

**WYANDANCH UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES/TRANSCRIPT OF
CHARTER SCHOOL- PUBLIC HEARING
HELD ON AUGUST 18, 2021
CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
1445 DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BOULEVARD
WYANDANCH, NEW YORK 11798**

Time Hearing Began: 6:00P.M. Eastern Standard Time

Trustees Present: Latesha Walker, Yvonne Robinson (via Zoom), Shirley Baker, James Crawford, Nancy Holliday, Jarod Morris, Charlie Reed

Others Present: Dr. Gina Talbert, Kester Hodge, Dr. Christine Jordan, Carl Baldini, Rich Snyder, Shamika Simpson, Al Chase (via Zoom), Lisa Hutchinson, Esq., Christian D. Code, Faculty, Scholars, Administrators and Community

**GREETINGS
DR. GINA TALBERT
Superintendent of Schools**

Dr. Talbert: Good evening, I am Gina Talbert, Superintendent of Schools. On behalf of the District at large, I welcome you here for tonight's charter school public hearing. I would like to acknowledge the presence of our Board of Education Trustees and our Board President, Ms. Latesha Walker, whom you will hear from momentarily.

Because we are committed to collaboration and providing an equitable platform for all participants, I ask that you would give your undivided attention to our District Clerk, Mr. Christian Code, as he will review our group meeting norms, render acknowledgements and present our Board President for opening remarks.

Thank you for your continued support of the Wyandanch Union Free School District.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT/NORMS
MR. CHRISTIAN D. CODE
District Clerk**

Mr. Code: Good evening and thank you Dr. Talbert. I would like to acknowledge our community members who are joining us not only in person, but on Zoom and on Facebook. We'd also like to recognize the Trustees of the Wyandanch Union Free School District Board of Education-

Latesha S. Walker, President

Yvonne Robinson, Vice President
Trustee Shirley Baker
Trustee James Crawford
Trustee Nancy Holliday
Trustee Jarod Morris
Trustee Charlie Reed
Mr. Al Chase, Fiscal Monitor

I'd also like to spotlight our Superintendent Dr. Gina Talbert and her cabinet:

Mr. Kester Hodge, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources
Mrs. Shamika Simpson, Assistant to the Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Dr. Christine Jordan, Assistant to the Superintendent for Administrative & Instructional Accountability
Mr. Richard Snyder, Business Administrator
Mr. Carl Baldini, Director of Special Education

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of the following individuals who you will hear from in a few moments:

The Honorable John Brooks, NY State Senate (District 8)
Scott O'Brien – President, Wyandanch Teacher's Association

My task tonight is to review our meetings norms- as we do in all meetings here at the Wyandanch Union Free School District. We ask that you all adhere to the following norms:

- 1. Take an inquiry approach**
- 2. Assume positive intentions (that meaning to engage in active listening and allow the equity of voice to follow).**
- 3. Ground statements in evidence**
- 4. Stick to protocol**
- 5. Be here now (that meaning be present, mindful and manage your technology-silencing your phone)**
- 6. Start and end on time.**
- 7. Be respectful**

Again, thank you so much for coming and with that being said it is my honor and privilege to turn our hearing over to President Latesha Walker, President of the Wyandanch Union Free School District's Board of Education, who will provide us with opening remarks- President Walker.

OPENING REMARKS
MS. LATESHA S. WALKER
Board President

President Walker: Thank you Christian and good evening.

My name is Latesha Walker, President of the Board of Education for the 2021-2022 school year. We are happy to see and welcome you here for tonight's public hearing.

By way of background, the District has been notified that an application for a charter school has been submitted to the SUNY Board of Trustees. The Academy Charter School is proposing to serve Wyandanch students with a planned opening date of the Fall of 2022.

By law, the District – as the community potentially impacted by the charter school and the school district in which the charter school would be located – is required to hold a public hearing regarding the application to establish the charter school in Wyandanch.

The hearing is being recorded and your comments will be transcribed and forwarded to the SUNY Trustees and the State Education Department.

This meeting is designed to give you an opportunity to share your feelings and ask questions about the proposed charter schools.

The Board of Education is committed to providing each scholar with the tools necessary for intellectual development and academic success by continuing to review, develop and implement sound policies.

In keeping with our singleness of purpose, the mission of the Wyandanch Union Free School District is to "inspire the passion for learning and educating all students to achieve their full potential."

We are dedicated to collaboration with our stakeholders to advocate for an equitable platform for Wyandanch schools.

We are dedicated to all of you. Together is better. Thank you Wyandanch community for your continued support of our leadership. I turn to Senator Brooks who will offer remarks. Welcome.

