.

Weighted lotteries were not permitted under federal and state law until 2015, when the NJDOE announced a reversal of prior policy that prohibited weighted lotteries. As the NJDOE is well aware, neither NJDOE nor PCS had the ability to implement a weighted lottery any sooner, and PCS has no authority to implement one on its own. Yet both the PPS Board president and Princeton mayor have publicly claimed otherwise.⁵ Further, the implication that PCS had the legal authority, but not the will and desire, to implement such a lottery any sooner than this year is another shocking misstatement of the law designed to inflame public opposition.

PCS’s good faith in seeking the weighted lottery coupled with expansion will be quite evident to any objective observer. PCS board members worked diligently as leaders of the NJ Charter School Association, advocating that the State change its position and allow

⁵ E.g., PPS Board President Sullivan stated “They don’t need to apply to any commissioner to do that” (Philip Curran and Erica Chayes Wida, *Princeton Packet*, January 25, 2017) and Mayor Lempert has stated “I feel like they should’ve been doing that from the very beginning” (http://www.centraljersey.com/news/princeton-council-to-consider-resolution-urging-state-to-reject-charter/article_2d61e9d4-e1ac-11e6-8ab8-671ba983ef68.html).

weighted lotteries. As soon as weighted lotteries were authorized by NJDOE in 2015 and piloted by two other schools in 2016, PCS immediately sought to implement this preference — and in a holistic manner that not only provides additional weighting but that also provides the financial wherewithal to expand its programs and supports for these students, including personal student plans for all students, to make PCS a more attractive option. Recognizing that PCS does need to do more than simply weight its lottery to attract more disadvantaged students, we have solicited a proposal for the services of the leading civil rights consultant for charter schools nationally, Civil Rights Solutions of Washington DC. Civil Rights Solutions works with charter schools around the country, and we intend to have them review current practices and assist us in ensuring the changes undertaken as part of this expansion in fact result in the intended outcome.

PCS has already detailed in prior submissions its past efforts at outreach to all corners of the Princeton community and will not repeat it here. NJDOE reviewers have regularly reviewed PCS's admissions practices and outreach efforts through four renewal cycles and found no deficiencies, and certainly never found any suggestion of discriminatory acts or intent by PCS. Had such practices been underway, they surely would have become known to PPS and PPS surely would have notified NJDOE. PPS's baseless insinuations to the contrary are out of line, outrageous, and a despicable effort to defame people of good will and to sow divisions in the community — all in the interest of protecting its estimable financial resources from what it perceives to be a competitive threat.

Claim: Because PCS is unlike any school in the State in its demographic makeup, let alone the Princeton Public Schools, little weight can be given to its performance data (p. 30).

All academic performance data included in PCS's charter application, and in every other public document produced by the school related to that application, is publicly available, independently generated data provided by the Department. As NJDOE knows, its peer percentile rankings use state of the art statistical methods including propensity score matching to match districts to demographically similar ones. PPS's dismissal of the peer percentile rankings (e.g., where their response on p. 2 states that "there is no proof that PCS's test scores outperform similar peer schools, and, as such, little weight should be given to such data") suggests a willingness to dismiss inconvenient data.⁶

This disrespect by PPS for the peer percentile rankings serves to distract attention from the fact that these measures indicate it is the PPS schools whose performance is less impressive once demographics are accounted for; as one example, John Witherspoon's peer percentile in Language Arts is 26 percentage points lower than its statewide percentile. More broadly, the peer percentile rankings are striking. Using the Department's selection of similar schools, Princeton Charter School has performed incredibly well, 94% and 100%

⁶ A more egregious example occurred in the December 13, 2016 PPS Board Meeting, where Sass Rubin as an invited "expert" invited claimed that PCS ranked 626th accounting for demographics without any verifiable explanation of where this number came from or how it was calculated.

in peer group rankings for LAL and math respectively. By contrast the district peer group ranking has them in the lower half in 7 out of the 10 possible categories, below the 50th percentile. (See Exhibit 4 for full peer percentile rankings across the PPS and PCS systems.)

To suggest that the academic performance of PCS students cannot be determined by using the standard measurement used by every other public school in the state is completely unsubstantiated and unprecedented. Furthermore, the suggestion that PCS should be exempted from validating academic performance by the same standards and methodology used to ensure academic performance in all other public schools in New Jersey is insulting to the students, parents, faculty and administrators who have worked tirelessly over the last 20 years to make PCS one of the highest performing schools in New Jersey.

Public Policy Supports Approval of the Application

Claim: The Princeton Public Schools are among the very best in the nation by any measure and there is no justification for the expansion based on educational quality or opportunity (p. 34).

The peer percentile rankings do not support PPS's claim that it is among the very best in the nation by any measure (see Exhibit 4). In addition, the absolute score performance shown in Exhibit 5, demonstrates that PCS consistently outperforms PPS in the percentage of total passing, and in the percentage of students scoring a 5 on the PARCC tests. Nevertheless, PCS itself is not basing the justification for the expansion on a critique of the PPS schools; the justification and rationale for warranting an increase in enrollment, including academic performance and demand for enrollment, is clearly explained in PCS's request to amend its charter application. Failure or subpar performance by a district is not a predicate to opening or expanding a charter, despite the claims of charter opponents.⁷

Indeed, the policy declarations of The New Jersey Charter School Program Act, N.J.S.A. 18A:36A, are not limited to failing districts, but rather seek to promote choice and reform in all districts:

"The Legislature finds and declares that the establishment of charter schools as part of this State's program of public education can assist in promoting comprehensive educational reform by providing a mechanism for the implementation of a variety of educational approaches which may not be available in the traditional public school classroom. Specifically, charter schools offer the potential to improve pupil learning; increase for students and parents the educational choices available when selecting the learning environment which they feel may be the most appropriate; encourage the use of different and innovative learning methods; establish a new form of accountability for schools; require the measurement of learning outcomes; make the school the unit for educational

⁷ That said, outperforming the district is a criterion for both renewal and expansion, and the NJDOE knows well that PCS has always outperformed its high performing district of residence, both under the prior NJASK and current PARCC testing protocols.

improvement; and establish new professional opportunities for teachers.

