

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA) NAME: The Sojourner Truth Public Charter School

BOARD CHAIR NAME: Wendy Pugh

SUBMISSION DATE: April 3, 2024

SUBJECT: School Expansion and Facility Amendment Request

SCHOOL BACKGROUND AND PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Campus name(s): The Sojourner Truth Public Charter School

Year(s) opened: SY2020-2021

Grades served: 6-12 (currently serving 6-10)

Year the school will undergo its next charter review or renewal: SY2024-2025

Proposal summary: The Sojourner Truth PCS plans to maintain the campus at 1800 Perry St NE for its middle school, and to develop the new campus at 3420 16th St NE to be its high school. Truth also hopes to expand its enrollment ceiling from 450 to 460 total students.

Year the school plans to implement the proposed changes: SY2025-2026

When did the school's board approve the proposed changes? Facilities changes were approved on February 17, 2024, and enrollment ceiling changes were approved on March 29, 2024. Meeting minutes and vote results included in appendix.

SCHOOL EXPANSION

1. What is the rationale for requesting a school expansion?

Sojourner Truth has been over-enrolled during each year of operation, and has a consistent record of serving students for whom we have not received funding. For the current school year, for example, we have 280 students (and an enrollment ceiling of 270). Given FY24 per-pupil funding levels, these ten students would mean \$130,046 in *foundation level per pupil* funding and \$36,220 in *non-residential facilities allotment*. This is a total value of \$166,266 in student services that we are providing but for which we are not receiving funding. We have been over-enrolled to varying degrees in each year of our organization's existence, and the true total of services we have provided as a school but which the District has not needed to provide funding is likely closer to half of a million dollars (which represents a very significant portion of our operating budget).

We understand the complicated nature of enrollment ceiling determinations and the importance of considering population trends, the number of overall seats across the city for any given grade, and the effect that expansions have on the District-wide ecosystem as a whole.

Our hope is that an enrollment ceiling increase of 10 total students, to start in SY26-27, will allow us to receive funding to better serve our entire student body without significant impact on the broader system.

2. What do you anticipate will be the challenges of expanding your school? How will you address these challenges?

The main challenge, which we feel very well prepared to meet, will be ensuring that we have the right academic and student support infrastructure in place to accommodate the additional students. We feel that we will be in position to address these challenges with supplements to our staffing model (such as the additional student support team member and instructional team member that the increased UPSFF revenue would afford us). We would also once again point to our pattern of serving up to 10 students over our ceiling this year and in past years, and allocating available resources to make sure that their needs are met.

If our facility amendment request is approved, physical space should not be a challenge. We will have close to 35,000 sq ft of high school space for a high school enrollment of around 285 students.

3. Do you meet the performance criteria described in the ECI Policy and the 2023 Temporary Guidance? Explain.

From the 2023 School Expansion Application: *"According to the ECI Policy, a local educational agency (LEA) seeking a school expansion must demonstrate at a minimum: A) high performance, defined generally as Tier 1 on the most recent Performance Management Framework (PMF); B) a compelling case for demand; and C) evidence that it has engaged and responded to community stakeholders."*

The PCSB's Data Analytics Team ran a preliminary ECI analysis for Truth on March 11, and the findings were that Truth does meet, at a minimum, the two major indicators of performance and demand.

For performance, this is because Truth met or exceeded the overall state proficiency rates for the PARCC exam in English and Math in SY 2021-2022. With respect to demand, Truth's waitlist data has grown at the following trajectory:

- 5 in SY20-21
- 20 in SY21-22
- 38 in SY22-23
- 119 in SY23-24

In the *2024 DC PCSB Sector Planning Supplement*, it states that “Ward 5 has the highest number of low-scoring campuses” (based on D.C. School Report Card data) for grades 6-8 and that there is only one grade 9-12 campus in Ward 5 that has a School Report Card score above 59.9%. An enrollment ceiling increase for Truth, even though for only 10 students, would increase the number of available seats at what the D.C. School Report Card would consider a “high-scoring” campus.

4. Demonstrate that there will be sufficient demand to sustain the proposed expansion by responding to the data in the Sector Planning Supplement. To inform your case for demand, answer these questions.

a. How does the scope, pace, and need for the expansion reflect DC’s current demographics and growth projections?