REMARKS
THE HONORABLE JOHN BROOKS
New York State Senate- 8th District
(Partially Transcribed)

Senator Brooks: Thank you for allowing me to stop over and um, you know, this is a school district, I think for a long time has been overlooked and uh you face some significant challenges....when I first got elected, one of the things I was looking at was what was happening with the different school districts- and we were watching Wyandanch in particular. Wyandanch School District, believe it or not, when you look at the rate of growth, in terms of percentage of growth was for about a five year period, the fastest growing school district in the state of New York. Over the five years we looked at, you grew 28%- 28%. This is a community that couldn't support that growth, you all understand that...we know that we are a community with very, very limited uh, commercial property tax base, um and to the greatest extent, much of your growth was associated with students coming here that were new to the country, um many of them who needed additional assistance, the English language was new to them; they had limited educational background- you were given - given an almost impossible task. And, you were in a situation where the growth and the facilities that you have available here in the District were quite limited and eventually you ended up renting a building out of state- out of state listen to me- out of district in Wyandanch to take care of your Pre-K students and kindergarten students.

One of the things we looked at, uh, last year in legislation that we are working on now since, is the question of what to do with these students- you know, we can have a debate on the value of public education versus charter school uh, but this District is in a position right now that we need to get a better understanding of where you are financially and otherwise...you realistically don't have the space for your current students- that's why you are renting out of District. Uh we worked, uh very hard and I believe it was very hard to get a monitor appointed to this District- that was not meant as a slap to this District- but assistance to this District and I know Al and Gina, have been working on hard on stuff- we are supposed to meet tomorrow on some information I am working on...to see if I can help support an idea that will help this District greatly, but I don't want to talk about it yet because it is that big of a deal, but I want to back up with data, what we are talking about here. But, uh we went to- and when I say we I mean, Assemblyman Kimberly and Senator Boyle, uh, and asked that we get assistance for this District- and again, you had tremendous growth, no property tax base (inaudible)- you know that we had if you will a septic system problem, which we were able to get some money for to get the hookup- you are not in a position right now, in my opinion, to entertain even the question of a charter school system.

A charter school system when they come in, normally (inaudible), which you don't have and financial assistance, which you don't have. Um, I am in the process of - I spoke earlier today with my legislative director- we are introducing a bill for any school district that is put in a system where the state has put in a place a monitor- that that school district cannot be subjected to an application for charter schools or other educational entities for a five year period so the district has a chance to find out where they really are, see what assistance we can get from the state and how we can help- this District and I have talked to people in this District- I have talked with teachers, employees they believe in this District- and they want what's best for your children. This is not a time for debate about the charter school versus public education, this is time to identify where you are- is there opportunities to find additional state aid because forms may not have been filled out

correctly or whatever else it is- time to get the sewer connection put in place- recognize where – you know, when Mary was here as Superintendent, I walked in this building one day and she was down on one end of the hall and I was down on the other and she yelled down to me “John! 18 kids just today!” 18 students came into your District in one day. How do you manage that?! So the whole idea of getting the monitor is help with some of the long-term planning- not to tell you what to do, but to help and to for us to find ways to get additional money for this District, which we are doing that and certainly the sewer money is a perfect example of that. So, I am going to say to you in a friendly way, I am not telling you what to do- but I am telling you this is not the time to entertain changing this District- you are not in a the position to absorb that and the charter school, I guess, we would have to be willing to build a whole new school and fund it because you don’t have the money nor the space- so I think again this District was neglected far too long. Let’s go through the process first- lets see if there is money that we can recover for this District from a state aid standpoint.

