



NJDOE News

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Commissioner Hespe Orders REACH Charter High School to Cease Operations

Citing the school's inability to resolve a growing number of serious fiscal and programmatic problems, Commissioner of Education David C. Hespe has revoked the charter of the REACH Charter High School in Egg Harbor Township.

The school, which opened in Atlantic County in September 1999 and was approved to serve 300 students in grades 9 through 11, was directed to cease operations immediately and transfer student records to receiving districts by April 20. The school was scheduled to begin its spring break tomorrow. Most students reside in the Atlantic City, Pleasantville and Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School and Egg Harbor Township school districts.

"Our primary concern is that the educational continuity of the students enrolled in the charter school is preserved," Hespe said. "We will work with the REACH school and resident districts to ensure a smooth and swift transition."

The REACH Charter High School has been on probation since December 3, 1999. Its initial 90-day probation period was for programmatic, fiscal and facility deficiencies.

The commissioner said the charter school has incurred a significant debt, making it fiscally insolvent, and it is now experiencing a loss of certified staff. "There is no reasonable prospect that you will be able to correct the deficiencies," Hespe wrote in a letter delivered yesterday to Martin Brown, the chairman of the school's board of trustees. "I am therefore left with no alternative than to revoke the charter for the REACH Charter High School. It is in the best interest of the students to effectuate the revocation of the charter immediately."

Among the unresolved deficiencies cited by the commissioner in his letter to the board chairman were:

- Services are not being provided to special education students in accordance with their Individualized Educational Programs.
- Students are not receiving 150 minutes of health and physical education instruction per week.
- The composition of the board of trustees is not consistent with the approved charter and the school's bylaws because it lacks a treasurer.
- Student records, including attendance records, have not been properly maintained.
- Student discipline policies have not been fully developed and implemented.
- The school has failed to fully itemize, verify and audit expenditures and present them to the board of trustees for approval.
- The school has failed to make requisite filings to ensure enrollment of employees in the pension system and social security fund for the 1999-2000 school year.

Prior deficiencies identified by the department at the school included using uncertified teachers, having an insufficient number of mentors for teachers and enrolling students in unapproved grade levels.

Hespe described the closing of the REACH Charter High School as an action that is not taken lightly. It is the first charter school in New Jersey to have its charter revoked.

"The revocation of this charter must be considered in the larger context," the commissioner said. "The charter school movement is exceptionally strong and successful in New Jersey. The goal of New Jersey's charter school law is to create and sustain high quality charter schools. An action such as this must be taken to ensure the integrity of the entire charter school movement."

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