The *Sector Planning Supplement* indicates that “Students enrolled in low-scoring middle schools are concentrated in Ward 4, 5, 7, and 8. These four wards also serve the highest numbers of middle school students.” It also states that “Wards 4 and 5 have the *highest* number of middle school students.” Truth’s application and effort to add 10 students to its enrollment ceiling would increase the proportion of Ward 5 middle schoolers at what the D.C. School Report Card considers a “high-scoring” school.

It also mentions that the DC PCSB has already approved seats to meet “73% of anticipated 6-8 population growth to 2025; 47% to 2030.” Based on this data it implies that there may still be room for the PCSB to approve seat increases to meet a share of projected growth in the future. An enrollment increase of 10 seats at Truth (some of which would likely be at the high school level), would represent approximately one-half of 1% of the 1,766 new seats it has already approved for grades 6-8.

b. For schools serving grades PK3 – 12, discuss, at minimum, the waitlist-to-seats offered ratios and enrollment trends at all campuses. For alternative and adult schools, discuss, at minimum, mobility data.

Truth’s overall waitlist data has grown at the following trajectory:

- 5 in SY20-21
- 20 in SY21-22
- 38 in SY22-23
- 119 in SY23-24
- Currently 270 in SY24-25 (**will change, as this is as of 4/1/2024*)

While the enrollment period is only just beginning for SY24-25, as of April 1st Truth currently had:

- 66 students on the waitlist for 6th grade (waitlist-to-seats offered ratio of 2.87)
- 56 on the waitlist for 7th grade (waitlist-to-seats offered ratio of 9.33)
- 22 on the waitlist for 8th grade (waitlist-to-seats offered ratio of 22.00)
- 90 on the waitlist for 9th grade (waitlist-to-seats offered ratio of 6.92)
- 25 on the waitlist for 10th grade (waitlist-to-seats offered ratio of 5.00)
- 11 on the waitlist for 11th grade (waitlist-to-seats offered ratio of 2.20)

Our overall application numbers have continued to increase over the years, and this year's total lottery application count is 38% higher than the count from the previous year.

5. Which, if any, of the 10 additional indicators did the school not meet? For each indicator missed, explain why. What evidence suggests you are improving in these areas?

With respect to the other *Additional Criteria for Grade Expansion Requests*, Truth has met each:

- The enrollment ceiling increase does support Sojourner Truth's overall mission and academic expectations, including its pursuit to make a public Montessori middle and high school experience accessible to more students
- Given the modest increase that we are requesting, our recruitment and retention efforts and performance to date are evidence that we are poised to meet the proposed growth trajectory
- There will be no new grades served, and our increase will complement our staffing plan and offer the opportunity for strong outcomes for those additional students we are able to enroll and for whom we will receive funding
- The increase will be inclusive, and our ongoing participation in the *Equitable Access Preference* will help to ensure the seats are made available in an equitable manner and that Truth is able to serve an increased number of at-risk students
- The impact on budget of the 10 additional students is modest and allows us to carry forward with our intended trajectory while being better able to serve *all* of our students

6. Describe the school's current and proposed enrollment matrices. Complete the proposed enrollment matrix below.

CURRENT Enrollment Ceiling Schedule (per Truth's Charter Agreement)

	SY 2024 – 25	SY 2025 – 26	SY 2026 – 27	SY 2027 – 28	SY 2028 – 29
PK-3					
PK-4					
K					
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6	30	30	38	38	38
7	48	65	60	60	60
8	45	44	63	63	63
9	75	77	80	80	80
10	70	72	75	75	75
11	41	67	70	70	70
12	21	35	64	64	64
Adult					
LEA Total	330	390	450	450	450

Proposed Enrollment Ceiling Schedule					
	SY 2024 – 25	SY 2025 – 26	SY 2026 – 27	SY 2027 – 28	SY 2028 – 29
PK-3					
PK-4					
K					
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6	30	30	38	38	38
7	48	65	60	60	60
8	45	46	63	63	63
9	75	79	83	80	80
10	70	74	78	75	75
11	41	68	72	70	70
12	21	37	66	64	64
Adult					

LEA Total	330	400	460	460	460
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7. Describe the staffing plan for the proposed expansion. Include the anticipated number of academic, non-academic, special education, EL, and mission-specific staff required for the ECI.

The proposed enrollment ceiling increase of 10 total students will allow for a staffing increase of one core instructional staff member (likely a core-content teacher but possibly a special education teacher) and one student support team member (likely a social worker but possibly a school counselor). The increase of 10 total students would be just a 2.2% overall increase in students but would allow for a 5% increase in core-content teachers and a 12.5% increase in student support team members.

a. How will you attract and retain high-quality staff for the proposed ECI?

