

Address to the Palm Beach County School Board
November 22, 2011
Henry Di Giacinto

Written remarks/Kendall Artusi

Good Afternoon-

When we attended the October school board meeting a request was made by the board for a map of all Palm Beach County charter schools to be constructed. In reviewing the agenda items and charter school information for the November meeting I noticed that the in question map was made. PLEASE NOTE THAT BRIGHT FUTURES ACADEMY IS ONLY SHOWN AS ONE SITE, ON THIS MAP. We actually have 3 sites: one in Palm Beach Gardens with almost 300 students and 2 in North Palm Beach with a total of 350 students.

We would like to thank Board Member Chuck Shaw who is the first and only sitting member to have come to any of our locations and last week visited two. And, of course, Board Member Marcia Andrews visited with us prior to her election. We appreciate your visits and thank you for listening to what we had and have to say.

Again earlier tonight was another example of what we are talking about with regard to the relationship of the Charter schools to the District. We are part of the public school system.

Yet, no awards were presented to any Charter school or employee for the many great accomplishments and contributions to public education. No mention is made on the District Web Site of Charter School events, participation in the life of the educational community or the people who work so hard in Charters to give the students the best education they can for their taxpayer's dollar.

As you can see, I am writing (as I speak) as an advocate for charter schools and have concerns with regard to the increase in charter schools in our area.

Location

First, based on the School Boards October meeting discussion regarding the making of the charter school map, the locations appeared to raise alarms due to market saturation. Constructing the map, in my opinion, should include all campuses an organization may have AND the number of students enrolled to be beneficial for planning. The many charter schools, and district schools, seem to suffer from overbuilding and under attendance due to market saturation. This directly affects the ability of new charter schools to achieve their projected enrollment numbers while not weakening existing charter school enrollment numbers in proximity to the newly opening charter school. Bright Futures Academy was directly affected by this during this 2011-2012 academic year; however, we have re-bounded and regained most of our lost student numbers which occurred due to the opening of 2 new charter schools within 2 miles of our location. After reviewing statutes it seems that the district has no say in the location that the prospective charter school chooses unless the property does not meet safety standards; therefore, the district must proceed with caution when pre-paying charters for their projected enrollment.

It is my understanding that the La Mensa School was paid on a much larger projection than they were able to obtain prior to the October Count. The current charter that we hold explains that first year charters are paid based on a projected enrollment and that existing charters are paid based on an average of the previous year, which is adjusted after the 11 day count and again after the October Count. This does not make sense to me. If I am going to loan money to an organization, which is what the district is doing when it is paying newly opening charter schools based on projections, I am going to be much more confident in loaning money based on projections to established organizations. Bright Futures Academy has grown, just since our charter was

modified in 2008 to almost doubling our numbers. This growth has been a source of stress for our school every year because of the way the district has chosen to pay based on these numbers. Historically we have shown a drop in the summer and then a steady increase from August to December. This year alone we have increased some 40 students during this time period and this substantially affects our budget. We must pay teachers to be in compliance with class size and 40 students requires about 2 teachers that we are not getting paid for because of this system. I would ask you to re-visit this decision, especially given the influx of newly opening schools.

Second, what is the district's vision with regard to charter schools?

There is a school of thought that states that district's can become financially compromised when charter schools enroll over 10% of the district's student population. We have been in this district working with charter schools since 2001 and have seen many changes both positive and negative. At this point charters in this Palm Beach county have 10,000 students enrolled out of the 180,000 total enrolled in the district: **5.5% of the students**, more than halfway to that number. With the substantial increases in the number of applications and approvals, the growing number of charter schools creates a new reality. The traditional District is no longer the education monopoly. The PBCSD needs to change it's approach to working with charter schools, recognizing the changing market conditions. Instead of working against Charters, the Board and new Superintendent need to work with us! The Concurrency Service Area Report states that **ALL OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN SERVICE AREAS 3, 4 AND 5 ARE UNDER CAPACITY**. With all of these campuses, which cost MILLIONS OF DOLLARS under capacity, has anyone in the planning department considered the impact of charter schools on these numbers?