The Legislature further finds that the establishment of a charter school program is in the best interests of the students of this State and it is therefore the public policy of the State to encourage and facilitate the development of charter schools.”

PPS’s constant focus on whether Princeton residents *need* a charter school is offensive to the families who have exercised this lawful choice in the interest of their children and to the educators who work tirelessly in service of these families.

For the past seven years, an average of 30% of all eligible kindergarten students in Princeton have sought to enter the Princeton Charter School via its lottery. The PPS administration and Board do not have the legal right to determine whether or not those families “need” or should have “access” to the education that Princeton Charter School provides. That debate was settled by the Legislature 20 years ago in enacting the law, and by the NJDOE when it granted the PCS Charter — with the support of the Princeton Regional Schools board. This consistent — and ongoing — high level of demand results from our unique program: Our record of performance speaks for itself.

However, we believe that the decision by the NJDOE will have significant consequences for other charter schools who may ask for an expansion in this or future cycles. We are a small, parent-founded and parent-led charter school with a 20-year track record of academic excellence, strong parental demand, and fiscal soundness. We are exactly the sort of charter school that New Jersey’s charter laws were designed to foster. In view of the district’s ample finances, there is no bona fide legal basis to deny this application.

Indeed, were NJDOE to deny this application on the grounds of fiscal impact, demographics, or otherwise, it would undermine the legal basis for every other charter expansion it grants. That is, if PPS’s claims are deemed to warrant rejecting the application, every other charter expansion in any district that is less wealthy than Princeton or whose demographics differ from those of the charter school would be subject to challenge on the basis of the NJDOE’s decision on this application. In view of the persistent appeals of urban and suburban charter expansions throughout the state by traditional districts, the Education Law Center, and the American Civil Liberties Union, NJDOE must consider the legal implications of its handling of this application on other pending expansions granted this year, as well as recent expansion approvals currently on appeal in the courts.

Claim: The Princeton community is overwhelmingly opposed to the PCS expansion request (p. 45).

The PPS district — after waging a campaign designed to incite the public against PCS relying on scare tactics and misleading analyses —claims that the NJDOE should not grant our request because members of the public are now against the expansion.

“Parents in both the District and PCS are worried about the detrimental impact on their

children's schools, especially the high school; older residents are concerned about the erosion to their home values when the District's quality declines due to the financial drain caused by an expansion; people with preschoolers, recently arrived and drawn to Princeton because of the diverse, extraordinary schools in the District, are seeing their hopes for their young children threatened." (p. 45)

Even the district's statement indicates the exaggerated and manipulative nature of their argument, i.e., that the expansion of 76 students will decrease home values in Princeton, and pose a threat to the hopes of young children living in Princeton. PPS has wrongly informed its parents that Princeton Charter School and PPS cost the same per pupil; that Princeton Charter School students fare worse in school performance; and that the loss of kindergarten students and first and second grade students will result in the loss of the athletics program or other cuts at the high school. In this brief response, we have documented above at least four different types of misleading information: on financial impact, on regulations regarding a weighted lottery, on demographics regarding free and reduced lunch, and on PCS and PPS school performance. In only one of these cases—free and reduced lunch demographics—could the error not have been readily corrected with publicly available data, and even there it is unclear where the PPS data is coming from. These and similar statements by public officials, presumed to be acting in good faith and the public interest, have understandably left some families in Princeton concerned.

PPS's constant stream of misinformation designed to inflame public opposition rather than inform public dialogue would be impressive were it not so troubling. The misrepresentation of data and analyses can only be interpreted as a deliberate strategy of the district. This is precisely why the charter school approval process is undertaken at the state level, in the most democratic exercise of checks and balances, and not by way of public vote or district approval in which public manipulation by a district trying to defend its turf will invariably preordain the result.

Claim: Because PCS's Board of Trustees failed to be open and transparent with their expansion plans, revealing them only at the eleventh hour, they have already done significant damage to PCS's reputation and credibility in the Princeton community, and granting the Application will likely destroy it (p. 49).

While many have questioned whether PCS should have apprised PPS earlier of its plans to expand, it is disingenuous to suggest that earlier notice would have resulted in a productive outcome, or changed the level of vitriol produced by PPS. Numerous attempts in the past by the PCS board to collaborate with the PPS board on cost-sharing initiatives, cross-pollination of curricular approaches, and other matters of mutual interest and far less import have been rejected by PPS's leaders.

In view of PPS's history of ignoring PCS — and seeking to undermine it through the legislative policies its members have sought to advance by the New Jersey School Boards Association — there is simply nothing in the actions of the PPS district to suggest that involving the District at an earlier stage would have ameliorated its concerns.

PCS complied with state requirements as to the process for seeking an expansion, giving the district ample time to respond with a nearly 150-page opposition, and ample time to know the outcome before finalizing its own facilities plans and advancing its anticipated facilities bond referendum.

Claim: Approving the PCS Application, in light of the overwhelming evidence in favor of denial, will not only harm the community of Princeton by continuing PCS's uniquely non-diverse, inequitable enrollment, but will reflect poorly on charter schools statewide (p. 50).

The implied threat of this claim seems patently clear: If the Department were to grant this expansion request, its judgment and ability to effectively provide regulatory oversight would be called into question by the same forces that have generated public opposition to Princeton Charter School's expansion (and other expansions around the state) through a coordinated campaign of intentional misrepresentations.

