



MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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FRANK R. ALVAREZ, ED.D.

Superintendent of Schools

December 15, 2011

Education Commissioner Chris Cerf
Department of Education
PO Box 500
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Commissioner Cerf:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and submit comments regarding the charter school application for Quest Academy Charter School of Montclair. Please note the following:

- This is the Quest Academy's fifth attempt to propose a charter school in Montclair. The current application is substantively the same as past applications that have been denied by the NJ Department of Education.
- Quest Academy's premise for justifying the need for this charter school is based on inaccurate information, outright distortions, and tenuous evidence of parental and community demand. In fact, many of the assertions they make are based on past perceptions of Montclair High School. Montclair High School students succeed. There is a five-year trend that shows a closing of the academic achievement gap based on HSPA results with only a three percent difference between Caucasian and African-American general education students. Ninety-three percent (93%) of all students in the class of 2011 went on to post-secondary education; ninety-one percent (91%) of African-American students went on to post-secondary education.
- Quest Academy estimates an enrollment of between 160 and 250 students. The subsidy from the Montclair Public School District would be \$2.1 million based on the NJ Department of Education's calculations. Such a diversion of funds, on top of state aid reductions of \$7.3 million since the 2009-10 school year and an additional district-imposed budget reduction of \$3.4 million, would severely impact the K-12 program.
- Budget reductions due to the loss of state aid have impacted staff, programs and services, including reductions in reading instruction, guidance services, library services, world language instruction, after-school and summer programs, among many others cuts. *Our efforts targeted at supporting at-risk student populations were also severely impacted by these cuts.*

- Montclair High School has a rich tradition of educational excellence dating back to the late 1800's. Montclair High School has something for everyone - literally - and that includes small learning communities, AVID, student centered instruction, rigorous academic experiences, and a wide array of AP courses. Relationships with higher educational institutions such as Montclair State University, NJIT, UMDNJ, and Essex County College, as well as community organizations such as the Montclair Art Museum, the Montclair Public Library, IMANI, and the Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence, provide support to our students and staff in meaningful ways.

For your convenience, I am providing you with the district's past responses to Quest Academy applications, which have been substantially similar to the current proposal. These draw a fuller picture of the continued inaccuracies and concerns that have plagued this process. With all due respect, I again affirm the belief that Quest Academy Charter School of Montclair cannot come close to the honored and long-standing educational excellence that is Montclair High School.

Sincerely,

Frank Alvarez
Superintendent

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Enclosures: Letters May 2010/Dec 2010/May 2011
c: Montclair Board of Education