

The announcement of the closing comes amid a district hearing to revoke the Palmer school's operating charter on multiple grounds, including shaky finances and a history of poor academic performance.

During his daylong testimony Monday, Palmer told the hearing officer that the school has cleared up most of the problems the School Reform Commission cited when it voted in April to begin the revocation process.

During a break in his testimony, Palmer said that the school he founded would continue to fight to remain open.

"This whole fight," he said, "is about school choice."

October 28, 2014

Philadelphia Tribune

"Palmer charter high school closes its doors"

By Wilford Shamlin, III

The **Walter Palmer** Charter High School closed suddenly Monday morning, turning some students away as they arrived for school, according to published reports and a statement from the city school district.

A **Palmer** official said no students were turned away, but one parent said she was "blindsided" by the closing.

"I work in a hospital where I can't be taking days off," Arlene Esquilin, a parent, told KYW Radio Monday. "And now I'm here, losing a day of work. I don't know where I'm going to put her."

The school plans to reconfigure from kindergarten to 12th grades to K-8, **Palmer** officials said. Shedding nearly 300 high school students was necessary to trim enrollment to 675. The charter school had been locked in a dispute with the school district of Philadelphia because its enrollment had grown to over 1,200.

"They broke the charter and operated above it, becoming a K to 12 school with 1,200 students," said Fernando Gallard, spokesman for the school district of Philadelphia. "They couldn't finance it so they went to the Pa. Department of Education and got additional funding, funding the state took away

from the school district. We went to court and the courts decided Walter Palmer has to pay back \$1.5 million with interest."

"It's a time of upheaval," said Maura Pennington, spokesperson for the Walter D. Palmer Learning Partners Charter School. "And the priority is to make sure students transition to another school that's appropriate for them and their families."

Gallard said parents received a call Sunday instructing them not to send their child to school Monday.

However, the charter school's spokesperson said parents were notified last week about the anticipated closing of the high school. Some students arrived Monday anyway but none were turned away, Pennington said.

The announcement was made after school administrators realized insufficient funds were available for school operations. A decision was made after holding a lottery for the transfer of 250 students and arranging for 286 additional students to attend other local schools, Pennington said.

The school district has stopped per-pupil reimbursement payments to Palmer charter school, which sought reimbursement for students that exceeded the maximum enrollment limit. A state appellate court has ruled enrollment caps set forth in a school's charter is binding, reversing a lower court decision.

The state Department of Education also put a stop on reimbursement payments to the charter school while the issue remains under appeal.

Palmer was expected to outline the next steps for the charter school to parents during a meeting scheduled Monday night. Palmer testified Monday at a school district revocation hearing.

School officials argue the district has overpaid the charter school provider for student enrollment that exceeded limits set in the charter. Palmer responded to formal complaints brought against the charter school by the school district.

"Needless to say, we really feel for the parents who are caught in the middle of this," Gallard said.

The charter school was accused of irregular bookkeeping practices and academic outcomes that fell below established benchmarks. A fourth and final hearing set to resume Wednesday could result in further disciplinary action, including closing remaining school operations.

Staff Writer Larry Miller contributed to this story.

Sidebar

Walter Palmer testified Monday at revocation hearing at the School District of Philadelphia's headquarters. In an unrelated move, Palmer ordered the charter high school closed. - PHOTO BY TRIBUNE CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER ABDULAR R. SULAYMAN

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Action News

6ABC

WPVI-TV, Philadelphia, PA

["Parents demand answer after charter school closes abruptly"](#)

Angry parents gathered in Frankford Monday night, wanting to know why their children's school was shutting down with what they said was virtually no advance notice.

Students arrived Monday morning to find the high school portion of the Walter D. Palmer Learning Partners Charter School closed.

Some families said they received a phone call with a recorded message Sunday night telling students not to come to class. Others said they showed up ready for school, only to be turned away.

On Monday night, the school's founder, addressed a gathering of parents.

Dr. Walter Palmer explained a court order was forcing the school to reconfigure in order to adhere to an enrollment cap.

Spokesperson Fernando Gallard from the School District of Philadelphia says last month the district was informed by the charter school of an eventual closing.

So the district created a special tab on its website and began helping students transition into their school communities.

However, the abrupt closing took even the school district by surprise.