

In an April 28 letter addressed to the Charter School Office, Joyner wrote, "Precedent dictates that a corrective action plan be developed and implemented before closing a school. Was a corrective action plan given to Mr. Palmer? I do not believe Mr. Palmer was given due process within the spirit of the law."

Palmer has stated publicly his charter school never attempted to infringe, impinge or deny education funding to the school district by falsifying enrollment records for reimbursement purposes. He took up the issue with the SRC but the panel voted to move forward with a June 2 revocation hearing against his charter school.

He later appeared before the City Council's Committee of the Whole as it heard from the public on the school district's budget. "I will never resist the chance to fight what, I think, is injustice," the 80-year-old charter school founder said.

"Everybody has a right to due process, and we look forward to you getting your opportunity," Blackwell replied.

Sidebar

Walter Palmer stands outside the namesake charter school he founded in North Philadelphia. He has hired an attorney to fight the school district's attempt to revoke the school's charter, a move he considers retaliatory in nature.

May 25, 2014

Philadelphia Tribune

"District changes direction in attempt to shut charter"

Wilford Shamlin, III

In a move intended to avoid a challenge to its authority to suspend a charter school, the School District of Philadelphia on Friday announced it would lift the suspension against Walter D. Palmer Leadership Partners Charter School in North Philadelphia.

However, school officials still intends to move forward with charter revocation process approved by the School Reform Commission (SRC) on April 24.

"The decision is based on the desire to move forward with the revocation process while avoiding potential legal delays due to state Supreme Court filings challenging the SRC's powers to suspend a charter," said Fernando Gallard, the district's chief of communications.

The decision, announced just hours before students and staff left for an extended Memorial Day holiday weekend, was made in consultation with the school district's Office of General Counsel. Matthew Haverstick, hired by Palmer to defend against a move to revoke his school's charter, could not be immediately reached for comment Friday.

School officials believe a charter suspension would have allowed them, as of July 1, to withhold payments to Palmer's charter school based on enrollment figures submitted by school administrators.

Friday's announcement means the charter school is no longer any such restriction and can continue to operate as the revocation process moves forward. It could take at least 12 months before a final disposition of the revocation action is issued, according to the school district.

Haverstick has filed legal briefs challenging the SRC's authority to disregard charter school regulations by invoking the legislation responsible for its creation as part of a state takeover in 2001. The school district has asked the state Supreme Court to validate its decision but there's no word about when the court would take up the issue.

Last month, the SRC voted to suspend and start the revocation against Palmer's charter school based on low academic performance for more than six years and allegedly violating its charter, charter school law and policy. The school district also contends it made \$770,000 in excess payments for students not enrolled at the school. Palmer has denied deliberately fabricating enrollment figures in an attempt to receive payments it was not entitled.

Palmer's charter school has sued the school district over its authority to cap enrollment. Days later, the school district announced it was recommending suspending the school's charter. Parents and two city council members have raised questions about due process.

An initial hearing date has been scheduled June 2. Palmer and his attorney will be allowed to challenge the district's decision at a revocation hearing. During the revocation hearing, school district officials and legal counsel will present evidence and testimony in support of its initial recommendation to suspend and revoke the school's charter.

The school district said letters notifying parents about its latest announcement and outlining next steps.

Palmer charter school operates the Lower School at 910 N. Sixth St. for students in prekindergarten through fourth grade and the Upper School for grades 5 to 12 at 5500 Harbison Ave.

May 30, 2014

Philadelphia Tribune

"Charter supporters rally to save school"

Wilford Shamlin III

Walter D. Palmer Learning Partners Charter School celebrated its high school senior class, which has a 100 percent graduation rate, and school choice during a rally Thursday on the school's main campus.

Hundreds of students showed support for the charter school, named after its founder, carrying signs with messages critical of the state Supreme Court ruling on Wednesday upholding enrollment caps.

"Save our school! Save our school!"-students chanted loudly at the entrance to the school at 910 N. 6th St. From an elevated position, Fajr Mitchell, a ninth-grade student who had climbed onto a retainer wall. "No justice, no peace," the 15-year-old shouted.

His classmates displayed signs with short messages: "Shame on the Supreme Court," "Where is due process," and "Our parents chose this school."

Supporters of the charter school charge the School Reform Commission (SRC), which oversees Philadelphia's public school system, with failing to give the charter school due process before moving to strip the school's charter.

Khalilah Mustafaa has four children enrolled at the charter school. The South Philadelphia mother said she's happy with the school climate in comparison to another school, which is district-managed.

"It's very family oriented," said Mustafaa, who liked the school programming offered at the charter school.