

SALVATORE GONCALVES
Superintendent

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Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum

May 26, 2017

VIA ELECTRONIC & REGULAR MAIL

Kimberley.Harrington@doe.state.nj.us
New Jersey Department of Education
Office of the Acting Commissioner of Education
P.O. Box 500
Trenton, NJ 08625-0500

RE: Bloomfield School District Opposition Letter:
Bloomfield Conservatory Charter School Application

Dear Acting Commissioner Harrington:

The undersigned serves as Superintendent of Schools for the Bloomfield Township Board of Education. The Bloomfield Public School District is in receipt of an application for the *Bloomfield Conservatory Charter School*. The Bloomfield Public School District is opposed to the establishment of the Bloomfield Conservatory Charter School for numerous reasons.

Based on material representations of fact in the application combined with faulty assumptions of alternative learning approaches, the Charter Application as submitted will accomplish nothing but providing another devastating financial blow to the Bloomfield Public Schools – to the tune of nearly half a million dollars for every 50 Bloomfield students enrolled and thus deepening the nearly \$3.93 million financial abyss caused by historical State underfunding.¹

The Bloomfield Public School District's fine arts, music, and theater programming, and technology and curriculum initiatives already meet the expressed mission of the proposed Bloomfield Conservatory Charter School.

Mr. Darrell Shoulars, Lead School Founder, states that Bloomfield Middle School children are educated using "antiquated instructional methodologies." This assertion could not be further from the truth as evidenced by the district's one-to-one *Chromebook* initiative whereby all Bloomfield Middle School students will have a one-to-one device in the 2017-2018 school year with continued implementation at Bloomfield High School for the 2017-18 school year. The Bloomfield Public School District's successful 1-to-1 initiative has been praised by the New Jersey Department of Education's Chief Innovation Officer, Joshua Koen, and, due to his recommendation, the district was invited to present at the New Jersey School Boards Association Fourth Annual Technology Conference. In addition, the Bloomfield Middle School's successful iSTEM program, developed under the guidance of Montclair State University Professor Jenn Goeke, is inclusive and designed to meet the needs of all students. Using the Defined STEM program, which is based on the Next Generation Science Standards, the Middle School is developing cross-content

performance-based tasks that draw on language arts and the fine arts as well as science, technology, engineering and math.

Another significant flaw in Mr. Shoulars' application concerns his vague and potentially misguided reliance on the "Blended Learning Approach." In the application Mr. Shoulars promotes the use of Blended Learning as an approach to teaching in the proposed charter school. Mr. Shoulars references a 2010 Department of Education study as proof that blended instruction has a positive impact on learning. In fact, the study concluded that there have not been sufficient rigorous studies completed that can draw such a conclusion. Additionally, studies comparing purely online and blended learning conditions found no significant differences in student learning.

Mr. Shoulars states the charter school will use the K¹² online curriculum to deliver its Blended Learning Educational Core Content Curriculum Courses. K¹², a for-profit company, is one of the biggest education online operators and has been [criticized repeatedly for poor academic performance](#). By example you, as Acting Education Commissioner, have ordered Newark Prep Charter School, which uses K¹², to be closed at the end of this school year because of its low performance. Last June California reached a settlement of over \$160 million with K¹² over alleged violations of false claims, false advertising and unfair competition laws.

The Bloomfield Conservatory Charter School will harm the Bloomfield Public School District financially. For every 50 students from Bloomfield attending the charter school our district will lose nearly \$500,000 with no concomitant savings to the district leaving our already under-funded district in a worse financial situation. Such payments would threaten the school district's educational offerings by requiring material reductions in teaching staff, support staff and programs such as art and music that engage the diverse needs and interests of students.

In conclusion, the founders of the Bloomfield Conservatory Charter School have not demonstrated community demand or support for their charter school. In addition the founders have no demonstrated track record of successfully starting and sustaining a charter school, as evidenced by the previous NJDOE denial of the "*Frank Sinatra Charter School*" also submitted by Mr. Shoulars in 2015-16. For all of the above reasons we respectfully submit our strong objection to the establishment of the *Bloomfield Conservatory Charter School*.

Sincerely,



SALVATORE GONCALVES
Superintendent of Schools



EMILY M. SMITH
President, Board of Education

CC: Members of the Board of Education

ⁱ According to the Education Law Center's 2016-17 School Funding Adequacy analysis, Bloomfield is underfunded by \$3.93M, has an adequacy gap of \$24.81M and is \$31.51M underfunded by the State since 2008 when the School Funding Reform Act was enacted.