



### **Comment on Chavez Schools' Proposed Closure and Charter Amendment**

School closures are incredibly disruptive to students and staff. The decision to close two campuses of Chavez Schools was made in the worst way - without input from stakeholders and without publicly discussing alternatives. It was made purely for financial reasons, so that they can “monetize” the school buildings. Last year, a brave group of charter school teachers and support staff, inspired by the legacy of Cesar Chavez, won a union election at Chavez Prep Middle School, making them the first unionized charter school in the city. Since then, they have been negotiating to make their school a better place for staff and students and yet the topic of school closure never came up. This is a failure of the board of trustees and their hired for-profit operator TenSquare and DCPCSB should not approve the closures.

Chavez Schools' decision to close Chavez Prep was made in secret and without the input of teachers, students, or parents. Per the application, the board of trustees revealed that they were discussing potential closures as early as November 2018.

Stakeholders were not engaged and the board mismanaged the announcement. The staff at Chavez Prep Middle School found out that their school would close when they received a phone call from a reporter at the Washington Post. Parents found out through an email later that evening.

Closing two schools weeks before the lottery closes is irresponsible and disrespectful of students and families. The announcement was made January 23 and the lottery closed February 1 for current 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Many families had only ten days to secure new schools for their kids for next year.

School closure does not “support or enhance the mission” of Chavez Schools. The Chavez board is showing students that the proper way of making decisions is behind closed doors, in secret, without including the proper stakeholders. Chavez schools says in their application for amendment that it will focus on what it does best: “prepare DC’s young people to succeed in college, careers and life, and empower them to use public policy to create a more just, free and equal world.” Their decision, implemented in this manner, does nothing of the sort.

This decision was purely for financial reasons and has nothing to do with best serving DC students. Chavez Schools' application acknowledges that “Chavez Schools holds significant debt that cannot be sustained long-term under the current network configuration.” They told their bondholders that closing Chavez gives them the best chance to “monetize the asset,” which happens to be a school building

owned by DC Public Schools.<sup>1</sup> Responsible oversight of the schools, without outsourcing to TenSquare, would have avoided such a dire situation.

Chavez Schools not only failed to give the union notice of their intention to close and bargain over their decision, but also continues to refuse to do so. At the bargaining table, they have refused to provide information about what will happen to the school property next year, including refusing to provide a copy of their lease. They recently countered the union’s proposal on effects of the closure, which included severance pay for staff and support for students, with a proposal that they won’t oppose unemployment.

Their response to item #5 does not significantly encompass the “notable opposition” to this decision among families and school staff. See, e.g., Perry Stein, It’s Absolutely Terrible, When a Charter School Closes, What Happens to the Kids? Washington Post, Jan. 31, 2019 (available [here](#)); Jenny Abamu, D.C.’s Only Unionized Charter School Faces an Abrupt Closure, WAMU, Jan. 24, 2019 (available [here](#)).

DCPCSB should reject this amendment and insist that the Chavez Board of Trustees explore alternatives while engaging stakeholders.

Sincerely,

Evan Lundeen

DC Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff

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<sup>1</sup> <https://emma.msrb.org/ER1193937-ER934264-ER1335232.pdf>