



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

September 22, 2010

Amy Ballin
Chair, Board of Trustees
Gloucester Community Arts Charter School
P.O. Box 1631
Gloucester, MA 01930

By email and certified mail

Dear Ms. Ballin:

I am writing to strongly urge you not to open the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School (GCACS). I am aware that, despite concerns I articulated in my letter of Friday, September 17, 2010, and despite my recommendation that students planning to attend GCACS should return to their home districts, plans are still underway to open the school. Given the current uncertainties, there is a very real possibility that if GCACS opens, it will have to close during the school year, creating a serious and unnecessary disruption for students and their families. For that reason, it is in the best interest of these students to return to their home districts for the 2010-11 school year.

To be clear: I no longer believe that this school is viable. If you choose to proceed with the opening of GCACS, you will leave me no choice but to call a special meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and to recommend that the Board take immediate action with respect to the school's charter. This action could include, but is not limited to, revocation.

Recent findings and allegations that the school has violated state law have further undermined my confidence in this school. The Attorney General's Office (AGO) issued a finding on September 15, 2010, that the GCACS violated multiple state laws pertaining to procurement and construction of its school facilities. The AGO found that the GCACS violated the public construction bidding law, the designer selection law and the modular construction law. The Inspector General's Office has also raised several serious allegations. For these and other reasons, it is apparent to me the GCACS board has badly mismanaged the opening of this school, which has already been delayed more than three weeks. This delay alone raises serious doubts about the ability of the GCACS board to effectively open and operate the school.

In addition, we just learned that several weeks ago the school's principal resigned and left for another position out of state. We learned this through the media, not directly from the school.

All of these issues, coupled with growing uncertainty around the school's enrollment, leave the financial viability of this school in serious jeopardy. As these issues continue to unfold, students

planning to attend GCACS may leave the school for a more secure option. Because the school's finances are directly tied to enrollment, it is not at all clear to me that the school will qualify for the funding it will need to operate in compliance with its charter and state law.

My primary concern is that attempting to open a charter school in the midst of all these circumstances is not in the best interest of the students. Consequently, based on all of these facts, I strongly urge the school's board of trustees to take the responsible course and not open GCACS. I continue to encourage the families of enrolled students to immediately enroll their children in their home districts.

Sincerely,

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

C: Tony Blackman (by email and mail)