Let’s see if we can additional federal aid for the students you have inherited that you will and all that you have for the lower grades you have rapid growth there too, so when you look at future of this District and you realize the obligation and (inaudible) and all these kids at Dix Hills and (inaudible), so on and so forth- there is no reason not to think the fact that you are probably going to see that growth (inaudible)- so we argue to get that monitor to help you- not to hurt you. You know, Gina- I talk to her with some frequency and Al with some frequency too, we are talking about different ideas- we are trying to run an idea up the pole in two places and see...I need the data to show that, but you have been given almost an impossible task in a community that has no commercial property tax base. We recognize that in the community with limited income. We need to figure out where you really are- what we have to do and build a longer term plan to get you there. We need to have the state understand how really bad you have it. I mean with the prior superintendent- not superintendent, commissioner, I was talking to her in disbelief. There was a day, I got her to come down here to Long Island. We met with the North Bellmore school district and then come here but we canceled at the last minute. I walked in and Mary was here and we wanted into the lower grade schools and the kids were all excited – all really excited- (inaudible) . You didn’t have any desks in the room, you have tables because they fit more people, file cabinets and everything is out in the halls because you didn’t have the space. The federal government (inaudible)...the only way we can do that was bring a monitor in here- to help, to challenge your suggestions and that is what has to be done (inaudible)...I think if we had a charter school it would be very difficult to try and get more state and federal money- I’m not saying that charter (inaudible)...I think now is the time we get handle on where this community is going- you’ve got the growth you’ve seen in the last couple of years. You’ve got the various apartment buildings that are being built here (inaudible)...and we have to understand again, you have students coming here with a limited educational background, a new language to learn- not always a parental support that we would like (inaudible)...honestly and realistically an assessment of bringing a charter school when your school district yourself is in need of repair right now and that is not meant as an insult; it’s a recognition of where we are. Nobody in this state, no school district in this state could’ve absorbed a 28% increase in student population, students who are new to this country (inaudible)...so I am here to tell you, I am working with my legislative director on legislation- as you know, we are not in session right now at least for right now. It looks like we won’t be back in session until January, but that is important legislation and we have to get to understand where you are right now, so we can put together some budgetary requests in the next budget so that we can

get you some help. We are looking at things in multiple ways (inaudible)...its not a question of who is better - public or charter; it's a question of where this district is realistically (inaudible).

We started the program- this District- and Hempstead to go under this system of a Fiscal Monitor. It is a system we are going to use throughout the state. Two additional districts have been added- it's a way to give you an expert for free- to give you advice if you are willing to listen and that is not an insult to you either and for the state to get a better understanding of where you are. The task you have before you is impossible where you are. I want the kids in this district to have the same opportunity any student has in this state – I want to see you have programs where you have kids graduating with college credits so that they can understand (inaudible)...we have to do that and show the students here in this District that they matter, that they can do college work, that they can do it in high school and graduate with a semesters worth of college work down and give them not only educational opportunities but job opportunities- that's our job.

(inaudible)

President Walker: thank you Senator Brooks. Ladies and gentlemen, round of applause for our senator. Certainly if there are any questions, it will come later at the public comment. At this time I would ask Mr. Scott O'Brien to approach the podium.

REMARKS
MR. SCOTT OBRIEN
Wyandanch Teacher's Association

Scott O'Brien (Wyandanch Teachers Association):

Good Evening,

My name is Scott O'Brien-Curcie and I am the President of the Wyandanch Teachers Association. I have also worked as a teacher for the past 22 years.

Our district has been in fiscal trouble since before I began here. The impact of a charter school will be devastating.

As President for the past 10 years I have to question what type of community outreach has been completed? I hear about everything, it's the nature of my job. I have never heard of this organization until this past month. We completed some quick research and found some disturbing issues with The Academy Charter School.

SUNY should reject The Academy Charter School's proposal:

SUNY Charter Schools Institute is considering a proposal from The Academy Charter School to replicate their Hempstead charter in Wyandanch. The proposal should be rejected, given concerns raised about The Academy Charter School in two recent lawsuits.

Allegations of anti-LGBT employment practices, close entanglement of The Academy Charter School with a religious organization:

The Academy Charter School is closely tied to a religious organization, Calvary Tabernacle, which believes homosexuality to be a sin. A former teacher has accused The Academy Charter School

leadership of extending this religious belief into their secular operations and firing him on the basis of their belief that he was a homosexual. A 2020 lawsuit, filed by Keiron Philips alleged that Calvary Tabernacle staff and church members received favorable and disparate treatment by The Academy Charter School leadership (many of whom overlap with the leadership at Cavalry Tabernacle). Additionally, Philips alleged that he was “pressured to financially support events at Calvary Tabernacle.” The lawsuit was stipulated to dismissal in April 2021, indicating that it was settled out of court.

A review of publicly available literature and publications supports the lawsuit’s contention of close entanglement between The Academy Charter School and the Calvary Tabernacle church.

- The 2020 and 2021 graduation ceremonies for The Academy Charter School were held at the Tabernacle Church.
- The Facebook page for the Calvary Tabernacle repeatedly features events hosted by The Academy Charter School, and content pertaining to the allegedly separate charitable non-profit.
- According to NYS Food Inspection data, meals for The Academy Charter School Summer Food program are sent to the Calvary Tabernacle church.
- According to the complaint filed by Keiron Philips, Krystal Goldson, the daughter of Bishop Goldson, was “provided a contract” to operate the after school program at The Academy Charter School, despite not possessing the proper qualifications.
- The leadership of The Academy Charter School largely overlaps with the leadership and congregants of the Calvary Tabernacle church. Calvary Tabernacle’s Bishop Goldson is the CEO of the Academy Charter School. Robert Stewart serves as COO of both organizations. Wayne Houghton, Chief Development Officer of The Academy Charter School, is listed on the “leadership” subheading of the Calvary Tabernacle site. General counsel and HR director Sandra Oneil serves as a Home Bible Study team leader for the Calvary Tabernacle. High School principal Travis Holloway, who does not appear to have a New York state teaching certificate. Board member Carol Beckles is a “With Care” team leader at Calvary Tabernacle.

