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January 27, 2014

Chancellor Carmen Farina
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Farina:

I write to you today concerning an issue of great concern and urgency. Against the wishes of the Brooklyn community and elected officials, this past November the New York City Department of Education (Department) made the ill-advised decision not to renew the charter for the Fahari Academy Charter School ("Fahari"), located within the Walt Whitman Middle School at 72 Veronica Place in Flatbush. I am respectfully requesting you therefore to reverse that decision and grant Fahari at least several more years to build upon its successes and demonstrate its worth as an institution to the Department.

Fahari has served as a beacon of educational hope and choice for hundreds of Brooklyn families for the past four and a half years. It is a middle school serving 400 students in grades 5 through 8, many of whom are at risk, children with disabilities, or English Language Learners. Significantly, 19% of Fahari's students are classified with a disability, many of whom spend between 60% and 100% of their school day receiving special education services. Unlike some other charter schools, Fahari has never shied away from its obligation to serve students with special needs for fear of a negative impact on its school-wide testing results. Fahari embraces and is deeply committed to all of its students.

To be sure, like other schools, Fahari has not been without its difficulties. At the outset, and in part perhaps due to its servicing a large special needs population, Fahari lagged behind in its academic test scores and had an unacceptably high suspension rate and high attrition of students and teachers. As a result, the Department placed Fahari on probation at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year. However, by the end of the 2012-13 school year Fahari had achieved a remarkable turnaround, stabilizing its educational environment and academic culture. Notably, compared to the 2011-2012 school year, student attrition declined from 37% to 4%; teacher attrition declined from 73% to 13%; and student suspensions decreased by over 50%. On a number of standardized tests and student cohorts Fahari even exceeded the scores of School District 17, its district of location. In fact, last year 100% of 8th grade students were admitted to at least one of their top two high school choices.

Of course, with the onset of the Common Core testing last year virtually every school in both traditional public school settings and public charter school settings experienced a precipitous decline in their test scores. Fahari was no exception. Notwithstanding, Fahari's turnaround has been both impressive and undeniable. As a result, and having satisfied the Department's concerns, the Department removed Fahari from probation at the start of the 2013-14 school year. For that reason I found the decision by the NYC-DOE not to renew Fahari's charter to be inexplicable and altogether unfortunate.

Importantly, Fahari has enjoyed a very productive relationship with the school in which it is co-located, and with the United Federation of Teachers (which Fahari's pedagogical staff is now affiliated). The surrounding civic and political communities support Fahari passionately. Fahari in turn has demonstrated a deep commitment to the lives of their students. The relationship that Fahari has with Walt Whitman and the Teachers Union serves as a model of productive cooperation which is essential to the success of the Charter School movement in New York City and elsewhere. Where in other parts of the City there is tension and rancor, here exists an example of working together for the common goal of advancing educational opportunities, and getting the best results for students and reasonable choices for parents.

In short, Fahari is succeeding where others are failing to build strong relationships across the educational spectrum and among the many stakeholders.

At minimum I feel strongly that Fahari ought to be given additional time to build on its successes and be able to prove its worth to you and your colleagues in the revamped Department of Education. To close its doors at the end of this school year would be tragic. It would also be, in my view, a very unfair outcome. Fahari and its leadership team have earned my confidence and the confidence of my community. It is my hope and request that you will give it time to earn your trust and support as well.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at (518) 455-2580.

Yours in Partnership,



KEVIN PARKER