We are confident that the NJDOE will consider the facts (including its own data) and make a decision solely based on the merits of the request, without consideration of PPS's veiled threats.

PCS's merits are known to the Department: PCS has a long history of focusing on student outcomes by using both state performance data and data from Educational Record Bureau tests. We have high expectations of all of our students. We have a strong record of spending public funds responsibly, practicing sound governance, and adhering to the relevant laws and charter requirements. As the Department knows from our charter renewal last year, we are never content to rest on our laurels: Instead, we practice continuous self-improvement and see our request as in keeping with two decades of challenging ourselves to continued progress.

However, as explained above, *were NJDOE to deny this application on the grounds of fiscal impact, demographics, or otherwise, that action would undermine the legal basis for every other charter expansion it does grant this year.* That is, if PPS's claims are deemed to warrant rejecting the application, every other charter expansion will be vulnerable to challenge. In view of the persistent appeals of charter expansions throughout the state by traditional districts, the Education Law Center, and the American Civil Liberties Union, the NJDOE should indeed consider the legal implications of its handling of this application on other pending expansions granted this year, as well as recent expansion approvals currently on appeal in the courts. And on that basis, the legal and factual record are clear: this application should be granted.

Exhibit 1

Exhibit 1. PCS's January 30, 2017 Memo to Commissioner Harrington

Princeton Charter School

100 BUNN DRIVE, PRINCETON NJ 08540 | WWW.PCS.K12.NJ.US

Phone: 609 924 0575 | Fax: 609 924 0282

To: Kimberly Harrington, Commissioner of Education

From: Princeton Charter School

Date: January 30, 2017

Re: Proposed Expansion of Princeton Charter School

On December 1, 2016, Princeton Charter School (PCS) submitted an application to amend its charter to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), seeking to implement a proposed Access & Equity Plan. The application contains three interdependent proposals:

- Make kindergarten our main year of entry by adding a second class in kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades, and adding 2 students per grade in grades 3 – 8 to provide more opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.
- Implement a 2:1 weighted admissions lottery to promote socioeconomic diversity.
- Augment support services to all students and especially disadvantaged and special education students.

Official state data and other publicly available information make clear that:

1. PCS has a history of extensive outreach efforts to improve socioeconomic diversity, and the proposed changes are necessary to ensure increased socioeconomic diversity of PCS.
2. The proposed changes will not jeopardize the ability of one of the wealthiest districts in New Jersey to continue providing a thorough and efficient education, nor will it have a 'devastating' financial impact on Princeton Public Schools (PPS), especially given the sizeable school-aged population growth the town of Princeton is experiencing.
3. Denial of the proposal would result in real harm to Princeton Charter School, which for 8 years has absorbed ever-increasing salary, benefits and other costs with no increase in per pupil payment or overall budget.

Since we filed our original application, district officials and others with substantial roles in founding and leading Save Our Schools New Jersey, have waged a relentless campaign of misinformation designed to influence the NJDOE's decision and create a divide within the Princeton community. As a result, the Department and public officials have been deluged with

letters opposing our application. This memo provides the Department with data and factual information that clearly and convincingly refute each of these claims.

First and foremost, the Department should recognize that community support and parent demand for more seats at PCS is exceptional: *Over the past seven years, thirty percent of all Princeton parents seek a seat for their kindergarten students at PCS, notwithstanding the reputation of PPS as a high performing district typically included among the top in the state.* When 30 percent of all parents apply for the PCS lottery, they demonstrate through their action that they want PCS, they want a choice in public school options, and that more seats should be authorized to satisfy this consistently strong demand. The following chart compares the number of PCS lottery entrants to the total kindergarten population in all Princeton public schools from 2011 through the current school year:

	SY11	SY12	SY13	SY14	SY15	SY16	SY17
Community Park	63	57	40	52	52	54	74
Johnson Park	48	58	52	48	50	45	44
Littlebrook	60	65	51	52	58	57	55
Riverside	37	44	48	44	42	38	50
PCS	19	19	19	19	19	19	19
Total K	227	243	210	215	221	213	242
Lottery	77	62	64	62	61	71	79
%	33.9%	25.5%	30.5%	28.8%	27.6%	33.3%	32.6%

The action of so many parents consistently seeking seats at PCS is far more meaningful than clicking a link to sign an online petition. Moreover, over 240 individually drafted letters in support for this application have been submitted to the Department.

The answer to the question posed by some — why does a high-performing district like Princeton need a charter school — is simple and straightforward: A substantial and persistent number of Princeton parents want the PCS option — *even* in a high-performing district. Presently, PCS has only 19 seats to offer in kindergarten. If our application is granted, PCS will be able to satisfy roughly half of the current demand, double the opportunity for economically disadvantaged students to obtain these highly-coveted seats, and enhance its programs to attract and serve these families.

Moreover, the high PCS parent demand fosters greater accountability of PPS. The presence of real parental empowerment through school choice positively impacts PPS’s governance and program decision-making.

(1) Socioeconomic Diversity and the Success of Economically Disadvantaged Students

Prior to filing the application, PCS has taken every available measure within DOE rules to increase our socioeconomic diversity:

- Every year, PCS initiates an aggressive marketing and advertising campaign specifically designed to increase enrollment applications from ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged students. We regularly host open houses and off-campus information sessions in diverse neighborhoods throughout Princeton, we engage religious and community leaders to identify potential candidate families, recruit prospective students at local preschools and learning centers; and deliver informational materials by knocking on doors in neighborhoods with low income housing to inform parents about PCS and its lottery.
- We have sought to meet with the parents of students in PPS's preschool program, which is offered at no cost to students who qualify for a free or reduced price meals program, to inform them about PCS and our lottery. To date, our requests have been ignored or rejected by PPS.
- We have scrupulously and immediately backfilled every open spot in the numerical order of our waitlist.