Lawsuit alleges that Academy Charter School stole intellectual property used in a prior replication grant:

A current lawsuit, to which The Academy Charter School has not yet filed an answer, alleges that The Academy Charter School stole intellectual property from a third party and passed that information off to the SUNY Charter Schools Institute as their own during their Uniondale replication. The federal litigation brought by Garner Group International, LLC seeks redress for The Academy Charter School’s alleged misappropriation of work submitted to the school by Dr. Sally Thompson and Dr. Ervin Griffin Sr., for which they were not compensated. According to the complaint, Thomson and Griffin drafted the plans for the vocational education extension program at Uniondale, which were presented by TACS to SUNY as their own.

I will ask the Charter School Institute to think hard about the ramifications of letting an organization that represents these thoughts into our community.

Thank you,

Scott O’Brien-Curcie
Wyandanch Teachers’ Association President

President Walker: Thank you Mr. O'Brien, I will ask Christian Code, our District Clerk to please read the statement of opposition submitted by Kimberly Jean-Pierre, NYS Assemblywoman (18th District).

**STATEMENT OF OPPOSITION
THE HONORABLE KIMBERLY JEAN-PIERRE
NY State Assembly-11th District**

Code: Thank you President Walker.

This letter is addressed to Ms. Susie Miller Carello, Esq., Executive Director, SUNY Charter Schools Institute, H. Carl McCall SUNY Building, 353 Broadway in Albany. This letter is dated August 18, 2021.

The letter reads:

Dear Ms. Carello,

I write today to voice my opposition to the proposed formation of a charter school within the Wyandanch Union Free School District, and strongly urge you to reject the application corresponding to the 'Academy Charter School' that is currently pending before the SUNY Charter Schools Institute. Having represented the entire Wyandanch School District and community in the New York State Assembly since 2015, I have made it a top priority to work with my legislative colleagues to help deliver critical public funds to one of the most financially distressed school districts in the entire State of New York.

Wyandanch has long been plagued by a lack of investment which has hurt our schoolchildren the most, which is why my state colleagues and I worked tirelessly to pass and enact legislation authorizing the appointment of a state fiscal monitor to oversee and work with the Wyandanch School District for a period of five years. Since the appointment of Mr. Albert Chase as state fiscal monitor, the Wyandanch community has passed two fiscally-sound, equitable budget proposals which helped the District erase a multi-million dollar budget deficit. My colleagues and I also took action to authorize Wyandanch's use of deficit financing as a means to pay down its past debt and be better positioned to issue bonds for critical expenses in the future. In addition, I am pleased to be working with my governmental colleagues at the state and local level to support Wyandanch School District's efforts to connect to the Southwest Sewer District—a vital public works project whose completion is essential to protect the public health and safety of all Wyandanch schoolchildren, teachers and staff.

In short, Wyandanch has continued to make tremendous progress in both fiscal management and educational outcomes, all while still adjusting to the 'new normal' brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to be abundantly clear—I categorically oppose any attempt to establish a charter school here in Wyandanch or in any of its surrounding communities, because supporting our public schools is the most important investment we can make, and we have made far too much progress with the Wyandanch School District to revert back and allow an outside entity to divert critical

public funds away from a district as reliant on State Aid as Wyandanch. When a handful of students leave a public school classroom to attend a charter school, that classroom still has to keep the lights on, compensate the educator and pay the heating bills; should this application be approved by the SUNY Charter Schools Institute, Wyandanch's ability to meet those basic needs for its schoolchildren will be decimated, and the ancillary consequences on the greater Wyandanch community will be devastating. Publicly-funded schools should not be serving to line the pockets of private companies and individuals with no real ties to the community they will claim to serve.

