

interaction and parental satisfaction. "Using the same criteria [used for traditional public schools] is a fallacy."

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"Several city schools to be converted to charters"

Damon Williams

Headnote

Renaissance Charter, Promise Academy to take over sites

As everyone involved - including the School Reform Commission, community groups, stakeholders, parents, students and educators - take a step back to reflect and shore up their positions in the aftermath of the recently-concluded series of three final school closure hearings, the School District of Philadelphia continued its business of reforming its portfolio by announcing several schools will be converted to Renaissance Charter Schools and Promise Academies.

Sunday marked the third and final SRC hearing on school closures; now all parties wait for the SRC to make its final decision on March 7.

Elementary schools James Alcorn, Kenderton and Pastorius will operate under the Renaissance Charter School model in the 2013-14 school year, while high schools Edison and Strawberry Mansion - along with elementary schools Barry, Bryant, Cayuha and McMichael - will operate in the Promise Academy model.

According to the district, compared to traditional schools, Renaissance Charter Schools have a greater autonomy in exchange for a higher degree of accountability; schools were chosen to become Renaissance Charters because of a history of low performance. These schools will be managed by private educational operators selected through the submission of Requests for Proposals the district sent out last month.

While Renaissance Charters Schools will be operated by for-profit entities, Promise Academies are the district's own turnaround initiatives, and according to the district, "in selecting schools for Promise Academy turnaround, the district focused on those [schools] that were among the lowest performing, demonstrated signs of stable leadership or other successes under district management, and likely to be impacted by the Facilities Master Plan process, such as becoming a receiving school or located near a Promise Academy recommended for closure."

Superintendent Dr. William Hite Jr., in a statement released by the district, expanded on the reasons these schools were selected, noting a host of factors went into the decision.

"When examining schools that continually fall short on a variety of performance measures, it was clear that these nine schools needed interventions and additional support," Hite said. "We believe that we have the capacity to support certain schools through the Promise Academy model and will engage our external partners with successful track records to advise others.

"Ultimately, our goal is to get the best outcomes for all students."

Jerry Jordan, president of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and a longtime critic of the Facilities Master Plan, accused the district of "continuing the pattern of making short-term decisions that will likely have long-term negative effects on our city's schoolchildren," in a stronglyworded statement released by the PFT.

Jordan also serves as one of the founders of PCAPS - Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools.

"After years of under-funding schools like Alcorn Elementary, Kenderton Elementary, and Pastorius Elementary, the school district has created a scenario where it becomes more cost-effective to sign these schools away to charter providers, regardless of their academic track record. For all the district's efforts to publicly distance themselves from the Boston Consulting Group, this latest move - like so many others before - seems perfectly aligned to the BCG recommendation to move 40 percent of Philadelphia's students into charter schools," Jordan said. "The district has for years denied most neighborhood schools adequate funding programs, services and staff such as art, music, world languages, counselors, school nurses and librarians. At the same time, schools like Barry, Bryant, McMichael and Cayuga Elementary Schools- along with Edison and Strawberry

Mansion High Schools will receive additional resources when they are converted to Promise Academies.

"Our schools are once again being subjected to unnecessary disruptive education reform that has added to community unrest, and left parents, students and educators feeling confused and unsettled when it comes to their options and their futures," Jordan continued. "Worse, this attempt at a quick fix for the district's budget woes will have a long term and negative impact on our district's finances and our children's education."

According to the district, both models have reaped measurable success. Since 2010, 17 schools have been converted to Renaissance Charters, and nine of those have double-digit increases in reading and math state assessments, have all increased daily attendance and experienced a reduction of violent incidences. The district also supports the offerings of Promise Academies by instituting longer school days, facilitating intensive academic supports for struggling students and using the siteselection process to hire its teachers.

Still, those gains weren't enough for school choice pioneer Dr. **Walter D. Palmer**, who recently testified before city council's education committee to urge the SRC to consider dismantling Renaissance Schools altogether and run them all into Promise Academies.

"My position hasn't changed, and that is that Renaissance Schools are failing public schools reconstituted and called Renaissance Schools. They end up getting more resources from the district, but then the district, on the other hand, creates Promise Academies, which are also reconstituted schools," **Palmer** said. "The public needs to understand that these are all a part of the school district, and this is the disingenuous piece, making the public think the district is doing education reform, but in reality, it's subterfuge. The real reform is independent, community-based neighborhood charter schools.

"The 50,000 seats the district claims are in failing schools, open them up to charter process. Take the 39 schools [originally targeted for closure], the ones that can be salvaged, and let parents, students, principals and their administrations turn them into Promise Academies or charter schools," **Palmer** added. "Then you'll get real reform. All the rest of it is a sham."