

November 1, 2010

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education  
75 Pleasant Street  
Malden, MA 02148

Dear Commissioner Chester;

Thank you for allowing me to respond to the Charter School amendment request for KIPP Academy Lynn (KAL). At the outset, I will reiterate what I have made very clear in the past: I am not against charter schools, parochial schools, private schools or home schooling. Each of these represents an opportunity for students and allows parents to choose an educational plan for their children according to their own individual opinions and beliefs. What I do object to is the establishment of a school that is based on the premise that the local public school system is ineffective, underperforming and unresponsive to its students needs. The Lynn Public School System is not ineffective and not unresponsive to its students needs, and the Lynn Public School System is not underperforming unless one uses the category status thrust upon us all by No Child Left Behind. If that basis is used, KAL is also underperforming and identified for improvement.

The KAL amendment application is fraught with quantitative inaccuracies and most egregiously incorrect qualitative statements. It is greatly troubling to me that this amendment will be judged without sending it back for corrections. I will restrict my remarks to a small sample of problems.

On page 12, there is a chart of inaccurate data that is repeated on page 39 and page 49 of the document. The corrected numbers are in red and were obtained from the ESE website.

Demographic group	Lynn Public	KIPP Academy Lynn
Hispanic	42% <b>48%</b>	57%
Black	17% <b>13%</b>	24%
Free & Reduced lunch	77% <b>78%</b>	84% <b>90%</b>
SPED	19% <b>16%</b>	19% <b>12%</b>
LEP	22% <b>26%</b>	17% <b>1%</b>
4 <sup>th</sup> grade MCAS Scores (Standard Deviation below the Mean state score)	Math = -.31 ELA=-.36	Math=-.34 ELA=-.40

KAL has very few LEP students, and for the past five years the percent of LEP students at KAL has never exceeded 1% (ESE data).

On pages 12 and 13, there is a chart of data comparing Lynn to KAL. Those data are also not correct. In some cases the percents for ELA and math have been transposed. In other cases, I am not able to verify the data because there is no indication of the source for the data.

On page 24 and continuing throughout the document, the header indicates that the information is from KIPP Academy Boston. I assume that a similar format is used, however after reading the document completely, I have grave misgivings that the information accurately reflects the program at KIPP Academy Lynn.

On page 28 the amendment states, “We currently have a waiting list for all four grades of over 600 students.” Please note that KAL accepts students into 5<sup>th</sup> grade only, thus they have no need for a waiting list. Unlike the situation in the Lynn Public Schools, their policy eliminates the possibility of mobility skewing their data.

On page 34, the text box labeled “2.” is interesting. To whom are the questions contained therein directed? ESE? Board of Education?

On page 37 a statement about my visit to KAL is grossly inaccurate and is particularly annoying. I made a single visit to KAL in an effort to work with its principal in a more collaborative manner. I was not seeking advice nor was I seeking information for Lynn’s two Level 4 schools. The collaborative relationship has become strained lately as a result of an incident at KAL. Last year a student was expelled because of an incident with a weapon. The Lynn Public School District gave KAL considerable assistance in dealing with the problem. Ultimately, KAL made an agreement with the student that would allow the expulsion to be lifted. Once the student fulfilled the tenets of the agreement, KAL refused to readmit him. The student’s only other option was the Lynn Public Schools. He is now with us. This type of situation happens all too frequently. Whether counseled out or thrown out on technicalities, KAL’s most difficult students are not retained but are returned to the Lynn Public Schools. The ability of charter schools to transfer disciplinary problems to local public school districts is another opportunity to skew data in their favor.

On page 38 appears the statement, “KAL faculty also visits Lynn Public Schools . . .” If KAL is visiting the Lynn Public Schools, it is without my knowledge.

On page 51, there appear to be more serious issues with data; however there is no indication of the source for those data. I have corrected the chart below with 2010 ESE data (in red).

<b>Race</b>	<b>% Lynn Public Schools</b>	<b>% KIPP Academy Lynn</b>	<b>% of State (Mass)</b>
African American	15% <b>13%</b>	24%	8%
Asian	13% <b>10%</b>	4%	5%
Hispanic	32% <b>48%</b>	57%	15%
White	40% <b>26%</b>	13%	69%
<b>Selected Populations</b>	<b>% Lynn Public Schools</b>	<b>% KIPP Academy Lynn</b>	<b>% of State</b>
		<b>Over first 5 years</b>	
Limited English Proficient	22% <b>26%</b>	17% <b>1%</b>	6%
Free & Reduced Lunch	77% <b>78%</b>	84% <b>90%</b>	33%
Special Education	19% <b>16%</b>	19% <b>17%</b>	17%

One interesting piece of data that KAL continually omits is the percent of students for whom their first language is not English (FLNE). For Lynn that percent is 51% compared to 37% for KAL.

KAL's amendment application has serious issues. If the Lynn Public School Department were to submit such an application, it would have been read by a committee from ESE and sent back for corrections of inaccuracies and misstatements. Charter schools are not required to adhere to the same rules and regulations as those for other public schools in the Commonwealth, and that creates a situation that allows skewed comparisons and the eroding of public confidence in public education.

I would ask that the Department of Elementary and Secondary education together with the Board of Education hold this and all other charter schools to the high expectations that they hold for all other public schools. I also ask that the Board of Education adopt a policy that supports the fine work that is being done in Lynn and other urban communities while encouraging other school choices for families. The urban public schools in Massachusetts and throughout the nation do not need to be destroyed while making room for charter schools. Keep in mind that, in the immediate future, the majority of our children will be attending local public schools. Political pressure to destroy public confidence in those public schools is inaccurate, inappropriate and insulting.

Very truly yours,

Catherine C. Latham, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
Lynn Public Schools