

2-6-15
Public Comments



From: Judith Jones <brckojudy@mac.com>
Subject: **Comment for DOE Charter Schools meeting tonight from Judith Jones**
Date: February 3, 2015 2:57:57 PM EST
To: infocso@doe.k12.de.us
Cc: Ben Cohen <bjcohen@gmail.com>

The online form says that formal public comment has closed for this evening's meeting but I hope these comments might be considered informally:

February 3, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

The Friere "Major Modification Request for Enrollment Change and Enrollment Preferences" attributes removing the pledge specifically to adhere to Friere's philosophy to a Federal requirement they must meet to obtain funding. If Friere intends to accept any applicant, without conditions, then they cannot force withdrawal of students who do not meet those standards or who cause academic or disciplinary problems, thus forcing the school to change its philosophy in order to keep up enrollment numbers. Their website for the Philadelphia school implies that those students sign such a pledge so I wonder if Friere has not accepted Federal Charter Schools Program funding there.

My own teaching experience with this age group was at schools using selective admissions – ten years at Athens College in Greece and two years at Stanford University in California. I admire Friere for not using a competitive admission process but their "contract" then becomes their only filter to find families who agree with their higher academic standards. The Freire application also proposes to begin operations with fewer students in fewer grades (8 and 9) who would have fewer facilities (no lunchroom which was also to be the gymnasium). The application admits Friere has no funding for coaching or club leader stipends so there would be no athletic program. While they hope to fundraise for these facilities, the students would, in the meantime, have only the immediate neighborhood in which to "hang out" with their friends before school, at lunch, and after school.

Background considerations for Friere application

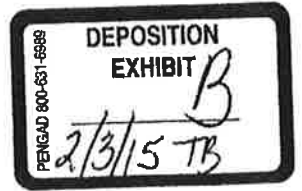
I have addressed the academic implications of most relevance to the Board above but I thought some local background might explain why, in my opinion, Friere is having trouble attracting students in Wilmington. Their philosophy is inspiring, their model has proven effective and the target student population seems similar but other assumptions about Philadelphia and Wilmington have been faulty.

LOCATION: The Rittenhouse Square area has broad, four-lane streets and wide sidewalks because it is a commercial/high rise apartment area with shops and fast food restaurants. Midtown-Brandywine has one lane, one-way streets with sidewalks allowing no more than two people to walk abreast. Friere's preferred Wilmington location on French Street was given to another charter school so their current building was what they described as "the last available space" their budget could cover in Wilmington.

TRANSPORTATION: This building has only one entrance, at the corner of two one-way, narrow streets so narrow that school buses cannot move through them. The school proposes using public transportation as they do in Philadelphia but the Wilmington system is much less extensive and is currently being downsized. It may not be suitable for all students. The system is also deemed less safe than Philadelphia, which may cause more parents to bring their children to school, creating a safety concern on congested streets.

SAFETY: At present, Friere suggests they can force parents to drop off children one block from the school but without explaining how they could force compliance. Even assuming public transport use, the children would be using very narrow sidewalks so that the temptation to walk in the streets would be very tempting. School buses cannot negotiate the narrow, one-way streets.

TIMING: The school would be best served to postpone opening for one year which would give them time to recruit more students across more grades while also finding a safer and more appropriate location for the school.



From: JonesPowell <jonespowell@me.com>
Subject: **Comment for tonight's DOE Charter Board meeting from Rosemary Powell**
Date: February 3, 2015 2:49:49 PM EST
To: infocso@doe.k12.de.us
Cc: Ben Cohen <bcohen@gmail.com>

The online form says that formal public comment has closed for this evening's meeting but I hope these comments might be considered informally:

February 3, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

The Friere application was originally approved by the Board to bring a new approach to charter education in Wilmington; however, the school's "Major Modification

Request for Enrollment Change and Enrollment Preferences" suggests that Friere has changed that approach so that they would become merely one more of the

many charter schools already in existence.

This major modification of the application proposes removal of the pre-admission pledge supplemental to the general charter application, indicating "specific interest

in Freire's methods, philosophy, and educational focus." Without this contractual agreement between the school, the students and the parents, the school will find it

very difficult to compel compliance with its stated educational and behavioral standards.

In addition, the school already states that there is less interest in the school than originally envisioned. The result of these lower attendance figures would suggest

that the school's standards would be further eroded simply to fill its student quotas.

There is currently no funding for coaching (and thus no possibility for an athletic program), no funding for extra curricular activities, nor money for a lunch room/gymnasium.

Nor is there, in this residential neighborhood, the cultural enrichment provided by the more urban environment of Friere's Philadelphia location.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Powell
220 W. 14th Street
Wilmington, DE 19801

From: [Joshua R Peck](#)
To: [infocso](#)
Subject: Freire Charter School - 2014-15 Major Modification Application Public Comment
Date: Thursday, February 05, 2015 8:50:17 AM

Full Name: Joshua R Peck

Email Address: jpeck534@gmail.com

Charter School: Freire Charter School

Comment: I do not believe that Freire Charter School of Wilmington should be granted a modification. It is my assessment that the reason why they are requesting this modification is because of their lack of due diligence to best understand the needs of the Wilmington community, which is indicative of their much lower than expected enrollment figures.

I also have concerns about the facility they have chosen for their school in terms of infrastructure and amenities. The building requires extensive renovations to be compliant with state and city codes to operate as a school and the lack of a gym, cafeteria and green space severely impairs the school's ability to create a vibrant and holistic learning environment for our kids. An outdated office building cannot compete with other nearby charter schools with state-of-the-art facilities like the Community Education Building.

