

Angela Mills, right, shouts angrily at a man whom she says was being "derogatory and anti-Trayvon" as Kelsey Sparks, center, looks on at a rally on Sunday at Westlake Center in Seattle. -AP PHOTO/SEATTLE TIMES, LINDSEY WASSON

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**Apr 25, 2014**

**Philadelphia Tribute**

**"Walter D. Palmer vows to fight charter suspension"**

Wilford Shamlin III.

The founder of Walter D. Palmer Leadership Learning Partners Charter Schools on Wednesday pledged to challenge a recommendation to suspend the city's second largest charter school with an enrollment of roughly 1,300 students.

Walter D. Palmer questioned whether the district has authority to suspend his school's charter.

"With regard to that, you can't by law suspend a charter school," said Palmer, adding that Pennsylvania courts already ruled that a local school district could not enforce an enrollment cap at a charter school in its jurisdiction.

"What you have here is that they think they can do whatever they want," Palmer said in a phone interview. "And everybody believes it because they said it, as if it's a reality. Caps are illegal. You can't cap charter schools. That's state law. Read the law and you'll understand."

In a statement released on Tuesday, the school district charged Palmer's charter school with continual violations of its charter and charter school law, including fraudulent billing based on inflated student enrollment. School officials also cited serious academic under-performance for more than six years and fraudulent billing for students not enrolled at the school for the sum of approximately \$770,000 in the 2012-13 academic year.

"This difficult decision was made with substantial evidence that this school is not serving the needs of students and their families," school Superintendent William R. Hite, Jr., stated. "We require better student outcomes from a public institution that was granted a charter to educate children. We must use all of our resources toward supporting students in academic success."

In 2010, the school's charter was renewed by the School Reform Commission with an approved enrollment limit of 675 students, according to the district. Currently, Walter D. Palmer charter school has an enrollment of 1,289 students in pre-kindergarten to 12th grades at two sites in the

city's Kensington and Tacony sections. The charter school is projected to receive about \$12.6 million in per pupil payments from the school district and state DOE, district officials say.

Palmer said his charter school is reimbursed 70 cents for every \$1 spent. "We start at a deficit," he explained.

"This fight is all about our growth. Our scores are reflective of the fact that we always take children no one else wants," said Palmer. He said standardized tests are a poor measure of intelligence.

Palmer provided a breakdown of demographics at his charter schools: 75 percent Black; 20 percent Hispanics; 5 percent white. Seventy-five percent come from single-family households with earned income at or below poverty level. There are about 350 special education students enrolled at Walter D. Palmer charter school, a member of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools, an advocacy group for charter schools statewide.

Pending the SRC's approval, the school district will stop per-pupil payments as of July 1 and start procedures to revoke the charter for Palmer's school. A hearing will be held before the April 24 SRC meeting. A statement, posted on the Palmer's school website, asked the public to show their support by attending the meeting.

The school district is developing a plan for affected students that will allow them to attend higher performing traditional public and charter schools. Meanwhile, school staff says a turnaround process began earlier this year, with the goal of maintaining a safe and nurturing environment that inspires lifelong learning.

In October, Solomon Charter School surrendered its charter to the state Department of Education, shutting its doors amid an investigation about whether the school was in compliance with regulations about extent of online instruction. According to the DOE, Solomon was granted approval to operate as a cyber-charter school and that meant most instruction had to take place online.

David Weathington was hired to turn around the school in May and was acting CEO and principal of the now-shuttered school at 1209Vine St More than 300 students were displaced.

Solomon Charter School was founded by Steven Crane, who was at the helm as CEO. He is president of TelWell Inc., a real-estate company that owned the building that housed the defunct charter school.

A DOE petition states the charter school's articles of incorporation and Telwell's business address listed 1213 Vine St. but the address was excluded from Solomon Charter School's cyber charter application. The show cause order was signed by acting Secretary of Education Carolyn Dumesq, in support of revoking the school's charter.

State investigation revealed the 1209-15 Vine St. property was used in marketing. The address was referenced in arranging transportation and food services and in making payments for purchasing equipment, cleaning and repairs associated with preparing for school opening.

The website for Palmer's charter school lists Weathington as CEO and academic officer.

At the time, Weathington was adamant in saying that the school's entire curriculum was offered online through a software program that gave students access to class assignments, message retrieval and a personal blog from home.

According to its charter, Solomon was configured for grades K-II. A district spokesman said Solomon had state approval to operate as a cyber-school for grades 6-11 and paid Solomon Charter School based on its enrollment for those grades. Solomon Charter School had requested payment based on K-11 enrollment.

In addition, the charter school was in close proximity to a clinic offering treatment to sex offenders. A leak also left carpets water-logged and moldy.

Sidebar

**Report: Most charter schools perform below expectations**

A new report on charter school performance was released this week by state Rep. James Roebuck, Jr., Democratic chair of the House Education Committee.

The report concluded most charter schools perform below expectations in regard to their academic performance and innovative approaches to education, but there are enough successful charter schools to warrant a closer look at the concept first conceived by former Gov. Tom Ridge.

"It's vital to look at what some charter schools are doing right and where they are being innovative, because that was one of two reasons they were authorized in Pennsylvania in 1997, to serve as models of innovation and to save taxpayers money," Roebuck said.

In a report posted on the state representative's office website on Monday, Roebuck raised questions about seven charter schools that received \$1.8 million in lease reimbursements approved by the state Department of Education.

"I am particularly concerned that the state DOE has taken no corrective action, to date, regarding these \$1.8 million in potential over-payments," he said. "In fact, it appears the last time the department addressed a charter school lease issue related to property ownership was 2009-10, when a charter school in Philadelphia was required to repay \$225,000."

His legislative proposal would require the state DOE to seek full repayment from any charter school that received in appropriate lease reimbursements. An e-mail message seeking comment from the state DOE was not returned by Tribune press time.

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**April 27, 2014**

**Philadelphia Tribune**

"Charter school founder vows to fight suspension"

Wilford Shamlin, III

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The charter for Walter D. Palmer Leadership Partners Charter School was suspended on Thursday night by the School Reform Commission (SRC), but the school's founder vowed to fight the decision.