



Statement Regarding the Need for Cornerstone Prep Lester Campus to Continue to Serve the Families of Binghampton

Thank you for allowing us to provide evidence that the denial by the local board of education contradicts the best interests of students and the community of Binghampton.

We believe the information and data provided below confirms Cornerstone Prep Lester Campus (Cornerstone Prep) serving as a charter school represents the best interests of Binghampton students and the Binghampton community.

The evidence will be provided in three categories:

1. Parent desires
2. Student outcomes
3. Community benefits

Parent Desires

Cornerstone Prep has been the neighborhood school for the students and families of Binghampton for the past 12 years as part of the Achievement School District (ASD). During this 12-year span, the school and organization earned the trust of parents and students as a charter school operating as a school option for Binghampton parents.

The school opened during the difficult transition as part of the original cohort of ASD schools. The organization worked diligently to build relationships, earn trust, and work alongside parents and the community to provide a school option that would meet the needs of students and the desires of parents located in the community. After 12 years of relationship-building, Cornerstone Prep parents now express enthusiastic support for the school and organization.

Three significant data points reveal parent desires and satisfaction with Cornerstone Prep as their elementary school option. The most dramatic and significant data point occurred recently when the school approached the end of the 10-year contract as an ASD school. The law allows an ASD charter school to ask parents if they would prefer the charter school to continue to be their local neighborhood school even after the end of the ASD contract. Parents got the chance to vote to be returned to their local district or select Cornerstone Prep as their school of choice.

In just one week of voting, 98% of respondents indicated their desire for Cornerstone Prep to continue to be the neighborhood school. This response rate included 278 families (82% of all enrolled families, a very high and representative response rate) of Cornerstone Prep students who provided signed, written affirmation of their desire for CEG to continue to run their neighborhood school as part of the trigger law process.

CEG believes parents know what is in the best interest of their children and their community. Therefore, this overwhelmingly positive and supportive response of parents provides clear, dramatic evidence that parents desire Cornerstone Prep to continue to be a school option for Binghampton. Surely this provides a most significant data point for overturning the MSCS denial.

In addition, parents have revealed their satisfaction with Cornerstone Prep as their school of choice through annual surveys conducted during the school year. On average, the last 6 school year surveys indicate 98% of parents responding to the survey stated they strongly agree or agree they would recommend Cornerstone Prep to other parents. During that same period, 95% of respondents indicated they would strongly agree or agree they are satisfied with their school. These consistent parent survey results provide a powerful second data point indicating parents believe that Cornerstone Prep meets their best interest as parents seeking a school for their child.

Finally, parents display their satisfaction with Cornerstone Prep by enrolling their children in the school year after year. The school's consistent enrollment over the past 12 years indicates parents desire to send their children to Cornerstone Prep. Memphis Shelby County Schools runs an elementary school, Brewster Elementary, located 1 mile from the Lester campus. Brewster is both a neighborhood school and an optional school and has space available for parents who desire to send their children there. For the last ten years, on average, 440 children have enrolled at Cornerstone Prep for another school year. Parents have consistently chosen Cornerstone Prep over the nearby Memphis Shelby County School option, providing an additional data point that parents believe it is in the best interest of their children to attend Cornerstone Prep rather than be returned to the local district.

Clearly, the results of the parent trigger law process, annual parent surveys, and enrollment indicate parents believe it is in the best interest of their students to attend Cornerstone Prep.

Student Outcomes

Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, Cornerstone Prep students:

- Earned double digit growth in every subject on TCAP during the first two years of transformation
- Was visited and honored by the National Secretary of Education celebrating the school's performance
- Earned the highest math mastery scores in the ASD on the 2018 TN Ready Assessment
- Received Composite TVAAS score of 4 and 5, respectively
- Earned the highest science proficiency rate in the ASD on the 2017-18 TN Ready assessment

Clearly, prior to the pandemic, Cornerstone Prep students performed well academically, and increased student mastery as measured by TN Ready. Then the pandemic hit. Nationally, and particularly at schools serving low-income students of color like Cornerstone Prep, the pandemic negatively impacted student achievement and especially student mastery of grade level content. National data, as well as CEG's own experience, confirms that the population of students served by Cornerstone Prep lost learning at greater rates than other students through the years of online and hybrid instruction.

For example, on July 14, 2023, the Wall Street Journal reported "The National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called the nation's report card, reveals a dire situation...Reading scores for fourth graders fell furthest for black, Latino, and Native American students, exacerbating the racial and ethnic achievement gaps that have long plagued the country." In addition, NWEA reported "historically marginalized and economically disadvantaged students have lost more ground in math and reading compared to advantaged peers."

The demographics of Cornerstone Prep students this year include 98% black students, 100% of whom are eligible for free and reduced lunch. With some of the highest levels of poverty in the state, Binghampton student demographics align with those who were most negatively affected by the pandemic.

