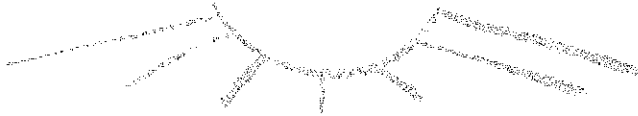


Center for Education Reform



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Honorable Martin O'Malley
Mayor
City of Baltimore
100 Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Dear Mayor O'Malley,

I would like to take this opportunity to update you on charter school potential in Baltimore City and ask for your help on behalf of potential applicants.

The Maryland General Assembly passed charter legislation in the 2003 Session and the Baltimore City Public School System is moving forward to prepare to accept and review charter applications. My work is on behalf of the Center for Education Reform, a DC based national advocacy group which has developed a project to encourage and assist groups in development of successful applications.

One of the groups described below could be ready for a September 2004 start date; however, the current BCPSS policy states that the system's intention is to not approve any schools for opening before September 2005 despite the lack of any such restriction in the state law.

There are several groups in the City actively pursuing development of a charter school. Their energy and dedication to the life of the city as well as to their children would impress you. They believe. Three in particular you will find of interest. What they represent are efforts to create schools with a diverse student population in areas of the City where there are working class/poorer blocks in close proximity to gentrifying areas. These first organizers are committed to staying in the City and to creating a public school option that would help to stabilize a neighborhood. These proposals have the potential to be an engine of progress for the City as well as a catalyst for student achievement.

City Neighbors Charter School:

This is a very energetic group of parents in Northeast Baltimore. This area is served by the adequately performing but overcrowded Glenmount elementary school. They are negotiating use of unused education space in a local church which has embraced their project as a hopeful development for the

neighborhood. This group would have a healthy shot at achieving a September 2004 opening if their application were approved in the next few months.

Patterson Park/Canton:

The Patterson Park neighborhood association seeks to develop a charter school in the closed St. Elizabeth's school on East Baltimore Street. They see the potential to serve the blocks nearest the park and to draw on the growing middle class around the Park and down to Canton. They have also discussed drawing on the growing immigrant population in the area. This effort could contribute to efforts to attract more immigrants to Baltimore.

Union Square:

A group of families living on and very near Union Square are meeting to consider the development of a charter school in that area. Again the potential for the economic diversity touted in Rusk's recent report for the Abell Foundation exists. The elementary school serving this neighborhood, Stuart Hill, has been a consistent poor performer in reading and math for several years.

These and other hopeful plans face significant obstacles, including securing facilities, which neither BCPSS nor MSDE will assist with. At least some of these planners will run into the frustration immediately of having to wait an additional year or be limited by a policy that contemplates only approving a maximum of 3 schools for the first 3 years of the program, the first to open in September 2005.

The mayor of Indianapolis, Bart Peterson, has convinced the Indiana legislature to give him charter authority and the mayor's office has established a fairly impressive application and evaluation process. He publishes very comprehensive reports (lots of stats!) on the schools which his office has approved. Thus, the energy of the mayor's office in Indianapolis appears to be making a strong contribution to creating more autonomous and highly accountable schools in that City.

I am at your service if you and your staff would like to learn more about the potential for charter schools to contribute to school reform and neighborhood stabilization in Baltimore. If you want a detailed briefing on these applicants they would be most eager to do that for you.

Thank you for your kind attention. Best wishes for a happy New Year.

Sincerely,

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