Kindergarten as Main Entry Year

Opposition to our application has failed to address the central premise of our application: that a significant reason our socioeconomic diversity lags that of the Princeton community as a whole is that PCS has an atypical, staggered admissions structure: We have one section of kindergarten, first grade, and second grade, but two sections in grades three through eight. Grades 3-8 are also bigger in size than kindergarten by design, as is standard in elementary schools. This staggered structure is the result of PCS's historical development. Unlike many charters that begin with the earliest grades and then add higher grades over time, we began without grades K-2 originally and only added them in over time starting in 1999-2000.

This staggered admissions structure has had unintended, but significant, implications for our ability to attract economically disadvantaged students. The data reveal that approximately half the students on free and reduced lunch at some point at PCS entered the school in these earliest years. This was so even though the number of students in these grades has comprised less than 20% of the total number of students at PCS.

% of Free and Reduced Lunch Students Who Entered in K-2 Since 1999-2000 (when K-2 added)	% of Total School Population in K-2 Since 1999-2000 (when K-2 added)
46%	19%

In other words, despite the fact that the percentage of total students in grades K-2 is only 19% of the School, 46% of the school's free and reduced students entered in those grades

historically.

As such children get older, they are less likely to move from PPS schools to PCS. We believe that the Department should conclude from this that the best way to attract more socioeconomically disadvantaged students to PCS is to offer more seats in the earliest grades and to provide the significant advantage of a 2:1 preference in the lottery for those seats.

Moreover, and perhaps equally important, our application demonstrates that joining the school in kindergarten would give every new student who enters, and especially economically disadvantaged students, greater academic benefits than joining in third grade.

Weighted Lottery

Our request for a weighted lottery is aimed directly at increasing our socioeconomic diversity. However, because economically disadvantaged students tend to enter PCS in kindergarten and prior to our current main entry year of third grade, adopting a weighted lottery alone without increasing the number of kindergarten seats to make it the main point of entry will have a limited impact on the socioeconomic diversity of our school. This is especially true since the sibling policy in our lottery usually allocates approximately a third of the available kindergarten seats to siblings of current students. If, however, we increase the number of kindergarten spots and add a weighted lottery, we are confident that we can attract more economically disadvantaged students and provide significant educational benefits to them at PCS. These two aspects of our proposal work synergistically.

Enhanced Educational Supports

Our plan to enhance economic diversity does not rest on additional seats and a weighted lottery alone. PCS has proposed, and all opposition has ignored, that the requested increase in enrollment will fund additional support services for all students, including special needs students, English Language Learners (ELL), and students in need of additional help to succeed at the highest levels. A key part of this effort will be the development of Personalized Student Plans for every entering student designed to assess the student's needs and family resources and to ensure that PCS is providing appropriate support. We believe this is valuable in itself; however it is also an important plank in our effort to promote socioeconomic diversity. As the community becomes aware of the depth of support available at PCS from the very beginning of a student's academic career, PCS will become a much more attractive environment for all families, especially those facing economic challenges.

(2) Budgetary Impact on PPS

The majority of the opposition is based on the belief that the proposed PCS expansion will have "ruinous" and "devastating" consequences for the PPS budget. Given the impact amounts to about 1% of a budget that already generously funds many nonessential programs, this is

a greatly exaggerated claim — if not an outright misrepresentation of the facts. In either event, this belief is not a valid basis to reject this application. .

It is well within the capacity of PPS to accommodate the proposed PCS expansion without harm to its current programs. PPS's per pupil spending is far higher than comparable districts in the state. According to the Department's own data the PPS district ranked 99th out 103 districts in its 2015-16 budget "per pupil ranking within group" — i.e. the largest K-12 districts in New Jersey with more than 3,500 students and significant economies of scale.ⁱ Only four comparable districts spend more per pupil — and three of those districts are New Jersey Schools Development Authority Districts (SDA).

- 99/103 Princeton Public Schools
- 100/103 East Orange— SDA District
- 101/103 Camden City— SDA District
- 102/103 Teaneck Township
- 103/103 Pleasantville City— SDA District

In light of these facts, the modest funding impact associated with the PCS expansion can readily be absorbed by the district. (Per pupil costs at PCS are of course significantly lower than comparable costs in PPS.) This funding impact was contemplated by the Legislature as an appropriate allocation of resources to foster the policy goals of the Charter School Program Act.

Moreover, PCS does not propose to expand its enrollment by drawing from a static public school population and budget, but rather from a growing population of students that already has and will continue to justify tax levy waivers for enrollment growth, and that district officials are planning to seek bond referenda to accommodate. In other words, the claim the PPS budget grows by only 2% annually is absolutely wrong.

According to published news reports, 759 new housing units are opening in Princeton this year:

- Merwick-Stanworth Apartments — (326 housing units)
- Copperwood Apartments — (153 housing units)
- AvalonBay Apartments — (280 housing units)

None of these developments is fully rented; but, as early as August 2016, PPS publicly announced proposals to study the capacity of its existing facilities and announced that it likely will need to expand some of those facilities. The PPS Board President has publicly discussed the likelihood of a bond referendum. PPS also announced that the majority of new students to the district have been in grades K-5.

Furthermore, according to published reports, other possible new residential developments include plans by the Institute for Advanced Study to build 16 new housing units and by Princeton University to build 300 units for staff and students, along with an unknown number

of additional affordable housing units on the former Butler Housing Tract.

