Jeffrey C. Riley

*Commissioner*

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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**MEMORANDUM**

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | January 19, 2023 |
| **Subject:** | Charter Schools – Surrender of Charter for Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School |

On January 17, 2023, the board of trustees of Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School (PFSJCS) voted to surrender its charter, effective June 30, 2023. The school has been unable to attract enrollment sufficient to maintain financial viability and has faced many other challenges, as detailed in my memorandum dated January 17, 2023. The school is committed to continuing operations through the end of the 2022-2023 school year. I recommend that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) vote on January 24, 2023, to accept the surrender of the charter granted to PFSJCS.

| Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School | | | |
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| **Type of Charter** | Commonwealth | **Location** | Chicopee |
| **Regional or Non-Regional** | Regional | **Districts in Region** | Chicopee, Holyoke, South Hadley, and West Springfield |
| **Year Opened** | 2013 | **Year Renewed** | 2018 |
| **Maximum Enrollment** | 320 | **Current Enrollment** | 261[[1]](#footnote-2) |
| **Chartered Grade Span** | 9-12 | **Current Grade Span** | 9-12 |
| **Students on Waitlist** | 0[[2]](#footnote-3) | **Current Age of School** | 10 |
| **Mission Statement:**  The Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School is a public high school preparing students for college success while inspiring them to be active and effective citizens. We achieve educational excellence and social responsibility for all our students through high expectations and a rigorous academic and social justice curriculum. Our students graduate with strong instructional and ethical foundation necessary for future leaders of a global society. | | | |

# Update on the Current Enrollment and Fiscal Situation of PFSJCS and Closing Procedures

In March 2022, PFSJCS reported 280 students as pre-enrolled for FY2023 (2022-2023) for grades 9-12. In its October 3, 2022, Student Information Management System (SIMS) data submission, the school reported 261 students as enrolled. After a review of records submitted by the school, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) subsequently adjusted the enrollment level to 240 students for the tuition payment to the school in December 2022. The Department further adjusted enrollment to 215 students for the tuition payment to the school in January 2023. The Department will work with the school to ensure accurate student enrollment levels and tuition payments for the remainder of FY2023 and make any additional adjustments as required.

The school’s budget for FY2023 was based upon an enrollment of 280 students. The Department has requested revised budgets and cash flow projections through the end of the current school year adjusted to 215 students. The Department has also requested additional contingency budgets for even lower enrollment levels. The Department will monitor cash flow closely and any changes to the assumptions used in the financial projections in order to support an orderly finish to the school year.

The Department will begin working with PFSJCS to facilitate an orderly closure by June 30, 2023. The school and the Department will work closely with the school systems of Chicopee, Holyoke, and Springfield, where the majority of PFSJCS students reside, and we also will identify and work with other school options to provide information to families that will help them transition their students to new schools for the next school year. I am confident that the local school systems will be helpful in enabling PFSJCS students to enroll for the 2023-24 school year.

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If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Alison Bagg, Director of Charter Schools and School Redesign (781-338-3218); Cliff Chuang, Senior Associate Commissioner (781-338-3222); or me.

Attachment: Motion to Accept Surrender of Charter

Communication from PFSJCS Board of Trustees

1. The Department has determined that the school submitted and certified inaccurate enrollment data. Student enrollment as of October 1, 2022, was much lower than this figure reported by the school. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. This is the number as of March 15, 2022, as reported in the [Massachusetts Charter School Waitlist Initial Report for 2022-23](https://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/enrollment/). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)