Given the overall modest increase request, we do not anticipate a significant impact on our ability to attract or retain high-quality staff. Given the positive effects it will likely have on our ratios of core teachers-to-students and student-support-team members to students, if there were any impact it would likely be positive as it would lead to decreased class sizes and caseloads.

b. How will the proposed ECI affect student-teacher ratios?

Because adding the 10 students would allow us to add a teacher, the overall student-teacher ratio would show a slight decrease.

c. What impact will the grade expansion have on the school's leadership team and reporting structure? If the ECI requires the school to hire a new leader, please provide an updated organizational chart and describe the expertise necessary for the role.

The requested ceiling increase would not include a grade expansion or necessitate any adjustments to Truth's leadership team or reporting structure.

FACILITY

8. Please check the box that best describes the school's proposed facility change.

- The LEA or a campus within the LEA is relocating from its current facility to a new facility.
- The LEA or a campus within the LEA is staying in its current facility and expanding into an additional facility (i.e., some students will attend the current facility while some will attend the proposed facility).
- The LEA seeks to open a new campus to be housed in a new facility. (Also complete the Expansion and/or Replication Amendment Application.)

9. In the table below, list the facility/facilities the school operates (i.e., the facility/facilities identified in the school’s charter agreement). For each entry, report the facility name, the campus(es) and grades served within, and the address.

Current Facility/Facilities		
Facility Name	Campus Name(s); Grade(s) Served	Address
1800 Perry St NE	The Sojourner Truth Public Charter School (6-12)	1800 Perry St NE

10. In the table below, list the facility/facilities the school seeks to operate (i.e., the facility/facilities the school will continue operating along with the facility the school proposes operating). For each entry, report the facility name, the campus(es) and grades served within, and the address.

Current Facility/Facilities		
Facility Name	Campus Name(s); Grade(s) Served	Address
1800 Perry St NE; "Truth Middle School"	The Sojourner Truth Public Charter School (6-8)	1800 Perry St NE
3420 16th St NE; "Truth High School"	The Sojourner Truth Public Charter School (9-12)	3420 16th St NE

11. Will the school lease or purchase the proposed facility? If the school has already purchased or leased the facility, when did the school acquire it?

Truth intends to purchase the facility and to close in late May of 2024.

12. How will the new location impact current students? How will the school encourage student re-enrollment? How will the school support students in need of transportation to the new location?

The new location is in the same neighborhood as Truth's current site, but is closer to the Brookland metro station. The new site also contains space for a half-court gym, which will allow our athletic teams to have a gym to practice in for the first time. The aim is for the new building to serve our high school students and for our middle school students to remain at our current location (1800 Perry St NE). This will allow for more space for our middle school students as well, and for us to no longer need the two modular classrooms that staff and students have been using since SY22-23.

13. What is the maximum occupancy at the new location? If the maximum occupancy load for staff and students is less than the total number of staff and students who will occupy the facility at any point in the future, please explain how you will address this issue

While the occupancy load of the new location may need to be re-established following renovation, there is currently an occupancy of over 600 individuals. This is significantly more than the roughly 275 students and 50 staff that we anticipate having. It is also significantly greater than the ceiling of 450 total middle and high school students that is in Truth's current charter (and the ceiling of 460 for which we are simultaneously applying).

14. Does the proposed space require renovation? If so, describe the renovations the new location will need, either to serve as a school or to be accessible for students with disabilities.

The space will require significant renovation, both to make it safe for occupancy and also accessible for students with disabilities. Abatement will need to occur due to surveys that have found materials that would be unsuitable if left in their current state, and an elevator will need to be added to make the school building portion of the campus, which is multi-level, fully accessible to those with disabilities.

15. Describe the proposed facility's neighborhood (i.e., is it residential or commercial, is it metro accessible). What value will the school add to the proposed neighborhood?

The proposed neighborhood is a residential one, and it runs directly along one of WMATA's priority bus lines on Monroe St NE. The church sanctuary section of the building has been

out of use for about 7 years and the school building section has been out of use for about 35 years. There have been two fires in the building in the last two years, and the building has also been in use by squatters who have occupied the building unlawfully. One benefit to the neighborhood will be the restoration of a prominent and beautiful building from its current state of disrepair.

