

Pikes Peak Courier, February 3, 2021

MERIT ACADEMY APPLICATION FACTS VS. HOW WPSD REPORTED THEM

It is clear that the “facts” are being misrepresented in the [Woodland Park School District’s response](#) (Jan. 20, 2021 Courier) to the community regarding the charter application made by Merit Academy. A group of parents and community members conducted a CORA request (CO Open Records Act) from WPSD. It is vital that the broader community be made aware of facts and statistics as they truly are.

It’s also important to note that WPSD commissioned an external, professional, objective review of Merit Academy’s application by the Colorado Association of Charter School Authorizers. WPSD did not inform the community of the following:

This report noted that Merit Academy’s application and school plan was typical of successfully authorized schools.

This report advised the district to approve with conditions (many of which, Merit Academy had already completed since the application submission...

Or to waive authorization if WPSD was not capable of the authorization duties.

The WPSD Board of Education and the supervisory staff elected to forego the recommendation.

Let us also consider the facts as they are versus how WPSD reported them.

WPSD cited a 52-48% approval rate for Merit Academy’s charter from the letters they received from the community. This is misleading: Of the 106 letters supplied from December’s request by the district, 63 letters supported Merit Academy (59%), 43 letters against Merit Academy (41%). Of those letters opposing charter approval, 34 letters were written by people on WPSD’s payroll (79%). Of those letters, six employees wrote more than one letter. The WPSD Board also did not include the 200 signatures in the petition to approve Merit Academy, nor did they mention the 20-plus letters of support that were included in Merit Academy’s application. When subtracting redundancies from both sides, this comes to: 302 community voices = 81% Merit Academy approval rate.

Of those “anti-choice” letters (79% written by District employees), the biggest issues were impact to staff and district funding. Here are data points to bear in mind:

Comparing the 2015-2016 school year to the 2019-2020 school year: According to WPSD’s budgets and annual reports: WPSD had a 13.3% decreased student enrollment (-334 funded pupil count), an increase of 14.6% revenues (with approximately 8% inflation adjustment it is over \$3.1 million increase in annual revenue), an increase of 33% in the number of administrators, a decrease of 6% in the number of teachers, and an increase of 29% in the number of non-teacher/administration employees.

The community has voiced concerns about Standards-Based Grading, Zuckerberg’s Summit Platform at all three school levels, Restorative Justice, the district’s “approaching” (yellow) performance ratings, “SDL” for elementary children, lack of transparency, “not yet” grades, and the “take it or leave it, but-we-don’t-want-you-to-have-a-local-choice” approach of leaders and union educators (among other things).

The WPSD Board of Education’s recently published letter noted, “We understand the passion and the desire for more choice in the District. We also know that it is not realistic to think we can meet every need for every family/child in the community.”

Exactly! This is the point! Merit Academy’s drive is to fill that gap and to provide the classical, Core Knowledge educational option for families who seek and desire this choice.

Some would have you believe that this is a movement that has little to no support. These numbers underscore the significant level of support and desire throughout the Woodland Park, and Teller County area. This endeavor is for our community, children and families for generations to come. Your continued support, action and fortitude are important.

A community parent,

Logan Haag

Woodland Park

https://gazette.com/pikespeakcourier/letters-to-the-editor-feb-3-2021/article_a7454580-60d2-11eb-a6ae-c7fe7c04da0c.html