



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
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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.