We still have a long way to go, but we are making tremendous progress here in Wyandanch, and I can think of no worse time than the present to allow a profit-driven charter school with minimal community roots to inject itself and jeopardize all of the positive developments we have spearheaded together. I look forward to continuing to work with my elected colleagues and the District to ensure that our schoolchildren receive all of the educational resources they need to succeed, but that goal will become that much less attainable should you choose to approve this application. Once again, I respectfully ask you to put Wyandanch children and families first, and reject the Academy Charter School's pending application. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Jean-Pierre
Member of Assembly, 11th District

CC: Carrie Gee, Esq., Associate Counsel, SUNY Charter Schools Institute
Dr. Gina Talbert, Superintendent, Wyandanch Union Free School District
Christian D. Code, District Clerk, Wyandanch Union Free School District

Thank you.

President Walker: Thank you Mr. Code and now it is my privilege to turn it over to discuss the potential impact of charter schools on District Finances and Curriculum by Mr. Rich Snyder and Mrs. Shamika Simpson.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON CHARTER SCHOOLS MR. RICH SNYDER AND MRS. SHAMIKA SIMPSON

Please see attachment.

PUBLIC COMMENT PORTION (Summary)

<u>Community Members Name</u>	Comment
Laurie Farber	<i>Praised our scholars and has worked with the scholars over the past 19 years. Charter Schools would cause a financial hardship on the area and hurt our public education system.</i>

	<p><i>Thankful for state legislative officials who are supportive of our week</i></p>
Cindy Paschall	<p><i>Worked as teacher here in the District and does not want her tax money split with the Charter Schools. Believes the District is doing a good job.</i></p> <p><i>The teachers support the students in anyway possible.</i></p> <p><i>Charter School could potentially divide families.</i></p> <p><i>We need our funding from the state and we need to learn how to manage it.</i></p> <p><i>Charter Schools are not familiar with the area...we are a community.</i></p>
Helisse Palmore	<p><i>Charter Schools are deliberate in their choices.</i></p> <p><i>Against charter schools and does not care for the model of selection. Charter schools preys on District's like us- provides the community with another option.</i></p> <p><i>With what has happened in the past, we need to address our problems head on and focus on the bigger picture. Wakanda pride/mentality for our students.</i></p> <p><i>Pleaded with the Board to support the Superintendent and administrators.</i></p>
Ana Melendez	<p><i>District has a bright future.</i></p> <p><i>Everyone wants to come here and build here but there is nothing be offered to the community to grow and thrive.</i></p> <p><i>Negative comments about Wyandanch, but the facts and numbers are not positive but the District is trying.</i></p> <p><i>There is no space for charter schools in Wyandanch. Our kids in Pre-K are in another District.</i></p>

	<i>The Board must make better discussions and we can do much better.</i>
Lawrence Nicholls	<i>Against charter schools.</i> <i>The charter schools are not what this community needs.</i> <i>We are not be given a fair chance and we should have organizations like the chamber of commerce to support our community.</i> <i>The charter school- he has concerns about their integrity and what they stand for.</i>

CLOSING REMARKS (BOARD OF EDUCATION/SUPERINTENDENT)
(Summary)

<u>Board Members Name</u>	Comment
Nancy Holliday <i>Trustee</i>	<i>Will the Charter School be bilingual?</i>
Jarod Morris <i>Trustee</i>	<i>Public notice went out and it was stated that all interested parties were invited and it is noted that no representative was present to state their desire to be in our community.</i> <i>Hempstead UFSD- \$11 million of State Aid / \$69 million in tuition is given to charter schools.</i> <i>Hempstead has a commercial base- Wyandanch does not. Funded on the tax payers and the state.</i> <i>Thanked the administration for the presentation.</i> <i>Mindful that Wyandanch UFSD has certified teachers- the charter schools has different regulations.</i>
Dr. Gina Talbert <i>Superintendent of Schools</i>	<i>Thanked the community for attending and for their continued support.</i> <i>Thanked Senator Brooks and Assemblywoman Jean-Pierre for their steadfast support.</i> <i>Shared the District's history of financial</i>

	<p><i>struggles. Stated that the community trusted us to fix the challenges and authorized the piercing of the cap to do that.</i></p> <p><i>Our scholars deserve the best of the best and the District is working in a steadfast manner to make sure that happens.</i></p> <p><i>Praised the faculty, staff and administrators for the extraordinary job they did over the course of the pandemic and how they cared for our scholars as if they were their own with 100% effort.</i></p>
<p>Latesha S. Walker <i>Board President</i></p>	<p><i>Challenged the community to follow the roadmap and asked everyone to stand to repeat the District's mission statement after her:</i></p> <p><i>To inspire the passion for learning and educating all students to achieve their full potential.</i></p>

Time Hearing Ended: 7:25P.M. Eastern Standard Time

**Minutes Recorded and Transcribed
By District Clerk**

Date of Meeting: August 18, 2021
PUBLIC HEARING

Christian D. Code