



September 24, 2012

Mr. David M. Foster, President
Virginia Board of Education
PO Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23218



Dear Mr. Foster,

Please accept this letter as documentation from the Rockbridge County School Board concerning the denial of the charter school application submitted by Buffalo Creek School, Inc. This application had been submitted to John Reynolds, division superintendent, in December 2011, and presented to the school board as an information item in January at a school board meeting. This submission came after the Buffalo Creek School, Inc. had received approval from the Virginia Department of Education that the application met all requirements. In February 2012, the school board appointed a local charter school review committee. After many months of careful review and scrutiny, the charter school review committee recommended to the school board at the August 2012 board meeting that the school board not approve the charter school application. At the regularly scheduled school board meeting on September 4, 2012, the school board members voted 4-0 to accept the recommendation of the charter school review committee and not approve the charter school application. The primary reasons for this denial are posted on our division website at:

http://fc.rockbridge.k12.va.us/~rcs/Charter_School_Application.doc?FCItemID=S00A92083

I have attached a copy of that document to this letter. To summarize that document, the denial was based on concerns with the dependence on revenue sources for funding of operations from existing state and local school sources, which would have required reallocation of resources from existing school sites and programs; lack of alignment between the proposed population of students to be served – “rural students at risk for not reaching their potential because of economic disadvantage or other factors.” (page 5, VBOE Public Charter School Application: BCS) and the enrollment process specified for use by the federal grant awarded the corporation for start-up purposes (not to be used for operations expenses); a perceived transportation concern that those at-risk students who might be selected would need additional transport time due to the isolated location of the proposed site, as well as potentially receiving fewer hours of instruction due to the longer bus rides; and a redistribution of existing human resources for special education services, Title I services, maintenance services, and technology services – at a time when the school division has eliminated over 50 jobs over recent years – causing already strained resources to be even further spread.

As a result of these considerations, the school board members did not believe that granting approval of the application and opening the charter school would be in the best interest of the school division as a whole.

Sincerely,

Laura Hoofnagle, Chair
Rockbridge County School Board

Rockbridge County Public Schools • Denial of Charter School Application

During the regularly scheduled meeting held on September 4, 2012, the Rockbridge County School Board voted 4 – 0 to uphold the recommendation from the Charter School Review Team and deny the public charter school application submitted by the board members of Buffalo Creek School, Inc. This denial was based, in part, on the following concerns held by Rockbridge County School Board members:

1. The primary revenue source for funding the Buffalo Creek School would be through state and local school revenues. In a time of continued economic stress, during which one elementary school in the division has recently been closed and a current middle school will be closed within the year, funding to support the Buffalo Creek School would have required reallocation of financial resources from remaining school sites and programs. The Board members do not believe this is in the best interest of the school division.
2. The charter application provided that the primary focus would be on “rural students at risk for not reaching their potential because of economic disadvantage or other factors.” (Page 5, VBOE Public Charter School Application: BCS). However, the enrollment process specified by the federal grant awarded the charter school required a lottery system be used for a pool of all interested students living within Rockbridge County. This system would not provide a mechanism to ensure those students who might most benefit from the charter school would have access to the program. The Board members do not believe this is in the best interest of the school division.
3. At-risk students exist across the school division at all school sites. To best serve the needs of these at-risk students, instructional time should be maximized. The proposed location of the charter school in the recently closed Effinger Elementary School building would ensure transportation delays – at best, the school day for the charter school would need to be reduced to allow transport time from and to Central Elementary School before and after school under the transportation model provided in the charter application. At worst, at-risk students from outside of Central School who might potentially gain from the learning experiences at the charter school could be on school bus rides which would take them from their homes to their home schools and then to Central Elementary School for the centralized pickup for transport to the charter school. This means students would spend more time on buses and less time in classrooms. A more centralized location for the charter school would reduce transport time and allow for increased instructional time.
4. The operation of the charter school would have required redistribution of existing human resources, in particular those for special education services, Title I services, maintenance services, and technology services. At a time when over 50 jobs have been eliminated within the Rockbridge County Public School system over the past four years due to reduced state revenues, it is unlikely additional staff members could be hired by Rockbridge County Public Schools to provide the support needed for a fully functioning school setting. To provide this support, current human resources would have to be used, which would reduce availability at the existing school sites. The Board members do not believe this is in the best interest of the school division.

The Rockbridge County School Board members do thank all of those individuals who have been involved with the charter school process. It is evident many hours of work and much careful consideration has gone into the planning process, the application, and the review. However, at this time, the members of the Rockbridge County School Board do not believe the granting of the application and the opening of the charter school would be in the best interest of the school division as a whole.