Given the impact of this significant influx of new students into local schools, this expansion request is ideally timed to assist the district in addressing these new needs at lower cost. Even if one were to accept the district's claims to the contrary, it cannot be credibly concluded that this phenomenon will cause devastating financial harm to the PPS district. Our proposal precedes any official request on the part of PPS for a facilities bond referendum. PPS has not yet hired additional teachers. We believe that our expansion now can only have the effect of mitigating the challenges PPS will, by its own admission, face in the near future.

Moreover, in misinforming the public and the Department that this application will consume most of the 2% annual tax levy increase the district receives without public approval, district officials and opponents have repeatedly and willfully ignored the fact that PPS routinely receives well in excess of a 2% tax levy increase each year, based on enrollment growth and health benefits waivers. In 2015, PPS received approval to exceed the 2% cap by \$1.7 million for enrollment growth and by another \$400,000 for health care costs. PPS has implemented some \$800,000 of that enrollment growth waiver, and retains another \$900,000 in banked waiver from that period. Notably, district officials have advised that waiver covers enrollment growth the district experienced *prior to 2015*.

Undoubtedly, the significant enrollment growth of 10% or more commencing in 2016 will warrant further cap waivers equal or greater than the \$1.7 million waiver granted in 2015. *Notably, the district has at no point ruled out raising taxes beyond the 2% cap during the public discussion of the PCS proposal.* Thus, the district's revenues will be increasing far more than \$1.4 million annually in the coming years.

The enrollment growth cap waiver covers the variable costs of the increase in students across all grades. It is inherently contradictory for PPS officials to assert that there are such significant variable costs for increased enrollment to warrant a waiver of the 2% cap and at the same time to claim that there are little to no variable savings to the district for decreased enrollment if PCS is authorized to accept 76 additional students.

It is also important to note that Princeton Charter School has expanded 9 out of the last 20 years and that both school districts have thrived during that time: Princeton Charter School's expansions have not prevented PPS from substantially increasing its programming offerings or led to any reductions in its faculty numbers over those two decades.

Finally, the law is clear and well established that financial impact is only a basis for denying a charter application or amendment if it will threaten the ability of the district of residence to provide its students with the constitutionally-mandated thorough and efficient education. At no point in the public debate has the district or any district official even suggested that this application will prevent or threaten the district's ability to deliver a thorough and efficient education. Nor could they, without violating their ethical obligation under the School Ethics Act to supply the public with accurate information: this is a district with a total budget in excess of

\$90 million serving some 3700 students — one that spends some \$24,000 per pupil, some 25% more than the statewide average of \$19,000 per pupil.

(3) Harm to Princeton Charter School

PPS and other public officials are dead wrong when they claim that Princeton Charter School will suffer no harm if this amendment to its charter were denied. District officials who complain to the Department of their difficulty balancing a budget with an automatic 2% budget increase plus numerous waivers of that cap know full well that for the past 8 years, Princeton Charter School has received \$15,339/student, with no increase whatsoever. Over the course of those 8 years, PCS has been required to provide annual salary increases to retain its top-performing faculty, and health care costs have gone up dramatically every year, as have other costs. Most notably, PCS received no additional public funding for the significant costs of buying new technology and hiring a technology director to administer PARCC, nor to enhance and expand its special education services. PCS has met these increasing costs by exercising a great deal of frugality while at the same time working hard to ensure its investments in technology and Special Education are cost-effective.

This past academic year, PCS met the annual challenge of additional expenses with no new revenues with the help of its faculty, who voluntarily agreed to assume a greater share of health benefits costs in order to preserve PCS's fiscal viability. This of course was an action of last resort, and accepted by faculty who understood the school's fiscal challenges.

As well, senior faculty have even declined or accepted reduced salary increases in recent years to ensure their younger colleagues receive their increases. This extraordinary commitment to the school and fellow faculty is unheard of in public schools.

Absent approval of this expansion, the *only* way PCS will be able to balance its budget without additional revenues will be to demand even greater benefits contributions from faculty, freeze their salaries, or consider staff and program reductions. These are real, tangible and concrete harms that PCS and its families will suffer, contrary to the claims of PPS and the Princeton governing body. The Department should not and cannot accept their claims as facts.

Without the expansion, Princeton Charter School will not only be unable to sustain current operations, but it will be unable to enhance its current program to support all its students and economically disadvantaged students in particular as contemplated in our application. This plan depends on the economies of scale that the expansion will make possible. Without expansion, we face salary freezes and reductions in our academic program, and any new initiatives of this sort to promote diversity will be impossible.

Educational Benefits

While this memo has focused on the diversity and fiscal effects of the Access & Equity Plan

application, it is worth briefly highlighting the educational justifications. Our PARCC scores are phenomenal and we are particularly proud of our student growth numbers:

Princeton Charter School Student Growth Indicators				
	School Wide	Peer Percentile	Statewide Percentile	Statewide Target
ELA	64	94	89	35
Math	77	100	99	35

We are asking to extend the number of students who can enjoy this level of growth, particularly with respect to economically disadvantaged students. Because studies suggest the achievement gap is best addressed through early intervention, the request to make kindergarten the main year of entry is an important component of providing the maximum educational benefit to these students.

Message to Charter Schools

For the past twenty years, Princeton Charter School has been a model charter school by every measure. We have excelled academically, consistently exceeding district results. We have a strong track record of being fiscally sound. We are an organic, parent-led school that provides a meaningful and highly sought-after option in one of the state's highest performing districts. We have scrupulously complied with every requirement from the Department. We embraced and had near perfect attendance for the PARCC test, in a town where the rhetoric and reality of "opting out" was widespread and fomented by many of the same groups and people opposing this application. The application itself is designed to increase socioeconomic diversity at PCS and is timed to coincide with a substantial increase in the school-aged population in the town.

