

February 11, 2015

Jarrett Fields  
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 ITL-Marquette University  
 414-288-1540

Dear Mr. Fields,

I am writing to share some information about Milwaukee Math and Science Academy and Concept Schools regarding some of the requests and questions that were raised at the Steering & Rules Committee meeting on January 15, 2015. Please feel free to let me know if you need more information or have additional questions.

### **1- Background Information on Concept Schools**

Concept Schools is a not-for-profit, 501(c)3 charter school network, serving 12,800 students in a total of 30 college preparatory, STEM-focused charter schools across the Midwest. 66% of the students that Concept-managed charter schools serve are African-American and 9% are Latino. 87% of our students come from economically disadvantaged families. Concept-managed schools serve academically diverse student body, too. 8% of our students are in special education and 6% receive ELL (English Language Learner) support throughout the network.

Back in 1999, a small group of educators, engineers and academicians founded Horizon Science Academy Cleveland and Horizon Science Academy Columbus in Ohio. The group, which included Turkish American educators, developed what has evolved into a proven successful school design that Concept implements in all of its schools today. Part of this visionary team was our current CEO, Sedat Duman, and Vice President, Salim Ucan.

Upon attaining a high level of success and establishing a great reputation as college preparatory, STEM-focused schools, the same team founded Concept as part of their replication model in 2003. Since then Concept has grown to manage 30 schools in seven different states in the Midwest. Below is a list of some of the success stories from Concept-managed schools:

- Concept was included in an extensive study conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University. The study, released in January 2013, covered longitudinal (5-year) performance of 176 Charter Management Organizations, 38 Education Management Organizations, and individual charter schools. Concept stands out in the study as one of the highest-performing EMO's in the 25 states that the CREDO study covered. In regards to poverty level, percentage of minority students, and the number of total students, Concept may easily be considered the highest-performing EMO in both math and reading. The CREDO report may be found at <http://credo.stanford.edu>
- In 2009 and 2012 respectively, Horizon Cleveland High School and Horizon Columbus High School received the National Blue Ribbon School Award, a prestigious award given to successful schools by the U.S. Department of Education. Horizon Cleveland was one of the 10 charter schools nationwide and the only charter school from Ohio, out of 350, to receive the award. Horizon Columbus High School is the only charter school in Ohio to receive the 2012 National Blue Ribbon Award.

- In 2014, Horizon Science Academy Cleveland made *Newsweek's* "Beating the Odds 2014: Best Schools for Low-Income Students." <http://www.newsweek.com/high-schools/beating-odds-2014>
- Horizon Cleveland High School has also made the list of "Best High Schools in America," created by the *U.S. News & World Report*, twice, in 2008 and 2010.
- Horizon Science Academy Cleveland High School received the "Distinguished Title I School" by The National Association of State Title I Directors in 2009.
- Noble Academy Cleveland was the only charter school in Ohio, out of 350, to be rated "Excellent with Distinction" by the Ohio Department of Education in 2010.
- Three of the Horizon Science Academies made the annual "Schools of Promise" list released by the Ohio Department of Education thus far. These were: HSA Cleveland High, HSA Columbus High, and HSA Toledo High.
- Chicago Math and Science Academy, managed by Concept Schools since 2004, was among the top 10 non-selective high school in the city based on their 2013 test scores out of 90+ high schools. In 2014, they had the highest college persistence rate of all non-selective schools in Chicago.
- 4 of the Concept-managed high schools in Ohio were rated "Excellent" by the Ohio Department of Education in 2012. Only 15% of the 350 charter schools in Ohio received the "Excellent" rating.
- Both IMSA-West and IMSA-North have been rated "Exemplary" based on their student growth by the Indiana Department of Education in 2012.
- HSA Cleveland Middle School was featured in a report, "Needles in a Haystack," by the Thomas Fordham Institute in 2010. The report identified 8 outlier schools that "showed significant achievement for disadvantaged youngsters from depressed inner-city communities."
- The first charter school student to compete at the INTEL International Science Fair was an HSA Cleveland High School student.
- In 2013, Gateway Science Academy was one of the highest-performing charter schools in St. Louis.
- Michigan Math and Science Academy was the highest-performing school in its region, earning an "A" on its annual report card by the Michigan Department of Education in 2011.
- The HSA Denison Middle School robotics team won the Champion's Award at Hathaway Brown Regional Robotics Competition in Cleveland in 2011. The Champion's Award covers the best robot design and programming, performance, project, core values, and professionalism.
- In 2012, the Horizon Cincinnati Robotics Team won the state championship and participated in the World Championship, held in St. Louis, Missouri, in April 2012.
- In 2008, Horizon Science Academy Cleveland High School student Edward Capps won the gold medal in the International Environmental Project Olympiad in Azerbaijan.

## 2- Federal Investigation

There is a pending federal investigation into Concept Schools. The inquiry relates to the E-Rate program, a federal program through which eligible institutions may obtain services for their technology infrastructure. Eligible schools receive only goods and services not direct funding through E-Rate.

On June 4, 2014 federal government representatives visited a total of 19 locations and served subpoenas for E-rate related documents. These locations included Concept's main office in Des Plaines, IL, 5 of the Concept's regional offices, 8 schools, and 5 vendors. We have been asked to provide information and are cooperating with the government in this matter fully on an ongoing basis. This process will continue and at some point will be resolved. In the meantime, our focus and commitment is where it belongs: on our schools, our students and our teachers, and the responsibilities that come with

that role. The inquiry does not and will not affect the academic or extracurricular operations of our schools.

Moreover, Milwaukee Math and Science Academy is NOT part of this investigation. Since it was founded in 2011, Milwaukee Math and Science Academy has not benefitted from the federal E-rate program.

### **3- Teachers on H1-B (working visas)**

There are more than 1,300 teachers working in the Concept network schools. 92% of these teachers are local, highly qualified, committed individuals. As a response to the nationwide shortage of high-quality math, science, engineering, and technology teachers, Concept has been recruiting teachers in the aforementioned fields internationally. Therefore, 8% of the 1,300 teachers (about 104) are working at various network schools on an H1-B working visa. Most of this 8% of teachers are of Turkish decent and all of these teachers go through a rigorous approval process by federal agencies such as Homeland Security, the Department of Labor, and US Consulates, in addition to the selection process by Concept. Teachers on working visas are held to the same standards and evaluation protocol that Concept-managed schools have in place for all their teachers.

Milwaukee Math and Science Academy has had 158 teachers since it was opened in 2011. Only 2 of them out of 158, which is 1.2%, were on H1B visas. In the current school year (2014-15) there are no teachers at Milwaukee Math and Science Academy working on an H1-B visa.

### **4- Affiliations**

As it was mentioned before, Concept Schools was founded by a few Turkish American educators and engineers 16 years ago. However, neither Concept nor its managed schools are affiliated with any religious, national, or political ideology. Concept is a not-for-profit 501(c) 3 organization with the mission of preparing students in underserved communities for college by operating and managing high-quality, STEM-focused charter schools across the Midwest.

Although it was founded by Turkish American educators, Concept has grown to be a very diverse organization with dedicated and high-quality individuals from many different racial and national backgrounds, experiences, personal inspirations, and political orientations. Our organization's mission and vision for our schools and leadership are what unite us and keep us working together harmoniously.

Sincerely,



Salim Ucan  
Vice President