There is also a concern of accessibility to the location. The proposed charter school is located deep within a residential neighborhood in Wilmington with crowded streets and narrow sidewalks. This congested area could easily exacerbate an emergency situation at the school and increase the response times of police, fire, or medical responders. Why would we put upwards of 600 students at unnecessary risk?

Lastly, the fact that the City of Wilmington is requesting a moratorium on new charter schools reflects the need to slow the expansion of the charter school network to allow adequate time to evaluate a long-term plan that best benefits the children in our area.

The Freire plan does not appear to be fully vetted when considering the choice of location and abysmal enrollment numbers. Does our city need another failing school?

Thank you.

From: [Leslie Jamison](#)
To: [infocso](#)
Subject: Freire Charter School - 2014-15 Major Modification Application Public Comment
Date: Thursday, February 05, 2015 10:52:28 AM

Full Name: Leslie Jamison

Email Address: jamison.leslie@gmail.com

Charter School: Freire Charter School

Comment: This was previously submitted on 1/28/15 to the DOE but I want to be certain it's included as comment regarding the Major Modification Application:

Dear Board of Education,

As long-time residents of Midtown Brandywine, we write to voice our opposition to the location of Freire Charter School at 201 West 14th Street in our neighborhood. While we understand the importance of quality education opportunities for young people, we must disagree that Freire Charter is a good fit in Midtown Brandywine.

With about 250 residents already facing parking and traffic issues, the influx of 560 students and staff would further aggravate this situation. The proposed use at this site is just too intensive. Midtown requested a traffic study from Freire but was only provided with a proposed plan to show how students would arrive to the school. This plan does not address the problems that we anticipate because it assumes there will be no drop-offs within the neighborhood. The plan shows students walking from DART bus stops outside Midtown which we believe poses a safety issue for the students having to navigate rush hour traffic in downtown Wilmington. We also think the reality is many parents will drop students off at the school, not blocks away as the school is proposing. Although the school may request the cooperation of parents, there is no way to enforce remote drop-offs which would have their children walk several blocks through the city especially in bad weather.

Additionally, there's confusion on the amount of parking spaces required on-site per city code and exactly what number the school has been given by the landlord. A request from the Midtown Brandywine Neighbors' Association to the city to clarify the parking requirements has not yet received a response.

We know recent legislation was proposed that would put a temporary halt to granting new charter schools in Wilmington. What's going on with Freire in Midtown is a prime example of why charter schools in general need to be reevaluated. Hopefully neighborhoods will be allowed some input in these decisions.

We respectfully ask for your help now in re-thinking the location of 201 West 14th Street as an appropriate location for the Friere School.

Sincerely,
Robert Butts
Leslie Jamison

From: Nancy Cooper
To: infocso
Subject: Freire Charter School - 2014-15 Major Modification Application Public Comment
Date: Wednesday, February 04, 2015 10:32:56 AM

Full Name: Nancy Cooper

Email Address: nancoop@comcast.net

Charter School: Freire Charter School

Comment: Why I feel the Freire School does not belong in the Midtown Brandywine area of Wilmington, DE:

Midtown Brandywine is a cozy residential area in Wilmington, Delaware. It is bounded by the lovely Brandywine Park and River, the "Hercules" building, Pennsylvania Ave./12th St., and Christiana Care's Wilmington Hospital. This small, quiet neighborhood is made of people of many races, education levels, sexual orientations, and economic levels. They work together to keep the neighborhood clean, attractive, and safe. They play together at block parties, progressive dinners, chili cheeks cookoffs, book club, etc. This is just the kind of neighborhood that Wilmington needs. I've lived here for about 37 years and am happy to be here. Midtown is in one of the first built parts of Wilmington and so has narrow streets which were quite adequate for the cars of years ago but a challenge for large vehicles today. We have a severe parking shortage also. Now Midtown has a new threat: Freire School.

The Freire School wants to open in the old Blue Cross/ Blue Shield building at the corner of 14th and Orange Streets in Midtown Brandywine. It is a tight fit for large vehicles to turn that corner. The school claims they will have most students take public buses to locations out of the neighborhood and then they will walk in to the school. That is a lot of foot traffic on our sidewalks where our toddlers play. All students and parents will not do as requested which will cause traffic jams and worsen the parking problem. The school wants to come to an agreement with neighbors on these and other issues. Many neighbors, myself included, do not trust that such an agreement would be followed. This school needs enrollment and I feel they will try to do whatever they need to do to get it. They would ruin our neighborhood and not be successful.

Enrollment is a big problem for them. That is not surprising. Some people are afraid to come into the city of Wilmington; therefore, I think they would not send their children to school in Wilmington especially on public buses. There are many wonderful high schools in New Castle County that because of school choice and their size can offer many varied educational experiences (more languages, fine science labs, sports teams, music programs, etc.) to all students.

Some people recently have asked for a moratorium on new charter schools in Wilmington until we assess what we have and make sure we are not making our schools segregated again. I am a retired teacher who taught 40 years of which 25+ years were in the public schools of Delaware. I taught in the old Alfred I. Dupont School District and Brandywine School District. I am not a part of the group asking for the moratorium but can understand their fears. Perhaps we need to reflect on what we are doing to our children.

The Freire School boasts of accomplishments in Philadelphia. I don't know if I can believe anything they say about their school. I do know it is near Rittenhouse Square which is an active area both day and night. I love to eat at Parc restaurant in that area when I go to concerts or plays. I do know: Midtown is not Rittenhouse Square, Wilmington is not Philadelphia, and Delaware is not Pennsylvania.

Freire School does not fit in Midtown Brandywine. I am glad to be living here with my wonderful neighbors in our cozy oasis neighborhood.