

VANCE COUNTY SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

February 20, 2014

TO: Members of the Vance County Board of Education
Jerry Stainback, School Board Attorney
Members of the Vance County Board of Commissioners
Jerry Ayscue, Vance County Manager
Members of the State Board of Education
Charter School Staff Members
Legislative Representatives for Vance, Franklin and Granville Counties

FM: Ronald E. Gregory 
Superintendent of Schools

RE: Kerr-Vance Academy

I have attached a copy of an anonymous document received on February 17, 2014 regarding Kerr-Vance Academy, currently a private school located in Vance County. The document provides information on Kerr-Vance's request to become a Charter School.

Thank you for taking time to read this information.

attachment

c: Governor Pat McCrory

FEB 17 2014

In 1967-68, Henderson and Vance County began the process of integrating the public schools as required by the United States Supreme Court. As implementation began, a number of students attended Dabney Elementary, which went through the eighth grade and was primarily white, even after the beginning of integration.

The following school year, when those Dabney students would have been sent to one of two integrated high schools, many students from Dabney moved en masse to the newly created Vance Academy. What was immediately dubbed the 'white school' was housed in a trailer located near Henderson. As forced integration continued to expand, Vance Academy added a grade each year and operated as a high school for years.

It was no secret in Henderson why this new school was created. Like numerous schools across North Carolina and the south, often called Academies, these private schools became the 'go to' alternative to forced integration of the public schools.

Over the course of the next 40+ years, the school experienced both growth at times and declining enrollment at other times. Eventually, in a move to stabilize attendance, the Academy merged with another school and remained Kerr-Vance Academy throughout the years. Today the school has remained highly segregated, with few minorities attending the school. Those minorities that do attend Kerr-Vance Academy tend to be children of parents with a professional/medical background

The latest report of ethnicity at Kerr-Vance Academy is approximately 95% white, 1% black and the remaining comprised of various minority groups (Hispanic, Indian and other) (Great Schools.org/NCES). While Kerr-Vance Academy maintains a policy of not releasing ethnicity data because 'it is not collected', the availability of this data through GreatSchools.org paints a picture of a traditional southern private school that maintains a highly segregated alternative to public schools.

Located approximately 3 miles from the downtown Henderson, Kerr-Vance Academy has suffered an alarming drop in enrollment in recent years. The enrollment had dropped to the current enrollment of 360 students. Enrollment decline is the result of both the economy and Kerr-Vance Academy's inability to compete with new charter schools and a Christian-based private school that opened in recent years. The bottom line- Kerr- Vance Academy has not been able to successfully compete against other schools now serving Vance County and surrounding areas.

The school is in danger of closing beginning with the 2014-15 or 2015-2016 school years unless dramatic steps are taken to find alternative funding. The options for funding have come down to a single solution.

The school's leadership is facing a dilemma: to apply for public charter school status or to close its doors and cease to exist. Given this dilemma the school's board of trustees voted to apply for charter school status through the application process as created by the North Carolina State Board of Education. Kerr-Vance Academy's unwritten reason for applying to become a charter school appears to be financial; based on the charter school application, Kerr-Vance Academy apparently will continue

to operate as it has historically with the state providing state/local funding to replace private funding with North Carolina tax dollars.

The only option to survival, to become a charter school, apparently scorned by Kerr-Vance Academy parents, appeared to be the school's only hope for survival.

Kerr-Vance Academy's application for charter school status appears to provide vague or misleading information related to how the school will operate within existing state laws. The 'special focus' of the school will be what is currently in place- a classical studies school designed to prepare students for college. The school states that minority students will be admitted yet transportation or a support base for these students is all but non-existent and will significantly reduce any student who does not have transportation to get to school.

As data has shown to date re: charter schools, the lack of transportation is the #1 hindrance for poor and/or minority students to attend these schools. It appears to be no secret among current North Carolina charter schools that the way to control the demographics of charter schools is to control transportation options for students.

One example provides data re: transportation. Henderson Collegiate Academy is a special focus charter school to help students with performance difficulties get back on track for graduation from high school. This alternative school, comprised overwhelmingly of minority students, provides transportation to any student who needs this service. If transportation can be provided for these students at one charter school in Henderson, the question to ask is why other charter schools in Vance County cannot do the same.

Historically Kerr-Vance Academy has provided bus transportation for students in Oxford, Louisburg, and the Kerr Lake area. Will this continue and/or expand? The charter school application appears to be vague at best in providing an answer as to whether or not any transportation will be provided.

The application contains no information to actively recruit minority students, as bus transportation for students in predominantly African- American communities is not addressed. Instead the application suggests parents create 'car pools' as one strategy to provide transportation. The impact on economically disadvantaged/minority students without transportation will be substantial, as clear evidence exists that this strategy has significantly impacted other charter schools (ie Vance Charter School).

In the area of special needs students, the application describes the willingness of the school to admit special education students. Yet the application is vague and prescribes boiler plate language about the type of special education student that would be admitted and served. Furthermore, the IEP requirement for special needs students is not mentioned as a requirement for student placement and service.

The likelihood of special needs students attending Kerr-Vance Academy would cost significantly more per pupil and would require specially trained teachers. However, the proposed budget for Kerr-Vance Academy provides little evidence of the cost factors associated with these special students.

