



Schools and Communities United

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March 3, 2016

President Michael Murphy
Milwaukee Common Council
200 E. Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

President Murphy:

You are undoubtedly aware that in a letter dated January 15, 2016, North Point Lighthouse Charter School (NPLCS) decided to relinquish their charter with the City of Milwaukee, effective June 30, 2016. Sadly, the school has now abruptly cancelled all further classes for 5th, 6th and 7th grade students, effective February 26, 2016. The parents of these students were caught unaware and must now find placement for their students in the middle of this semester.

In their meeting of October 28, 2015 the Charter School Review Committee (CSRC) devoted some time to the issue of what would be an appropriate time and method to notify parents that the school would be closing. They expressed concerns that other charter schools would not be willing to accept the displaced students. It was unclear to observers what preparations the CSRC had in place or would execute with administrators at NPLCS, with other charter schools, or with MPS to minimize the impact on students.

Clearly, the early closure of NPLCS has been more complex than the CSRC or its staff has been prepared to handle, raising a number of questions, including these:

- Will NPLCS shut down additional classes or the entire school prior to the end of the school year?
- What legal responsibility does the City have for the orderly continuation of curriculum and instruction at a school such as NPLCS that is in the process of closing?
- What legal recourse does the City have for non-fulfillment of a charter that is relinquished early?

According to the February 25 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* article, “Diane Dotson, whose 13-year-old granddaughter [attends] North Point, said she has been calling other charter schools but can't find an opening. ‘This really puts us in a bind,’ she said.” Under such circumstances, the remaining City of Milwaukee charter schools should be compelled to accept these students.

In the FOX6 report of February 25, the principal of NPLCS stated, “Because our school is closing, we’ve had a very difficult time finding qualified staff.” But the reason they have shut down three grades is not that simple. We have learned through the Department of Public

Instruction (DPI) that NPLCS failed to fulfill state requirements and that as a result, DPI withheld the third quarter state aid from them.

For those NPLCS students who enroll in MPS, we do not know whether DPI is able to reimburse the district with per pupil aid directly from the withheld funds. If not, the City should play a positive role by temporarily reimbursing the district with City funds.

We look forward to your response to these concerns.

Sincerely yours,

Ingrid Henry Jenni Hofschulte

Co-Chairs, Schools and Communities United

Cc by email:

CSRC Chair Kevin Ingram, City Clerk Jim Owczarski, Assistant City Clerk Linda Elmer, Steering and Rules Committee members, State Representative Mandela Barnes, Sarah Zarate