

infocso

From: Rep. Kim Williams <infocso@doe.k12.de.us>
Sent: Saturday, January 30, 2016 12:16 PM
To: infocso
Subject: First State Montessori Academy Major Modification Application Public Comment

Charter School: First State Montessori Academy

Name: Rep. Kim Williams

E-Mail Address: Kimberly.Williams@state.de.us

Public Comment: I am writing to you to express my deep concerns about First State Montessori Academy and their modification request. I do not believe their modification should be granted until they address these issues.

Students typically attend their assigned feeder school unless a parent chooses their child into another school. School choice is an option that many families in New Castle County use. I have concerns about the preferences being used by First State Montessori School. This school is located in the City of Wilmington and one of the preferences is a 5 mile radius. The issue with this preference, it is last on the preferences being used which means children who live within the 5 mile radius may not get into this school before other children who may live outside the 5 mile radius. In the Montessori charter application it states: "To achieve a vibrantly diverse and active community of staff, students, families, and friends of the school." Why is the five mile radius preference last if this is their goal?

Below are First State Montessori Academy admission preferences.

Children of FSMA founders (up to 5% of the school's population)

Children of staff employed 20 hours or more a week by FSMA

Siblings of children currently enrolled at FMSA this school year (2014-2015)

Applicants who have demonstrated an interest in the Montessori teaching philosophy

Children whose primary residence is within a 5-mile radius of FSMA on the date of the lottery.

Preference #4 could be a roadblock for families living in the city who would like to send their children to this school but cannot because their child did not previously attend a Montessori school or a Montessori camp. Private Montessori schools charge tuition and how many private Montessori schools are currently located in the city? Other options for showing an interest at this school: the family could participate in a teleconference with FSMA administrators or board member and discuss the educational philosophy, attend a session, tour or educational program sponsored by FMSA or submit a 100 word essay on FSMA's teaching philosophy. Again, these enrollment practices are ways for a charter school to pick the students who seem to be a better fit and to deny access to others.

This continues to be an issue over and over in Delaware with some of our charter schools and it needs to stop. Charter schools need to open their doors and accept all students--not set up preferences so they can cherry pick their students. Do what is right for the City of Wilmington families!

From: Eve Buckley <infocso@doe.k12.de.us>
Sent: Saturday, January 30, 2016 11:29 AM
To: infocso
Subject: First State Montessori Academy Major Modification Application Public Comment

Charter School: First State Montessori Academy

Name: Eve Buckley

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Public Comment: I am a big fan of Montessori teaching, and I wish it were available to more children. However, I write in opposition to FSMA's modification application. FSMA, in Wilmington, currently enrolls a student population that is dramatically whiter and wealthier than that of the school districts and (especially) communities surrounding it.

According to DOE's "school profiles" website, for this school year FSMA students are 65% white and 8% low-income. The two districts surrounding it are 44% white, 35% low-income (Red Clay) and 32% white, 41% low-income (Christina); those figures include suburban regions with less poverty than the city. FSMA could clearly be doing more to attract and retain a student population more reflective of its surrounding communities (or even of the countywide student population). It is the state DOE and board of education's job to ensure equitable opportunity for lower-income and minority children. The state charter authorizer should not approve this modification request until FSMA demonstrates its ability and willingness to serve a student population more representative of the communities where it is located.

Note that among the ways parents can demonstrate their young children's "special interest" in Montessori education is by having enrolled the child in a Montessori school previously. With one exception other than FSMA, Montessori schools in DE are private, and often quite pricey--cf. Hockessin Montessori. This way of demonstrating "special interest" is likely one reason that FSMA's enrollment is so vastly disproportionately middle class.

I do not expect DDOE or SBOE to take this issue seriously, as they have declined to act when other charter and choice schools underenroll low-income, special needs and minority children (cf. Cab Calloway magnet & CSW (Red Clay authorized, but ultimately subject to DOE authority), Newark Charter, Sussex Academy, Sussex Tech and others). I am submitting this comment to ensure that there is a public record of DDOE and the state board's awareness of this serious issue. At some point in the near future, a civil rights lawsuit against both of those entities, for negligence in defending minority children against discrimination by publicly funded schools, is certain to succeed--we are piling up examples of Delaware's disregard for equal opportunity. At that point, it will be helpful to have comments like these on record, so that our DOE's willful disregard for equal educational opportunity is undeniable.