

Common Council Steering and Rules Committee 6/11/15

Karen J. Coy-Romano, CFRE, MS
Speaking to the following ordinance motion: 150171

As a lifelong resident of Milwaukee, I choose to live in the city purposely to ensure that the property taxes I pay every year go to support public education. I am a graduate of the MPS system as well as holding undergraduate and graduate degrees in urban education from a public university in Milwaukee. Like all children growing up in extreme poverty, I attended numerous Milwaukee public schools because I had no choice. That being said, I am a supporter of Milwaukee public schools-- but I remain a firm believer in providing opportunities for our community's low-income children and families to select the school that fits the needs of their child whether it's a traditional public school, a public charter or choice school. I am very pleased to see the improvements taking place in MPS and I have a great deal of respect for Dr. Driver and what she is doing to turnaround MPS student outcomes.

As a respected nonprofit executive, community advocate and academic researcher for over 45 years with 23 years in leadership positions in urban education (within K4 through post-secondary colleges and universities) I had numerous opportunities to work directly with MPS, public charter and choice schools fitting the diverse needs of our students. I requested MPS students from 3rd through 8th grades that were suspended or expelled from MPS and 3 to 4 years behind academically in core subjects moving them into a voucher school to demonstrate what teacher qualifications and strategies are needed to drive improved academic performance. This school and its teachers were able to raise academic test scores by 2 to 4 years in one school year. I also served on the MPS Task Force in Exceptional Education for 10 years. As a member of the charter and choice school movement in the early 1990's, our focus was to ensure that disadvantaged students have every opportunity to be successful. As professional counsel to educational institutions, I know that leadership development and qualified teachers trained in social/emotional learning and data-driven teaching strategies are key to supporting strong

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academic outcomes for our students. In spite of the rhetoric from opponents of charter schools, 7 out of 10 students in public charter schools are outpacing the state average on academic achievement scores and the statewide report card--a far better percentage than that of MPS schools. These charter schools, in spite of receiving per pupil allocation dollars thousands of dollars less than MPS students, are meeting the needs of students who have been underserved in MPS schools. These same students, by the way, still support MPS with revenue that comes from our state structure that allows MPS to count these same low-income students in their district with these additional dollars going directly to MPS. Public charters are performing miracles with very little revenue and still serves many special needs students, providing transportation and operations--doing more with less than MPS is privileged to receive.

I want to thank the Common Council for serving as a chartering body for public charter schools and to remain that objective authority in accepting and monitoring the performance of these critical school environments. The residents of our city need your support and oversight promising the best options for our students. Contrary to the propaganda about charter schools, they are 'public' schools and operate within the same accountability practices as MPS. Like MPS, we believe in accountability; we believe in the mandate of teacher licensing regardless of school or grade level, we believe in academic testing and data collection to continue to close the achievement gap for our cities most disadvantaged children. The majority of us support Common Core State Standards which ensure the consistent delivery of curriculum and instruction that provide critical thinking skills and problem-solving ability regardless of social and economic status. I urge the Common Council to continue to use their leadership ability to charter and provide oversight for the educational opportunities available to Milwaukee's low-income children.

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Speaking to the following Motion: 150281

I am requesting that the Common Council Steering & Rules Committee approve the renewal of the charter school contract with King's Academy as recommended for 5-years by the Charter School Review Committee on June 2, 2015. I have been a member of the King's Academy board of directors for just over one year and serve as the chair of the Education Committee. I bring over 23 years of urban education expertise serving children from Birth to Three and K4 through post-secondary education. I have both undergraduate and graduate degrees in urban education. I have served as a leader within educational institutions and work as a nationally certified fundraising and communications executive providing leadership and transformational change management to drive high performing schools. All individuals serving on the current Education Committee are experts in education and have worked as leaders in schools or for educational systems for many years.

As a new board member for King's Academy in May 2014, I was actively involved in selecting our new principal, Ms. Erika Whitehead, and as chair of the Education Committee approved the hiring of an academic dean to monitor and coach teaching staff, provide oversight to academic performance, continue building a positive school culture and environment, and working to improve student and parent engagement. King's Academy originally began as a faith-based choice school. In later years, it transitioned into a public charter school reaching out to disadvantaged families in the city of Milwaukee. Like many new start-ups, this school has evolved to strengthen its leadership, its teaching staff, and to implement the best practices and accountability measures critical to public charter school performance. New leadership has taken on an under-performing school and has put it on the path to success and higher academic achievement. This does not happen overnight and it has unfortunately come at a time at the end of our contract period.

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King's Academy has been working hard under new leadership to improve its academic outcomes, to attract and maintain a skilled and licensed teaching staff in spite of very limited financial resources as compared to what traditional public schools are able to offer their teaching staff. I am proud to report that we have made tremendous gains on the quality of our school environment, on the use of data and metrics in driving academic performance, and on providing professional development and coaching for our teachers. All of this was accomplished under the leadership of principal, Erika Whitehead, a strong board and Education Committee, and with the support of PAVE and Schools That Can Milwaukee.

You were given a packet of materials today that provide insight into what we have accomplished this year. We have a robust system in place to drive academic performance:

- a focus on the use of data in closing the achievement gaps of students
- ongoing leadership development and coaching initiatives for our teaching staff
- detailed student and parent engagement practices, and
- the momentum to drive excellence and positive outcomes for our school and our students

Some opponents have said, 'if King's Academy hasn't improved in 16 years, (referencing its evolution as a faith-based school, choice school and then public charter school) it should not have its contract renewed.' We are a totally different school than when it was founded; we have new leadership; we have new teaching and accountability practices in place--the same used by MPS and all public charter schools; and we have demonstrated a significant turnaround in performance with a bright future ahead. If we use that same faulty logic cited by our opponents based on the number of years in existence, poor academic performance, and high turnover of teachers and staff, MPS would have to put itself in the same category and should close its schools. MPS has had over 60 years to improve. As a city and as a state, we have not had the

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best report card when it comes to student outcomes. With the promise that has been demonstrated, we implore you to allow King's Academy to continue on its successful path along with other public schools that provide students with options that meet their educational needs. I urge the Common Council Steering and Rules Committee to approve the city charter school contract with King's Academy allowing us to hire qualified teachers who can and will invest in the academic success of our students. We ask that you allow us to come back to you with student success stories as one of your public partners in delivering positive outcomes for Milwaukee's low-income students. Thank you.