Were the Department of Education to deny our application for a modest expansion, it would be sending a message to all charter schools that such expansions are no longer possible and that educational innovation and parental empowerment are no longer supported. Indeed, given the community demand for more seats, the academic success of PCS, the strength of its application, and the wealth and growth of the PPS district, if the Department finds a charter expansion is not warranted here, any other charter expansions it may grant would be hard to justify and will vulnerable to legal attack.

A decision in favor of the expansion would recognize and reward the kind of success that the DOE charter structure is designed to foster.

Please be assured that we are prepared to work with the PPS district to mitigate any disruption that our expansion may involve. We are all citizens of Princeton. Many of our families have students in both PCS and PPS schools, and most of our students attend Princeton High School. We believe that Princeton Charter School and PPS both make indispensable positive contributions to our shared community.

In sum: We remain confident that Princeton Charter School's proposed charter amendment would increase the socioeconomic diversity of Princeton Charter School without significant harm to PPS, and that the denial of the proposal would result in real harm to Princeton Charter School while sending a negative message to charter schools throughout the state.

Over the course of the two months since filing our application, PCS has issued numerous public statements and rebuttals in response to the irresponsible claims of opponents. So that the Department has a complete record, we append to this memorandum copies of each of those documents for the Department's consideration.

We appreciate your attention to our application, and welcome the opportunity to discuss any and all of these issues with the Department upon request, and to respond to any public comments submitted to the Department not encompassed by these materials.

Exhibit 2

Exhibit 2. RESPONSE TO DECEMBER 13, 2106 PPS PRESENTATION

PRINCETON CHARTER SCHOOL RESPONSE TO DECEMBER 13, 2106 PPS PRESENTATION

December 22, 2016

Many people have reached out to us questioning the incredible “facts” and claims that were presented at the PPS board meeting on December 13 by a private citizen with a long history of anti-charter activity throughout New Jersey, Julia Sass-Rubin, at the request of the Princeton Public Schools Board of Education (PPS).

As a threshold matter, PPS’s immediate and disingenuous opposition, before reviewing the PCS application and before having the meetings with PCS leaders they claim to have wanted, is disappointing. Clearly, PPS has prejudged the matter. Just as PPS has for years ignored PCS’s prior requests to meet and collaborate, PPS is now ignoring the many PPS families whose children now or previously attended PCS, as well as the many taxpayers who recognize PCS’s cost efficiencies and great outcomes. These students, families, and taxpayers are constituents of PPS whose voices deserved to be heard before PPS rushed to judgment, rushed to poison the well with false and misleading information, and rushed to form an opposition group dedicated to spreading fear and misleading information.

Rather than address real and challenging issues, the PPS board seems to blame Princeton Charter for all its fiscal problems. Meanwhile over the years, it has declined our board’s many offers to meet to help to clarify any misunderstanding about PCS, or to collaborate.

Second, it is equally disappointing the PPS Board and administration were themselves either unwilling or unable to present facts concerning this matter, as is their official duty and responsibility. After the Superintendent’s initial claims of a \$1.4 million impact to the district were promptly disproven by PCS, they were abandoned. Now, admitting that the subject of school funding is too complex for them to explain to the public, they are relying for their “facts” on a private partisan having no official role with the PPS system – and no legal duty or obligation to supply the public with accurate information.

Below are a few points in response to some of the questions and comments we have received that you may find helpful. In terms of what you can do, the most important way that you can be of help is to write letters in support of the charter amendment to the NJ Department of Education and our legislators. This will help balance the taxpayer-funded campaign by PPS that is spreading fear, division, and false information about our Access and Equity Plan. Next is to educate your friends and neighbors about the faulty premises being spread to stoke fear and opposition.

- The alleged impact to the district is presented to the public without acknowledging that **PPS has already authorized a \$1.7 million tax increase** -- without any public vote -- as a result of its projection of 100 new students (some \$17,000 per pupil) from new housing projects. PPS has implemented \$900,000 of that increase over the past two years, and “banked” the remaining \$800,000 increase to be applied in the upcoming 2017-18 budget. **As well, PPS has so far failed to inform the public that the additional new students in excess of its prior projection allow PPS to impose in its upcoming 2017-18**

budget yet another even larger tax increase without voter approval to educate these students.

- Unless the district intends to forego that tax increase, it is simply not dealing forthrightly with taxpayers about the alleged budgetary impact to PPS when it does not recognize that it has and will continue to increase taxes and its budget anyway, regardless of the PCS proposal.
- During the first part of its meeting, PPS used a false economy of scale argument to assert that the three classrooms offered by the PCS expansion would not alleviate the current and projected pressure in PPS K-5 schools. The second part of the Board meeting focused on the district's plan to hire architects and consider building new facilities to handle the potential increase in student population in the District. In November, PPS announced its intention to float additional bonds to pay for such construction. The PPS claim of impact on its budget ignores the most important impact - the taxpayer impact of additional taxes and bonds to fund PPS construction. Adding three classrooms at PCS will entail no bond issue or additional tax burden, and can only reduce the burden PPS imposes on taxpayers.
- We disagree with the patently misleading figures that were presented on December 13 on cost per student, as detailed below.
- At the meeting, it was asserted that PCS essentially does not have any “real” special education students. At this point, 9.6% of the students at PCS are classified as special education with 1/3 of those not speech only.
- The academic performance “data” presented were manipulated to reach an outcome at complete odds with official state data, as well as the experience of most families familiar with the different public schools in Princeton. The so-called “expert” presenter admitted she was unable to explain the way that these data were manipulated. Her methods have not been authorized by the state or undergone academic peer review, and are not even made available publicly for purposes of checking and replicating the results.
- We are disappointed that the PPS Board has chosen to present this issue in overly dramatic terms that are unproductive, unrealistic, and that serve to create a hostile climate, placing PCS students and families at the center of the target. Meanwhile, with the opportunity to renew or terminate its receiving relationship with Cranbury at hand, they have remained silent on significant concerns of many taxpayers such as whether or not Princeton taxpayers should continue to subsidize the attendance of Cranbury students at the high school, and whether Cranbury taxpayers will bear any of the cost of the high school expansion necessitated by overcrowded conditions.