As mentioned previously, Kerr Vance Academy provides a vague description regarding historical data about the demographic make-up of the school. In fact the school states that such data has not been

collected and thus providing a specific answer to this question is unavailable. Why is this data not provided? A strong case could be made that the historical attendance of the lack of minority students could be a hindrance to approval of its charter school application. The answer provided in the application appears to be misleading at best. A sample of the language used by Kerr Vance in its application:

"Kerr-Vance Academy...does not discriminate on enrollment based on a school's gender, religion, race or nationality, therefore it has not tracked students according to such demographics. The school is unable to track the socio-economic diversity as there is no income basis for enrollment other than the ability to pay tuition..... The school strives to be a reflection of the community it serves. The school continues to struggle with diversity with a declining enrollment...."

This answer stands in stark contrast to the enrollment data provided in Great Schools data previously mentioned. According to the website, Kerr Vance Academy's, racial make-up is as follows:

- 95% white
- 1% African American
- 2% Hispanic
- 1% Indian origin

In the application, Kerr Vance Academy "strives to be a reflection of the community it serves". Vance County Schools is over 80% minority, with the vast majority being African-American. Kerr- Vance Academy is 5% minority and only 1% African American.

Will Kerr- Vance Academy's minority enrollment change once it becomes a public charter school? The application paints a picture of 'business as usual' and thus the answer to this question is less than transparent.

The application for charter school status describes Kerr -Vance Academy that appears to be primarily the same school as currently exists:

- A classical studies school designed to prepare students for college.
- A school that provides little transportation alternatives for students in predominately minority locations.
- A school that is likely to remain predominantly white with little focus on students of different races and special needs.

Is Kerr-Vance Academy reflective of the original intent of the charter school movement?

Alternatively, would Kerr-Vance Academy serve as a beacon for perhaps the new intent of the General Assembly and Governor? It is a school whose history has been a race-based alternative to the public schools since its creation in 1968. It is a school struggling to stay afloat and has no choice but to apply for public funds to survive.

If approved, would Kerr-Vance Academy receive state funds to continue the type of school begun during integration?

The answers to these questions raise serious financial and policy issues with a major impact on education in the state:

Policy Implications- financial- the amount of local funding that will be taken from local school system and given to Kerr-Vance Academy is staggering. Approving a current school to stay afloat using public money is a serious financial factor for Vance, Granville and Franklin counties. These counties tend to be among the lowest funded school systems in North Carolina, and giving local funds to the private charter school would continue the downward financial spiral in the counties impacted.

Currently Vance Charter School, with an enrollment that is within Kerr-Vance Academy's projected enrollment, receives over \$1 million in local funds. The impact of a loss of \$1 million in local funding would be substantial.

Major policy issue- Should public funds be used to fund an existing private school?

Public School choice- is the creation of a charter school for Kerr-Vance Academy the first K12 funded voucher program in NC? Is it a behind-the-scenes attempt to fund with tax dollars students who currently attend a private school? Is this legal?

Expansion of state funding for historically anti-integration academies If Kerr -Vance Academy is approved as a charter school, this opens the door for predominantly white academies across the state to become charter schools and receive public funds. Should such schools as Halifax Academy (2% minority), Parrott Academy (10% minority- 3% African-American), or Ridgecroft School (3% minority) be funded by state and local funds? Each of these schools has enrollments in direct contrast to the demographics of the counties of their location. Like Kerr-Vance Academy, they appear to have been created as an alternative to the demographics of the public schools in their geographic locations.

One example provides a theme for the integration factor. Ridgecroft School in Hertford County is 97% white. Hertford County High School is 85% black (Great Schools). Ridgecroft School is located approximately 5 miles from Hertford County High School. The reality is based on data- Ridgecroft's student population, race-wise, stands in stark contrast to the county's demographics based on race and income. This pattern appears to be the case in most private academies across North Carolina and especially in the northeastern part of the state.

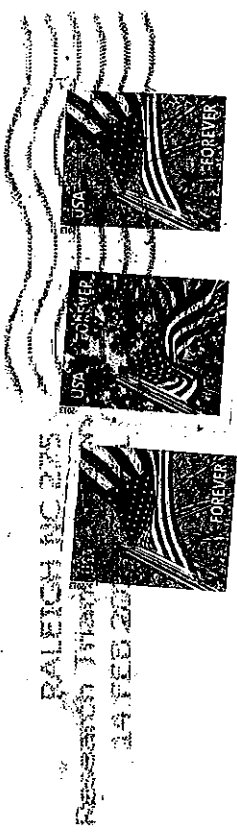
Do these schools have the 'right' to admit only students they want? Absolutely. But when schools such as these, as exemplified by Kerr-Vance Academy, are considered as charter schools, a question about a voucher system funded by public money must be considered.

As the charter school movement expands rapidly in North Carolina, the intent of rules/regulations for approval of charters needs to be thoroughly reviewed and examined with a lens towards a fair, equitable and funding issues. For example, how do local public school systems thrive as they lose funding when state charter school policies support the creation of schools that stand in stark contrast to the demographics of the students in the public schools?

An approach to fund predominantly white private schools?

An effort to 'save' private schools that cannot compete with other schools in the service area?

The answers form the future direction of all schools in North Carolina and deserve a thorough analysis before final decisions are made by the North Carolina Charter School Board in the spring of 2014.



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