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Subject: Academia Antonia Alonso Major Modification Application Public Comment

Charter School: Academia Antonia Alonso

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Public Comment: I am writing in support of the Major Modification requested by Academia Antonia Alonso (La Academia) to move from its current location in the Community Education Building (CEB) to Building 26 at Barley Mill Plaza. As a founding board member of La Academia, I am well aware of the difficulties involved in securing the best possible learning facilities for a new charter school. After an intense search, La Academia moved into the new facilities of the CEB in 2014. Growing pains were felt by both the school and the building, which was completed barely on time for the start of school. The difficulties of moving small children (K and grade 1) between floors were not fully understood in the midst of the logistics of opening a new school. But it quickly became evident that climbing up and down adult-sized staircases or lining up and waiting for elevators with limited capacity was not beneficial to the children in terms of time taken away from their learning, as well as optimal environment for emotional development. This continues to be a problem for the young students of La Academia. Another problematic issue is the coordination of shared space in the building, such as the cafeteria. Large groups of children converge into the wide open space which is overstimulating for many of the youngsters. Accommodating so many students from multiple schools results in a noisy and difficult environment for young children. On the issue of recess space and outdoor availability, it is clear that the Barley Mill space is superior for the students. Not only will they spend less time walking to and from their outdoor space for physical play, they will also have more opportunities for outdoor learning expeditions. While the atrium of CEB and the blacktop area nearby were the best that could be found when La Academia was initially opening in the urban space of Wilmington, the space surrounding Building 26 at Barley Mill Plaza will provide better opportunities for the children at this time. Lastly, I would like to address the issue of availability of the school building for meetings involving both staff and parents. As has been noted, the culture of an Expeditionary Learning school is extremely important, as is parent involvement. Many, if not most, parents of La Academia students work full time, often in jobs where they are not able to take time off for school activities. The limited hours available at CEB, with financial consequences for use beyond the stated hours, provide a hardship for the school since they often cannot offer the most desirable options for parents to be involved in their children's education. Academia Antonia Alonso presents an innovative educational experience for families in Wilmington with its Expeditionary Learning and Dual Language program. It is particularly attractive to families who do not have many choices in the education available for their children. Allowing the school to move to a campus which is easily reached by downtown families, but provides an improved overall educational and developmentally appropriate experience through its physical layout and facilities for the students will be a positive outcome for all.