- Even in the highly unlikely event PPS does not intend to implement the banked \$800,000 tax increase or to impose further and much greater tax increases based on enrollment exceeding its prior projections, the proposed expansion represents a 1% change in costs. Such a modest impact is a legally insufficient basis to deny PCS's application, and by no means can it be characterized by any honest public official as a "serious perhaps potentially ruinous threat to the school district as we know it," as one PPS board member has chosen to describe it. For those new to Princeton within the last eight years, this is the same refrain PPS has resorted to time and again since the founding of PCS in 1997. Yet for the past twenty years, the district has thrived despite - and indeed, because of - PCS. Each year, 85-90% of PCS students go on to become academic and extracurricular leaders contributing to the excellent reputation of Princeton High School. Meanwhile, the district has spent millions on a pool, a new locker room, field turf, the conversion of a gym to a media center, and many other projects not central to the primary purpose of public schools, at the considerable expense of driving less fortunate families and retirees out of town as a result of the ever increasing PPS tax levy.
- The district has a healthy per pupil expense that is several thousands of dollars above the per pupil expense of local districts with similar or better academic performance (see 3 below).

Here are some details that should address recent questions, and illustrate the basic errors that manipulate the numbers so dramatically in the December 13 presentation. This is a complex funding formula and, as such, is very difficult to simply and clarify. As a result, it lends itself to manipulation.

Cost figures:

The presentation rests on several clearly unwarranted manipulations plainly designed to mislead in view of the presenter's claimed familiarity and expertise in this area:

- a. The presenter removes the cost of PCS from the PPS cost per pupil, but does not remove the weighted number of PCS students from the divisor in calculating the per pupil cost for PPS to educate those students it does serve. Correcting this error alone increases the PPS cost per pupil from \$17,825 to **\$19,488**.
- b. The presenter removed all Special Education spending from PPS costs, by some \$14,135,166. Yet, the presenter did not subtract the number of PPS Special Education students from the divisor when calculating the per pupil cost. PPS has a 505 students whose costs are covered by the \$14million that was removed by the presenter for special education. Correcting this error increases the PPS per pupil cost from \$19,488 to **\$23,082**.
- c. The presenter removed the cost of Special Education from the PPS budget number in calculating the per pupil cost for PPS, but did not remove the

commensurate cost for PCS, stating that she could not find them in our CAFR. Removing the cost of Special Ed for PCS lowers the PCS per pupil cost to \$13,217.

- d. The claim that PCS's budget has been increasing in recent years is patently false. Unlike PPS, PCS has succeeded in meeting rising costs without increasing our per pupil budget for eight years. We have had the same budget per pupil in state and local funding since the 2008-2009 School Year: \$15,399. See last five years "Grand Totals" from state funding reports; total budget variances reflect minor differences in the total enrollment counts:

Year	"Grand Total"	Final enrollment
2011-2012	\$5,278,258	(345 students)
2013-2014	\$5,282,830	(344.4 Students)
2014-2015	\$5,325,565	(347.2 Students)
2014-2015	\$5,333,359	(347.7 Students)
2016-2017	\$5,337,918	(348 Students)

From "State Department of Education Division of Field Services, Office of School Finance" reports.

- e. The current cost to the taxpayers of Princeton for the Charter School is:

\$4,691,920	from local tax levy (\$4,952,634 - \$261K in State equalization aid for PCS Special Education that flows through the PPS budget.)
\$13,217	Per pupil (Divided by weighted per pupil=\$4,691,920 /355)

Other important PPS cost-related items:

1. Full time district employees for PPS grew in the last 10 years by 130 employees, from 563 to 693. (From 2015-16 PPS CAFR, p. 116)

The number of students enrolled in Princeton Public Schools increased by 198 students from 3,355 to 3,553 in the last 10 years. (From 2015-16 PPS CAFR, p. 117)

This is an increase of 130 PPS employees to serve an increase of 198 students.

2. Cranbury students make up approximately 260 of the students attending Princeton High School. Cranbury residents have not contributed to the cost of any debt service for bonds issued in support of PPS school facilities in the past, nor will they participate in any future loan service costs for construction of facilities to address the overcrowding at the high school. Yet PPS chooses to build more and increase the already costly subsidy of Cranbury taxpayers by the Princeton taxpayers it is elected to serve.
3. Updated: PCS is listed as **5.2%** of the PPS total budget (p.19 of the 2015-16 PPS Comprehensive Financial Report), and we educate **8.9%** of the total publically educated students in Princeton. This is a reduction from the figure previously reported in PPS's 2014-15 CAFR cited in our prior FAQ document.

4. PPS spending compared to other districts: Relative to its peer school districts, PPS remains the most costly of the top five performing districts in New Jersey in recent rankings in which PPS was ranked number 1. A simple analysis of per pupil spending (based on dividing total spending, not including debt burden, by total enrollment as reported by each for 2016-17) shows that PPS taxes and spends at a significantly higher amount than the other top districts, which are of similar size, educate similar students, and achieve similar outcomes:

Princeton:	\$21,341
West Windsor:	\$19,470
Montgomery:	\$18,645
Millburn:	\$18,341
Chatham:	\$15,871

Important data regarding School Performance

The PPS Board accepted without question or inquiry manipulated academic performance comparisons that its expert admitted she could not explain, that were not determined by the state, and that have no credibility or external acceptance.