Third, the capital budget for the PBCSC is another area of concern for charter schools, as we only receive 40% of the statutory required funding from the state and **NO CAPITAL FUNDING FROM THE DISTRICT**. Our Bright Futures Academy ("BFA") students alone are losing \$700,000 per year because of this decision. In spite of this shortfall BFA and many other charters are still able to operate quite successfully with significantly less funding. What will happen if more and more students enroll in the charters that are moving into our neighborhoods? Will the District just continue to operate under capacity buildings or will decisions be made to take charters into account and share the use of these facilities? With this in mind, consider the district's decision to re-vitalize NPB Elem. From an economic standpoint I am still confused by the decision to re-vitalize North Palm Beach Elementary. I mentioned in my speech given at the October board meeting that I had met with Mr. Malone, Karen Marcus and Dave Norris about the possibility of our school moving into the NPB Elem. campus. A couple of months after our meeting an announcement was made that NPB Elem. was going to get the renovations that had been on the 5 year planning stage for years. There is enough room in Eisenhower Elementary alone to re-zone the students attending NPB Elementary and send them there if they wanted to go! BFA could assume the NPB campus and it would be a win-win situation for our school and the District. A \$29 million dollar opportunity was lost to the District. The district is acting in a way that is reminiscent of the US automobile industry of the 70's-more tailfins, push-buttons and chrome, not mileage, not economy, not excellence. The more one thinks about it the more examples abound of fighting the last war, selling an inferior product, ultimately losing its market, its way and place.

Across the country charter schools are receiving attention for various reasons. In New Orleans 69% of all public school students attend charter schools, as they were able to start over and build an innovative educational system. New York State has found themselves tangled in a sea of union red tape battling for student rights to equal funding. Still eleven states do not have charter school law and states range from below the national average of 3.7% to the District of Columbia enrolling 39% of all public school students in charter schools. The School District of Palm Beach County is ranked as the 11th largest school district in the United States, preceded by Orange County 10th, Hillsborough 8th, Broward 6th and Miami Dade 4th. When reviewing the various budgets of the 10 largest districts in the United States it is easy to see which districts have made

adjustments to this new market reality, recognizing that the efficacy of charter schools and those that have not gotten it. For example, Miami Dade has reached the critical 10% enrollment number, yet in their budget narrative they recognize the impact charters have not only in the district's loss of revenue, but in their reduced expenditure needs as well. In short, the district's that are adapting to this change are fairing much better than those that have not.

My plea to you as a Board is simple:

1. Recognized Charters as a part of the school district in the following ways:

- a. Start by talking about charter schools on your web site
- b. Allow Press Releases about charter events to be published on your web site
- c. Solicit interesting information about the charters in your district to place on the charter school web page on your web site.
- d. Create a standing spot on your agenda for charter school news to be reported by your charter school director.
- e. Discuss the financial impact charter schools are having on your district and how you can adjust in a most positive way.
- f. Cooperate in sharing none-classroom facilities and assets to more efficient utilization rates.

2. VOTE ON MATTERS REGARDING CHARTER SCHOOLS AND FUNDING-

Vote as to whether the district is FOR or AGAINST charter school funding expenditures.

Vote: For or against sharing the .25 mileage with charters.

Vote: **For or against sharing capital outlay dollars with charter schools.**

AS A TAX PAYER I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHERE OUR VOTED OFFICIALS STAND ON THIS ISSUE.

3. Develop a plan that will allow for a positive shift in funding for our students from 100% of students enrolled in district run public schools to currently 5% enrolled in charter schools with a steady increase developing.

- a. The funds going to charter schools are going to fund students in this county and should be funded in the same way other public school students are funded- BUT THEY ARE NOT.
- b. When schools are under enrolled determine WHY they are under enrolled. For example, are there charter schools or private schools in the area with substantial enrollment that could be reducing the numbers of the district run public schools?
- c. When schools are under enrolled combine schools and offer available property to charter schools for use.
- d. Explore successful charter schools and how they are managing to operate on 50% less than the district run schools.
- e. Look deeply into the affects the unions are having on student education and how charters are succeeding without them. The Palm Beach County teachers union is relatively weak as compared to the unions operating in New York and Chicago.
- f. Look into these other districts and how they have adjusted, or have not adjusted to the increase of charters. Analyze why some are successful and others not.

4. Enrollment Rankings and percentage of students enrolled in charter schools.

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| 1. New York City | 3.8% |
| 2. Los Angeles | 11.9% |
| 3. City of Chicago SD 299 | 9.5% |
| 4. Dade | 10.2% |
| 5. Clark County School District NV | 1.4% |
| 6. Broward | 9.4% |
| 7. Houston | 16.% |
| 8. Hillsborough: | 3.2% |
| 9. Hawaii Department of Education | 3.1% |

10. Orange	3.1%
11. Palm Beach	5.1%

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns and our requests.

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