Truth intends to leverage its high school students and our Montessori "Enterprise Program" for the overall benefit of the neighborhood and surrounding neighbors. The site will have a garden with the intention of cultivating produce that is shared with surrounding residents (as has been the tradition with produce grown at our 1800 Perry St NE campus), and our high school students will be given regular opportunities for service hours focused on neighborhood beautification (such as for trash cleanups and flower plantings).

16. List the traditional and public charter schools near the new location, identifying schools that educate the same grade span your school serves/will serve. Describe how the school's mission and academic performance compare to these schools. What impact will the school's relocation have on enrollment at neighboring schools?

Same grade span:

- Luke C. Moore Opportunity Academy (DCPS) - 9-12 - 0.6 miles
 - This is the closest school that educates an overlapping grade span. Luke C. Moore Opportunity Academy is one of four public alternative high schools in DCPS that services youth ranging in age from 16 to 22 years old. While both schools put an emphasis on social emotional well-being, Luke C. Moore serves a slightly older range of students and does not enroll first time 9th graders the way that Truth does.
- Coolidge High School (DCPS) - 4.3 miles
- McKinley Tech High School (DCPS) - 2.4 miles
- KIPP DC College Prep (PCS) - 2.1 miles

Coolidge, McKinley Tech, and KIPP DC College Prep are all 2 to 4.5 miles from Truth. Coolidge provides a traditional and well-rounded program, McKinley Tech is a DCPS application school that specializes in STEM, and KIPP DC College Prep aims to develop 21st century skills necessary for college, careers, and choice-filled lives. As a Montessori high school, Truth offers a different approach and program than these other nearby schools.

Given that the relocation is only 0.5 miles from the current Truth high school location, it is not anticipated that the relocation will have a significant impact on the enrollment of the aforementioned schools.

Other grade spans:

- John Burrows Elementary School (DCPS) - PK3-5 - 0.3 miles
- Perry Street Prep Public Charter School (PCS) - PK3-8 - 0.5 miles
- Noyes Education Campus (DCPS) - PK3-8 - 1.0 miles
- Brookland Middle School (DCPS) - 6-8 - 1.1 miles

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

17. When did the school hold an open board of trustees meeting to discuss the proposed changes?

A meeting was held on February 17, 2024 to specifically discuss and approve the pursuit and purchase of 3420 16th St NE.

18. Describe how the school has engaged its internal community in its decision to expand and relocate/operate an additional facility. Submit documentation of the school's communications with its staff and families regarding the proposal. Identify the internal community's concerns and how the school is responding to their needs.

Truth's relocation has been a topic of discussion at regular Truth Community Meetings (with families and staff) since our first year of operation (see slide decks in appendix representing samples of updates). We have had Family Focus Groups on facilities over the years as well, where we have developed key priorities for what will eventually become our new space (see slide decks in appendix). A few priorities, for example, that have consistently come out of these groups have been locations with lots of natural light, enough space for a modest gym, and access to public transportation.

More recently, as we have found and focused more on 3420 16th St NE in particular, we have engaged both staff and families along with architects in the process of visioning and design. Family and staff concerns around things like having enough natural light and enough space for a small gym have become critical elements of the design work, and we look forward to continuing to work in collaboration as design continues and actual construction begins.

Recent touchpoints with Truth's internal community include:

- Interest shared with Truth staff June 2023, August 2023, fall 2023
- Interest shared with Truth parents March 2023, May 2023, August 2023, November 2023, February 2024

19. Describe how the school has engaged the community surrounding the proposed location. Please attach documentation of communications with

nearby principals, neighbors, ANC representatives, Councilmembers, and other community groups, notifying them of the school's plans.

Recent touchpoints with the community include:

- Neighbors were given letters about our interest in this building in November 2023
- DC PCSB, Councilmembers, ANC leaders, DCPS, Mayor's Office were all contacted personally between November and December 2023 regarding our interest
- 3rd round of letters in January inviting them to a community meeting to discuss
- Spoke at January 2024 ANC meeting and March 2024 meeting
- Additional flyers shared in February and additional community meeting held on February 16th

Documents attached as part of the appendix.

a. When did the school inform the ANC representatives of its expansion and facility plans? Has the school already presented its plans during an ANC meeting? If not, when will it do so?

The ANC representatives were first informed about our interest in 3420 16th St NE on August 17, 2022. We remained in communication throughout 2022, 2023, and into 2024 (see messages included in the appendix). As our likelihood of trying to make the purchase increased, we presented at the ANC meeting on January 17, 2024. We have remained in communication, and also spoke to share information at the March 20, 2024 meeting.

b. Summarize the external community's concerns, if any, and describe the school's response with specificity.