While the lost learning pulled Cornerstone Prep students further away from grade level and created larger learning gaps, Cornerstone Prep students have grown dramatically since returning to the classroom after the pandemic. Eve Slaughter, the current principal of Cornerstone Prep, took over the school two years ago and has led scholars to dramatic academic gains. Consider these results:

- Increased TN Ready scores from 2021 to 2023 by 50% in math, 300% in RLA, and 200% in science
- Averaged annual growth on the MAP assessment of 1.6 years in both reading and math across the school, including school record growth of 2 years in Math in 1st grade, 2.8 years of growth in 3rd grade science, and 1.9 years of growth in 4th grade reading and math in 2022-23
- Recorded ELA TVAAS scores of 4 in 2021 and 5 in 2022, with expected similar scores in 2023
- In 2021-22, k-5 students performed better than 92% of schools nationally on the Reading assessment and 87% in math with similar fall student RIT scores as measured by the average National Conditional Growth Percentile (NCGP) of each grade level and subject compared to academic peers at the same starting point
- 67% of Cornerstone Prep 2nd graders scored level 2 or higher on TCAP, compared to only 40% for the district
- In 2022-23, k-4 students performed better than 89% of schools nationally on the Reading assessment, 99% of schools in math, 96% of schools in language and 99% of schools in science with similar fall

student RIT scores as measured by the average National Conditional Growth Percentile (NCGP) of each grade level and subject compared to academic peers at the same starting point

The TN Ready mastery gains and GLE growth noted above for the past two years provide strong evidence that Cornerstone Prep students are gaining back the learning lost during the pandemic. While it will take 1-2 more years of continued “gap-closing” work for many students to reach grade level on TN Ready, the data above provides strong indication that students are on track to overcome the gaps created during the pandemic.

Clearly, it would be in the best interest of students for the school to continue this two-year trend of academic growth that exceeds 87%-99% of schools at the same starting point.

Community Benefits

As part of the ASD, Cornerstone Prep moved into the Lester School building to transform the school as part of Tennessee’s desire to improve its worst schools. Lester School was the lowest performing school in the state of Tennessee based on the Priority School ranking when Cornerstone Prep began working in Binghampton.

CEG schools, including Cornerstone Prep Lester Campus, provide significant supports and benefits to students, parents and the community that is unmatched by MSCS. For example, CEG provides the following roles in every school: Fulltime school Nurse, Dedicated Inclusion Special Education teachers, full time Counselor, Dedicated English Language Learner teachers, Behavior Team, 3 teacher coaches, Arise to Read tutoring, and a Pre-kindergarten program on the campus.

CEG also partners with local organizations to provide neighborhood improvements. Consider these changes in Binghampton since CEG began working in that community: 3 new homes built and occupied next to the school, 6 “unhealthy” homes torn down on Carpenter Street, the opening of an Art Garden, Vegetable Garden, Bike shop, Tutoring house, grocery store and apartment complex for senior adults. Safety features including speed bumps, police cameras and flashing warning signs have been installed in the community around the school.

CEG brings additional financial resources to families and the community as well. Consider these CEG investments in Binghampton: \$750,000 in school building improvements, more than \$3 million in grants for education and wraparound services, 5 years of summer camps and 8 years of afterschool programming, \$1 million in services provided by LeBonheur, more than 2,000 free uniforms donated to parents, \$500,000 in Chromebooks and wifi provided to families and dozens of college visits for students and parents.

Cornerstone Prep has become a central part of the Binghampton community and the lives of parents and students. School leaders, teachers and staff communicate consistently with parents and have formed strong relationships and partnerships with families. Many of the students served have siblings in multiple grades in both Cornerstone Prep and the Capstone Education Group middle school, Lester Prep, located in the same building. Certainly, it is in the best interest of students and the community to have one organization offering a prek-8 education with common expectations rather than send 400 students to a new school with unknown teachers and expectations in a different building or have separate organizations sharing a campus where parents must interact with different leaders, teachers, curriculum, uniforms, schedules and academic expectations for their children. In fact, research shows students who must change schools after 5th grade typically suffer significant academic setbacks. According to Education Week, “The Program on Education Policy and Governance Working Papers Series at Harvard University, found that students moving from grade 5 into a middle school show a “sharp drop” in math and language arts achievement in the transition year that plagues them as far out as 10th grade, even risking thwarting their ability to graduate from high school and go on to college. Students who make a school transition in 6th grade are absent more often than those who remain in one school through 8th grade, and they are more likely to drop out by 10th grade.”

Clearly, these wrap around services, building and community improvements and deep relationships provide evidence that removing these supports from the community would not be in the best interest of the students or community.

Conclusion

CEG believes parent desires, student outcomes and ongoing community benefits provide overwhelming evidence that it is in the best interest of the students and community for Cornerstone Prep to continue to serve the families of Binghampton.