To avoid any doubt, the state's process for gathering academic performance data concerning student performance and growth that allows for an apples to apples comparison of schools that have different student populations is the student growth percentile (SGP) methodology, which measures student growth year over year in a way that accounts for 'starting gate' inequalities. By comparing a student's achievement outcomes to a group of students that had similar achievement in the prior year(s), it is possible to measure how much growth a student demonstrated relative to students with a similar test score history or academic peer group. These are the official measures used by the State to compare school performance, and are not skewed or dissembled as were the data presented at PPS's December 13, 2016 board meeting.

By these official, apples to apples measures, PCS outperforms 99% of all public schools statewide, and 100% of its peer (similar) schools in Math Growth.

Likewise, PCS outperforms 89% of all schools statewide, and 94% of its similar peer schools, in Language Arts Growth, as reflected in the charts on the following pages.

Here are the numbers available through the State DOE website; complete NJSPR results and interpretive guides can be found at <https://homeroom5.doe.state.nj.us/pr/>:

Princeton Charter School				
	School Wide	Peer Percentile	Statewide Percentile	Statewide Target
Language Arts	64	94	89	35
Math	77	100	99	35

John Witherspoon School				
	School Wide	Peer Percentile	Statewide Percentile	Statewide Target
Language Arts	42	17	28	35
Math	49	26	52	35

Community Park				
	School Wide	Peer Percentile	Statewide Percentile	Statewide Target
Language Arts	48	44	40	35
Math	42	14	26	35

Littlebrook				
	School Wide	Peer Percentile	Statewide Percentile	Statewide Target
Language Arts	59	47	73	35
Math	64	74	83	35

Johnson Park				
	School Wide	Peer Percentile	Statewide Percentile	Statewide Target
Language Arts	68	100	93	35
Math	63	81	82	35

Riverside				
	School Wide	Peer Percentile	Statewide Percentile	Statewide Target
Language Arts	52	47	53	35
Math	55	44	60	35

Exhibit 3

Exhibit 3. Per Pupil Costⁱ at Princeton Public Schools versus Princeton Charter School

	Princeton Charter School	Princeton Public Schools	
AY ending	Comparative Cost Per Pupil	Comparative Cost Per Pupil	Per pupil Difference b/w PCS and PPS
2007	\$ 10,725	\$ 15,112	\$4,387
2008	\$ 12,390	\$ 16,834	\$4,444
2009	\$ 12,007	\$17,290	\$5,283
	Total per pupil*	Total per pupil	
2010*	\$ 14,396	\$ 22,511	\$8,115
2011	\$14,797	\$ 22,570	\$7,773
2012	\$ 16,219	\$ 23,386	\$7,167
2013	\$ 17,074	\$ 23,803	\$6,729
2014	\$ 17,549	\$24,614	\$7,065
2015	\$ 20,737**	\$24,636	\$3,899
*Note: The report format changed in 2010.			
**In 2015 the cost per pupil for PCS was elevated by the restructuring of debt and is a one year anomaly.			

ⁱ NJDOE website: **Taxpayers' Guide to Education Spending 2016**: <http://www.nj.gov/cgi-bin/education/csg/dist.pl>

Exhibit 4

Exhibit 4. Student Growth Percentiles - 2014-15 PARCC Tests.*

Princeton Public School	PARCC Test	PPS Schoolwide Growth	PCS Schoolwide Growth	PPS Peer Percentile	PCS Peer percentile	PPS Statewide Percentile	PCS Statewide Percentile
John Witherspoon 6-8	LAL	42	64	17	94	28	89
	Math	49	77	26	100	52	99
Community Park K-5	LAL	48	64	44	94	40	89
	Math	42	77	14	100	26	99
Littlebrook K-5	LAL	59	64	47	94	73	89
	Math	64	77	74	100	83	99
Johnson Park K-5	LAL	68	64	100	94	93	89
	Math	63	77	81	100	82	99
Riverside K-5	LAL	52	64	47	94	53	89
	Math	55	77	44	100	60	99

*From NJDOE School Performance Reports for 2014-15 testing year, which are the most recent available reports on-line.

Exhibit 5

Exhibit 5. Score Comparison - Absolute Scores- 2014-15 PARCC Tests.*

Side by side comparison of score percentages for Students earning 4, 5, and Total passing PARCC scores for 2015 Spring Tests

English Language Arts

2015	% w/ 4-Meeting Expectation		% w/5 - Exceeding Expectations		Total Passing	
	PPS	PCS	PPS	PCS	PPS	PCS
Grade 3	61%	74%	11%	9%	72%	83%
Grade 4	44%	52%	31%	30%	75%	82%
Grade 5	63%	61%	16%	26%	79%	87%
Grade 6	46%	50%	16%	46%	62%	96%
Grade 7	43%	21%	27%	74%	70%	95%
Grade 8	49%	49%	32%	42%	81%	91%

Mathematics

2015	% w/ 4		% w/5		Total Passing	
	PPS	PCS	PPS	PCS	PPS	PCS
Grade 3	37%	43%	10%	43%	47%	86%
Grade 4	41%	67%	13%	17%	54%	84%
Grade 5	45%	57%	13%	20%	58%	77%
Grade 6	46%	43%	16%	51%	62%	94%
Grade 7	38%	89%	5%	0%	43%	89%
Grade 8	11%	N/A	16%	N/A	27%	N/A
Alg I	62%	64%	5%	31%	67%	95%
Geometry	N/A	20%	N/A	80%	N/A	100%

- From NJDOE School performance Reports for 2014-15 testing year, which are the most recent available reports on-line.

ⁱ <http://www.nj.gov/education/guide/>