We have presented twice to the ANC, held two open community meetings with neighbors, and shared letters with neighbors to explain our interest and to provide personal contact info for school leadership. The main concerns that were shared were related to increased traffic and parking, and a worry that there would be an increased amount of trash in yards and along the sidewalk. We reached out to DDOT on March 6, 2024 to consult regarding traffic and with a request for support identifying the impact we would have and ways to mitigate any challenges. We also expressed to neighbors that there are not as many pick-ups and drop-offs via car for high school students as compared to elementary and middle school students, and that most of our students would be taking public transportation. The fact that the Brookland-CUA Metro Station is 0.7 miles away and that 3420 16th St NE is located along one of WMATA's priority bus lines is helpful as well, because both will reduce the amount of car traffic.

Truth's 1800 Perry St NE site is located in a residential neighborhood, and it is worth noting that we currently do not have access to any parking spots on-site. This means that for our current staff and students (which outnumbers our projected staff and student count at the proposed site) we are already relying on neighborhood parking. We have been working with neighbors since our founding to manage parking in such a way that does not cause strain or inconvenience for surrounding residents and stakeholders.

Similarly, we have worked hard to make sure that the routes our students walk and ride in order to get to and from school remain as trash and litter-free as possible. We have teams of students and volunteers that routinely walk along 18th St NE, Randolph St NE, South Dakota Ave NE, and around Dwight Mosley Park to clear trash, and our surrounding neighbors have the personal contact info of school leadership (executive director, principal, assistant principal, and director of culture) so that concerns can be responded to in real time.

FIVE-YEAR OPERATING BUDGET

20. Complete and submit DC PCSB's [Five-Year Operating Budget](#) template in accordance with its instructions. Explain the financial objectives supported in the attached Five-Year Budget.

A primary goal is generating enough net operating income and operational surplus to comfortably satisfy a debt service coverage ratio of 1.2 or higher once construction is complete, enrollment is fully scaled, and financing is closed. Additionally, Truth seeks to put ourselves in position to build upon existing cash reserves in order to serve as both a risk mitigant and to fund elective programming for our students. An objective is to keep cash-on-hand to 30 days or greater at a lowest point and to eventually sustain a level of 60 days or higher. We aim to keep a positive gross margin (ideally above 2%) once construction is complete and enrollment is fully scaled.

Additionally, a core goal is to maintain high quality staff and avoid sacrifices to any funding of our core academic and social-emotional programming. This includes being able to support a competitive salary scale and Montessori training.

a. Describe contingencies if per-pupil funding is lower or outlays are higher, any planned fundraising efforts, and cash flow management.

Truth has gone through extensive modeling to develop contingency plans should per-pupil funding be lower than anticipated, if enrollment targets are not met, or if there are other unexpected drops in revenue. As seen in the contingency budget, if per pupil funding is

lower than anticipated then reductions will be made in expenses for things like student materials and in some cases staffing. If enrollment targets are not met, reductions will focus primarily on staffing adjustments in order to account in a commensurate manner to the drop in student number.

Fundraising efforts will increase over the coming years. In our early years, Truth benefited from federal and private launch grants. Since then, our fundraising has been comparatively modest and has focused on modest donations from within our community. We have developed a short-list of larger-size donors from whom we will seek support over the coming years, as well a list of foundations from which we hope to benefit. Additionally, our families and broader school community have expressed an appetite for increasing their giving in order to support development of a new facility.

b. What impact will the proposed expansion have on the school's facilities?

Truth intends to continue operation at our 1800 Perry St NE campus, and to move our growing high school into the new space at 3420 16th St NE. This will relieve some of the space-challenges we currently face with 280+ students here on Perry St NE, and in our middle school community will allow more pull-out groups to have physical spaces in which to work, and for our counselors, social workers, and administrators to have private offices for confidential meetings (rather than relying on shared spaces).

Having the new space at 3420 16th St NE will improve the high school experience for our students in grades 9-12 for similar reasons. There will be more designated spaces for small groups to work, more offices for student support team members, and a modest-sized gymnasium for our P.E. classes and sports teams.

As the enrollment ceiling increase is for just 10 students, there will not be a significant impact on either of Truth's facilities. Each building has the capacity (square footage and number of classrooms) to absorb a larger increase.

APPENDIX

Additional docs for reference