

Subject: Public Comment re: Chavez Schools Campus Closure and Consolidation

Date: Monday, February 25, 2019 at 11:03:34 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: Jennie Tomlinson

To: Public Comment

Text of Public Testimony

My name is Jennie Tomlinson and I am the school librarian at Chavez Prep. The priorities of the Chavez Schools board of trustees and of TenSquare were made clear when their legal representative said on Feb. 12th that they made “an entrepreneurial decision” to close our school due to their “inability to derive adequate revenue out of the asset.” That statement is distasteful at best - we’re talking about a school, not a start up - but it clearly demonstrates that they see schools as assets in a portfolio and students as dollar signs.

The Chavez Board and TenSquare decided that it was no longer “economically viable” to continue operating Chavez Prep. The reason given was declining enrollment, which has led to a decrease in overall revenue, but there has not been a corresponding decrease in administrative expenses.

- In 2016, the board hired TenSquare at a rate of nearly \$140,000 per month. This pays for a small team of “consultants,” the majority of whom we have never seen.
- Between 16-17 and 17-18, Chavez Schools increased spending in the “other general expenses” category by over 900%, from \$199,000 to almost \$2 million.
- Since 2013, business and administrative expenses have increased by 36% while student-facing expenses have increased by only 2%.
- In 17-18, two teaching positions at Chavez Prep were left empty because the school said they couldn’t “afford” to fill them, but they could find money to continue paying TenSquare’s contract
- The budget for library books was cut by 70% during the last three years.
- Music, reading, and math intervention programs have been discontinued

I could go on, but it’s clear that Chavez

Schools has frequently chosen to spend taxpayer money in a way that benefits adults, not students. The argument that operating Chavez Prep is no longer “economically viable” rings hollow when Chavez Schools is sitting on over \$10 million in unrestricted assets

and could instantly add almost \$2 million to their annual budget by simply ending their contract with TenSquare. Their own financial records do not support their claims. It is unacceptable to close a public school because the people in charge want to continue spending money on consultants instead of kids. Do not allow Chavez Schools to amend their charter agreement. Thank you.

Response to the Statement of the Chavez Representatives and Questions by the Public Charter Board

1. Mr. Cruz asked the Chavez representatives for comment on the late-night tours they have given to potential tenants of the Chavez Prep building. As of today, these tours are apparently no longer being given after hours. A group of prospective tenants were given a tour of the building this afternoon while staff were still at work and students were still in the building. This is incredibly disrespectful to the staff who are working hard to maintain a sense of normalcy for our students during the closure process.
2. Mr. Cruz asked the Chavez representatives about the successorship clause that was discussed in the collective bargaining process. None of the Chavez representatives were able to respond to this question. This is most likely because no Chavez board member has attended a single collective bargaining session, despite multiple invitations that have been delivered to them in person, via email, and as handwritten notes. The only Chavez representatives who have consistently attended collective bargaining sessions since September 2017 are their lawyer and a representative from TenSquare.
3. Ms. Bireda commented on the wealth of financial data that was shared by staff members during the public comment portion of the meeting. A Chavez representative implied that this information is publicly accessible and was freely shared with staff members. This is false. This financial information was turned over by Chavez Schools only in response to information requests that were made as part of the collective bargaining process.
4. Several members of the PCSB asked the Chavez representatives why they did not give staff more advance notice that the school might close. A board representative replied that this notice may have caused teachers to leave in the middle of the year. This is incredibly insulting to the staff members at Chavez Prep. We show up every day for our kids - we would never punish them for the board's actions by abandoning them.
5. The representatives from Chavez Schools implied that TenSquare employees are active, full-time participants in the school communities. This is untrue. We have never even seen many of them, and they certainly are not actively involved in instruction at Chavez Prep. Dr. Miller's experience at Parkside may be different. Additionally, Chavez Schools has refused to provide further clarification during the collective bargaining process about the roles and responsibilities of individual TenSquare employees, as well as a scope of work for TenSquare's contract with Chavez Schools.